

Pergamos

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[0 : 00] We shall read verses 12 to 17, a letter to the church at Pergamos. Revelation chapter 2 and at verse 12.

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 Balak to cast a stumbling block 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.

[1 : 33] 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 stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.

There is nobody totally bad or totally good in this world.

Sin and grace are competing in every life. In the Christian, sin and saving grace are at work.

And in the unconverted, sin and common or restraining grace are at work. So, even those that we think most highly of have their faults.

And those whom we are quite ready to condemn, have their good points. And it's the same with churches. Churches are made up of individuals.

[2 : 53] And because they are, they have all the features of individuals. There's no perfect church in this world. Every church has its faults, and its good points.

There's always room for improvement. And every church should be a reforming church. When we see horrific faults in a certain church, let us at the same time try to see the good points that are there.

There's always room for us to learn from others. We ourselves should be always reforming and improving.

And it's like that with the seven churches in Asia. Christ addresses these seven letters to them. And in each letter, there's some words of praise and some words of condemnation.

A part that is from the church at Smyrna, where there's no condemnation, and the church at Philadelphia, where they, again, condemnation is not given.

[4 : 14] But normally, there's words of encouragement, and words of commendation, and at the same time, words of rebuke.

And that should make us all concerned to look objectively at ourselves, as a church, as a congregation, and to try and see what is good and what is bad, get rid of what is bad, and strive towards what is good.

Now, first of all, this church in Pergamos is commended because they were faithful in persecution. I know thy works, verse 13, 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.

This church at Pergamos made a great stand. They stood out tremendously for God. They were subjected to intense persecution, but they didn't give in.

[5 : 30] They were faithful. They were placed in this city of Pergamos, which is described as Satan's seat.

It was obviously a very wicked place, a place of particular heathen, pagan darkness. We were told about Pergamos, that it was the first city in Asia which was given permission to build a temple to the Roman emperor.

It was indeed the center of worship for the emperor, for Caesar. And you know how so many Christians suffered.

They were asked to say, Caesar is Lord, and to put down on Christ. Otherwise they would be put to death. And they were not prepared to say, Caesar is Lord, Jesus is Lord.

They were asked just to burn a little incense to the emperor. But no, they remained steadfast and firm.

[6 : 53] Where Satan's seat is, there they have the temple to this sinful, wicked worship of a man, the emperor, the Roman emperor.

There are certain places in the world where Satan manifests himself more clearly than in other places.

There are places where you can feel the presence of Satan. I remember when I made my trip to India a few years ago, one day walking past a temple, the Sibaba temple, where there were lots of worshippers offering their sacrifices to idols.

I felt a terrible sense of evil. I couldn't get past the place fast enough. Principal Boyd, who was with me, was having to run along beside me to keep up with me.

There was such a sense of evil there. It was like Satan's seat, where the devil was and where the devil was being worshipped.

[8 : 17] There was that horrid, tingling sense of evil. Our own nation has been noted for its Christianity and described as the land of the book, the land of the Bible.

And for 450 years, we have enjoyed the Reformation in this land, and we have enjoyed evangelical religion and the blessing of God.

But bit by bit, we are losing this Christian heritage. Bit by bit, this Christian teaching and practice is going.

The Sabbath, the Sabbath, so distinctive as a mark of Christianity in our land, is no longer observed.

Indeed, there's more of the Sabbath now observed on the continent than there is in our own country that used to be so so Sabbatarian, so rich in its observance of this day as a day for the Lord to worship and serve the Lord and rest in him.

[9 : 46] We are seeing coming in amongst us the New Age movement with its old paganism revived once again. witchcraft, spiritualism, Satan worship and various forms coming into our land.

People turning their back on the church, on the Ten Commandments, on the gospel of God's redeeming grace and turning to idols, turning to paganism.

And what is the result? And what is going to be the result? We fear this flood of iniquity which is coming in upon us and which is carrying away so many people.

There is a sad decline. Pergamos, the church at Pergamos was where Satan's seat was situated.

Could it be true concerning us that we today are more and more to be found where Satan's seat is?

Surely this should make us aware of the danger, alert and concerned, deeply concerned to stand for the faith once delivered to the saints and to hold firmly to it.

[11 : 16] I know your works and where you dwell even where Satan's seat is and thou holdest fast my name.

They were holding firmly to the name of Christ, professing Christ, prepared to profess him no matter what abuse was being heaped on Christ or on his church, no matter what persecution might be involved, it can sometimes be very hard.

