

# The Churches of Christ Salute You

Lesson Ten

(Romans 16:16)

August 17, 2008

## LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS



### Overview:

1. Paul wrote to the Romans about the “churches of Christ.”
2. A plurality of churches did not mean a number of different denominations.
3. Instead, each was a local body of believers that belonged to Christ.
4. Since we also are a church of Christ, there are many lessons to be learned from these early churches.

### Introduction:

1. Pergamos (or, Pergamum) was located about 30 miles north of Smyrna and about 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.
2. Unlike Ephesus and Smyrna, it was not located on any commercial trade route.
3. However, it was located on the Caicus River allowing small ships to access the Sea with ease.
4. Pergamos was the capital city of the Roman Province of Mysia (called “the royal city”).
5. The city possessed a library of 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria, Egypt.
6. It was also a center of medical study and practice – the healing cult was represented by a serpent entwined around a sapling or branch.
7. It was the first city to build a temple dedicated to Emperor worship (Augustus, 29 BC).
8. It also boasted the “Altar” of Zeus – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
9. From God’s perspective, Pergamos was a city where Satan dwelled...

### I. Salutation

Revelation 2:12 a

- A. The church at Pergamos is mentioned only in Revelation 1:11 and 2:12.
- B. It is not known how, when or by whom this church was founded.
- C. It was located in a center of idolatry...
  1. Asclepius “the Savior” – god of medicine and healing (*a serpent*)
  2. Zeus – temple built 800 feet high on the hillside
  3. Athena – temple built opposite of temple to Zeus
  4. Emperor – “Caesar is Lord” (more political than religious)
- D. Clearly, the church had many enemies in Pergamos.

### II. Description of Jesus

Revelation 2:12 b

- A. Jesus is described as “He which hath the sharp sword with two edges.”
  1. Jesus’ authority superseded the false gods and the Emperor.
  2. His Word alone is authoritative (cf. Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17).
- B. It is by His Word that He rules as with a rod of iron (12:5; 19:15).
- C. It is by His Word that He fights against error (2:16).
- D. It is by His Word that He authorizes – opens and closes (3:7).

### III. Commendation

Revelation 2:13

- A. The Lord knows His people (cf. 2 Timothy 2:19).
- B. The church at Smyrna was commended for her faithfulness in spite of sacrifice.
  1. This church continued to work even in the face of severe persecution.
  2. They served Christ in the midst of a city where Satan reigned.

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- a. The word for seat is actually "throne."
- b. Pergamos was a center of idolatry – allowing Satan to rule.
3. In spite of the pressure and persecution that came from such a society, the brethren in Pergamos held fast and did not deny the Lord.
  - a. They held on to the name (and authority) of Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 4:14).
    - i. Often, those who were persecuted were given a chance to deny Christ and escape suffering.
    - ii. Those in Pergamos would not deny His name.
  - b. They would not deny the Gospel (the faith of Jesus).
4. This they did while having to witness one of their own brethren killed for such devotion.
  - a. No more is known of Antipas than is stated here in this verse.
  - b. Such persecution is often a cause of discouragement and denial, fear and failure.
  - c. But, it was not so for the church at Pergamos.
5. Satan still bears rule upon the earth and has thrones in communities all over our land.
6. Will we be faithful to God even where Satan dwells?
- C. Because the Lord knew both their works and the environment in which they were forced to practice such works, He was able to commend them for their faithfulness.

#### IV. Condemnation

Revelation 2:14-15

- A. In spite of their loyalty to Christ in the face of persecution, there were still some things for which Jesus condemned this congregation.
- B. First, there were those among them who held false doctrine, called the doctrine of Balaam (cf. 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11).
  1. This doctrine was so called because it was of like character as what Balaam had taught and practiced under the Old Law (Numbers 22 - 24).
  2. Balaam was hired to curse the people of God.
  3. However, every time he tried, God intervened and caused him to pronounce a blessing upon Israel.
  4. So, Balaam formulated a plan to cause Israel to sin.
  5. He encouraged Balak, king of Moab, to tempt the Israelites with the most beautiful Moabite women.
  6. Thus, Israel would participate in the idolatrous practices of the Moabites and be abandoned by God.
  7. Balaam's only goal for his actions was the acquisition of money!
  8. Thus, Balaam's doctrine consists of the following...
    - a. Casting a stumbling block before others (or, enticing others to sin)
    - b. Encouraging others to participate in false worship or false doctrine
    - c. Motivating others through lust to endanger their eternal souls
  9. There was great pressure for the church at Pergamos to compromise with the pagan society in which she dwelt.
  10. Perhaps wealth was the goal of those who sought to destroy the church by doing the work of Satan.
- C. Second, some held the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

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1. It is possible that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was the name of the doctrine of Balaam when the book of Revelation was written.
  2. If these are two different groups, it is unknown what the Nicolaitans taught and practiced.
  3. Indications from some (questionable) historical records are that the Nicolaitans were very sensual and fleshly in their beliefs.
- D. Compromise with error negates all good works and even sacrifice.  
E. One cannot be loved (accepted) by God while compromising with something that He hates!

### V. Warnings

Revelation 2:16

- A. Because of their compromise, the Lord threatened to punish this church.  
B. He warned that He would not tarry in His punishment.
1. Jesus literally says, "I am coming unto you without delay."
  2. God is longsuffering, but His patience has its limits – especially when concerning error.
- C. He warned that they would be fighting against Him – the Lord.
1. Actually, Jesus says He will make war with them.
  2. What a terrible thought and tremendous motivation to change.
  3. How tragic it is when the Lord must fight against His own body!
  4. While Jesus was fighting against the church, He was also fighting for the church – to preserve it from error.
  5. His weapon is His sword – His Word (cf. 2:12; John 12:48).

### VI. Exhortations

Revelation 2:16 – 17 a

- A. The Lord exhorted the church at Pergamos to repent or perish.
1. Notice that the call to repentance was not only for the false teachers, but also for those who followed them and for those who allowed them to continue to influence the congregation.
  2. The church needed to repent for not hating the error and sin which was hated by God.
- B. He exhorted them to hear the words of the Holy Spirit.
1. Hearing means to listen – to take in what has been said to them.
  2. It implies that they will then practice what they have heard.
- C. He exhorted them to overcome this allure from the devil.

### VII. Blessings

Revelation 17 b

- A. Hidden Manna
1. This is spiritual food, the bread of life eternal.
    - a. Jesus is the true Bread from Heaven (John 6:31-51).
    - b. Thus, this is an indication of restored fellowship with Christ.
  2. It is hidden from those who do not have eyes to see it (cf. Matt. 13).
  3. It is in contrast to the physical food that was eaten in idolatry.
- B. White Stone
1. It is symbolic of being declared not guilty – forgiven.
  2. God longs to forgive His wayward children (1 John 1:9).
- C. New Name
1. Probably indicates a heavenly name, renewed and cleansed.
  2. It is possibly the name of Jesus Himself (cf. 3:12).

Conclusion: The church at Pergamos teaches many powerful lessons for us today.