

Pergamos – The Church at Satan's Seat

Revelation 2:12-17

¹² And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

¹³ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

¹⁵ So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

¹⁶ Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

The Order of The Letters to The Churches

As with all of the churches there is a fitting pattern which comes forth describing what each church is having to deal with:

- The Commission addresses the church by name which is actually it's location.
- The Character paints a portrait of that church's actions.
- The Commendation shows the favorable conditions that exist within this church.
- The Condemnation lists the adverse criticisms in sequence.
- The Correction comes in form of varied commands of obedience for change of spiritual condition.
- The Call always begins with the words "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith."
- The Challenge is given to those who are overcomers and rise above the temptations and perils of his particular church.

The Church at Pergamos

We now come to the third church in the series of churches listed by John. The church of Pergamos, the church at Satan's seat. This church is the northern most of all the seven churches of Asia.

The place of Pergamos had been a center of an independent kingdom that had existed for centuries. It was only in 133 B.C. before it came into possession of the Romans. Because of its geographical location, the Romans started a trend with this particular city. Sitting on the top of the highest hill in its surroundings, the city of Pergamum had a scenic view of the Mediterranean Sea.

Most historians make this location as the first location that an actual physical temple was built for the worship of the Caesars. Although all of the Roman Empire was to worship the Caesars as a deity, not all of them had actual temples.

Somewhere around 29 B.C. a temple was built in honor and worship to Augustus. This is perhaps why the Angel identifies this place as the church at Satan's seat. There was the double presence of both civil authority of Rome and also the presence of religious authority that rendered worship to Caesar.

Not only was Pergamum stronghold for Rome, but it was also a very educated society. Within the city a library housed some two-hundred thousand parchments that catered to some of the finest academic minds in the world during its time. Yet for all of its inclination toward academics and human reasoning, human atrocities were committed by the opponents of Christianity.

Revelation 2:13 mentions Antipas, another martyr who was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle.

2 Timothy 2:12 "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:"

Jude 3 "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Hebrews 10:23-25 "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)" "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:" "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

The Character of Pergamos – 2:12

Commonly found on the coins in Pergamos was the serpent, identified as the god of healing (Asclepios), who was also worshiped there. The temples to Asclepius served as the hospitals of the day. The symbol of this serpent is still in existence today, with the coiled snake on the staff, prominent in the world of medicine.

It is only fitting that the description of the Lord Jesus Christ here is one who has a sharp, double-edged sword in His possession. The Sword in the struggle with the serpent.

The overcomer who found himself in Pergamos would be repulsed by the worship that was given to a serpent. He would look to this symbol with a dread and loathing and something to react against such.

Then Christ supplied just that with His Sword. To the Romans, the sword was equated with power and authority. But now the overcomer can look to a powerful God who can use the Sword to expose, dissect, and slay all false doctrine.

The Commendation of Pergamos – 2:13

The commendation for Pergamos is found in Revelation 2:13.

- ✓ You live right in the middle of trouble, of Satan's nest and have remained faithful.
- ✓ You hold fast my name and have not denied the faith.

The Lord of the Candlesticks makes allowances for the handicaps presented by social and political pressures during their stance for the Lord.

There is an incredible discovery that one finds in all of this calamity of martyrdom and spiritual declension: A man can live for God anywhere. Serving God never depends on geography but rather it depends on character.

Some plants will bloom in the tropical rain forests but will die in the bitter cold of Antarctica. There are some flowers that will grow only in the high, cold mountain passes of Siberia but will never grow in the great plains. Serving God is different from this. A man can serve God wherever he may live.

- ✓ Obadiah kept a clean conscience in the house of Ahab.
- ✓ Daniel preserved his integrity amid the corruption of the courts of Babylon.
- ✓ Nehemiah maintained his devotion to God in the palace of the Persian emperor.

Even though the Roman army was a very poor school for morals, strangely enough, one finds that when we study the Word of God that many of the centurions mentioned held a high place in their heart for the Lord God of Israel.

Character may take some of its coloring from its surroundings but ultimately it comes from a man's heart what he is. It is the choice of a man's personal will whether or not to allow the surroundings to shape him. It is that same will within that will help him to overcome the circumstances and make them become the servants of his great purpose of life.

