

DATE of MESSAGE: February 14th, 2016

MESSAGE TITLE: The Heart of the Matter

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:12-17

GETTING STARTED

The church at Ephesus resisted false teaching, and Smyrna endured persecution. Believers at Pergamum faced both assaults, withstanding persecution well but wrongly condoning dangerous deception. The city of Pergamum was built on terraces leading up the only accessible slope of its acropolis. It was an important center for pagan and imperial religion, but there are also indications of Jewish influence. As in Smyrna, Christians were persecuted harshly for their refusal to engage in emperor worship. According to this passage, at least one believer already died for his refusal to participate in idolatry. Jesus' message to the church at Pergamum reminds us that the church must abide in its first love or risk becoming married to the surrounding culture.

OBSERVATION

How were the believers in Pergamum being tested? What did Jesus find commendable in this church?

Jesus reveals Himself as 'him who has the sharp two-edged sword.' Why is this self-revelation appropriate for the believers in Pergamum to hear? Is the sword Jesus references used for protection or punishment?

Jesus affirmed that He's aware of Satan's presence in the city. Judging from this passage, how was Satan's presence manifested?

Who were Balaam and Balak, and what did they do (see Numbers 22-24)?

What did Jesus have against the believers in Pergamum? What warning did He give them?

What is the significance of the sword, hidden manna and white stone?

APPLICATION

Which do you think is easier to endure: persecution by enemies or seduction by the culture? Why? What does this passage say about how believers might deal with both of these pressures?

Our culture places a high value on tolerance – being tolerant of people's differences, lifestyles, moral choices, values, etc. In this passage, Jesus

confronts the church for tolerating false teaching that led people astray. How can the church fight against an attitude of tolerance that allows false teaching and compromise to settle in among believers?

Read II Corinthians 10:3-6 and Ephesians 6:10-11. What spiritual weapons of warfare has God given the church to combat ungodly cultural pressure to conform to the pattern of this world?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please guard us against tolerating any teaching or mindset that opposes your Lordship. Lead us instead to love you first and fast! Help us always cling to the truth of your word, and daily renew our minds by the power of your Spirit. Grant us heart-felt repentance if we find that we have become seduced by the lure of unbiblical tolerance and compromise.

SHARE POINT

Read Revelation 2:12-17 and review the application questions. Share with someone in your life how God's Word is changing you into a growing disciple. Encourage that person to do the same. That person could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker or a neighbor.

COMMENTARY NOTES

2:12 Christ's reference to the sharp two-edged sword proceeding from his mouth forewarns that the church's failure to discipline false teachers, will prompt him to intervene.

2:13 Pergamum was located 50 miles north of Smyrna and was the leading religious center of Asia Minor. This city hosted temples dedicated to 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma' and to Asklepios (the god of healing) and a large altar dedicated to Zeus. The worship of the emperor as a god was also strongly emphasized, even required, in the province of Asia, and it was a major problem for Christians at the time. In fact, the situation in Pergamum was even worse than at Smyrna for believers. All of this qualifies Pergamum to be called the site of Satan's throne. Amid oppressive paganism, a believer named Antipas had sealed his testimony with his life, and Jesus shares with Antipas his own title, faithful witness. The believers in Pergamum had been faithful to God through severe testing but had compromised their testimony by tolerating false teaching.

2:14-15 As the Israelites migrated through the wilderness, the prophet Balaam, prevented from cursing them, advised Moab's king to seduce them into both sexual and spiritual adultery. Balaam had been guilty of counseling King Balak

to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship. Likewise, the Nicolaitians, though opposed in Ephesus, were spreading sexual and spiritual infidelity at Pergamum. Simply put, compromise with pagan morality and departure from biblical faith soon corrupted the church.

2:16 Jesus sharply rebuked the church with the abrupt command to repent or else. He would contend with them using the sword of his mouth to judge all compromise that led to sin.

2:17 As God fed Israel in the wilderness, Christ supplies hidden manna to the one who conquers, who endures persecution and stays pure from defilement. Historically, a white stone was given to victors at games for entrance to banquets such as a stone was also used by jurors at trials to vote for acquittal. The new name given to the one who holds fast Jesus' name may refer to the Holy Spirit's work of conforming believers to the holiness of Christ. The manna and the white stone suggest differing types of eternal blessings and rewards as appropriate in each situation. Manna may refer to Jesus, the unseen source of nourishment and strength for believers. Scholars differ as to the meaning of the 'white stone.' Whatever the meaning, the 'new name' signifies acceptance by God. This may be an allusion to the Old Testament practice of the high priest wearing 12 stones on his breastplate with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on it.

SOURCES CONSULTED

The ESV Study Bible

The HCSB Study Bible

Serendipity Bible for Personal and Small Group Study

The Bible Knowledge Commentary of the New Testament