

### 1. Introduction

- a. Jesus' seven letters to these seven churches provides a unique chance for the church to evaluate itself
- b. Almost every letter follows a similar pattern: Jesus introduces himself in a unique way, he commends the particular church for something, he criticizes the particular church for something and then he offers a gracious gift

### 2. The Stumble

- a. Pergamum was a city with a cone-like hill directly behind it which held temples to various deities including the Emperor himself
  - i. Pergamum was an interesting city because it represented the chance to worship many gods and adopt many definitions of "truth."
  - ii. Pergamum was a religiously tolerant and open city. You chose your personal god based on your personal circumstances and personal needs. You were free to practice in multiple temples. It was part of the society's mindset that personal freedom was the most important aspect of life.
- b. Jesus remarks that the church in Pergamum had been true to his name (v. 13)
  - i. A name was everything at this time—it gave you significance, value, importance and identification
  - ii. Each letter is Jesus calling back his church in love. If you love me you will swoon over me. If you love me you will follow me when it's not convenient for you. If you love me you will stay with me when it doesn't look truthful to do so.
- c. Jesus here looks at the church in Pergamum and calls out the fact that they had slowly and subtly adopted other "truths" in addition to the gospel message.
  - i. The church had remained faithful even in the face of extreme persecution. They were willing to die for their faith (v. 13).
  - ii. But, they also had slowly begun to assimilate the ultimate truth in their lives to the convenient truth of the society around them by adopting common social practices (v. 14).
  - iii. In Numbers 25:1-3 and 31:16, Balaam advised King Balak to lure the Israelites into apostasy by enticing them with Moabite women to share pagan sacrificial meals. Jesus warns this church for tolerating those in their midst who have recapitulated Balaam's foolishness - the Nicolaitans (see also 2 Peter 2:15).
- d. The church started to compromise—to find truth in what felt right—or, rather, in what was beneficial to them even if it meant compromising their beliefs.
  - i. Jesus calls out two practices that the Pergamum Christians were doing which were in direct conflict with the truth of God.
  - ii. He takes issue with the Christians eating meat sacrificed to idols (v. 14).
    - 1. This was a common practice when hosting a large dinner party for friends or family.
    - 2. You would take the meat to be served and go to the temple of your personal God, sacrifice some of the meat, and then share the rest at your party.
  - iii. The logic for the Christians would be "I can eat the meat because idols are nothing. I'm saved by grace alone and therefore what I eat or do doesn't really matter."
  - iv. If they refused to eat the meat and attend the parties they would be socially cast out—they would lose out on jobs, promotions, networks, connections.
  - v. The Pergamum church had begun to define truth as "follow God and be faithful until it is convenient for you to bend the truth a little bit in order to meet your personal needs."

### 3. The Sword

- a. So Jesus decides to cut through the people who had stumbled this way with a double edged sword (cf. v. 12, v. 16)
  - i. The "sword" is his word—the sword comes from his mouth—it's His Word, the Bible

- ii. He will cut through the believers who compromise their moral standards when it's convenient for them to do so
- b. But the sword isn't necessarily meant to cut them to death, but rather to cut out the insidious compromising evil that had crept into the church (i.e. the sex cults, food given to idols)
  - i. See, each of these letters is trying to woo the church back to its groom—they're love letters
  - ii. The sword is not meant to be an instrument of destruction, but of help, because of the gifts he offers to them later—gifts of love, mercy and life
  - iii. But these gifts must come with truth (truth without mercy is harsh judgement but mercy without truth is just feel good thoughts)
- c. The practices of Balaam that the church was slowly falling into would actually "destroy" them (hence the mean of Balaam's name as "destroyer of people") so Jesus here is trying "cut out" this destructive thing

#### 4. The Stone

- a. And he offers some amazing gifts for the people who refuse to compromise to meet their personal needs
  - i. He promises hidden manna.
    - 1. Why? Manna was a sign of faith.
    - 2. The Hebrews in Exodus who collected the manna had to blindly obey and trust God for daily provisions—hence, they lose control of their lives and know that God would take care of them
    - 3. This is especially important to note in light of the compromising behaviors of the Pergamum church—they would have had to say something like "I know that even if I don't do this particular thing I know I shouldn't do that God will still take care of me, my career, family, etc."
  - ii. He gives them a name on a white stone.
    - 1. But what's with the white stone? Why is this grace?
      - a. A white stone pronounced a good verdict.
      - b. God says "I will give you a clean verdict when you really deserved a bad verdict"
      - c. Now, it may seem like you only get the white stone of God's good verdict if you work hard and "conquer"—this looks like it's up to you to earn the white stone of freedom and find your true name in God
      - d. BUT---keep in mind, he's speaking to people who are ALREADY Christian!!
      - e. He's not saying "you have to perform and then get the white stone" but rather he's saying "You have to put me above everything else in your life—even more than your reputation or livelihood at times—and THEN you get the verdict that was waiting for you all along"
      - f. The great thing is that God "gives" us the white stone—we don't make it ourselves
        - i. We can try to make white stones that call us innocent, good and approved
        - ii. But we have to see that ultimately the true white stone comes from God
  - iii. Commentators note that these gifts have odd connections to Jesus
    - 1. Manna—Jesus the bread of life (John 6:35) who is broken for you (Matthew 26:26)
      - a. How do you know you can trust God without compromising your moral behavior? Because Jesus was broken for you and is the only thing you need to survive
    - 2. White stone of "innocence"—instead of the guilty verdict passed on Jesus in our place
      - a. Jesus stood in an unfair trial (Matthew 27) and got a "guilty" verdict so that you know you get the "innocent" verdict on your life
    - 3. Also, the name no one knows except the one who receives it
      - a. Remember, a name means everything—it's your worth, value, identity and here Jesus is saying you get a name only you know—a unique, personal and beautiful relationship with the one who died for you