

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS (Rev. 2:12-17)

Read Rev. 2:12-17 (NIV)

****What Scholars Say****

DESTINATION

Rev. 2:12. The third church was in Pergamos, about 20 miles inland from Smyrna. Like Ephesus and Smyrna it was a wealthy city, but it was wicked. It was a very important religious center, with temples dedicated to Zeus and other gods. Pergamos was also the leading center of the worship of Roman emperors, the first city in the province in which a temple had been dedicated to "the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma."

Pergamos was famous for its university with a library of about 200,000 volumes, and for manufacturing of parchment resulting in paper. The atmosphere of this city was adverse to any effective Christian life and testimony.

Anticipating Christ's rebuke for some being tolerant of evil and immorality, John described Jesus as the One who has the sharp, double-edged sword (also mentioned in 1:16; 2:16; 19:15,21). The sword is a symbolic representation of the Word of God's twofold ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world for its sin. It was the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death.

COMMENDATION

Rev. 2:13. Following the same order as in the two preceding letters, commendation is given first. Christ recognized the difficulty of their situation. They lived where Satan has his throne. Further recognition of Satan is indicated at the close of the verse. Pergamos was where Satan lives. The saints there were commended for being true, even when Antipas (which means "against all") was martyred. Christians at Pergamos had been true to God under severe testing but others had compromised in other ways, as seen in the next two verses.

REBUKE

Rev. 2:14-15. They had been guilty of severe compromise by holding the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Balaam had been guilty of counseling King Balak to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship (cf. Num 22-25; 31:15-16). Intermarriage with heathen women was a problem in Pergamos where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols. Usually meat in the marketplace had been offered to idols earlier (cf. 1 Cor 8). They were also condemned for following the Nicolaitans' teaching. Earlier the Ephesian church had been commended for rejecting what appears to be a moral departure (cf. Rev 2:6). Some Greek manuscripts add here that God hates the teaching of the Nicolaitans, as also stated in v. 6. Compromise with worldly morality and pagan doctrine was prevalent in the church, especially in the third century when Christianity became popular. So compromise with pagan morality and departure from biblical faith soon corrupted the church.

EXHORTATION

Rev. 2:16. Christ sharply rebuked the church with the abrupt command, Repent therefore! They were warned, Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He promised that the judgment would come "soon" which also means "suddenly" (cf. 1:1; 22:7,12,20). Christ would contend with them, using the sword of His mouth (cf. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15,21). This again is the Word of God sharply judging all compromise and sin.

PROMISE

Rev. 2:17. The final exhortation to individuals, as in the messages to other churches, is again addressed to those who are willing to hear. Overcomers are promised hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it. The "hidden manna" may refer to Christ as the Bread from heaven, the unseen source of the believer's nourishment and strength. Whereas Israel received physical food, manna, the church receives spiritual food (John 6:48-51).

Scholars differ as to the meaning of the "white stone." The important point is the stone's inscription gives the believer "a new name," indicating acceptance by God and his title to glory. This may be an allusion to the Old Testament practice of the high priest wearing 12 stones on his breastplate with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on it. Though believers at Pergamos may not have had precious stones or gems of this world, they had what is far more important, acceptance by Christ Himself and assurance of infinite blessings to come. Taken as a whole, the message to the church in Pergamos is a warning against compromise in morals or teaching and against deviating from the purity of Apostolic doctrine that has been given to Christians.

****My Thoughts****

1. We are talking about a day in which it cost something to be a Christian. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:26, NIV)

2. It cost everybody the same. The cost is – everything!

Juan Carlos Ortiz, a pastor from Argentina, relates the truths of discipleship this way: "The Bible says the kingdom of God is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of real worth, he sells everything he has and buys that pearl. (Mt. 13:45). Of course, according to traditional thinking, man is the pearl of great price and Jesus the merchant who sells everything to make the purchase. Now I understand that He is the pearl of great price, and man the merchant.

So when man finds Jesus, it costs him everything. Jesus has joy, peace, healing security, eternity. Man marvels at such a pearl and says, "I want this pearl. How much does it cost?"

