

Session 4 Jesus' Message to the Church of Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17)

I. THE PRIMARY MESSAGE: A CHURCH WITH COMPROMISE (REV. 2:12-17)

- A. Jesus encouraged the church in Pergamos for standing strong in the face of persecution. However, He corrected them for not standing against false teaching that tolerated immorality and idolatry.

¹²“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³“I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before...Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷...To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”
(Rev. 2:12-17)

- B. Pergamos was 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. A wealthy city, it was a center for idol worship. Pergamos is also spelled Pergamum or Pergamus. Today, the village of Bergama is on its site.
- C. Jesus addressed three groups—those who held fast to Jesus’ name, those who embraced false teachings (the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans), and the elders who refused to correct those in the church who gave the false teachings as well as those who embraced them.

II. JESUS’ REVELATION OF HIMSELF: WITH A SHARP SWORD (REV. 1:16; 2:12)

- A. The sword in Jesus’ mouth speaks of Him fighting against sin in the government or the Church. John made references to a sword proceeding from Jesus’ mouth (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21).

¹⁶...out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword...^{2:12}These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword... (Rev. 1:16; 2:12)

- B. Jesus uses the sword of His mouth to fight against believers who walk in immorality.

¹⁶Repent or...I will come...[to] fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:16)

¹²For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit... (Heb. 4:12)

- C. Jesus uses the sword of His mouth to war against the evil governments that persecute His people, especially the kings in alliance with the Antichrist in the end times (Rev. 19:21).

¹⁵Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike nations...²¹The rest [of the kings] were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him... (Rev. 19:15, 21)

- D. Some of the Lord’s judgments are *redemptive disciplines* to wake people up to receive more of His grace, and some of them are *punitive judgments* to remove those who oppress others, etc.

III. AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFULNESS

- A. Jesus knew their works in being faithful to Him in the face of persecution and demonic darkness.
¹³I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold fast to My name and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. (Rev. 2:13)
- B. ***Satan's throne***: Pergamos was the center of Satan's activity in the east as Rome was in the west. The combination of temples dedicated to Satan worship with the prominence of the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans in the church and the persecution (martyrdom) of the saints made Pergamos a city with an unusual amount of satanic activity.
1. Many temples in Pergamos were dedicated to Satan worship in context to worshipping the emperor and the Greek gods (Zeus, etc.). They built a temple to worship the emperor Augustus, making Pergamos the center of emperor worship in Asia. At each temple were many temple prostitutes, as immorality had a central role in their idolatrous feasts.
 2. Will the "throne of the Antichrist" be at Pergamos (Rev. 16:10)?
¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast [the Antichrist], and his kingdom became full of darkness... (Rev. 16:10)
- C. ***You hold fast to My name***: Jesus knew those who held fast to His name in the midst of so much satanic activity. To hold fast to Jesus' name refers to being faithful even in the face of death.
- D. ***Antipas was My faithful martyr***: Tradition says that Antipas was the bishop in Pergamos and was boiled to death in a copper vessel over a fire.
- E. The word for martyr is *witness*.

IV. CORRECTION FOR COMPROMISE

- A. Jesus is for His people, even while being against an area of compromise in their lives.
¹⁴I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before...Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (Rev. 2:14-15)
- B. The doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans had similarities, yet some distinctions. They both taught a perversion of liberty in grace. They taught that believers could participate in the drunkenness and immorality of the idolatrous feasts under the pretense of Christian liberty.
⁴Certain men have crept in unnoticed...who turn the grace of God into lewdness. (Jude 4)
1. Antinomianism is the belief that the gospel frees us from obedience to moral standards.
 2. Since salvation is God's gift that is given by faith, antinomians teach that believers do not need to repent. (Greek: *anti* – against; *nomos* - law).

