



The Seven Churches and the Seven Seals

Part 3

September 19, 2021

Last Sunday, we began our process of gleaning insight and understanding from the corrections and commendations of Christ to His Church. And it was during this sermon that we had an introduction to the Seven Churches and were able to discuss the Church at Ephesus but we were not able to get to the Church at Smyrna.

Today we will maintain the same process as last Sunday and seek to cover two of the noted churches; namely, The Church of Smyrna and The Church of Pergamum.

These two Churches are found in Revelation chapter 2 leading into the first part of Revelation chapter 3.

The second Church listed is the Church of Smyrna noted in Revelation 2:8-11. Smyrna was a heavily persecuted and hated Church which suffered terribly at the hands of the pagan culture around them. It was during this season of time that the Church went through some of the heaviest points of persecution in its history.

But we must also observe that it was this Church's willingness to endure hardship and persecution that kept them pure and in pursuit of Christ's presence by the Holy Spirit. There was not any Reproof given to this Church from Christ! So let's navigate the Praise, Recommendations and Actions Steps prescribed in the Text.

The Church of Smyrna was a persecuted Church. When studying this passage, it is self-evident that this Church remained ever faithful, even in the face of great persecution. This period is, safe-to-say, the most persecuted Church period that Christianity has ever known.

The more Satan persecuted the Church during this period, however, the more the Church overcame the condemning characteristic of “leaving its first love.” I believe that history and Scripture bear out that the Judgment Seat of Christ will reveal this Church to be the most outstanding local body of believers in Church history.

Revelation 2:8-11, “⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

1. Praise

- a. ⁹“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- b. The Church of Smyrna is being put through the ringer and the onslaughts of Hell were let loose against this Church. It was in terrible tribulation, they were impoverished, and they are being terribly persecuted by the Jews and their society because of their message and religious beliefs.

2. Recommendations

- a. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- b. Notice how Christ's prophetic warning of what was to come was intertwined with Hope and Blessing. And instructs them to not fear what was to come because there is a Glory to be experienced in Suffering!

3. Action Steps

- a. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.
- b. Notice how Christ instructs them to be willing to listen and hear what the Holy Spirit was saying to the Church and to not turn a deaf ear to His instructions! And He ends with Hope to those who Conquer will not be hurt by the Second Death.
- c. His Correction always comes with a Reward!

The third Church listed is the Church of Pergamum noted in Revelation 2:12-17. The City of Pergamum was built high upon a hilly perch that was overlooking the area below and was the capital of Asia Minor. Pergamum was known for its embracement of idolatry and was filled with Pagan Temples which included Zeus, Athena, and even Caesar himself.

Notice that in verse 13 of this passage of text that Christ makes reference to Pergamum being where “Satan’s Seat” was located because demonic powers had a stronghold of influence over the people in this region. It would seem that this was the seat of a Principality or Power that was in authority over this region.

This city became the home to the group known as the Nicolaitans and was also the city where Antipas, who was an early church believer, was martyred for his faith. Moving forward in the historical time line, after the failed attempts of Diocletian to persecute and destroy the Church, another emperor arose to follow him known as Constantine who looked upon Christianity favorably thus he began to embrace the Church but all was not as it seemed.

I do not believe that Constantine was a Christian because he had some distorted views of Christianity and to add to this conundrum is the fact that Constantine was a pagan monotheist who worshiped the sun god, Sol Invictus; the unconquered sun.

Furthermore, he claimed to have had a vision of a Cross in the sky with these words inscribed, "In this Sign You Shall Conquer". After this experience, allegedly, Constantine accepts Christianity therefore passes laws that protect Christianity.

As time progresses, the government begins to financially supplement the Church and provide other favors to the Church because Constantine discovered that if he garners the support of this Faith Movement then he could solidify his authority in abounding ways; it was a political move motivate by power. Remember, in this sign you shall conquer.

As the Church continued to receive favor and authority from the Government, it began to take over pagan temples but this was a terrible mistake because in this take over, it required of the church to accept and adopt pagan practices and customs that were damnable and heretical in nature.

And it was this embracing of the culture that corrupted the Church; sound familiar? Mysticism, Gnosticism, and other influences of paganism and hedonism began to spread like a disease throughout the Church body and Church Governance.

From 313AD, when Constantine passed the Edict of Milan, forward into the coming years, the Church became more Roman and less Christian; it was this transitional time frame from which the Roman Catholic Church was birthed.