We all have our fear and it's difficult to stand for Christ in danger or to stand for Christ when he is despised and mocked and abused and slandered and ridiculed.

But they were identifying openly with the crucified one. It can be very difficult sometimes for children in school in their teenage years when there's a tremendous amount of peer group pressure to stand out for Christ, to stand firmly on his side when their friends laugh and mock and ridicule.

You hold fast my name and have not denied my faith. don't be ashamed of the gospel no matter what it costs you.

[12 : 50] The apostle Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. So what if people laugh at you?

So what if they mock you? So what if they don't want to associate with you and regard you as a leper? as long as Christ loves you and as long as you're one of his people their mouths will soon be shut.

This little life of ours will soon be over. We will soon have to stand before the judgment seat and what will we say on that day?

Better to be ashamed in this world than to be ashamed before Christ on the judgment day and to be cast out of his presence as those who have denied his cause and failed to stand up and be counted for Jesus.

and has not denied my faith. Peter denied the faith didn't he?

[14:06] Three times he said I don't know Jesus. I have nothing to do with Jesus. I'm not associated with him. Indeed with oaths and curses.

But thankfully he came to his senses and he went out and wept bitterly. He repented and eventually Peter stood as one of the clearest witnesses for Christ and tradition tells us that he died crucified for Christ.

There are different ways in which we can deny the faith. We can deny it with our words but we can also deny it with our lives.

If our lives are inconsistent with that faith we're denying it. If we're saying on the one hand that we're Christians and members of the church and yet on the other hand living as the ungodly and the immoral we're denying the faith and we're bringing shame on Christ and we're denying that he has saved us from our life of sin.

But the church in Pergamos they did not deny the faith no matter what it cost them even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth.

[15:51] We don't know very much about Antipas. We know nothing more than we're told here. Very likely he was a leader of the church probably their minister and he was martyred.

He was put to death for the faith. The enemies of the church thought that if they killed Antipas that that would be the end of the church.

But it wasn't the end of the church. You remember when they killed Jesus they thought that would be the end of Christianity but it was really in a sense only the beginning.

When they killed Stephen they couldn't argue with him. He knew his Bible so well he was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. he was showing them that they were wrong and they hated it because they didn't want to change their wicked ways and be converted.

They thought they could destroy the church by taking this great leader Stephen and stoning him to death. But the opposite was the case.

[17:03] That day an arrow sank into the heart of Saul of Tarshish he was pricked and sometime shortly after that he was converted.

Following the death of Stephen the Christians were scattered abroad and went everywhere denying Christ. Oh no.

Although Stephen suffered for the faith the Christians were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the word. So the gospel spread throughout the world.

My faithful martyr how could he be faithful simply because he was given the gift of faith by God. My grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in weakness.

God gives faith and gives grace to stand firm and steadfast to the end and that is something we should pray for. God's grace to maintain a clear faithful Christian profession all the days of our life.

[18:24] In Hebrews 11 we're told about various people who suffered and yet maintained their witness through faith.

We're told of those who were stoned of those who were sawn asunder who were tempted were slain with a sword wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins of whom the world was not worthy destitute afflicted tormented it but by faith they remain steadfast to the end.

Do you have faith? Are you holding firmly on to Christ? Are you standing on his side? No matter what it costs who is on the Lord's side can you say you are firmly and steadfastly no matter what people say hold fast.

Antipas he was slain but the church remains steadfast it's great to see a church standing firm despite the opposition of the world.

Today there is physical persecution in many countries particularly Muslim countries a friend of mine from time to time visits Iran and there the Christians are in great danger they have to meet in secret

several of their pastors the leading men in the church have been found dead they disappeared and found with gunshot wounds dead martyred for the faith it's hard for Christians constantly watched by their neighbors fanatical Muslims who are persuaded that by the power of the sword they can convert the whole world to Islam but we praise God that in Iran today there are faithful

[20 : 52] Christians holding fast and indeed their number is increasing they don't have leaders they don't have many ministers life is very hard for them but they are holding fast surely they are an inspiration to us other countries also Saudi Arabia Yemen Sudan Christians suffering for their faith but yet faithful let them be our inspiration let us stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters throughout the world maintaining them by our prayers and our loving support and prepared to suffer with them if the Lord should call upon us so to do so this is the first great point then about the church at Pergamos they were faithful in the midst of persecution

