

## 5) Rewards For The Overcomer

- A) Jesus Christ, calling on those who are believers in Him to listen carefully ("He who has an ear, let him hear..." 2:17), lists two great rewards for those who "overcome."
- B) The 'overcomers' to which Jesus is writing (in all of the letters in Revelation) are to those who have faith in Jesus Christ, every saved person†.
- C) The first reward to the overcomer is to eat of the "hidden manna" (2:17). Manna (Exodus 16) was the person of Jesus Christ (John 6:33-35, 47-58, Bread of life). In eternity, we will assimilate Christ, like the food of manna, for the sustenance of all believers through all of history!
- D) The second reward to the overcomer is the receiving of the "white stone" with a special name (2:17).
  - i. The color white is probably a reference to purity, glory and victory (1:14, 7:9-10, 14:4).
  - ii. The reward is given as a stone (perhaps a reference to acquittal or even God's will), as a picture of a perfectly pure relationship with Jesus, whose Name is written on His followers -- and is only known by them (2:17).

† While there is not sufficient room to discuss the different possible views on the identity of the "overcomer" in Revelation, I firmly believe that it is a reference to all of those who are saved. In other words, these are rewards which will be given by Jesus Christ to all those who are Christians (the saved, God's chosen, the elect). Embracing this view should give us guidance in the rejection of other views, most popular of which are that the "overcomer" is a: A) Saved person who retains their salvation, which others will forfeit (lose) who do not overcome, or, B) Saved person who conquers, distinguished from defeated (back-slidden) Christians, who were not overcomers, but still retain their salvation. Distinguishing between these views is critical for our understanding of the letters in Revelation, and should be consistent with an orthodox view of salvation and rewards in Scripture. I strongly recommend "The Overcomer of the Apocalypse" by James E. Rosscup, Grace Theological Journal, Fall, 1982 for a thorough discussion of this important subject.

# Tolerance

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**'HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES. TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES, TO HIM I WILL GIVE SOME OF THE HIDDEN MANNA, AND I WILL GIVE HIM A WHITE STONE, AND A NEW NAME WRITTEN ON THE STONE WHICH NO ONE KNOWS BUT HE WHO RECEIVES IT.'**  
**~REVELATION 2:17 (NASB)**

## 1) Pergamum -- Satan's Throne

- A) You might remember that the city of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) prided itself as the "first in all of Asia" when it came to worship of the emperor (called the Imperial cult).
- B) Despite the self-designation of Smyrna, Rome (where Caesar and the Roman Senate resided), under the leadership of Caesar Augustus (cf. Luke 2:1), designated Pergamum as the official location for an imperial temple.

- C) The difference between Pergamum's commitment to the Imperial cult and other Asia Minor cities was three-fold:
- i. The temple in Pergamum was erected to a living Caesar, rather than an already-dead emperor. The citizenry of Pergamum worshipped the "living emperor" as a god.
  - ii. Whereas in Smyrna, the martyrdom of saints was still a future event, in Pergamum, a faithful saint ("Antipas," Revelation 2:13) had already been publicly martyred.
  - iii. The other cities of Revelation all experienced opposition from the Imperial cult, however Pergamum was the 'capitol city' ("throne," 2:13) of worship to the living emperor.
- D) In addition to the Imperial cult, there were other popular (although not as prominent) cults in Pergamum. Most notable were two cults (Zeus and Asklepios), for which giant idols were erected in which powerful snakes were portrayed.

## 2) Compliments For Pergamum's Christians

- A) Jesus Christ aggressively ("two-edged sword," 2:12) approaches the church in Pergamum with two compliments in the midst of the hostile environment in Pergamum ("Satan's throne," 2:13).
- B) The first compliment to the church was their "holding fast" to the Name of Jesus Christ (2:13). The word-picture is one of individuals who were "attached firmly" to their relationship with Christ, despite the opposition.
- C) The second compliment to the church was their commitment to their faith in Jesus Christ, despite persecution and the public martyrdom of Antipas (2:13).

## 3) Criticisms For Pergamum's Christians

- A) Jesus Christ also has some criticisms for Pergamum ("a few things," 2:14) because of their toleration of false teachers and accommodation of pagan cultural practices.
- B) Jesus first criticizes Pergamum for some who are holding to the "teaching of Balaam\*" (2:14). These were false teachers which were tolerated in the midst of the Christian community.
- C) The church's toleration of false teachers in their midst was leading some toward accommodating Pergamum's culture, rather than transforming it -- so much so that they had even allowed the hated (2:6) Nicolaitans into their midst (2:15).
- D) While we do not know exactly what the teachings and practices of the Nicolaitans were, we can surmise from these verses (2:13-15), that they taught Christians how to follow Jesus, while tolerating and accommodating the culture.

## 4) The Solution For Syncretism

- A) Jesus makes clear that tolerance & accommodation of pagan culture is absolutely wrong! Jesus calls on the church to repent (immediately turn from sin), or Jesus Himself will come and "make war with them" (Revelation 2:16).

\* Balaam was a Gentile prophet who was employed by the King of Moab against the Israelites in Numbers 22-24. While there is no record of Balaam advising against Israel, the Israelites do succumb to immorality with pagan women and idolatry in worshipping the "Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:1-3). This episode is credited by Moses (Numbers 31:16) as being because of the "counsel of Balaam." Balaam thus became a Jewish figure for false teachers/teaching, particularly in relation to convincing the Israelites to "eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality." Following Balaam's teaching became an idiomatic saying which came to represent a loss of identity as the people of God, becoming indistinguishable from the culture and practices of the local pagan peoples. The great threat was syncretism, of losing ethnic and religious identity, and consequently losing the blessings and promises of God. (From various sources, esp. "The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without" by David A. deSilva, Westminster Theological Journal, Fall, 1992).