

Revelation of Jesus Christ

Study 15

Revelation 2:12-17

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

17 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 written which no one knows except him who receives it." '

Last week we looked at the first three of eight facets in this letter to the Church at Pergamos, we looked at who it is that is sending and communicating this letter, Christ, and we looked at the Church, a congregation that had come out to believe in Christ in the midst of a pagan society and they stood firm. We also looked at the City and its place in Asia Minor at the time of John, and found it to be a place of worship of many gods, including the worship of the Roman Emperor. All of the society and culture ' centered around the many gods and the worship of such. We also looked at the faithfulness of many who loved God and worshiped Him in the midst of this paganism, They loved Jesus and would not tolerate error to be taught even though they were in the place Jesus calls the throne of Satan.

So there was much good about this church, however there was also listed in this letter some concerns

THE CONCERN

Rev 2:14-15

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The church at Pergamum remained loyal to Christ and Christian truth. It faithfully persevered at the very headquarters, as it were, of satanic opposition, even in the face of martyrdom.

Yet not all was well at Pergamum.

After commending the believers there, Christ informed them, **I have a few things against you.** His concern was that they had **there some who hold** to false **teaching.**

While the majority of the believers at Pergamum were faithful and loyal to the truth, there were some associated with the church, who came to believe false doctrine.

While many in the Christian realm today, who make light of doctrine, and biblical and theological error, are viewed as unimportant, **that is not the perspective of the Lord of the church.**

Our Lord holds it against any in His church who hold to error. Tragically, the rest were tolerating these errorists, instead of confronting them.

Titus 3:10-11

*10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,
11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.*

Like many churches today, the church at Pergamum failed to obey the biblical mandate to practice church discipline:

Matt 18:15-18

*15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.
16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'
17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.
18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

Specifically, Christ was concerned with two heresies being tolerated at Pergamum, one associated with an Old Testament character, the other with a New Testament person.

1st **Some were following the teaching of Balaam.**

The story of Balaam, a notorious Old Testament prophet for hire, is found in *Numbers 22-25*.

Fearful of the Israelites because of what they had done to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse them.

After trying unsuccessfully three times to curse Israel, Balaam came up with another plan. Since he was unable to curse the Israelites, he decided to corrupt them **by teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.**

He plotted to use Moabite women to lure the Israelites into the behavior of the godless world around them, sexual immorality and idolatry (*Num 25; 31:16*)

That blasphemous union with Satan and false gods would debase the Israelites and destroy their spiritual power.

Balaam's plan succeeded, though not to the extent that he had hoped. God intervened and severely chastened Israel, executing twenty four thousand of them (*Num 25:9*), including many of the leaders (*Num 25:4-5*).

That drastic action halted the Israelites' slide into immorality and idolatry.

Like the Israelites, who were seduced by Balaam's false teaching, some in the church at Pergamum were lured to mix with the pagan system.

Jude 10-11

10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.

11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Peter rebuked the Balaamites:

2 Pet 2:15-16

15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

As God severely chastened Israel for such a union, so the Lord Jesus Christ threatens to do the same in this passage. Read (*Rev 2:16*)

The Apostle Paul points out the sinful absurdity of believers' seeking to unite with the world:

2 Cor 6:14-17

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."

Despite the graphic example of Israel and the clear teaching of the apostle Paul, with which they were likely familiar, some in Pergamum persisted in following Balaam's teaching.

They believed one could attend pagan feasts, with all their debauchery and sexual immorality, and still join the church to worship Jesus Christ.

But that is impossible, since:

James 4:4

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1 Pet 2:11

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

The issue of whether Christians could participate in idolatrous feasts had been settled decades earlier at the Jerusalem Council, which issued a mandate for believers:

Acts 15:29

29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

Such compromise still goes on today, as people like Balaam appear to speak for God, but motivated by greed and self-aggrandizement they lead the church into sin.

2nd A second heresy tolerated at Pergamum involved a New Testament figure. There were some there who in the same way held the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The phrase **in the same way** indicates that the teaching of the **Nicolaitans** led to the same wicked behavior as that of the followers of Balaam.

We discussed the **Nicolaitans** and their teachings when we studied the letter to the church at Ephesus.

We learned that this group had derived their name from Nicholas, one of the seven men chosen to oversee the distribution of food in *Acts 6*.

