

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

by William McCarrell

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CHAPTER 4

PERGAMOS - THE COMPROMISED CHURCH

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Revelation 2:12-17)

SUGGESTIVE STUDY OUTLINE

- I. THE COMMAND TO WRITE. Vs. 12
- II. THE CHURCH ADDRESSED. Vs. 12.

- 1. Pergamos

- III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SPEAKER (CHRIST). Vs. 12

- 1. Possesses sharp, two edged sword.
 - 2. The Bible -- GOD's Word

- IV. THE COMMENDATION FOR WORKS. Vs. 13

- 1. Hold fast CHRIST's Name.
 - 2. Hold true to CHRIST's faith.

- a. Despite testing days.

b. Antipas -- opposition -- martyrdom

V. THE ASSURANCE OF SYMPATHY. Vs. 13

1. As to Hard Environment - Satan's throne
2. Days of Antipas -- suffering -- martyrdom
3. Severe opposition noticed.

VI. THE CENSURE -- CRITICISM. Vss. 14-15

1. Doctrine of Balaamism. Vs. 14.

- a. Encourages being spiritual stumblingblock.
- b. Encourages idolatry -- compromise
- c. Encourages spiritual fornication.

2. Doctrine of Nicolaitanism. Vs. 15

- a. Man supplanting CHRIST.
- b. Hated by GOD.

VII. THE CALL TO REPENT. Vs. 16

VIII. THE WARNING. vs. 16

1. CHRIST's unexpected coming.
2. Opposition from CHRIST

- a. Through His sword
- b. Through the Bible

IX. THE APPEAL TO HEAR. Vs. 17

X. THE REWARD FOR OVERCOMERS. Vs. 17

1. Partake of hidden manna (life)
2. Recipient of white stone (favor).
3. Recipient of new name -- Indescribably blessedness, glory, fulness.

SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The letter of the church at Pergamos offers many helpful exhortations and significant warnings to any church during any period of the Christian era. It foreshadows church history -- especially that which began in the third and continued through the fifth century. This period was featured with the launching of Roman Catholicism. Its message offers much significant truth for churches and Christians affected by Roman Catholicism and apostasy, especially during the close of this present church and grace dispensation

A SEPARATED CHURCH

The first century church, pictured in the Ephesian letter, was characterized by separation from the world, fruitful service and true testimony, but endangered by weakening of spiritual fellowship with CHRIST. The second and third century church, pictured by the Smyrna letter, though suffering much, especially in martyrdom, stood true to the "**faith once delivered.**" Satan, failing to secure denial of faith or cessation of Christian life, testimony, and service through violence, corrupted the church through subtle popularity and worldly alliance.

The Roman Emperor, Constantine, evident was favorably impressed with the moral stamina and qualities of those representing Christianity. These qualities were evidenced by their standing true to CHRIST and the Christian faith despite three centuries of testing through violent persecution and suffering. Constantine concluded that assimilation of Christians would strengthen the Roman Empire. Rome ever boasts of its policy and ability in assimilating anything which contributes to its strength.

CHURCH CORRUPTION

Constantine professed salvation. Its genuineness is still debated. Imprisoned Christians were released. Persecution of Christians ceased by governmental decree; thus the glory of suffering for and with CHRIST was largely ended. Those in Christian service were cared for by the State; thus the blessedness of trusting GOD for daily bread was largely lost. Christianity became a State religion. Soldiers were baptized by regiments. By gradual process, religious formalism displaced vital spirituality. The State ruled the known world. Many Christians who had been praying, "**Thy Kingdom come,**" were led into the delusion that by union of Church and State, the church would control the world empire, and thus bring CHRIST's Kingdom on earth. The aim, "CHRIST for the world," was steadily changed to "The world for CHRIST."

Here the post-millennial delusion began.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The word, "*catholic*," means "*universal*." The church which has been generally referred to in such statements as the Apostle's Creed as the "holy Catholic Church," was changed in name to the "Holy Roman Catholic Church." Rome's pagan religious rites and heathenish life-standards gradually corrupted Christianity's life and worship. The leavening through corrupt mixture, which then began, gradually strengthened its hold upon Christianity. This hold has been, and continues to be strengthened steadily. This strangle-hold is made possible through Papal decrees that officially inaugurate, order and establish customs that corrupt genuine Christianity. As the church claims equal authority with the Bible, and the Pope claims infallibility, the decrees are accepted and followed by the ecclesiastical leaders and are accepted and followed by the ecclesiastical leaders and laity of the church. A partial list of decrees are:

Prayers for the dead and the sign of the cross -- 310 A.D.

Wax candles -- 320 A.D.

The daily mass -- 394 A.D.

The worship of Mary -- 431 A.D.

The doctrine of purgatory -- 593 A.D.

