



# Citadel Of Faith Covenant Church

July 27, 2016

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ALPHA AND OMEGA

We continue the conversation with the churches. Last time we looked at Jesus' Words to the church at Ephesus we now turn our attention to two more churches today, Smyrna and Pergamum. Rev. 2:8 begins with the salutation directed to the "angel" of the church at Smyrna. Once again, it bears repeating that Jesus referred to these pastors or church leaders as "angels" or messengers. He did not say to the angels, but to the angel. This is significant. Although healthy church governance should never be done in a vacuum (there should be checks, balances and other systems of transparency and clarity); we should guard against thinking that there are many heads in any body. Anything with two heads is a monster. God speaks to the church through the angel. He still speaks to His church through the Pastors he has placed as "angels" over them. Jesus says similar words to what we saw in Rev. 1:17&18. He introduces Himself as the first and the last (Alpha and Omega) and the one who died and came to life again. Not only is He reaffirming his eternal existence and Deity, but He's also reminding us of His humanity, the one who died. So significant especially for the comfort He is going to bestow up on the suffering church. Jesus suffered and He died. If sinless perfection can suffer and die, surely we will not be exempt. But He came back to life again and lives forevermore! This is the hope.

The Church at Smyrna typifies the condition of the church during the time from about 100 years after Christ to A.D. 313. The word Smyrna means myrrh. It is frequently used in scripture in connection with embalming the dead. Myrrh had to be crushed to release it's fragrance. This was an appropriate name for the church at Smyrna. Just thirty five miles north of Ephesus, Smyrna was a vital port city (2<sup>nd</sup> largest number of exports in Asia Minor). The believers in Smyrna were under unbelievable persecution because of their faith. This extremely wealthy city would pillage, imprison and persecute anyone who openly followed Christ. Because of this, many of their homes were lost, businesses ransacked and lives threatened. Rev. 2:9a; Jesus says I know.... We should be comforted by these words. Jesus KNOWS. He doesn't merely empathize, He KNOWS! (Heb. 4:15 read). He particularly knows their affliction and poverty. Because of their affliction there is poverty. Yet from His perspective Poverty = Wealth. He says, "yet you are rich". (Rev. 2:9). So not only have they been attacked in body and possession, but also in reputation. Rev. 2:9 speaks of the slander from those who claim to be Jews but are not. Jesus actually calls them the synagogue of Satan. What an interesting play on word. Using the synagogue as a front but fueled by Satan. These were Judaizers who had a false blend of teaching which mixed grace with works, but relied heavily on works as salvific.



Rev. 2:14 states that there were some within the church who held to the teachings of Balaam. This brings us back to Numbers 22-25. This “prophet for pay” encouraged the wandering Israelites in the wilderness to intermarry with idol-worshipping pagans and worship those foreign gods through idolatrous immorality. The worship of many of these pagan gods in Rome involved sexually immoral acts along with greed and lustful practices. Not only had they adopted the practices of Balaam, but also that of the Nicolaitians. Remember they were mentioned in Rev. 2:6. Although the Ephesian church was commended for not embracing the Nicolaitian teachings, this could not be said for the church of Pergamum. This was a teaching which embraced the hierarchical dogma which meant that those in certain official positions within the church had authority over others. This went well with the mindset of the Christian church during this era as the church was now a church state. There was comingling of the affairs of the church with those of government. **COMPROMISE!** Pure and simple. This is the challenge the church of Pergamum. One good way to see where we are on the pendulum of being like the world around us (the popularity index). John 15:19 reminds us that “if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” Why is the church trying so desperately to be loved by the world? The religious leaders also became popular civic leaders. As the role of ministers (Biblically) was to serve, we now see many of them being served. This heretical teaching was tearing the church apart. Jesus gives one warning...Repent!!! If they do not, he says (Rev. 2:16) He will come and fight against them with the sword of His mouth..with the Word!

He concludes this letter to the church at Pergamum like all other letters, (Rev. 2:17); let those who have ears hear. Just because we have the tools to hear doesn't mean we have the ability to hear. He makes a promise. To the one who is victorious, He will give some of the hidden manna. He will allow us to receive the “bread of life” which is hidden from those in darkness. He then stated that those who overcome would have a new name, and the white stone, which no man knows except the one that receives it. In those days the white stone was an absolution from guilt of sin, alluding to the custom of giving a white stone to those acquitted on trial and a black stone to those condemned. The new name is the name of adoption: adopted people took the name of the family they were adopted. No one could read the evidence of the adoption but himself; he cannot always read it, but if he persevere, he shall have both the evidence of sonship and the inheritance. What a promise to those of us who will overcome such dark and tough days!

#### Questions for Thought:

1. Do you avoid environments which challenge your spirituality?
2. Do you find that you have compromised to “fit in”?
3. Do you connect with people who are not like you? (Deeply connect: soul-tie?)
4. Do you feel as though your voice is real in the kingdom or do you feel as though you don't have the right “position”? Why?
5. How does repentance look to YOU?
6. Do you have hidden manna...name some examples of how/when you receive it.
7. What's your white stone?