



Pergamum—Truth Revelation 2:12-17

Pergamum—Satan’s hometown

“Satan’s throne” in Pergamum is a way of referring to that city as a center of Roman government and pagan religions in the Asian Minor. It was the first city in Asian Minor to build a temple to a living Roman ruler, Augustus. Pergamum was designated as the “temple warden,” a title of prominence for the worship of Caesar. Life in such a politico-religious center put all the more pressure on the church to pay public homage to Caesar as a deity, and refusal was seen as high treason to the state. Satan’s throne may also refer to the conical hill behind Pergamum. On this hill stood the throne-like altar of Zeus.

Revelation 13:2 says that Satan gave the “beast” his throne and great authority. In other words, Satan works through the unholy, earthly political power in Pergamum to persecute God’s people.

The image of “Christ’s sword” is a picture of judgment against the satanic centre of Roman justice in Pergamum, which had misused its power to persecute Christians.

While the Roman government had the right of the sword, Christ’s throne is sovereign. Never forget that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth!

When governments misuse their God-ordained power of the sword, Jesus himself will judge them. This judgment, the destruction of the pagan nations, is portrayed in Revelation 19:15, 21, in the same image of the sword. In this light, the oppressed believers could be encouraged that their cause would be vindicated on the last day.

Pergamum—the hometown for the believers

Instead of saying, “*I know your deeds,*” as he does to the other churches, Jesus says, “*I know where you live.*” In other words, Jesus is well aware of the local situation in which these Christians live. And He is aware of our situation, too. He sees when we withstand the onslaught of harassment or persecution from the world. He is pleased when we stand firm. *I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. (Revelation 2:13)*

Christ’s concern for the church at Pergamum is not the threats from the outside; rather, it’s compromise from within.

Pergamum—Lessons for us today.

1. Jesus tells the truth about faithfulness.

Partial obedience is actually disobedience. Partial faithfulness is unfaithfulness. Jesus is saying that if you are not giving him all of you, then it means you are giving him none of you. "It's all or nothing. I own you!" It's not enough to love the Jewish Messiah; we must love Jewish morality as given in God's Word. Jesus is not our assistant; He's our Master.

But note in v. 16: Jesus criticized the faithful majority for not confronting the mushy minority! He warned them, "If you leaders lose your nerve; you're going to lose your church!" Are you afraid of confrontation? Do you compromise to avoid conflict? Are your decisions based on pleasing others? Do other people control your life?

"Walk in your God-given authority; or someone will take it and use it against you."
(John Bevere)

The problem with the church at Ephesus was that while it knew how to fight, it had forgotten how to love. The problem with the church at Pergamum was that while it knew how to love, it had forgotten how to fight.

2. Jesus tells the truth about truth.

Truth is not subjective, as suggested by Pergamum's acropolis of idols. It's objective. "Objective truth is independent of the knower and his/her consciousness." (Koukl, 1998, 80) Objective truth has a life of its own apart from what I believe. The truth of gravity exists whether I choose to believe it or not. Freedom comes from living within the boundaries of absolute truth.¹

3. Jesus tells the truth about himself.

He is Truth. He has the sword of truth, the sword of sovereign power, because He himself went under the sword for you and me. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me." Jesus' manna was to do the will of His Father. And the Father's will was submitting to the "sword" of crucifixion. Jesus was the only one who by obeying God fully, lost his freedom. The only way He could give us freedom was by losing it himself.

The white stone has several meanings behind it, one of which is that it was often used by jurors to acquit the accused. If a juror submitted a white stone, it meant innocence. If a black stone, it was guilt. On the Cross, Jesus said, "I take your black stone so that you will receive a white one." I will be guilty so that you can be free. I will be "uglified" so that you can be beautified.

"God did not abolish the fact of evil: He transformed it.
He did not stop the Crucifixion: He rose from the dead." (Dorothy Sayers)

¹ "The principle of tolerance exists only in world in which moral absolutes exist, and only if one of those absolutes is 'All people should respect others' right to differ.' The ethic of tolerance can be rational only if moral truth is objective and absolute, not subjective and relative. Tolerance is an absolutist principle and makes no sense from any view of ethical relativism." (Koukl 1998, 154-155)