Antipas had been killed as a martyr but that did not break their spirit but secondly we notice that this church at Pergamos had its fault and it wasn't a little fault I have a few things against thee verse 14 because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block 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 all sin is serious and yet some sins are more serious than others some are more heinous in the sight of God when sin is open and disgraceful it hurts God exceedingly such sin in this church it grieves his Holy Spirit here obviously in this church there was a form of antinomianism antinomianism anti against nomos law against the law against the law of God that's the teaching of antinomianism that it's not important for us it's not necessary for us to keep the law there are many different forms of it and it's a heresy that keeps on appearing at different times through the history of the church and in different places Rabbi Duncan said it's the one basic heresy behind all other heresies antinomianism against God's law thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam remember Balaam was that false prophet in the Old Testament he was in contact with Satan but God also spoke through him remember how he was hired by Balak to curse the children of Israel and he tried hard to do it but God wouldn't let him and he had to say how can I curse whom he has not cursed blessed is he whom God blesses and cursed is he whom God curses Balaam could not curse Israel because God had blessed them but he loved the wages of unrighteousness and although he wasn't able on that occasion to do any damage to Israel he did in another way he taught the women of Moab to entice the Israelites to their feasts their pagan festivities to eat things offered to idols and to indulge in fornication and immorality and by this means God's wrath came down in Israel and many Israelites lost their lives and were destroyed in the wrath of God the Nicolaitans they seem to have been the same group of people who followed the same sort of teachings eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication now of course there were many sophisticated arguments that could be used by the Christians and Pergamos they could say well what's an idol anyway just a bit of stone or a bit of metal nothing special really in an idol so the fact that it's offered to an idol means it's just simply offered to nothing and all food is good it all comes from God and I can ask a blessing over the food can't I so there'll be no harm will come to me from eating something offered to idols

[26 : 41] I've asked God to bless it it cannot do me any harm it's just good food that God has created it's very hard to escape idolatry and there are certain places where it's very hard to keep yourself clean it's very difficult to go into a mill where flour is being milled and come out spotless without some of the white dust sticking to you and similarly it's very difficult to go into the houses of wickedness and come out spotless it would seem that the food that is spoken about here was not simply food that was sold in the marketplace that couldn't be distinguished as whether it was offered to idols or not but the food spoken about here was food that was actually there being offered to the idol and it was festivities taking place in the idol temples now these things were very natural in the ancient world this was the place to go for a feast and if you're invited to a feast or a party it's very hard sometimes to turn it down it can be very tempting to go along to compromise perhaps to get into a situation that you shouldn't be in and that was what was happening to these people in the church in Pergamos they could have said well

I'm going along to the feast because I'm going to witness there I'm going to be a Christian at that feast and I'm going to tell people there about Jesus and I'm going to make a stand for Christ and you've got to get in there and witness for Christ right in the middle of Satan's seat it's easy said but not so easy done it's very hard to go into a den of iniquity and witness there in the midst of the

power of evil and where nobody wants to hear your witness where their ears are closed to it and where the atmosphere is completely unconducious to witnessing the very opposite of witnessing sometimes people say oh I can go into a public house and witness to Christ there it's a very difficult place to witness to Christ a public house and it's far more easy to become soiled by the public house than for you to communicate the grace of Christ to those who are gathered in the public house in the pursuit of sinful pleasure so that was one part of their sin they were eating things sacrificed to idols they were becoming tainted through these feasts and festivities that they were getting involved in and the second part was committing fornication indulging in immorality and this fornication was often linked with the idol worship it was often connected in the temples with the feasting and the idolatry remember in the old testament the children of Israel they sat down to eat and to drink and they rose up to play it can be some people will try to justify it all things are good it's right for us to enjoy life and the good gifts that God has given us and to enjoy one another's bodies it's all right for us to do this and to do that there's no sin in it there's nothing harmful about it we're not under the law anyway we're under grace aren't we and as long as we're not hurting anybody as long as we're not causing sadness to anybody or trouble to anyone or pain to anyone as long as we're loving

Christ commanded us to love the Lord and to love one another as long as it's loving it's all right as long as it feels all right it must be right I've prayed about it and there's nothing wrong with something you've prayed about surely if you pray about it you can do it but the scripture says thou shalt not commit adultery and the scripture condemns all immorality marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled but outside of marriage it is wrong it is immoral and Christ says that if you so much as look upon a woman to lust after her you have committed adultery with her already in your heart and that's serious thou shalt not commit adultery we might be very sophisticated in our arguments we might even argue well if I do sin there's always the blood of

