

The Letter to the Seven Churches of Asia: Pergamos

I. Introduction:

- a. **(Rev 2:12-17)** “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 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. 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. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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.”
- b. The City of Pergamos
 - i. “A city of Mysia, about 3 miles to the north of the river Caicus, and 20 miles from its present mouth. It was the residence of a dynasty of Greek princes founded after the time of Alexander the Great, and usually called the Attalic dynasty, from its founder, Attalus. The sumptuousness of the Attalic princes hall raised Pergamos to the rank of the first city in Asia as regards splendor. The city was noted for its vast, library, containing 200,000 volumes. Here were splendid temples of Zeus or Jupiter, Athena, Apollo and Æsculapius.” (Smith's Bible Dictionary)
 - ii. “Not only was Pergamos a government center with three imperial temples, but it was also the site of the temple of Æsculapius (the Greco-Roman god of medicine and healing), and the medical center where the physician Galen worked.” (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
 1. Great center of Medical Healing – attributed to pagan god
 - a. “Now there was at Pergamos a celebrated and much frequented temple of Æsculapius, who probably there, as in other places, was worshipped; in the form of a living serpent, fed in the temple, and considered as its divinity. Hence Æsculapius was called the god of Pergamos, and on the coins struck by the town Æsculapius often appears with a rod encircled by a serpent” (McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia)
 - iii. Seat of Strong Pagan and Emperor Worship
 1. “There were beautiful temples to the four great gods Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Æsculapius. To the temple of the

latter, invalids from all parts of Asia flocked, and there, while they were sleeping in the court, the god revealed to the priests and physicians by means of dreams the remedies which were necessary to heal their maladies. Thus opportunities of deception were numerous. There was a school of medicine in connection with the temple. Pergamos was chiefly a religious center of the province. A title which it bore was "Thrice Neokoros," meaning that in the city 3 temples had been built to the Roman emperors, in which the emperors were worshipped as gods."
(International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

- c. The Church of Christ at Pergamos
 - i. Nothing is known as the founding of this congregation – However it is most probable during Paul’s third missionary journey like Smyrna
 - ii. Paul going into Jewish Synagogues and preaching
 - 1. **(Acts 19:10)** “And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

II. Christ Description

- a. **(Rev 2:12)** “These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges”
 - i. A Description given to Christ earlier in this book
 - 1. **(Rev 1:16)** “And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”
- b. Sword is a symbol of authority and strength
 - i. Speaking of earthly rulers... **(Rom 13:4)** “...for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”
- c. The Spirit’s instrument, tool, weapon:
 - i. **(Eph 6:17)** “And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the **word of God.**”
 - ii. This weapon of God is sharper than any two-edged sword
 - 1. **(Heb 4:12)** “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
- d. Jesus identifies himself to this congregation by claiming to have the authority that this sword yields.
 - i. His authority supersedes the authority of the Roman government
 - ii. His authority today supersedes the authority of this government and any government of this world
- e. Must listen and obey Christ

- i. **(Matt 17:5)** “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”
- ii. **(Heb 1:1-2)** “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

III. Condition of the Church

a. Divine Approval

- i. **(Rev 2:13)** “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.”
- ii. Jesus’ knowledge of what is going on around and in His church
 - 1. **(Heb 4:13)** “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”
- iii. Two aspects of the church are highly praised
 - 1. They dwell in the midst of Satanic oppression
 - a. Satan’s seat or throne – This city was city of false religion and evil doings – even more so than Smyrna, which was more a city of commerce
 - b. Many direct attributes of this city have been placed as being the reason Jesus called Pergamos the city of where Satan dwells.
 - i. The ‘throne’ of Zeus was there
 - 1. “The temple of Zeus (Soter Theos), the “saviour god,” had a huge altar 40 feet high carved like a great throne in to the face of the mountain dominating the city, perhaps suggesting the words, “where Satan’s throne is”. (Coffman NT Commentary)
 - ii. The Medical Center with its god and worship of serpents
 - iii. The three temples dedicated to the worship of emperors
 - c. Divine opinion of this city was most probable made because of all these attributes.
 - i. The figure, Satan’s seat, denotes the wickedness of these idolatrous temples and the dedication given to them by this city!
 - d. Jesus didn’t praised them for simply dwelling in this city, but praised them for dwelling and at the same time holding fast His name!

