

The Church in Pergamos- Pressured to Play the Fool

by Phil Beach Jr.

The sermon addresses the challenges faced by the church in Pergamos, emphasizing the need for faithfulness amidst worldly temptations and the call to repentance for those who compromise their beliefs.

Topics: "Persevering Faith", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches about the church in Pergamos, a city filled with worldly temptations and false teachings. Despite the challenges, there were faithful believers who held fast to the name of the Lord amidst persecution and suffering. Christ, holding the sharp two-edged sword, calls for repentance and warns against compromising with impure doctrines and indulging in worldly pleasures. Those who overcome these temptations are promised the hidden manna and a new name, symbolizing spiritual nourishment and transformation into Christ's moral likeness.

Transcript

Rev. 2: 12-17. Pergamos was a beautiful city, sitting on top of a huge mountain, overlooking a gorgeous valley. Like New York City today, it was a center for cultural and religious activity for the world of its time. Within its borders were innumerable temples that had been erected to various gods, including Zeus. This pagan altar was the most famous and attracted people from all parts of the Roman Empire. Additionally, this city was the center and headquarters for imperial worship, that is, the worship of the state and its leader.

After Rome conquered the world the government began to erect temples in many quarters. In these temples were built altars and images in Caesar's honor. Eventually he became a god in the eyes of the Roman world and a law was passed forcing all citizens to come to the temple and bow down saying, "Caesar is Lord". Those who refused to bow down to the image of Caesar but confessed Christ as Lord were subject to death by the sword! Indeed, the wisdom of man, with all his pride, pomp and passion to possess power and prestige were thriving in this ancient city.

But remarkably, in the midst of such a place, the Lord had His church. To this church He speaks words of commendation, condemnation and hope for those who overcome the tantalizing temptations within its borders. Pressure to play the fool and follow after the seducing allurements of Satan were intense. Some remained faithful to their Lord but others fell under the power of Satan's temptation. Many began to

participate in worldly activities and became seduced by the serpent, embracing false teachings that led to moral failure.

Now, let's look and see what our Lord had to say to this group of believers. The Sword in His Mouth Whenever the life of a church or individual believer becomes corrupted by compromise, embracing the things of the world, Christ responds in a most remarkable way. To this church He introduces himself as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword in His mouth. This sword in His mouth represents the Word of God. Worldly hearts are in desperate need of the Word of God. God's Word is like a sharp sword that can cut away the sinful desires and worldly passions afflicting the compromising church or believer.

God's Word will convict and convince the world of their sin and command repentance. In Hebrews, God says that His Word is sharper than any two-edged sword and is able to go very deeply into the heart and soul of the believer. As God's Word goes deeply into our hearts, it is able to discern our deepest thoughts and desires and expose the true motive behind our actions. God's Word demands that we live a life of moral purity and imparts to the humble and meek heart the grace and mercy to live in such a way.

Usually when there is an absence of hearing and embracing the Word of God there will be a falling away and embracing of immoral beliefs and actions. This is exactly what happened to this church. Only God's Word can keep our hearts clean and free from falling prey to the many alluring temptations we face by living in this evil and corrupt world. Additionally, it is interesting to note that many innocent believers were being put to death by the sword of man because of their witness for Christ.

Many of the officials in this city were misusing and abusing the power of the sword they carried. However, Jesus is the one who truly holds the power of the sword and He will never abuse or misuse it. Though sinful men will always abuse any authority they may possess, we can be confident that our Lord will never abuse His authority and that the sword in his hand will be wielded in truth and justice. Some innocent followers of the Lamb may have been slain by the sword of man but they are yet alive in the Lord's presence, never being truly harmed by that sword.

But indeed all who are slain by the sword of the Lord shall suffer much loss and pain! Let us never fear the sword in the hands of sinful man, but the one in the hands of the Sinless Savior. It is by His sword alone that men can truly be harmed. Christ Commends His Faithful Followers In spite of the peril that faced this church there were some who were faithful to the Lord. Even though this church was surrounded by a cesspool of worldliness where people were consumed by pleasures, accumulating possessions, and loving the comforts of this life, the Lord found some who were holding fast to His name and keeping the faith.