The Condemnation of Pergamos – 2:14-15

But then the words of the Spirit turn ominous in verse 14. The condemnation of Pergamos begins. It is an incomplete church. It is valiant and passionate at times, but it has been oblivious to the corrupting influence of some of its members.

The influences are so subtle that it has endangered the spiritual life of the church. The doctrine of Balaam has crept in. The Spirit retreats to an Old Testament example of a man named Balaam. He is found in all of his underhanded dealings in *Numbers 22-24*.

Balaam represented a present-day problem of one who wanted to serve God and at the same time please the enemies of God. He was summoned by Balak who was the king of Moab. Balak was interested in defeating the children of Israel.

Balaam was called by Balak to fulfill this task. Initially, he refused because he would not give him permission to go and deal in treachery. But Balak offered him a richer reward, and this caused Balaam to ask God again for permission to go. God granted him passage to Moab, but instead of being able to curse Israel all Balaam could do was bless them.

This presented a problem for both Balaam and Balak. Balaam was embarrassed and Balak was exasperated. Finally, Balaam found insight in how to destroy the children of Israel. He instructed Balak to get the young women of Moab to entice the young men of Israel and through illicit relationships, sinful actions, and other vices, Israel brought the judgement of God upon themselves. **If you cannot curse them, then corrupt them.**

Immorality and idolatry always lead to a bad outcome. Balaam represented those who foster evil and disobedience to God under a guise of devotion and piety.

Such activities were found among the church at Pergamum. They had become compromisers. Satan had not made a frontal assault on them by coming in as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) but rather had slithered in the back door and led them astray as a deceiving serpent.

In all three of these churches thus far, Satan has used a different approach:

- In Ephesus, the church had lost its first love.
- In Smyrna, the cruelty of Satan's forces had come from the outside forces of persecution.
- In Pergamum, Satan used the approach of Balaam. A corrupt insider to destroy them.

The Spirit of God was incensed at their activities. Worldliness prevailed because of their toleration of evil and wickedness. Worldly standards had crept into their fellowship. We battle with that same worldly spirit within the Church during our day (we use the term "church" very loosely). Everybody is saved. We have yet to meet someone who is lost. However, there is little difference in the way the world lives and oftentimes the way the church lives.

God sharpen our conscience with Your Word!!! When a worldly spirit gets into your life, you begin to lose your saltiness. When it becomes difficult to distinguish between the actions and lifestyles of people of God and those of the world, something is sadly wrong.

There is a prevailing thought that comes from Scripture which affirms that there will be a great sorting out one of these days.

Galatians 5:19-21 "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness," "Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies," "Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Romans 8:12-13 “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,” “Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

If you find yourself in the categories that Scripture (not me, not this church, etc.) mentions, there is but one word for you, “Repent!!!” You are fooling yourself to think that you will get away with such activities.

Pergamum had it all:

- Heretics bringing immorality into the church.
- The pastor was not preaching.
- The saints were not praying.
- No one was fasting.
- Men and women were no longer hunger for personal revival.
- Holiness was a lost commodity.
- There was an indifference to false doctrine.
- Apathy had shut down all opposition of sinful practices.

Within Pergamum was also the presence of another group called the Nicolaitans.

In Ephesus, it was the “**deeds**” of the Nicolaitans.

In Pergamos, it was the “**doctrine**” of the Nicolaitans.

What was tolerated as a deed over the course of time becomes tolerated as a doctrine. We have witnessed such in our own time with the concepts of homosexuality being permitted in the church. Tolerated in the 80's and 90's, now it is becoming the accepted norms in some denominational circles.

The Correction of Pergamos – 2:16

- The correction given to Pergamos is blunt, brusque, and very brief. “You better Repent!” If you don’t, I am coming quickly and will come with the Sword of the Lord.