- i. They didn't shut themselves up into a convent, monastery, or compound
- e. We as Christians are commissioned to live in this world while not being of the world
 - i. **(Matt 28:19-20)** "Go ye **therefore**, and **teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."
 - ii. **(John 17:14-20)** "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because **they are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. **As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.** And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."
- f. They held fast the Name of Christ:
 - i. Good example for us today – didn't run and hide but stood their ground and continued to dwell and hold on to their profession.
 - ii. The world around us today is the same as it was in Pergamos
 - 1. Idolatry all around us – Idolatry is anything that one puts over the true God.
 - 2. The world wants to destroy the church and they want us to run and hide in our church buildings – must live out in the community "in the world" and be Christians "not of the world"
 - iii. We must continue to lift the Name of Christ up high
 - 1. **(Acts 4:12)** "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given

among men, whereby we must be saved.”

2. They did not deny His faith – speaking of The Faith
 - a. They continue to hold to God’s system of doctrine despite their surroundings
- iv. Jesus gives an example of this job that is worthy of praise
 1. **(Rev 2:13)** “...even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.
- b. Divine Condemnations
 - i. **(Rev 2:14-15)** “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. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”
 - ii. Some in the congregation held to the doctrine of Balaam
 1. Balaam a prophet found in the book of Numbers
 - a. Taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel
 - i. **(Num 25:1-2)** “The people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.”
 - ii. Israel began to mingle with those around them and partaking of their evil practices
 1. As a result 24,000 people died by a plague (Num 25:9)
 - b. They did these because of the teaching of Balaam
 - i. **(Num 31:16)** “Behold, these (seducing women) caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.”
 - ii. The doctrine of Balaam is a doctrine of compromise
 1. The false idea that I can be a child of God and still be a friend to the world!
2. This was what was going on in Pergamos
 - a. What harm is there to be a Christian and give a pinch of incense to Caesar? If the gods are not real then what’s the harm in eating sacrificed food?
3. Some thought that they could profess the name of Christ and yet do the things that the world wanted

- a. **(1 Cor 15:33)** “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”
 - b. If you act like a pagan, then you’ll become a pagan.
 - c. If you act like this world, then you’ll become part of this world!
 - d. Christian’s must abstain:
 - i. **(Acts 15:20)** “But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.”
 - ii. **(Acts 15:29)** “That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.”
4. A Christian is a new creature – we must change our lives and abstain from the ways of the world
- a. **(2 Cor 5:17)** “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”
 - b. **(Rom 6:6)** “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”
- iii. **(Rev 2:15)** “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”
- 1. We do not know exactly what doctrine the Nicolaitans taught, but it probably follows the same line of Balaam.
 - a. This doctrine was probably a doctrine that taught one that they could compromise on spiritual matters in order to keep their physical safety.
 - 2. Like the Ephesians, we must hate what Christ hates!
 - 3. Any doctrine that is not God’s is false and the proponents of that doctrine are in error.
 - a. **(Matt 7:21-23)** “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”
- iv. The sin of the congregation was that of being tolerant of such doctrines – Jesus knew that if the evil compromising was tolerated then the whole church would suffer.

1. **(1 Cor 5:6-8)** “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”
2. This church had disregarded their duty of discipline
 - a. **(Rom 16:17-18)** “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”
3. Tolerance to compromise is a cancer that will destroy a church

IV. Divine Exhortation

- a. **(Rev 2:16)** “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”
 - i. Repent – change their mind
 1. Resolve to not have a spirit of compromise
 2. Resolve to not tolerate a spirit of compromise
 - ii. “Fight against them with the sword” – Divine Judgment!
 1. Those that follow Balaam will also be punished the same way that Balaam was punished! – by the sword
 - a. Balaam – Physical
 - b. His followers at Pergamos – Spiritual
 2. **(John 12:48)** “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

V. Divine Promises

- a. **(Rev 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.”
 - i. Manna was the bread that God used to sustain Israel while they were in the wilderness
 1. This declaration is used by God to encourage them to abstain from meats sacrificed to idols and He will reward them with meat that is found in eternity
 2. Application: If we keep from gratifying our flesh with evil gratifications, then God will one day reward us with joys that are unspeakable in Heaven!
 - ii. White Stone – This stone is the ticket and on it a new name will be written, in which we will be able to enter into the abode of God!