The Latin language for public prayer and worship -- 600 A.D.
The title of "Pope" or "Universal Bishop" (Boniface III) -- 610 A.D.
Worship of the cross, images, and relics -- 788 A.D.
The use of holy water -- 850 A.D.
Celibacy of the priesthood (decreed by Hildebrand, Boniface VII)-- 1079 A.D.
The rosary, or prayer beads --1090 A.D.
The sale of indulgences for sin --1190 A.D.
The dogma of transubstantiation (decreed by Innocent III) -- 1215 A.D.
The Bible forbidden to laymen -- 1229 A.D.
The confession of sins --1229 A.D.
The doctrine of purgatory incorporated --1439 A.D.
Church tradition declared of equal authority with Bible (Council of Trent) -- 1545 A.D.
Apocryphal Books placed in Catholic (Douay Version) Bible -- 1546 A.D.
Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception proclaimed --1854 A.D.
Papal infallibility proclaimed by Pope Pius IX --1870 A.D.

Many rites and ceremonies of Roman Catholicism can be traced directly to pagan or heathenish origin.

That which Rome's sword could not do, Satan accomplished by leading the church into loss of separation from the world: **"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"** (II Corinthians 6:14-18).

Such instruments as Constantine with his golden throne at the Council of Nice, human popularity, unsaved religious leadership, and governmental force even unto violence aided greatly. Scripture indicates that the religious corruption of Roman Catholicism will leaven religion world-wide. In chapter seventeen of Revelation, GOD gives graphic description of its consummation and judgment.

THE PAPACY

Constantine received the title, "*Pontifex Maximus*," which had come down from Babylonian heathenism through Julius Caesar. When Boniface III accepted the title "Pope," meaning universal bishop, from the wicked Emperor Phocas in 610 A.D., the title, "*Pontifex Maximus*," passed to him. Every succeeding pope has carried, and still carries, this title, "Pontifex Maximus" means "high priest of the heathen." Thank GOD every saved one has CHRIST JESUS as his HIGH PRIEST at the right hand of GOD in glory. He is the only Mediator between GOD and man. As CHRIST is eternally sufficient, he needs no other mediator: **"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"** (Hebrews 7:25) and **"My little children, these things write I**

unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2) and "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5) and "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

CHRIST-DISHONORING UNION

As in each of the seven letters of Revelation two and three, the Church name greatly strengthens CHRIST's message. "**Pergamos**" means '*a tower*' -- a work impressive before men. It also carries the meaning of "*a union*," such as through marriage. Can anyone fail to see the connection between the newly formed Catholicism of this period with the infamous tower of Babel in Genesis 6 - the true birthplace of the heathen world church which would later become the so-called "*universal*" church of Rome. The church pictured by Pergamos, through union with the State, became mistress of the world but lost the fulness of CHRIST. It received rest and favor through man, but lost the rest and favor possible only in CHRIST. Heathen wealth robbed of spiritual riches. Formal creeds displaced a living CHRIST. Enamored by Constantine's sword, it was drawn from the SPIRIT's Sword (Ephesians 6:17). In this letter, CHRIST teaches Christians that their weapon is the Bible. The Bible rebukes and rewards, works inwardly and outwardly, offers consternation and consolation, involves life and death, and is ever GOD's offensive and defensive weapon. The Word is GOD's two-edged sword.

RELIGIOUS ABOMINATIONS

The Pergamos Church held to CHRIST's name (2:13). Corrupt religious systems such as Roman and Greek Catholicism still do. Roman Catholicism never denies certain fundamental truths such as Bible inspiration, CHRIST's virgin birth and deity. However, through its church decrees, it has filled itself and the world with many abominations. A few of these abominations are mass, confession, purgatory, Mariolatry (worship of Mary), indulgences, papal infallibility, and salvation through church rites. This system is illustrated by the scarlet woman, the mother of harlots who holds a golden cup full of abominations (Revelation 17:4). The golden cup illustrates the form of doctrine, while the abominations are the corruptions wrought through church decrees and otherwise.

COURAGEOUS STANDING FOR CHRIST

CHRIST encouraged Christians in the Pergamos Church by acknowledging their good works. His grace made victorious living possible despite the fact that they lived where Satan dwelt and where Satan's seat [throne] is found (2:13).

Historians inform that Pergamos contained the great idol Aesculpius, which represented worship of the serpent, a heathen conception of the god of medicine. Bible teachers have taught that this explains the expressions, "**Satan's seat**." Others believe this expression is used because of the fact that the evil cult linked with Babylonian mysteries chose Pergamos as headquarters after the destruction of Babylon. Possibly a better interpretation is gained by study of much Scripture, such as James 4:4: "**friendship with world is enmity with God**"; II Corinthians 4:4: Satan is the "**god of this world**"; Ephesians 2:1-3; this world functions according to the course of Satan (as

did we before we were saved); 1 John 5:19: this world in the evil one; and John 12:31: Satan, the prince of this world. No doubt, many saved ones in the first three centuries were convinced that Satan's throne was in this present evil world and that it was the throne of the Roman Empire.