Some want to argue, “Oh I’ve got time!” “I will take care of this matter of my soul, next week, next month, next year. . . .” And men buy into this lie of the enemy week in and week out. The longer that a debt remains unpaid, the longer the interest is accruing in that account. The longer that sin remains, the harder it is to repent. Watch a man backslide and pray back through twice and it becomes progressively more difficult for him to do so. By the time he makes it back for the third time, the sin that has his heart and mind is almost like chains of iron. It takes so much more power and strength of God to free that man.

In Revelation 2:16 we find that there is a fierce command given by the Spirit. “You better repent!” Nowhere in Scripture can you find such a fierce discharge of an expression of vengeance against any sinner as the Spirit of God who is confronting those who delay their return back to God.

To delay:

- Abuses the grace of God.
- Causes guilt to kick at mercy of God.
- Familiarity causes one to take advantage of compassion of God.
- Shows that a man does not value the love of God, he merely uses it as an escape.

The man who demonstrates these principles states that he will live a sinner, and will then on his deathbed will become a man who is repentant. Don’t count on that, you must repent now.

The Call and Challenge to Pergamos

Finally, in Revelation 2:17 comes the call and the challenge to the church at Pergamos.

Revelation 2:17 “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

The overcomer will always have an ear for what the Spirit is saying. Frankly enough it is only the small few that will find themselves in the position to hear what the Spirit has to say.

Three Lessons from the Church at Pergamos

We find three lessons from this church at Pergamos:

The church cannot live on it’s past.

The memory of a martyr named Antipas was not enough. With that danger came renewed strength but there was not enough. History serves us only as a point of reference. There is no power of history for the present.

Don’t live on your past. Take hold, seize the day, seize the future for God. Place your life on a personal growth plan. Let someday become today. Do it now!!!

The church cannot live on a single value.

If days like those of Antipas had come back, doubtless the church at Pergamum would have been faithful as before; but as the times were different, new graces were called for.

Our walk with God is like the tree of life that John mentioned: “bearing twelve manners of fruits, yielding its fruit every month.”

Spiritual progress must mark our life as never before. If you are the same man, you were ten years ago, God help you. If you are the same man, you were five years ago, God help you. If you are the same man, you were a year ago, God help you.

The message of 2 Peter 1 is ADD, ADD, ADD, ADD, and ADD.

The church must have a passion for God and for revival.

All of the encroachments into the church came about because apathy had seized them by the throat. Toleration, toleration, toleration is the name of the game for the new millennium. But we can never tolerate our beliefs right out of heaven.

It still takes some cardinal doctrines:

- The Oneness of God.
- The New Birth (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38)
- The Holiness Lifestyle
- The Hunger for Revival
- The Dedication to the House of God.

Sometimes you have got to be passionate enough about it to say, "I am sorry but that does not line up with Scripture and it will send you to hell."

The Overcomers at Pergamos

Yet there is one allowance that God gives, even in the middle of all of this calamity, there will be some who will overcome the heresy of the day. Wherever Satan makes his final resistance, there will be those who are committed enough to overcome.

The promise to the overcomers is that of hidden manna. God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna. A portion of this was laid away in the Ark of the Covenant and was hidden from public view.

Jesus Christ, speaking as the manna of a type of Himself said these words: "I am the Bread which came down from Heaven."

- Jesus is the food of our faith – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.
- Jesus is the food of our love – We love Him because He first loved us.
- Jesus is the food of our obedience – The love of Christ constraineth us.
- Jesus is the food of our peace – When justified by faith we have peace through God.
- Jesus is the food of our joy – We joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Jesus is the food of our hope – That blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our life is hid with Christ in God. The outward effects may be seen, but it is the hidden manna on the inside that makes a man an overcomer.

One other thing was given to the overcomer: A White Stone.

This white stone was called the Tessera Hospitalis. The token of hospitality was employed by the ancients. When one person was kindly received by another, or a friendship was entered into, the tessera hospitalis was given. It was named for its shape (it was four sided) and divided into two pieces. Each wrote his name on one half, then exchanged the one with his name to the other party. When they were placed together, they fit well, and the person was welcomed with banqueting and fellowship.

Paul wrote it like this:

Ephesians 1:13-14 “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,” “Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

We have half of the stone now. We get the other half at home. We will see you for supper there.