

The Church at Pergamos: The Faltering Church (Part 2)

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[0:00] The second part to the letter to Pergamos, the faltering church.

! We're ready for point number two. Point number two. And last week I finished up with point number one, obviously, and we wouldn't be ready for number two.

The concern for the truth. The concern for the truth is what we looked at last week. The second thing we want to consider is the cause for the error. Remember the problem at Pergamos that Jesus was addressing, a mixture of truth and error.

In fact, you could even argue, kind of reading between the lines, that they were drifting more toward the error side. And specific, I guess we could identify it as a kind of worldliness, but it was error. And so what was the cause? That's what we want to consider here first of all tonight. The cause for the error. The cause of it. Well, verse 13, and we've looked at some of this verse.

[1:20] We'll look at other parts of it tonight. Verse 13 says, I know your works and where you dwell. And then this phrase, where Satan's throne is, which is quite interesting.

And you hold fast to my name and did not deny my faith, even the days in which Adipas was my faithful martyr. So there's a martyr in the church. Who was killed among you where Satan dwells. There's another kind of reference to Satan dwelling there. His throne is there. He dwells there. This is interesting. I'm not sure that anybody can explain it fully or definitively.

That is one thing you discover pretty quickly when you analyze these letters. There are things mentioned here. There are reference points. You know, references to historical events and names and such things that aren't very easy to identify.

And so here's kind of one of those where Satan's throne is. And yet, even if we do nothing else but just notice what this is saying in a general sense, that the church at Pergamos actually lived and worshipped and served the Lord.

[2:40] Fill in those blanks. I think I left those blanks for you. They lived and worshipped and served the Lord right smack dab in the fairy town where Satan's throne was located.

That's what he's saying. Now, exactly what that means, if we're talking about some major center for occult activity, you know, I don't know.

There's a lot of speculation. We're not going to get into that tonight. But it is a very strong statement. Here, this church, these people of this church, they're struggling with error. And Jesus says, you know, I know something about you.

I know that you live and worship and you serve the Lord right there where Satan's throne is located. And so Satan not only had an ongoing ministry there at Pergamos.

I mean, you could say that. That's certainly implied. And I think not only did Satan have his kind of habitation at Pergamos, because he says where Satan dwells, his habitation, but it was worse.

[3:53] He ruled. He ruled Pergamos. Now, this is not a statement about ruling the church. It's a statement about what this church was immersed in, what surrounded this church.

And Jesus is saying to them, I am fully aware of this. And I know what you have to deal with day in and day out as citizens of Pergamos, as a church, the believing church there located in that city. And so the idea being, or the point being, that Satan is the influence or the cause behind their trend toward error, their struggle with error.

You see, this is yet again a statement concerning the divine knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's been doing that all along since we started looking at these letters.

In his letter to Ephesus, remember, Jesus said, I know your works. All right, so Jesus knew all about their works. Last time, or a couple of weeks ago, when we looked at the church, or the letter

to Smyrna, Jesus said, I know your tribulation.

[5:05] See, that was what they were struggling with. Persecution, tribulation. And Jesus said, I know all about that. I know all about your works, you people at Ephesus. I know your tribulation there in Smyrna.

And then here in this letter to Pergamos, Jesus said, I know the environment of wickedness you live in. And apparently that was the case in Pergamos, because he highlights that.

Now there was, you know, obviously pagan activity all throughout that part of the world. And the worship of false gods and so forth.

But particularly in Pergamos, he said, it's so intensified here, I'm naming this Satan's throne. His throne. So I know all these things.

And now, that brings us to this point we ought to make. We should know something about Satan. We know some things about him from God's Word.

[6:06] But there's something we need to know that maybe we forget about, and that is that he's a liar. Satan is a liar. And not only that, he's a liar, but he also has power.

We could even, from our perspective, say that he has great power. He really does. Don't underestimate the power of Satan. Now don't overestimate it either. And that's what a lot of people do, of course, because we need to remember that Satan, though he has power, it's power that is granted to him by God.

Now you can ask God about that when you get to heaven. I'm not sure I understand all the ins and outs of that. In fact, I know I don't understand that. But God has granted Satan a certain power, and a great power.

Alright, so he's a liar, and he has power, but that said, we should never ever fear him. Now, you should have a respect for his ways so that you keep yourself, you know, you understand how he works, his wiles.

I ought to try to do that, and understand that he is a liar and all these things. But we should never fear him. Not as God's children. And quite frankly, some people give Satan more credit than is due him.

[7:27] We should always keep in mind that what Satan is not, what he is not. You know, we have a tendency to focus on what we think he is, what we think he looks like, or what we think he's able to do, and so forth.

