

The Letter to the church at Pergamos - The Worldly (Compromising) Church

Elder Robert Courson

March 20, 2022

Introduction

- Pergamum or Pergamos means “citadel” as it was built on a 1000’ hill in a fertile plain about 20 miles from the Aegean Sea.
- Pergamos is the word which we get “parchment” the writing material made from the skins of animals, it was first manufactured here to get past the ban Egypt had placed on papyrus, as she was jealous of Pergamos at that time in history.
- This city was the first to build a temple shine for worship to the Roman Emperor Augustus in 29BC and another one later dedicated to Emperor Trajan. This city was the capital of emperor worship outside of Rome.
- It served as an important religious center for pagan cults, such as Athena (goddess of beauty), Asclepius (god of healing), Bacchus (god of drunkenness) and Zeus (the savior god).
- Pergamos was the ancient seat of culture and had a library that rivaled the one at Alexandria for its size and importance to the society.

Opening Instruction

- To the angel at Pergamum write,
- One of the pastors of this church, Antipas, was martyred for his faith in Christ. He was called a faithful witness by Jesus; a transliteration of the Greek word for martyr is “witness”.
- Tradition says that Antipas was burned to death inside a brass bull for refusing to state that Caesar is Lord.

Title of Christ used to the church

- “HE who has the sharp 2-edged sword”
- This sword signifies judgment that will come on this church if they continue in their current ways.
- This sword is the very Word of God from Jesus, and it fights both external opposition to the church and the internal doctrinal error that seeps into the church.
- Jesus is reminding this church, that HE will be judge of ALL people, including and starting with HIS church!

Commendation of Jesus to the church

- I know your works
 - o Once again Jesus knows in detail what HIS church is up to and why!!
- I know where you dwell, where Satan lives
 - o Refers to the worship in pagan cults mentioned in the Introduction
 - o Refers to the emperor worship going on in the city
 - o HQ of Satanic opposition and gentile base for false religions.
 - o Jesus knew what environment they lived in, that Satan and his demons were living in the city because of all the sinful activity, wickedness and idolatry.
 - o Satan has a strategy for peoples, cities and nations, we are foolish not to consider his schemes, Jesus knows and so should we. See Ephesians 6:12 for his unholy hierarchy.
- You held fast to MY Name and did not deny MY faith even in the face of persecution and the death of Antipas, who was killed in front of you, where Satan dwells.
 - o Many in this church remained faithful to Jesus even in the midst of hardship, persecution and pain of death.
 - o Hold fast (remain true) to MY Name
 - HIS name is HIS person, the fact that Jesus is GOD
 - Jesus Christ is both Savior (Lord) and eternal GOD, not just a good man or prophet.
 - Conviction leads to commitment, if Jesus is the Divine Lord and Savior, then I must submit to HIM as my Lord and personal Savior!
 - Personal appropriation of Christ, not just intellectual acknowledgment of Jesus as a person.
 - o Did not deny MY Faith
 - We must have faith in who Jesus is and exercise that faith to obey HIM (see Hebrews 11:6)
 - Faith also means “body of doctrine”, they did not deny the gospel, they did not deny Jesus when it would have been easy to do so.
 - Not only did they believe in Jesus (HIS NAME), but they lived out that belief by their actions and behavior (did not deny MY FAITH)

Condemnation of Jesus to the church (2-fold)

- You have those to hold to the doctrine of Balaam - Numbers 22-25
 - o Balaam was a prophet for hire that led the people of Israel into sin so that God would curse them which he was hired to do. He did it for the money!!

- He had the Israelite men indulge in illicit sex with the Moabite women, knowing that God would punish them for it. There was a blasphemous union of Israel with fornication and idolatrous feasts.
- These at Pergamos also held to this doctrine, that a little sin is ok as long as we don't hurt anyone. There were those in the church who seduced others into sinful behavior and activities under the guise of "freedom in Christ" and Jesus HATES this doctrine.
- They suggested the liberty with which Christ set us free was a liberty to sin, especially since grace would forgive us!!
- You have those who also hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans
 - The name Nicolas means "one who conquers the people"
 - Nicolas was thought to be one of the deacons in Acts 6, but was more like Judas than the others, because of his position and role he was able to lead people astray.
 - Like Balaam in the OT led people into sin, Nicolas, in the NT led some in the church into immorality, wickedness and idolatry. He assaulted the church with sensual temptations and said it was ok to live this way, since we can always ask God for His forgiveness.
 - Clement of Alexander said of them: "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading lives of self-indulgence".
 - Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license to sin.