It was this transition that introduced the Commercialization of Christianity, the process of managing or running the Church as an organization for the sake of financial gain and political control.

The same mentality that Constantine had was now the same for the Church, in this sign you shall conquer. Except now the motivation was greed and power and not the Great Commission. And it was this motivation and subsequent fruit thereof that the Church began to lose its identity and fell into heresy and error. So with this in mind, let us look at what Christ had to say to the Church in Pergamum.

1. Praise

a. ¹²“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.’¹³ “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

b. Jesus begins by acknowledging the fact that this Church is in a hotbed of paganism and spiritual warfare with His reference to “where Satan’s throne is”.

c. Pergamum has held fast to Christ’s name and haven’t shied away from their faith even when persecution lead to the death of one of their church leaders. They have stood strong in the face of adversity when it comes to attacks and spiritual oppression.

2. Reproof

a. **“¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”**

- b. Notice that Christ refers to two different teachings in this passage of text: Teaching of Balaam and the Teaching of the Nicolaitans. Now let's look at the Teaching of Balaam first. Balaam was a prophet noted in Numbers chapter 22 and was pursued by Balak to speak curses against Israel. Balaam could not do so because he couldn't curse what God had blessed.
- c. However, there was a caveat; he may not be able to curse them but he discovered a key that all need to be aware of. Balaam couldn't curse them but if Israel began to intermingle with the pagan culture around them then they would ultimately remove themselves from the blessings of the Lord.
- d. The way to remove the Blessing of the Lord is to intermingle one's self with the World. Balaam knew this and that's exactly what happened.

- e. You can read about this progression from Numbers 22 to Numbers 25 and in Numbers 25, the plan comes to fruition.
- f. Notice the text of Numbers 25:1-3, “While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. ²These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”
- g. And it was this same tactic by the Satan against the Church that was used; Satan couldn’t curse the Church so he introduced pagan practices and suggested tolerance... Sound familiar?
- h. The Church began to intermingle pagan practices and rituals into their church culture and it polluted the sanctity thereof. And this why we must stand guard over our lives and our church to ensure that the Teachings of Balaam do not have a place of authority.
- i. The Second teaching noted by Christ was the Teachings of the Nicolaitans. Notice in early verses when Christ was addressing the Church of Ephesus, Ephesus did not embrace this doctrine but Pergamum did.

- j. And it was this damnable doctrine that made room for sexual sin and idol worship to be accepted within the Church itself. You can't judge a matter if you are guilty of it.

3. Recommendations

a. **“¹⁶Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”**

- b. This verse is very bottom line in its interpretation. If you do not repent of this matter then you will be judged along with those are guilty of this same issue. “Well I don't believe that Jesus judges' people!” Again, please consult what is noted in this verse.

4. Action Steps:

a. **“¹⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”**

- b. Notice how Christ constantly refers to those who have an ear to hear the Spirit; this implies that not everyone within the Church is going to listen nor repent of what Christ is addressing.
- c. With that said, there are two interesting items that Christ references to in this passage of text: Hidden manna and a White stone. Manna, per the description found in Exodus, was a supernatural food provided to Israel during the wilderness season to feed them until they arrived to the promise land.
- d. This supernatural food was sustaining for a day and required daily devotion to gather manna to survive. The same can be said of us when we daily partake of the Word of God as spiritual food to keep our spirit man strong.
- e. The white stone is another topic all together. Jesus said, “and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.””

- f. Notice that the believers are given a white stone with a new name written on it that no one knows except the one who receives it. This is a Gift from Christ as a sign with a New Name written on it.
- g. After doing much research I found an article written and published on ActiveChristianity.com entitled, “The White Stone and a New Name” is explained as, “At the time the book of Revelation was written, a white stone was equivalent with innocence. If you were to be tried for a crime, a white stone signified acquittal, and a black stone signified guilt. To receive a white stone means that you are free from condemnation. You have been tried and have been found worthy.”
- h. The White Stone was an Acquittal of Crimes and a Token of Innocence. And just as a Christ gave a White Stone and New Name as a promise to the Church at Pergamum, He can do the same for you today! He can give you a New Name and a Clean Slate of Innocence.

i. My question for us all today is have we received our White Stone and a New Name? Has your slate been wiped clean? Is your name written in His Book?