

Message to the Church of Pergamos

Revelation 2:12-17

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Introduction: We have seen Ephesus described as a loveless church; Smyrna as a suffering church, & this morning we will see Pergamos as a compromising church. The city of Pergamos was just 15 miles from the coast of the Aegean Sea, about 60 miles north of Smyrna. It was a capital city in John's day, having been the capital of the kingdom of the Attalids & later became the capital of the Province of Asia. It was built on a mountaintop, 1,300 feet above the Caicus River valley, making it a fortress easily defended against attack. The city was famous for its library, second only to the one in Alexandria, Egypt. There were an estimated two hundred thousand volumes in it. Parchment (or animal skin) was invented by these people. The name comes from the name of the city, the 'Pergamene sheet', hence the name, 'parchment'. The city was also known for its 3 major religions: (1) Worship of Asklepios, the god of healing; (2) Worship of Zeus, the Greek god; & (3) Emperor worship (3 temples erected to different Caesars). Let us consider the command, commendation, condemnation, correction, & challenge to the church of Pergamos. As we do so, ask yourself this question: "Is it possible to be an overcomer in a difficult place under difficult circumstances?"

I. The Command (:12)

A. He Who has the sword of salvation.

1. The sword of God's Word - Hebrews 4:12.
2. The sword able to deliver from sin to salvation - Ephesians 6:17.

B. He Who has the sword of judgment (cf. Rev. 19:14).

1. Sword - symbol of war & judgment.
2. Symbol of authority, with the power of life & death - Romans 13:4.

II. The Commendation. (:1) - consistency toward Christ

A. Their diligence - "*their works*" [Christ knows the circumstances of their faith.].

1. Where they " *dwell*" - speaks of a permanent dwelling; permanent address (not fleeing).
2. Where they were needed, though in a difficult situation ["The greater the darkness, the greater the need for a light" (Neal).] – Christ knows our circumstances too!
3. Where Satan's "*seat*" is - his throne, where Satan has special authority & power (cf. 3 major religions) - see Ephesians 6:12.

B. Their devotion - "*thou holdest fast...*" [Christ knows the conviction & courage of their faith.].

1. To the name of Christ - cf. Proverbs 18:10 > their loyalty.
2. To the faith in Christ ("faith" - body of Christian beliefs) > their fidelity.
3. To the death for Christ – Antipas ("against all"), "*My faithful martyr*" - the word 'martyr' comes from the word 'witness', one who seals his witness with his death > their bravery.

III. The Condemnation (:14-15) – [Christ knows the compromise of their faith.].

A. They tolerated those holding the doctrine of Balaam (:14) ["If you can't curse them, corrupt them"].

1. The story of Balaam in the Scriptures - Numbers 22-25.
 - a. He used the prophetic gift for his own profit - II Peter 2:15 & Jude :11.
 - b. He encouraged the Moabites to intermarry with the Israelites - cf. Numbers 31:16 & Revelation 2:14 [Illustrate: II Cor. 6:14, Amos 3:3, & Malachi 2:14-15].
2. The influence of Balaam in the church (it lacked discipline) - cf. Acts 15:28-29.
 - a. The Balaamites taught that it was all right to worship Christ & also conform to the world - idolatry (meat sacrificed to idols).
 - b. The Balaamites encouraged (condoned) immorality ["The spirit of compromise has surely been one of the greatest evils in the Christian church ever since..." (H. M.)]

- B. They tolerated those holding the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.
 - 1. Comparison:
 - a. Nicolaitans taught compromise with the world.
 - b. Nicolaitans were perhaps more open than the Balaamites in introducing pagan practices into the church.
 - 2. Contrast:
 - a. That which the Ephesians & the Lord abhorred... (see 2:6) [Do we hate what God hates?].
 - b. That which the Pergamos church allowed..
- [Satan used direct confrontation against Smyrna; he used deceptive compromise against Pergamos.]

IV. The Correction (:16)

- A. Repent:
 - 1. Change > of attitude reflected in a change of action.
 - 2. Confession > be willing to deal with sin & compromise.
 - 3. Correction > evil ones should be corrected or expelled.
- B. Expect:
 - 1. Christ will fight against them (those holding false doctrines).
 - 2. Christ uses a sword - cf. Numbers 31:8, Balaam perished by the sword.
 - 3. Christ has the sword in His hand (:12); the sword in His mouth (:16).

V. The Challenge (:17)

- A. The overcomer is given fellowship:
 - 1. Manna fed the Israelites in the wilderness.
 - 2. Christ is the living bread (John 6:51), the nourishment & strength of the Christian.
 - 3. "In heaven, the Christian will be rewarded by fellowship with His Lord & even there, he will be sustained & cared for by Him." (Neal) – assurance of His presence & provision.
- B. The overcomer is given favor:
 - 1. A white stone (a white diamond??) >
 - a. A ballot, white for "yes" (black for "no") (cf. 'blackballing') [an "acquittal" – Rom. 8:1].
 - b. An emblem of victory -marked a memorable occasion ("day marked by the whitest of white stones"; cf. 'red-letter day').
 - c. An amulet - worn as a protection against evil.
 - d. Urim - stone worn by the high priest.
 - e. All speak of God's favor & approval.
 - 2. A new name >
 - a. The name given by the Lord - His name? (cf. Rev. 3:12),
 - b. A personal name - as written down in heaven, representing one's character.

Conclusion: The church at Pergamos was commended for its diligence & its devotion, yet faltered in its doctrine. They compromised with the world, & failed to remain separate & distinct. "The filthiness of the spirit & the filthiness of the flesh often go together. Corrupt doctrine & a corrupt worship often lead to a corrupt conversation" (Henry). There is a parallel in church history to what happened in Pergamos. Constantine, the Emperor, was supposedly 'converted' to Christianity about A.D. 325. The previous persecution of the church was replaced by a favored status with the government. "It became increasingly difficult to maintain a clear distinction between the church & the world & to preserve the purity of biblical doctrine. The history of the 3 centuries which followed is a record of increasing corruption of the church, departure from biblical doctrine, & an attempt to combine Christian theology with pagan philosophy." (Walvoord)

The lesson for us to learn from this church: though it is not popular, it is possible to be an overcomer, even in a difficult place under difficult circumstances. "The faithfulness of the church at Pergamos is a challenge to Christians today to stand true when engulfed by the evil of this present world, the apostasy within the ranks of religion, & the temptation to compromise their stand for the truth" (Walvoord). Are you & I prepared to follow the challenge of our Savior in Luke 9:23?