

Studying the book of Revelation (6)

@Concord Community Church on 09/03/2025

Jesus's Message to the Church in Pergamum

The Church That Married the World ([Revelation 2:12-17](#))

Introduction

The city of Pergamos was the capital city of Asia Minor. It was renowned for its political power, its intellectual achievement and its pagan worship. It was a wealthy city given over to luxury and fashion. There are two special features that caused Pergamos to stand out in its time.

First, there was a 200,000-volume library there. That may not sound like many books to us, but when you consider that every page of every book was handwritten on papyrus and parchment, it was quite an achievement. Pergamum was the place where parchment was invented. Parchment was a type of writing material developed from animal skins and far stronger than papyrus, which was made from reeds.

A second feature that marked ancient Pergamos was its pagan temples. There was a temple in Pergamos to Aesculapius, the god of healing and medicine. His temple was filled with snakes and when a person needed healing, they would go into that temple, lie down on the floor and spend the night there. If a snake crawled across them during their stay, they considered themselves healed. There were three temples in Pergamos devoted to the emperor worship cult. As I already mentioned last week, once each year, every Roman citizen was required to walk into one of these temples, place a pinch of incense on an altar and say "*Ceasar is god.*" Of course, Christian's refusal to do that caused severe persecution against them. On the hill outside the city there was a massive altar dedicated to Zeus, the supreme ruler of their gods.

It is to the Christian congregation in this city that Jesus addresses this letter. They were a church in desperate need of a word from the Lord. So, when Jesus comes to them, He comes as One having "*the sharp sword with two edges.*" The two-edged sword is a clear picture of the Word of God ([Heb. 4:12](#)).

As we study these verses, we are going to discover that this church was doctrinally pure; but they had drifted into compromise. Jesus comes to call them back to the right path. In these verses, there is a word for our hearts too. So, let's turn our attention to the Lord's Words spoken to the church in Pergamum.

I. Words of Praise & Appreciation ([v. 13](#))

(⇒ *"I know thy works"* — Jesus knew all about this church, where it was, what it was doing and what it was facing. He knew them intimately. We need to remember that He knows this church intimately too. He knows everything there is to know about them and He begins by giving them words of commendation.)

A. He Knows Their Situation

This church operated right in the middle of a city chosen by Satan as his headquarters on earth. Regardless of what some people think, some preachers preach, and some songs say, Satan is not now, nor has he ever been in Hell. He dreads that place more than any lost man ever has. When he is sent to Hell, it will be his eternal doom, and he knows it, [Rev. 20:10](#).

In our day, Satan is free and he operates as the *"god of this world"*, [2 Cor. 4:4](#); and as *"the prince and power of the air"*, [Eph. 2:2](#). In other words, Satan is active in our world, and he has a seat of power somewhere. It might be New York, Las Vegas, Washington DC, Moscow, or any of a thousand other places.

These words are used to let these people know that Jesus knows they are living in a tough place. He knows where they are and He has a word just for them.

(Note: He knows your situation too! He knows it when you are in a difficult marriage. He knows it when you face persecution on your job, at school, at home, or even at church. He knows the pressures society places on the dedicated child of God. He knows, He cares, He is there and He will help you, [Heb. 13:5](#); [4:15-16](#)! That is what we need to remember!)

B. He Knows Their Steadfastness

The church in Pergamum was doing a couple of things right and Jesus commends them for it. Let's see what Jesus found to brag on as He looked at this church.

- First, they *"held fast to His name."* This church was not ashamed of the name of Jesus. His name is the most divisive name in history, yet His name is the only name *"whereby men must be saved"*, [Acts 4:12](#).. We

need to make much of this name! We need to sing it, shout it, preach it and tell it! we are here to exalt Jesus!

- Second, they are admired & praised because they have “*not denied the faith.*” This church was doctrinally pure. They held on to the fundamentals of the faith, and Jesus praised them for it. What are these fundamentals?
- The Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures
- The Virgin Birth of the Savior
- The Vicarious Death of the Savior
- The Victorious Resurrection of the Savior

We need to take our stand on these precious truths. Far too many groups are turning away from the fundamental doctrines of the faith and are swiftly sliding into apostasy. Regardless of what anyone else does, or even what our denomination does, we must take our stand on the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God.

C. He Knows Their Sacrifices

Their stand for Jesus had been costly. Even when this church was undergoing severe persecution, they stood for the Lord and for His Word. Jesus mentions a man by the name of Antipas. He is called a “*faithful martyr*”. History tells us that Antipas refused to offer the pinch of incense and say, “*Caesar is god.*” Because of his refusal to worship Caesar, Antipas was placed inside of a brass bull. A fire was built under the bull, and Antipas was roasted to death. In spite of this, the Christians in Pergamos held fast to their witness. Jesus applauds them for their stand.

Notice this, Antipas is called “*my faithful martyr*”. This is the same name that was given to Jesus in [Rev. 1:5](#). Because Antipas stood with the Lord, even though it cost him his life, Jesus calls Antipas by His Own Name! Notice this also, Antipas has been all but forgotten by history. Still, Jesus knows his name! We need never fear that our sacrifices for Him are in vain. He sees them all and will reward them openly some day!

II. Words of Confrontation ([v. 14-16](#))

(⇒ When the Savior looks at this church, He finds some things that please Him; but not everything is to His liking. Having offered them some *Words of Praise & Appreciation*, He now gives them some *Words of Confrontation*.)