And a lot of that is based not on the Bible, but on movies we've watched. You know, certainly Satan is not some red little creature with a pointed tail and a pitchfork, and you know, with horns and so forth.

He's an angel of light. But, you know, we need to keep in mind what he is not. And I'll give you four things he is not. Satan is not omniscient.

He's not omniscient, which means he does not know all things. You know that about Satan? We have a tendency to think he can read our minds, and he knows what we're thinking, he knows what we're going to do, and he's got it all planned out.

We almost kind of attribute God-like qualities to Satan. He's not God. He's not even a lesser God. He's not deity. He does not know all things.

[8:36] He does not know even what all believers know. Have you ever thought of that? He doesn't even know what you know. Specifically about Christ's triumph through the cross.

Satan does not know that. Does not understand that. I'm convinced he doesn't. And he does not know about his own defeat. His own eternal defeat.

He still thinks he can win. I don't know how you explain that, but I think 1 Corinthians 2, 7 through 8 and verse 10 gives us an indication, but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.

Now what is this wisdom he's talking about? He's talking about his plan of redemption. Talking about his plan of the gospel. And so it's a hidden wisdom which God ordained for the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew.

Now I think that is an all-encompassing kind of statement. There's some debate about what that means and the implications of it, but I think it certainly includes Satan.

[9:54] It includes all wicked rulers who are at the service of Satan. And if they didn't know it, then Satan didn't know it. None of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. So these things are revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. We didn't learn these things just because we read it in a book. There are many people who have read those facts, the things concerning the Gospel and redemption and the true meaning of the cross and its accomplishment.

They've read those things, but they don't get it, understand it, and that's the way Satan is. We do because the Holy Spirit has taught us, has illuminated us, and has guided us in the truth.

And if the rulers of the age had known they would not have crucified Jesus, on the one hand, some of them would not have participated in that because they would have realized that He is the Messiah.

[11:04] But I think it's meant in the negative that they would not have crucified Him because that would have accomplished redemption, the very last thing Satan would want.

Number two, Satan is not omnipresent. That is, he can only be in one place at a time. I get a little amused sometimes. People talk to me about the devil.

You know, the devil came to visit them, or the devil's here. They see the devil everywhere. The devil isn't everywhere. In fact, it's very unlikely anyone has ever met or come into the presence of the devil himself.

The devil has many demons, and they do his work, his purposes, and they're very organized. But it's very unlikely you've ever met the devil.

The devil's not omnipresent. He can't be everywhere at the same time. God is. He's everywhere present and nowhere absent. You ought to write that down.

[12:08] I didn't coin that. That's just a good, short definition of the omnipresence of God. He's everywhere present. That is, he's present everywhere.

And he's nowhere absent. Everywhere present, nowhere absent. But Satan is not. He can only be in one place at one time. Now, he's a spirit being.

I'm not suggesting that he's physical flesh and blood. He's certainly not that. He's an angel, a spirit being. But he was a created being.

Alright? He's a created being. Created by God and therefore does not possess the unique qualities of deity. Any of them. Alright? So, Satan is not omniscient, not omnipresent.

Satan is not omnipotent. And we've got all the omnis out of the way. Alright? He's not omnipotent. He does not have absolute power. God does.

[13:08] No limit to God's power. God doesn't have to rest when he's done a little too much work. He has absolute power. There's no diminishing of it, no increasing of it.

It's absolute. But Satan does not have absolute power. His power, the power he has, is number one, granted and therefore limited.

By whom? God. Granted by God, limited by God, and somehow Satan's power, even all the things that he does, ultimately are part of God's eternal purposes.

And we can't answer how that works. I'm not sure necessarily that we'll ever be able to answer that. I don't think once we get to heaven we're going to suddenly be omniscient and know all things.

We'll know as we are known. The Bible says that that doesn't mean we're going to suddenly become like God and know everything. And I think a lot of questions we have here we won't even care about once we get to heaven. Number four, Satan is not triumphant.

[14:17] Though sometimes it seems that he's winning. Does it seem that way to you sometimes? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. At least it seems that he's having his way.

And I guess in one sense he is but it's going to be short lived. In fact it's already been settled. At the cross Jesus defeated Satan and all his forces of evil.

And yet you might be thinking well but they're still at it. Seemingly unhindered. but I guess you could put it this way it's final.

He's defeated. It's final but not yet finalized. Not that there's any hope that it's going to turn out otherwise. It's a sure thing.

His defeat is sure. It's kind of like you know you get out and you got pesky flies in the house and so you get out the spray we don't already do that anymore we used to and spray those flies you know and they still fly around.

[15:28] They're just dead and don't know it yet. You know that kind of thing. And next time you look they're laying all over the kitchen table and on the floor and in your food and coffee and

whatever.