Correction to remedy the condition

- "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and fight against you with the sword of MY mouth"
- Jesus will personally fight against those in church with HIS Word who would attempt to destroy HIS church by bringing in false doctrine and unholy lifestyles as a norm for believers.
- The Word of God has many sword-like qualities:
 - Pricks the conscience, wounds the pride of sinner
 - Cuts away our camouflage and excuses, while piercing our defense of sinful actions
 - Slices our sins to the core
 - Kills false doctrines with the sharpness of its truth
- Again, we see the word quickly associated with the needed action, Jesus is loving and patient, but HE means business when it comes to our confession, repentance and return to holiness!

The admonition to the church

- If anything is certain about divine judgment in Scripture it is that God will hold us responsible and accountable for the measure of truth we have known; to whom much is given (made known), much is required!
- The way of conquest and victory over error and false doctrine is the truth found in the Holy Word of God, which is manifest in Jesus Christ alone!

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers of the church

- To be given some of the hidden manna to eat, which is the Bread of Life: Jesus Christ
 - o The truth of who HE is hidden from the unbelieving world until they see their desperate need for HIM
 - o Like manna fed the children of Israel, Jesus satisfies our spiritual hunger, and we have HIM now in spirit, but we will see HIM in Heaven.
- To be given a white stone with a new name written on it which no one knows except him who receives it.
 - o The white stone could be one of 2 things:
 - A white stone was given to those who won in athletic games as an invitation to the award ceremony and it was just for the person who won the prize; Jesus will give us this white stone as our invitation to claim our rewards in Heaven and it speaks to the personal relationship we will retain with Jesus in Heaven. HE will welcome each of us personally.
 - In ancient times, black and white stones were placed in a bucket and the judge would pull out and present the black stone for a guilty verdict and a white stone for an innocent verdict. Jesus will award to each of us individually the white stone personalized so should that we are innocent of sin before God because of the blood of Jesus which cleansed us from all our sin!!

Summary of this church

- Love becomes sentimental if not strengthened by truth and proper doctrine, while truth becomes harsh if not softened by love. We should strike a balance of the Bible, which tells us to hold the truth in love, to love others in the truth and to grow not only in love, but in truth and discernment.
- Jesus is deeply concerned that the Truth be preserved (hold on to) and spread, this is the theme of this letter. He commended some for remaining true to HIS name, but HE complained about others who held to false teachings and doctrines.

- As powerful as Satan is, he is no match for the truth of the Word of God and the power of the name of Jesus.
Our freedom in Christ should never be viewed as a license to sin and then to use the grace of God so flippantly to try and gain forgiveness when no confession or repentance has taken place.
- It is best to avoid and stay away from “willful sin” and unrighteousness, as Satan will take that desire and action and turn into something that we never thought would/could happen. A little yeast spreads quickly through the dough!

The Letter to the church at Thyatira: The Corrupt Church

Introduction

- Was probably this least illustrious city of the 7 cities mentioned in this section.
- It was a military garrison for hundreds of years by its location
- It was a city of commerce, and a popular locale of trade guilds
- Under Roman rule since 190BC
- Lydia, whom Paul met in Philippi was from Thyatira and returned there to help the church

Title of Christ used to the church

- The Son of God – HE has the authority to speak these words as ALL authority is given to the SON
- Who has eyes like a flame of fire.
 - o Jesus sees the through all the rationale, the reasons, and excuses to the core of the heart
 - o HE wanted this church to especially know HE saw the wickedness and HE called it like HE saw it as HE walked in the midst of HIS church, and still does so today!!
- HIS feet are like fine brass
 - o HE would be as a judge to this church, as it is written in Scripture, “For the time has come for judgment to begin in the house of God.....” I Peter 4:17
 - o Fine brass indicates that HE is the pure, holy and righteous Judge, who has the credentials and power to judge fairly and rightly.

Commendation of Jesus to the church, I know your.....

- Works, love, service, faith and endurance
 - o This church was one of hard work and faithful service unto Christ

- This church loved people and met needs in the community
- As I Thessalonians 1:3 points out, Thyatira had:
 - Works produced by faith
 - Labor prompted by love
 - Endurance inspired by hope in Christ
- As for your works, the last are more than the first
 - This was a growing and maturing church, they understood that the Christian life is a life of growth
 - Christian growth was occurring at Thyatira
 - From infancy, through adolescence to adulthood in the faith
 - II Thessalonians 1:3-4 was evident at this church
 - Your faith is growing more and more
 - The love every one of you have for each other is increasing
 - Your faith and patience are noticed by God
 - They are a picture of beautiful garden in which the Christian graces and virtues were blossoming to full bloom, and they included the trinity of virtues so often mentioned in Scripture: Faith, hope and love.