**The seller says, "It's too dear, too costly."
"But how much?"
"Well, it's very expensive."
"Do you think I could buy it?"
"Oh, of course. Anybody can."
"But you say it's too expensive. How much is it?"
"It costs everything you have – no more, no less – so anybody can buy it."
"I'll buy it."
"What do you have? Let's write it down."
"I have \$10,000 in the bank."
"Good, \$10,000. What else?"
"I have nothing more. That's all I have."
"Have you nothing more?"
"Well, I have some dollars here in my pocket."
"How many?"
"I'll see: 30, 40, 50, 80, 100, 120 – 120 dollars."
"That's fine. What else do you have?"
"I have nothing else. That's all."
"Where do you live?"
"I live in my house."
"The house too."
"Do you mean that I must live in my car, then?"
"Have you a car?"
"I have two."
"Both become mine. Both cars. What else?"
"Well, you have the house, the cars, the money, everything."
"What else?"
"I have nothing else."
"Are you alone in the world?"
"No, I have a wife, two children...."
"Your wife and your children too."
"Too?"
"Yes, everything you have. What else?"
"I have nothing else, I am left alone now."**

"Oh, you too. Everything. Everything becomes mine: wife, children, house, cars, money, clothing, everything. And you too. Now you can use all those things here but don't forget they are mine, as you are. When I need any of the things you are using you must give them to me because now I am the owner." (Call to Discipleship by Juan Carlos Ortiz, pgs.42-43).

3. It appears that there were some in Pergamos that committed apostasy. Apostasy means "the abandonment of a former loyalty to Christ." They renounced their loyalty to Christ and followed idols. It appears that they began OK but shifted positions. The means by which they did this was false teaching.

The doctrine of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. This taught the people of God greed, idolatry and fornication.

The means of this doctrine was a prophet (possibly a true prophet who had turned bad). Balaam was his name. Jesus used the Old Testament prophet as an example to warn the New Testament believers.

Read the Old Testament: Num. 22:18-20; Num 23:3, 5, 12, 16, 23, 26; Num. 24:13; Num. 25:1-2.

Read the New Testament: 2 Peter 2:14-15; Jude 1:11-12.

4. There are two kinds of persons in this church: (1) vv. 12-13 Those who remained true to Me and did not renounce your faith. (2) The second kind of person were people who hold to the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

Christ admonition was: Repent! or I will come and fight against you! (with the sword of My mouth).

5. You might say, "I'm the elect! This apostasy (turning from the faith) stuff doesn't apply to me. My question is, "How do you know you are the elect?" This how the Apostle Peter approached the subject, he said:

"Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things (the things listed in 2 Pet. 1:5-9), you will never fall, [11] and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

This is what the Life Application Bible says about this verse: *"Peter wanted to rouse the complacent believers who had listened to the false teachers and believed that because salvation is not based on good deeds they could live any way they wanted. If you truly belong to the Lord, Peter wrote, your hard work will prove it. If you're not working to develop the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, maybe you don't belong to Him. If you are the Lord's – and your hard work backs up your claim to be chosen by God ("calling and election") – you will never be led astray by the lure of false teaching or glamorous sin."*

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS (Rev. 2:12-17)

****Questions****

REV 2:12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: (NIV)

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

1. Who was addressing John? (2:12)
2. What church was the subject of this letter from Jesus? (2:12)
3. How did the speaker in this passage identify Himself? (2:12)

[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.

- 1..Where was the church of Pergamos said to be located? (2:13)
2. For what did Jesus praise the people of the church at Pergamos? (2:13)

REV 2:14 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.

1. How did the error of Balaam influence the believers at Pergamos? (2:14)
2. What bad influences or teachings had infiltrated the church at Pergamos? (2:14-15)
3. What were the believers at Pergamos doing wrong? (2:14-15)

[16] Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

1. What command did Christ give to this church in light of its dangerous direction? (2:16)
2. What stern warning was issued for those who would not obey Christ? (2:16)

REV 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.

1. Who else did Jesus say could benefit from the message to the church at Pergamos? (2:17)
2. What did Jesus promise to "him who overcomes"? (2:17)

3. What would be inscribed on the white stone received by "him who overcomes"?
(2:17)

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