But you know the end of Satan's story has already been written hasn't it? That's why we have the book of Revelation we can read to the end. Revelation 20 10 the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

One of these days Satan is going to as I've heard it put going to get a one way ticket to hell. And when he gets there he's not going to be the lord of hell. But you ought to put out of your mind this kind of fanciful notion that Satan is down there with his pitchfork making people shovel coal and such.

He's not the lord of hell. He's not even in hell yet. One day he will be and he'll be tormented there the Bible says day and night forever and ever. Now he's an eternal being.

He can't go there and die. His torment will be ongoing forever and ever and ever and ever. So Satan is none of these things. These four things.

[16:48] But the Lord Jesus is all of these things. And more of course. And he's omniscient.

And so therefore he knows where we are in the world. He knows where we are here. He knows about the things we struggle with. He knows about our culture and the difficulties of that and so forth.

And he knows. And he knows what we have to deal with every day. He knows all those things. 1 John 4.4 You are of God little children and have overcome them because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

So the cause of error is Satan. He is the father of lies. Remember John 8.44 he tells a lie because that's his nature. And he's the father of all lies.

He's a liar from the very beginning. Alright, so third, we've talked about the concern for the truth. We've now finished up the cause of the error and now the conquest of truth over error.

[18:00] So we have the truth, we have the error, both those things are there and we struggle with the error part of it. So how how is error, how do we conquer error with truth?

So the conquest of truth over error. You and I, as born again believers, we can be sure of something, we can take comfort in the fact that truth shall triumph.

It shall. So it doesn't seem like it today. It doesn't always triumph even in our own isolated individual lives. You know, the truth doesn't always come to light like we think it should.

The truth about ourselves, what people think about us and it's not true or say about us. Sometimes we don't even see truth necessarily coming to full light as we would like for it to in our own personal lives, much less in our culture or in our world.

So it may seem like that this is not the case, but it shall. Truth will always triumph. It will. Verse 16 and 17, repent or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

[19:11] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat and I will give him a white stone and on the stone a new name which no one knows except him who receives it.

That's a very interesting passage. Now some of this we've already kind of touched on. Need for repentance, that's how we should respond always to the Lord's rebuke, to sin, to wrong direction, we should repent.

About some of these other things, he mentions three things here that need some explanation and I would suggest to you that these three things represent instruments or aspects of conquest, resources, maybe we could put it that way, resources, for conquest over error.

The first one, well, the first one is the sword. These are the three things. The sword, the hidden manna, and a white stone.

Those three things are mentioned in this passage of these two verses. That needs some explanation and I'm not sure that we, well, some of it is a little difficult, but I think we put it all together.

[20:35] These are resources. These represent resources for our conquest, our battle against error. The sword, the hidden manna, and the white stone. First one, the sword, it says the sword of my mouth represents our weapon, our weapon against error.

That is very clear. And of course, you may have already guessed the sword of my mouth refers to what? The word of God. I mean, we have testimony to that throughout Scripture.

The word of God is a sword. And Hebrews 4.12, for the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. So, the sword of my mouth refers to the word of God. And specifically, we could even say that God's weapon for overcoming error is the proclamation of the gospel. And I use the word gospel in the broadest sense of the word.

Not just simply that he died for our sins, was buried and raised from the dead, according to Scripture. That's the bare essentials of the gospel message. But the gospel is, in a sense, encompasses the whole of God's word because the gospel is all about God's plan to redeem lost sinners to himself, to show his grace and for his glory to save lost sinners.

[22:04] And that's been his plan all the way from the beginning. And we could say that from cover to cover, that's what this book is about. So, gospel in the broadest sense. So, here's the weapon we have.

It is the proclamation of the gospel. And so, the word of God is the only true weapon against error. And not, here's several things that do not represent our weapon against error. Not burning heretics. The church has done that at various junctures in its history or at least certain elements of the church. Burning heretics at the stake will not suppress error.

It may for a time and it may for isolated places for a time, but that's not the answer. Also, not legislation. Legislation.

[23:07] Legislation that restricts immorality. Would you say that's good? Well, you better say it is. Of course it is. And we need it, don't we? Legislation that would restrain immorality.

We need it, absolutely, need it to be enforced, but how is that working for us? It doesn't mean we throw that out, we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

We do need legislation for morality. You can legislate morality at least in a civilized society. you can put a check on it, but that's not going to be the answer. That never will be the ultimate answer. Third, war. War against wicked nations.

Sometimes necessary, I believe, not everybody would agree with that. Sometimes it's necessary for justice sake, but that will not triumph over error.

[24:07] I mean, how many wars have been fought against Islam, and how's that working? It's just not working. Education also won't do it.