A. He Confronts the Compromise in the Church ([v. 14-15](#))

The name Pergamos means "married". As we look at what Jesus points out about this church we are given a glimpse of a church that has fallen into a state of compromise with the world. This church has held onto pure doctrine with one hand and with the other, they have embraced the world. They are literally in an unequal yoke with unbelievers and Jesus confronts them about it in these verses. Here is what He says is wrong with this church.

1. There Is Corruption In The Membership ([v. 14](#)) - He tells them that some of their number "*hold the doctrine of Balaam*". Balaam is one of the strangest characters on the pages of the Bible. He is an enigma, a real mystery. On the one hand, he was a man intimately acquainted with God. He knew about God, about God's character and he even talked with God. On the other hand, he was motivated by greed, and he was guilty of leading the people of God into immorality and idolatry. His story can be found in [Numbers 22-25](#).

In those verses, Balak, the king of Moab wanted to curse the nation of Israel, so he called for Balaam to come do the dirty work. He promises him wealth and promotion for his services. Four times Balaam tries to curse Israel, each time the Lord turns his curses into blessings. When he sees that his attempts to curse Israel have failed, Balaam apparently suggests that since they can't curse Israel, they should corrupt them. This is accomplished by leading them off into immorality and idolatry and thus bringing the wrath of God down upon them, [Num. 25:1](#); [31:16](#).

Basically, the "*doctrine of Balaam*" is wickedness and worldliness. The church at Pergamum was tolerating people in their midst who claimed to be Christians, but who lived like the world around them. Some of their membership were living immoral lives and participating in pagan worship. Jesus is not at all pleased with these things.

(Note: This same problem is flourishing in the modern church. There are so many who believe that since you are saved by grace and kept by grace, you can live any way you please. It is no wonder that society has no respect for the church! It is no wonder that there is no power in the church. We live as we please without regard for the clear commands of the Lord.

Here is the fact of the matter: if you are saved, you will not be like the world around you. If you are saved, you will walk differently, talk differently, and you will have a different set of standards than the world. When Jesus saves a soul,

He creates a new creature, [2 Cor. 5:17](#). He changes everything about that saved person's life. They are different and they live like it!

2. There Is Confusion In The Leadership ([v. 15](#)) - Others there held “*the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*”. As we discovered back in [Rev. 2:6](#), the word “*Nicolaitans*” means “*to conquer the people*” and probably refers to a priestly class that had developed within the church. What was merely “*deeds*” in [verse 6](#) has become a “*doctrine*” in [verse 15](#). It had started out with the leadership in the church elevating themselves above everyone else and it has turned into a doctrine in that fellowship.

No one in the church is to be worshipped or place on a high pedestal of honour. We are all under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and we are all accountable to Him!

B. He Confronts the Consequences for the Church ([v. 16](#))

He tells them to “*repent*”. This word means “*to change the mind*.” Repentance is really “*a change of mind that results in a change of direction*.” If they refuse to repent & deal with the corruption and confusion in their midst, He is going to come to His church and fight against those who trouble it. The Lord knows who belongs to Him and who doesn't. He will come to His church and afflict those who are not really His people, but who would bring trouble into the church. Those who will not repent are going to have to face the Lord in judgment.

III. Words of Consolation ([v. 17](#))

(⇒ The Lord makes some precious promises to the overcomers in the church. Those who walk with Him in full obedience of the Word.

A. He Promises Special Provisions

He promises them “*hidden manna*”. In the Old Testament, when the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness, God fed them by sending Manna down from Heaven. This Manna is a picture of God's precious promise to feed His children.

The world and those in it have to search for ever deepening experiences. They go to the table of sin and eat their fill. The true saint of God is content to be alone with His Lord in His tabernacle, feeding on His Word and His presence, [Psa. 27:1-5](#). He promises His people a place of escape and refreshment, even during the most difficult of times.

B. He Promises Special Privileges

Not only will He provide for the overcomers, but He will also grant them some special privileges not enjoyed by others.

1. A New Degree — “*a white stone*” — The Lord promises to give His faithful ones a white stone. There are several possible meanings attached to the white stone. I want to point out a few that speak to us.
 - *White and black stones were used to indicate judgment in ancient courts of law.* When a judge rendered his verdict, he would place a stone in a container and at the appropriate time, he would roll the stone out, thus rendering his judgment. A black stone indicated a judgment of guilt, while a white stone indicated a judgment of innocence.
 - *White stones were used to signify citizenship.* A white stone was often given to people who had proven their allegiance to the city. Jesus honours those who live for Him.
 - *White stones were used as a symbol of victory.* They were given to those who had won a victory in one of the ancient games. These white stones were called “*tessera*” and they allowed the owner free access to all public entertainment. Jesus allows His victors access to the glories of His heaven!
 - *A courageous gladiator would be given a white stone for his bravery & courage.* So, Jesus promises to honour those who take a stand for Him!
 - *White stones were a symbol of friendship.* Often two friends would take a white stone, break it in half and write the other friends name on their half. When they met, even after many years, they could place the halves of their stones together, signifying their lasting relationship.
2. A New Designation — Jesus promised His overcomers that their white stone would contain “a new name which no man would know except for the one who receives it.” This is a promise of close familiarity, inseparable and affectionate friendship. Jesus promises those who are faithful to Him that He will reveal Himself to them in a personal way. And those who walk with Him and separate from the world will see this intimacy heightened and taken to new levels as the years go by.

Conclusion: As we conclude, let’s ask ourselves: Is my relationship with Jesus all that it should be? Have I separated myself from the world to love Him and Him alone? Do I claim/profess to know Jesus even while I am living for the world? If so, we/I/you need to repent, or He will come and fight against us/me/you. Let’s Pray.