Again whether he became an apostate (as some of the early church fathers believed) or the **Nicolaitans**, his followers perverted his teachings is not known.

Abusing the biblical teaching on Christian liberty, the **Nicolaitans** also taught that Christians could participate in pagan orgies. They seduced the church with immorality and idolatry.

The majority of the believers in Pergamum did not participate in the errors of either heretical group. They remained steadfastly loyal to Christ and the Christian faith. But by tolerating the groups and refusing to exercise church discipline, they shared in their guilt, which brought the Lord's judgment.

THE COMMAND

Rev 2:16

16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The only remedy for any sinful behavior is to **repent**.

Repent is from *metanoeo*, a word used in Scripture to describe a change of mind that results in a change of behavior.

While tolerance is lauded in or modern culture, tolerating heretical teaching or sinful behavior in the church is not a virtue but a sin.

So serious a matter is it that, should they fail to repent of failure to discipline, Christ warns them *"I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth"*

Num 22:23

23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road.

The entire church faced the battle sword of Christ's judgment, the heretics for practicing their heresy and iniquity, and the rest of the church for tolerating it.

The change in pronouns from **you** to **them** reflects an underlying Hebrew idiom commonly found in the Septuagint:

Both pronouns refer to the entire church.

The church cannot tolerate evil in any form.

To the boastful Corinthians, proudly tolerating a man guilty of incest, Paul wrote;

1 Cor 5:6-7

6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Sinning believers should be made to feel miserable in the fellowship and worship of the church by being confronted powerfully with the Word of God.

Neither is the goal of the church to provide an environment where unbelievers feel comfortable;

It is a place where they can hear the truth and be convicted of their sins so as to be saved,

Rom 10:13-17

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Gently, lovingly, graciously, yet firmly, unbelievers need to be confronted with the reality of their sin and God's gracious provision through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Error will never be suppressed by compromising with it.

Today's nonconfrontive church is largely, repeating the error of the Pergamum church on a grand scale, and faces the judgment of the Lord of the church.

THE COUSEL

Rev 2:17

17 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 written which no one knows except him who receives it."

Christ concludes His letter with words of counsel and encouragement.

As we have seen before the words **he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches** stresses the vital importance of Christ's words and believers' responsibility to hear and heed them.

As is the case with the other six letters the promises are addressed to **him who overcomes**, a phrase encompassing all believers

1 John 5:4-5

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Christ promises three things to the faithful members of the church at Pergamum.

1st He promises to **give them some of the hidden manna**.
Manna, was a honey flavored bread with which God fed the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness. (*Exodus 16:14*)

According to *Exodus 16:33*, the Israelites were to memorialize that divine provision by keeping a jar of manna inside the Ark of the Covenant during their travels.

The **hidden manna** represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven;

John 6:48-51

48 I am the bread of life.

49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

He provides spiritual sustenance for those who put their faith in Him.;

The **hidden manna** symbolizes all the blessings and benefits of knowing Christ;

Eph 1:3

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

There has been much speculation about what the **white stone** symbolizes.

- a. Some link it with the Urim and Thummim on the breast plate of the High Priest; (*Ex 28:15, 30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Duet 33:8*).

Those stones were used to determine God's will and represented the right of the high priest to request guidance from God for the leader who could not approach God directly, but had to come through the priestly structure.

Somehow, God caused those stones to disclose His will in a form beyond just the simple yes and no of casting lots.

According to this view, by this **white stone** God promises the overcomers knowledge of His will.

- b. Others identify the **white stone** as a diamond, the most precious of stones, symbolizing God's precious gift of eternal life to believers.
- c. It seems best however to understand the **white stone** in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests.

A white stone, inscribed with the athlete's name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet.

In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

There will be **a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it**. As is self evident from that phrase we cannot know what that **new name** is until we receive it

Duet 29:29

29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Now the word new here comes from the word *Kainos*, new in the sense of qualitatively different. It does not mean new in contrast to old in time.

The **new name** will serve as each believer's admission pass into eternal glory. It will uniquely reflect God's special love for and adoption of every true child of His.

The Pergamum church faced the same choice that every similar church faces. It could repent and receive all the blessedness of eternal life in the glory of heaven. Or it could refuse to repent and face the terrifying reality of having the Lord Jesus Christ declare war on it.

Maintaining the path of compromise ultimately leads to judgment.