- C. **The doctrine of Balaam:** The doctrine of Balaam taught that believers could participate in the “parties” associated with temple feasts and their orgies.
1. The false prophet Balaam was paid by King Balak to curse Israelites, but when he tried to curse Israel the only words that he received from God were prophetic blessings for Israel.
 2. Balaam told King Balak that he could not curse Israel; however God would judge them if Israel entered into sin. Balaam advised Balak to get the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men to participate in feasts engaged in idolatry and immorality that would lead to God judging Israel (Num. 25)—24,000 Israelites died under God’s judgment. The false teachers in Pergamos had a similar impact on some of the saints who embraced their errors.
- D. **The doctrine of the Nicolaitans:** The common view among the early church fathers was that this was a reference to followers of Nicolas, a deacon in Jerusalem who fell into error (Acts 6:5).
- ⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:6)**
1. In the second century, Irenaeus taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This distortion of “liberty in grace” is common today. Jesus corrected believers in Ephesus related to the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6).
 2. Twice Jesus mentions His hatred of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15). The *deeds* in Ephesus and the *doctrines* in Pergamos allowed immorality to go unchallenged.
- E. **Idolatry:** Paul taught that covetousness was idolatry—pursuing riches without reference to Jesus’ leadership. Most idolatry throughout history and at the end of the age is economically driven.
- ⁵Therefore put to death...fornication...evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col. 3:5)**

V. EXHORTATION TO RESPOND (WITH A WARNING)

- A. Jesus warned them to repent of tolerating and embracing idolatry and immorality. Jesus comes to His people to evaluate them in various seasons. This is not a reference to His second coming.
- ¹⁶Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. (Rev. 2:16)**
- B. **I will fight against them:** Jesus releases the sword of His mouth against immorality in the church. He fights for us by fighting against those things in our life that are in agreement with darkness.
- ¹⁷The time has come for judgment [God’s discipline] to begin at the house of God... (1 Pet. 4:17)**
- C. Phinehas is an example of one filled with God’s zeal in standing up against the sin that Balaam facilitated. Balaam was eventually killed by the sword (Num. 22:23, 31; 25:5; 31:8). However, the Lord sent an angel with a drawn sword to warn Balaam to obey God’s Word. He would have been killed with the sword earlier if his donkey had not spoken up (Num. 22:22-25).
- ¹¹“Phinehas...turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel...¹²Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; ¹³and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God...’” (Num. 25:11-12)**

VI. THREE PROMISES FOR OVERCOMERS

- A. ***I will give some of the hidden manna to eat:*** This speaks of the Spirit giving overcomers an increased capacity to delight in and be fed on the Word of God today and in the age to come.
- ¹⁷...To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)*
1. Jesus is the true bread, the true manna from heaven that sustains us (Jn. 6:48-51). The overcomer is promised full enjoyment of that of which they had a foretaste in this life.
 2. God supernaturally sustained His people with manna in the Old Testament. The manna was called "angel's food" (Ps. 78:19-25).
 3. Manna was hidden only after it was put in the golden pot in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 16:32-36; Heb. 9:1-5). Only the high priest might see this hidden manna once a year, on the Day of Atonement, as he entered the Holy of Holies.
- B. ***I will give him a white stone:*** Precious stones were given to honor those who offered valiant service to their community or in battle. Those receiving these stones were also given special privileges. This was similar to winning a gold medal in the Olympics. A stone with a person's name on it gave them admission to special events hosted by the emperor or a senator in Rome.
1. A stone that is "white" (Gr. *leukos*) refers to one that is *shining* or *glistening* (Mt. 17:2; Rev. 3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14). The stones that will be given to the saints are probably similar to the gems in the walls of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:19-20), on the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:17-21), or those in God's presence (Ezek. 28:13).
- ¹⁷And you shall put settings of stones...the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald...¹⁸the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond...²¹And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel... each one with its own name... (Ex. 28:17-21)*
2. A white stone will be given to overcomers in the age to come. This might apply to various degrees of honor and privileges in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).
- C. ***On the stone a new name written:*** A special name will be given to indicate one's faithfulness, character, and role in the Millennium. A new name reflects one's unique relationship with Jesus.
1. A new name reveals one's character, destiny, and dedication (Gen. 32:28; Isa. 62:2; 65:15). As earthly parents give their child a name of endearment, so Jesus will give His faithful names that reveal how He feels toward them.
 2. Simon was renamed Peter, speaking of his character and position as the rock. Abram's name was changed to Abraham to indicate that he was to be the father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5-15). God changed Sarah's name. Jacob's name was changed to Israel to speak of his place of government and access to God.
- D. ***Overcome:*** To overcome in this context is to refuse to participate in idolatry or immorality and to stand up against false teaching on grace which allows others to be confident in their compromise.