

The church at Pergamos had remained faithful to the name of Jesus Christ despite the pagan environment of the city and the martyrdom of one of its members. However, the pagan influences of their environment had infiltrated the church and they had done nothing to correct it. There is a similar danger to the church today as the world influences Christians to follow its ways.

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

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write” - This message is for the pastor of the church at Pergamos, a city that was an important religious center for the worship of various pagan gods. It also was the first city in Asia to build a temple to worship Caesar in 29 BC. Thus it was a city of idolatry.

“These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges” - Christ identifies Himself as the author of this message, describing Himself as the One having “the sharp sword with two edges.” As we’ll see, such a sword speaks of judgment in the Book of Revelation (v. 16, 19:15, 21). Christ portrays Himself as the One Who is ready to judge the sin of the unrepentant for He knows the secrets of the heart. **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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

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.

“I know thy works” - As with the other churches, Christ knows what they have been doing (and not doing) to spread the gospel.

“and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is” - Pergamos was a place of idolatry with all the temples to various gods in the city. On its acropolis was a huge throne-shaped altar to Zeus, which may be what Christ is referring to as “Satan’s seat.” Christ wants the church at Pergamos to know that He is aware of all the temptations and challenges that they face in the environment where they are living. Christ is aware of all the influences of the world that we face today as well (TV, radio, social media, etc.).

“and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith” - They were surrounded by pagan alternatives to the gospel of Christ so the temptation to take the “easy path” and comply with the rest of society was strong. However, despite the temptations to compromise their faith in Christ or to turn their back on Him and return to the pagan ways of their past they were remaining faithful to the name of Jesus Christ as their only hope of salvation.

“even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr [witness], who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth” - We do not know who Antipas was beyond what is said here, but we can surmise that this man from their church was slain in Pergamos because he refused to deny Christ and worship any of the pagan gods of the city. The Greek word for “martyr” means “witness” so apparently Antipas gave witness to Jesus Christ before he died. The Greek word means “witness” but since so many Christians died as witnesses of Christ over the centuries our word “martyr” has evolved to have its current definition of a person being killed for their beliefs. “Where Satan dwelleth” may refer to one of the many pagan temples in the city and possibly where Antipas was killed.

Christ’s commendation to the church at Pergamos is that they did not deny Him or abandon their faith even when Antipas was killed. Seeing one of their own killed for the name of Jesus Christ might have caused them to shrink away from being a witness for Christ in fear but they remained faithful regardless.

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

“But I have a few things against thee” - Despite their faithfulness to Christ, there were some problems within the church.

“because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam...” - The story of Balaam can be found in Numbers 22-24. After failing to make money as a prophet when Balak, king of Moab, wanted to pay him to curse Israel, Balaam apparently found another way to take Balak’s money. According to Numbers 31:16, Balaam was the reason that Israel fell under the curse of God for committing whoredoms with daughters of Moab and bowing to their gods (Num. 25). Since the Lord would not allow him to curse Israel, Balaam apparently advised Balak how to tempt the people of Israel to sin so that they placed themselves under the curse of God.

In the church at Pergamos there were people teaching that it was acceptable to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols as an act of worship. Apparently these things were being tolerated and church discipline was not being exercised. The influences of the secular culture of the city, which embraced the fornication and idolatrous worship, was influencing the behavior and morals of the church. Unfortunately the same thing is happening today as we see the church influenced by the morals and worldview of the world.

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

As we saw in our study of the church in Ephesus, there are two main ideas proposed for who the Nicolaitans were: (1) Based on the compound name (“niko” [“to conquer”] and “laos” [“the people”]) this idea says that the Nicolaitans promoted a priestly order with spiritual authority over the common people, much like the Roman Catholic Church; (2) Early church writers said that the Nicolaitans followed the false teachings of Nicolas, one of the original deacons (Acts 6:5), who was an apostate that led people into the immorality and wickedness of indulging their flesh.

In addition to those who held the doctrine of Balaam, the Nicolaitans were also committing similar sins. The word “so” at the beginning of the verse seems to suggest that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans naturally flowed from or was in agreement with the doctrine of Balaam. Such teachings and behavior was not acceptable to Christ but the church at Pergamos was apparently doing nothing to prevent it.

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

“Repent” - It seems the entire church is being called upon to repent – not just the one’s following the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The followers of Balaam and the Nicolaitans obviously needed to repent but Christ also calls on the church as a whole to repent for they had allowed such sin and false teachings to continue within their congregation and had not taken steps to correct it.

“or else I will come unto thee quickly [suddenly; by surprise]” - If the church does not take steps to repent and put a stop to the sin then Christ will step in and do so. The word “quickly” implies that He will come without warning to deal with the sin. Christ will not allow unrepentant sin to continue among His people because He loves them too much.

“and will fight [to engage in warfare] against them” - The word for “fight” does not describe individuals coming to blows because of a disagreement. Rather, it speaks of warfare where the goal is the destruction of the enemy, an indication of the seriousness that Christ places on sin. Just as doctors do not like to wait to remove a cancerous tumor before it spreads, Christ also wants to remove sin from His people before it does more damage. He says He will fight “against them,” indicating that He is not going to war against the entire church but against the ones who follow the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

“with the sword of my mouth” - The double-edged sword in the mouth of Christ speaks of judgment. All Christ has to do is speak the word of His judgment because He does not have to use a physical sword to execute judgment. In Balaam’s day, the Israelites who fornicated with the daughters of Moab and bowed to their gods died by the sword (Num. 25:5), as did Balaam (Num. 31:8).

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.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” - Christ makes this statement in His message to each church. As with the other churches, the call is to listen to what the Spirit is saying, and since only born-again people can hear and understand the Spirit, the call is to God’s people to pay attention to what the Spirit is saying to these churches. The messages to each church are important and we need to pay attention to them because we can all become guilty of the sins He identifies in the churches and we all need the encouragement He also gives.

“To him that overcometh will I give” - The message to each church contains a promise to “him that overcometh.” John told us who overcomes in **John 5:4-5** ⁴ *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* ⁵ *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* Here Christ promises to give a couple of things to the overcomer.

“to eat of the hidden manna” - Those with the doctrine of Balaam ate meat offered to idols, but Christ promises to give to the overcomer the “hidden manna,” the spiritual bread that the world cannot see. God gave Israel manna in order to sustain them in the wilderness but Christ gives eternal sustenance to those who come to Him in faith.

“and will give him a white stone” - When an athlete won a sporting event, he was often given a white stone that served as his admission pass to the winner’s celebration afterwards. Overcomers will be rewarded with admission to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

“and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” - Speaks of the personal nature of the access that Christ gives the overcomer. Instead of a being like a handful of generic tickets being handed out to a group of people, the “ticket” given to the overcomer is given from Christ specifically to the recipient and is non-transferable. No one can steal and use it.