Christ God and I can ask God to forgive me and he'll wash away my guilt so I'll do it just this once it's all right now and then isn't it and I can ask God to forgive me and the blood of Christ will wash away my sin and my guilt shall we continue in sin that grace may abound God forbid how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein how can we live in it when we are Christians we have died to sin we must put our back to sin turn away from it completely how shall I that am dead to sin live any longer therein no Christ died to free us from sin not simply from the guilt of sin but from sinning so that we might be crucified with Christ to the world the flesh and the devil and live holy godly pure and loving lives that love the Lord and love the truth and love righteousness the cross of Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world let us remember there are certain things which God hates some people talk nowadays as if there was no such a thing in God as hate God is love there's no hate in God but the scripture itself tells us that there's hate in God verse 15 so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which thing I hate God abhors it he hates it with a holy hatred with an infinite hatred he can in no way condone it but must totally condemn it sin is serious and there's a serious problem for the church at Pergamos it's wonderful the stand that they made it's wonderful that they were prepared to suffer even unto death for

[35 : 29] Christ but that's not enough there was a serious problem in the church remember 1 Corinthians 13 though I give my body to be burned and have not charity it profiteth me nothing even although I would die as a martyr and do not love the Lord with that proper love and what is it to love the Lord if you love me you keep my commandments not under the law but under grace and what does grace make us do grace makes us keep the law not under the law so that we are saving ourselves through keeping the law but under grace so that we are redeemed from law breaking by the grace of God strengthened empowered enabled to turn our back upon sin to die daily unto sin if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live that's what we have to do through the spirit put into death the sinful lustful unclean immoral acts of the body or that we would fear sin

God hates it we ought to hate it to abhor it to have nothing to do with it thirdly we have the warning addressed to the church at Pergamos repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and we'll fight against them with the sword of my mouth you notice in verse 12 these things saith he which hath the sharp sword with the two edges what are the two edges of this sharp sword the sword that comes out of his mouth that's of course the word of God isn't it sharper than any two edged sword the word of God the word that created heaven and earth that's powerful the word of Christ who is the word of God a sharp sword of two edges one edge converts people the gospel as it reaches out it convicts it humbles it convinces of sin and it changes people's lives the sword that comes out of

the mouth of

Christ smites down the proud sinner like the apostle Paul so that he cried out in the Damascus road Lord what wilt thou have me to do but there's the other side to the sword the side of judgment the other blade that cuts down and destroys that casts out that casts into hell two edges that cuts both ways and if you're not converted by it and transformed by the word of God you will be convicted and condemned destroyed by it how awful is that word that Christ will speak to some depart from me he cursed thou fool this night thy soul shall be required of thee do you wish to have Christ as your friend or as your enemy if you wish him as your friend repent depart from evil repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth he hates sin and he calls upon us to repent to turn from it turn ye turn ye from your evil ways for why will you die the sword it slays it destroys why will you die turn ye turn ye from your evil ways if he fights against us if he fights against you will you be able to fight back against Christ the mighty one with his sharp two edged sword don't turn the grace of God into lasciviousness don't turn the gospel into license to sin we must not misuse or twist or destroy the word of Christ's redeeming grace we have a wonderful saviour who died to save us from our sins and the blood of

Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin but there's no excuse for persisting in sin so there's the warning and then finally the promise verse 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 I will give him a white stone and on the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it him that overcomes who overcomes temptation doesn't yield to the enticing of those who would take him along to the feasts and festivities of the heathen doesn't yield to the temptation to immorality and to uncleanness to him that overcomes who repents of sin and departs from it [42 : 35] I will give to eat of the hidden manna remember how a pot of manna was taken and hidden away in the ark of the testimony kept there down through the centuries it's a picture of Christ the bread of life and he gives to his people to eat of the hidden manna the bread that came down from heaven the spiritual bread and the little taste we have of the spiritual bread in this life it's just a foretaste of the banquet above you've been enticed to go along to the heathen feasts and parties there's a far better party in heaven the hidden manna the glorious banquet the wedding supper of the lamb and a white stone

I will give him a white stone it it would seem that this white stone was a kind of token a right of entry to the banquet that sometimes white stones were used in this sense in ancient times and here is the white stone that guarantees entry the promised entry in to the banquet white speaking of holiness of purity