It doesn't mean education is a bad thing or wrong thing. Some of the most educated people are the most immoral you'd ever want to meet, so education, you can say, well, biblical education, well, you know, over the centuries, throughout 20th century liberalism, and then after 20th century liberalism, you know, was kind of replaced by what we call neo-orthodoxy, and all these things represent major error, and yet the scholars who were involved in liberalism, 20th century theological liberalism, and neo-orthodoxy knew the Bible better than anyone in this room, and yet that did not change, they were educated, and economic prosperity certainly will not do it, in fact, it usually has the opposite effect, doesn't it?

I think maybe that helps us understand, maybe part of our problem, affluency, economic prosperity, has in some sense been our curse, as a nation, we don't need God, and all right, so error then can only be defeated by what?

Truth. By truth. I put the text of an old, old hymn, I think it was written back in the 1850s, somewhere in there, the words written by Thomas Hughes, and composed by Henry Smart, Jonathan, I don't mean anything to you, it's the words really that mattered to me, and listen to it. Some of the language is kind of archaic and old, so it's an old, old hymn. O God of truth, whose living word upholds what e'er hath breath, everything that has breath, look down on thy creation, Lord, enslaved by sin and death.

[26:23] Set up thy standard, Lord, that we who claim a heavenly birth may march with thee to smite the lies that vex thy groaning earth. Fain would we join that blessed array, array of an army, and follow in the might of him the faithful and the true, in raiment clean and white.

Yet who can fight for truth in God, enthralled by lies and sin? Who can? He who would wage such war on earth must first be true within.

O God of truth for whom we long, O thou that hearest prayer, do thine own battle in our hearts and slay the falsehood there. So tried in thy refining fire from every lie set free, in us thy perfect truth shall dwell, and we may fight for thee.

It's a great, great word. Do that hymn. I don't have any idea what the tune is. There's a second instrument of conquest over error.

We need to hurry along here. I would like to finish Pergamos, so you'll bear with me. The second instrument or resource would be the hidden manna. The hidden manna represents our wealth, not our own personal wealth, but our riches, our wealth that we have, because we're believers.

[27 : 50] Verse 17, to him who overcomes, I will give him the hidden manna to eat. Now, what is this? Really, this is not hard to figure out either. The hidden manna is, as it's stated, in the way it's stated here, it's a reward for the overcomer.

It's a reward given to the one who hears, receives, understands, and strives to live by the Word of God. And so essentially, the hidden manna is Jesus.

The hidden manna is Jesus. He is our reward. He's our treasure. John 6.35, he's the bread of life. John 6.51, the living bread which came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. John 14.6, the way, the truth, and the life. So this is our treasure. Our wealth is the hidden manna.

It's the Lord Jesus Christ. Third instrument of conquest over error is this white stone. And this is probably the most difficult to understand.

[28 : 59] I can only tell you my conclusion. There are other thoughts about it. But the white stone represents our wisdom. What is this white stone?

It has a new name written. a new name written on it which no one knows except the one who receives it. That's kind of cryptic, kind of strange, isn't it?

White stone may, and I say may because I'm not absolutely sure, but it may be a reference to the Old Testament Urim and Thummim.

Have you ever heard of the Urim and Thummim? Kind of hard to say. You have to eat some sour candy to be able to say. Urim and Thummim.

In the Old Testament, I don't know if I put this down, this little blurb here kind of describes the Old Testament, the high priestly garments. You might kind of picture that. Maybe you've seen some pictures of the high priest garments.

[30 : 10] I mean, they were quite elaborate, very specific, included a number of things.

Undergarments and those outer garments and the breastplate and special head dress and all kinds of things.

And all those things, of course, were meant to point to Christ. But in these garments, included in the garments, he wore something called the Urim and Thummim.

And scholars believe that it consisted of two small stones. and the high priest would somehow, I'm not sure how, he would use them to seek divine guidance.

I don't think we ought to be so, you know, think they're dice or anything like that. I've heard it described that way. These holy dice that they had, they'd throw them down there.

But somehow they were used to give him guidance and they speculate that the Urim, partly because of the word itself, the root of the Hebrew word, that it means, that it was a white stone.

[31 : 19] The Urim was a white stone and on it was written the secret name of God. The secret name would be very likely the name for God that was not to be pronounced, it would be Yahweh.

And that would be on that stone. And so, if that's the case, the white stone may be a reference to then the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

that's a major tool, resource, in our conquest against error. And that is guidance, wisdom. Alright, so, these instruments for the conquest of error are available, according to verse 17, wrap this up, to him who overcomes.

And who is the one who overcomes? Born again believers. It's not a reference, again, I want to drive this home, got a reference to self-determination.

And if you don't make it, you don't get it. I'm talking about our own works, our self-determination, or discipline. I'm talking about God's grace operating in our lives to number us among the overcomers based upon the conquering work Lord Jesus Christ.