Condemnation of Jesus to the church

- Jesus gives this church HIS longest and most pointed rebuke of all the churches
- For all the good things that were happening at this church that made HIM glad, this one thing made HIM mad and angry with what was being allowed to happen!!
- You tolerate (allow) Jezebel to seduce / teach MY servants to commit sexual immortality and eat things sacrificed to idols. Jesus is mad at the church for its toleration of this activity, but HE is boiling angry at Jezebel and that clan for what they were up to!!
- This real woman in the church at Thyatira was not named Jezebel, but she had the spirit of the woman of OT by that name. The OT Jezebel (a priestess of Baal) used false teaching to cause the children of Israel to worship Baal, and to practice harlotry, idolatry, murder, witchcraft and rebellion against God.
- This NT “Jezebel” seduced the members of the church to practice that which was evil and wicked unto the Lord, especially 2 of the things mentioned in Acts 15:29 as the outcome of the Jerusalem Council: Abstain from sexual immorality and from eating things offered to idols.
- This Jezebel lived out and practiced what James warned of in 1:14-15 of his epistle. She enticed or seduced believers to engage in these practices under the guise of being tolerate of others and having liberty in Christ (a familiar theme of sinful behavior).
- The church was tolerating or allowing her to teach this harmful and false doctrine and that is one of the things Jesus is so angry about. Jesus expected HIS church to grow in

the graces HE mentioned earlier, but HE also demands growth in Holiness and this church was not Holy!!

- This Jezebel group prided themselves on their “mature” experiences in life. Like the Gnostics, they delved into the “mysterious, private and special” revelation denied to the others in the church; they saw themselves as spiritual elites, to whom the normal rules did not apply.
- The Christians at Thyatira were either very feeble (no sound doctrine) or had no conscience, they were weak in stopping Jezebel since they did not know the pure doctrine of the Word.

Correction to remedy the condition

- To the Jezebel group Jesus says:
 - I gave you time to repent and you did not (not willing); Jesus is patient to a point!
 - When HE says to Repent, then the church should listen to its Lord.
 - I will cast her into a sickbed
 - Jesus used the illustration of her luxurious bed used to commit immorality and the reclining couch at the idol feast to eat things offered to idols, that HE would throw her and those with her, in a bed in hell unless they repent of their deeds.
 - I will kill her children; the church was about 40 years old at the time of this writing and there were children of the adults that practiced this same un-Godly lifestyle, and they too would be accountable unto death.
 - All the churches will know that I am the ONE who searches the minds and hearts
 - Nothing gets by HIM who sees everything both outside and inside.
 - Intimate knowledge of a person’s secret thoughts and motives
 - I will give to each one of you according to your works!
 - Personal accountable is not a faux pax to Jesus, HE will demand it of each person and each person will account to HIM, see Eccl. 12:13-14.
 - Works do not save, but they are evidence of being saved! James 2

The admonition to the church

- To the rest of the church at Thyatira (non-Jezebel group) Jesus says:
 - As many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan
 - The unbelievable libertinism and license was the result and fruit of the Gnostic teaching that one is free to engage and explore the sphere of Satan and participate in evil with the body without harming the spirit.

They said since God is spirit, HE does not care what we do in the body.
Jesus thought differently!!

- I will put no other burden on you
 - A reference to Acts 15:28 to not lay any other unneeded burdens on the believers who held the faith.
 - Jesus is not asking them to do any more than they have been doing, a very positive admonition to a group that needed encouragement.
 - They were working and serving very hard
 - There was persecution because of Satan's throne
 - There was the jezebel group that caused trouble
- Hold fast what you have until I come
 - Keep doing what you have been doing
 - Keep on believing what you have already received
 - Don't give up anything you are holding on to

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers of the church

- I will give Authority over nations to rule with Christ
- I will give the Morning Star, which is Jesus Himself, we will know HIM and have HIM in HIS fullness when we get to Heaven and have overcome this world!! HE is our reward.

Summary of this church

- If it is God's purpose to make us holy, then Satan is resolved to frustrate that purpose and create opportunities for causing us to partake in un-holy actions. He seeks to entice believers into sin by whatever means possible, even guised as that which is good, in and of itself.
- If the devil cannot destroy the church by outward persecution and tribulation, then he will resort to try and corrupt her with evil, sinful behaviors and false doctrine that tickles the ear.
- Holiness of life, along with faith, love, service, works and endurance, is an indispensable mark of a true Christian and of the true church. The tricky thing is you can do all of the latter 4 without being holy to a degree, but if you are holy, then the latter 4 will come as natural outflow of that holy life unto the Lord.
- Jesus admonishes us to hold fast to that (doctrine) which we have received, and HE will be our Morning star and reward.