

The Church at Satan's Seat

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Reading

Revelation 2:12-17 *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-- where Satan lives. 14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you 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. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”*

1. Introduction - the Order of the Letters to the Churches

As with all of the churches, a pattern describes what each church has to deal with:

- The Commission addresses the church by name, which is actually its location.
- The Character paints a portrait of that church's actions.
- The Commendation shows the favourable conditions that existed within this church.
- The Condemnation lists the adverse criticisms in sequence.
- The Correction comes in the form of varied commands of obedience for change of spiritual condition.

- The Call always begins with the words "*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says.*"
- The Challenge is given to those who are overcomers and rise above the temptations and perils of the specific church.

2. The Church at Pergamum

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

a. The Location of Pergamum

The place of Pergamum had been the centre of an independent kingdom that had existed for centuries. It was only in 133 B.C. that it came into the 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 place 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.

So somewhere around 29 B.C. a temple was built in honour and worship to Augustus. This is perhaps why the warning identifies this place as the church at Satan's seat, because there was the double presence of both the civil authority of Rome and also the presence of religious authority that rendered worship to Caesar.

Not only was Pergamum a stronghold for Rome, 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 Christ's faithful martyr Antipas, who was slowly roasted to death in a bronze vessel.

b. The Character of Pergamum - 2:12

Commonly found on the coins in Pergamum was the serpent, identified as the god of healing (Asclepius), 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 Word in the fight with the serpent.

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

c. The Commendation of Pergamum - 2:13

The commendation for Pergamum 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.

A man is able to serve God wherever he lives, no matter how evil it may be:

- 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.

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

d. The Condemnation of Pergamum - 2:14,15

But then the words of the Spirit turn ominous in verse 14. The condemnation of Pergamum 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. False doctrines had crept into the life ... and the soul of the church.

Balaam represents a present day problem of one who wanted to serve God and at the same 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. Balak offered him a rich reward and this caused Balaam to ask God 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 disaster. 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*” (I Peter 5:8) but rather had slithered in the back door and led them astray as a deceiving serpent.

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 (I use the term 'church' very loosely). Everybody is saved. I have yet to meet someone who is lost. However, there is often little difference in the way the world lives and the way the church lives. Yet, there will be a great sorting out one of these days.

e. Is This Me or My Church?

If you find yourself in the categories that Scripture mentions (it's not me, not this church, etc.), There is only one word, "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 leaders were not preaching
- The saints were not praying
- No one was fasting
- Men and women were no longer hungry for personal revival
- Holiness was a lost commodity
- There was an indifference to false teaching

Apathy had shut down all opposition to sinful practices – and here we need to emphasise a warning concerning our modern day reliance on books and 'famous' prophets.

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

- In Ephesus, it was the 'deeds' of the Nicolaitans that caused problems
- In Pergamum, it was the 'doctrine' of the Nicolaitans

Whatever is tolerated as a **deed** over the course of time becomes tolerated as a **doctrine**.

We have witnessed one such example 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 norm in many churches.

f. The Correction of Pergamum - 2:16

The correction given to Pergamum is blunt, brusque, and very brief. “*You better repent! If you do not 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 people 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 his way back; it becomes progressively more difficult for him to do so. By the time he makes it back for the second 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 become a man who is repentant. Do not count on that, you must repent now.

3. Conclusion - The Call and Challenge to Pergamum

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

Revelation 2:17 *"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. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."*

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

a. Three Lessons from the Church at Pergamum

We find three lessons from this church at Pergamum:

1. The church cannot live on its 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.

Do not live on your past. '*Carpe Diem*' -- take hold, seize the day, and seize the future for God. Place your life on a personal growth plan. Let someday become today. Do it now!

2. 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 to be passionate enough about it to say, "*That does not line up with Scripture and it will send you to hell.*" But you have to believe that hell is a real place for the person to avoid.

3. 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.

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.

- We have failed to obey Jesus' warnings, especially of the 'end times' and have become open to **every wind of doctrine**. See these **critical** Scriptures from the Lord and from Paul: Mat 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Cor 11:4,5,12-15, Gal 2:4,5, 1 Tim 4:1-7, 1 Tim 6:3-5, 1 Tim 6:20,21

b. The Overcomers at Pergamum

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.

1. A promise given

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 you shall be saved

Our life is hidden 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.

2. A stone is given

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 also used in court trials, when a black stone was given to announce '*guilty and condemned*' and a white stone announced '*innocent and free*'.

You can choose which stone you will receive, but choose wisely and only so long as you have breath in your body.