The church is encouraged by reminder of those who were true to CHRIST even during the days of Antipas (Revelation 2:13). In chapters two and three of Revelation, the HOLY SPIRIT chooses names, the meaning of which strengthens His message. "**Antipas**" means "*against all*." Those standing true to CHRIST were standing against false religion, GOD-defying government, unbelief, sin, and mankind in general.

The great Arian controversy was raging. It revolved around CHRIST's Person. Arianists declared CHRIST the greatest of all beings, but not very GOD of very GOD. Their orthodox opponents contended that CHRIST was GOD of very GOD, perfect GOD and perfect man in one Person.

Two Greek words concerning CHRIST were prominent in the controversy. "*Homoiosian*" which means "*like substance*," was held correct by the Arians. This is the exact contention of present-day Unitarianism and much Modernism. The other word, "*Homoousian*," which means "*very substance*," was held by orthodox forces, led by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. At the council of Nice, the church decided in favor of "*Homoousian*," declaring that CHRIST was very GOD of very GOD. The spirit of Antipas was well illustrated by Athanasius. He was summoned by Emperor Theodosius who requested him to admit Arians to the LORD's table. Upon refusal, Theodosius remarked, "The whole world is against you." Athanasius replied, "Then I am against all the world."

GREATEST CHURCH DANGER

Pergamos is rebuked for false doctrine. The church's greatest sin is false doctrine, which ever produces false living. The church had been led in Balaamism (Revelation 2:14). Study of chapters 23 through 25 of Numbers, II Peter 2:15, and Jude 11 reveals that Balaamism reasons that natural morality rather than GOD's grace makes righteous and delivers from sin's curse. It prostitutes spiritual office by using it for material gain. It opposes GOD's work by mixture of the spiritual and worldly. It produces idolatry. How graphically Balaamism has been developed throughout professing Christendom since the third century. Roman Catholicism ever leads in this respect. Present-day Protestantism is permeated with it. GOD's people should be separated from all of it (II Corinthians 6:14-18; James 4:4).

The Ephesus Church was commended for hating Nicolaitanism which GOD also hates (Revelation 2:15). The Pergamos letter reveals that Nicolaitanism had developed into a doctrine which indicates a system of teaching. This evidenced willful disobedience of GOD's Word and stubborn resistance to His revealed will. Unless corrected, such a course always ends in spiritual disaster. Nicolaitanism is the sinful attempt of man, or man-made religious systems, to usurp power that belongs exclusively to CHRIST.

GREATEST CHURCH NEED

CHRIST called the Pergamos Church to repent (vs. 16). Repentance demands change of living. CHRIST warns that failure assured opposition from Himself with the sword of His mouth, which

is the Word of GOD: "**And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God**" (Revelation 19:15). The Bible has always been, and still is, GOD's means of rebuke and defeat for false religions. Six words, "**The just shall live by faith,**" (Romans 1:17), so wrought in Luther as to use him mightily in leading the Protestant Reformation.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR OVERCOMERS

The Pergamos Church is assured by CHRIST. Through some be ostracized, excommunicated, or even martyred through Satanic forces, if overcomers, they would be amply compensated through GOD's hidden manna (2:17). Manna typifies GOD's hidden, miraculous, sufficient life for pilgrims in this world's wilderness journey. Overcomers are assured of receiving GOD's white stone which means "GOD's favor." In early centuries juries condemned with the black stone and favored with the white stone.

Overcomers are assured that, while the world disapproves, CHRIST will approve; -- while the world disowns, CHRIST will own; -- while the world sets aside -- even murders -- CHRIST will receive. Overcomers are assured of a new name. GOD's names often signify enrichment and blessing through Him. The new name encourages overcomers by the assurance of such enrichment and blessing as is impossible for any name known to human phraseology to describe. The expression, "**He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear,**" assures that while the church collectively may go astray, the individual Christian can be an overcomer.

PRESENT-DAY MESSAGE

What a message Pergamos has for the present-day church! Churches and Christians, seduced by temptation to master the world, will eventually be mastered by the world. JESUS refused Satan's offer of temporary world mastery (Matthew 4:1-11). He will eventually reign over the world forever because of doing so in GOD's time and way. The Pergamos letter warns that those who play with sin will eventually find sin playing with them. It warns that those seeking this world's rest and favor lose GOD's rest and favor. It warns that creeds are shallow when minus CHRIST. The great compromise which broke forth in the Pergamos period travels on to the culmination, described in chapter seventeen of Revelation. Saved ones faithful to GOD's Word have always separated from it, cost what it may! GOD's blessing has ever rested upon such separation. Such separation is increasingly needed as apostasy deepens and CHRIST's return draws nigh. GOD's blessing will increasingly rest upon it. During a crisis time and with life endangered because of separation from, and opposition to, sins described in the Pergamos letter, Luther, at the Diet of Wurms, stated:

"Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. GOD help. Amen."

Who dares to do likewise?

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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