Jesus said he knew their works and where they dwelt, even where Satan's seat was. No doubt He is referring to the cult of emperor worship where the very powers of Satan were abounding. Those who were being faithful to the Lord were suffering and their works were being tested greatly. Jesus even mentions Antipas, who He says was His faithful martyr, who was killed among the believers, where Satan lives. Perhaps this refers to a time when this man Antipas was killed by the sword of an angry soldier who saw this faithful witness refuse to bow down and give his allegiance to Caesar.

I'm sure these believers could have quietly served the Lord and kept their light under cover so that they would not have to suffer under the hands of the Roman officials. Yes, they very well may have refused to be a testimony for their Lord for fear of the sword of man. But thankfully they did not! Instead, they most likely were filled with God's Spirit so deeply that the very life of Jesus and His moral beauty and holiness

flowed out of their lives, gushing into the streets and work places where these faithful believers lived and labored.

They refused to deny their Lord and make a false profession to a false god. They held fast to the name that they loved so deeply and to that name that kept them from compromise and moral failure. Additionally, this church was faithful to the faith that was handed down to them by the apostles. They loved God's Word and studied it often. As the Psalmist says, they must have thought upon God's Word day and night, hiding it in their hearts and minds. Daily they were gathering in homes to pray for the souls of those who were persecuting them and asking God for help so that would not deny His name.

In those prayer meetings they were praying for their children too. They knew that their children would be the prime target of Satan to seduce their young hearts away from the faith they held dear and tempt them to love the pleasures of that city which abounded like a flooding river, running through its streets and touching all its citizens! The early church as recorded in the book of Acts was so filled with the life and love of Jesus that they gathered daily, in homes and in public places to pray, to hear the Word of God and to help one another.

There was no hint of selfish ambition in their midst. Each one shared their abundance with those who were in need so that all were cared for and there were none that lacked what was needful for living. This is what a healthy church looks like and how it behaves! These believers in Pergamos were living like this. But some were not. Let's look at those who were rejecting God's Word and refusing to embrace the Word of God as their life and final authority. Christ Condemns the Compromising Christian In the midst of this church where Christ commended those who were being faithful to His name and Word there were those who were guilty of embracing false doctrine which resulted in a departure from moral purity.

Two specific charges were made by the Lord against those in this church that were compromising. The first one was a charge that they had embraced the doctrine of Balaam. What does this mean? It means that corruption and worldliness had crept into this very group of believers and was destroying them from within. This statement, "The doctrine of Balaam", refers back to a story in the Old Testament. During the time when Israel wandered in the wilderness there was a Moabite king named Balac.

Balac feared Israel would conquer his kingdom, and in an attempt to keep this from happening, he sought the services of Balaam, a pagan prophet, to curse them, in the hopes that they would be destroyed or weakened. Three times Balaam cursed Israel with no results. Then Balaam thought up a horrible plan. He suggested that Balac to send Moabite girls into the Israelite camp to seduce them into committing fornication and to worship the gods of the Moabites. Tragically this plan worked. (Num. 22-25; 31:16) Balaam knew that God would protect His people from any kind of a curse that would be brought to them.

However if God's people were to embrace impurity and indulge in the worship of the gods of the world, i.e. money, man's glory and accomplishments, sexual pleasure, and worldly comforts, then they would destroy themselves. Apparently these compromising believers in Pergamos had fallen into the same snare that Israel fell. Those who embraced this false teaching were committing fornication and engaging in all kinds of impure acts, getting drunk and eating at the table of this world's pleasures, where devils live and infect the heart with their venom.

Secondly, this same group of believers was embracing the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Jesus said that He despised and hated with a deep passion this false damnable belief. This was the false doctrine that teaches that the material world was inherently evil. Therefore, it does not matter what the body did

because it was part of the material world. This opens the door to indulge in all kinds of sexual impurity, resulting in the tragic loss of the conscience! Many forms of this deadly doctrine lurk in Christendom today.

Anytime a church or believer rejects God's Word, neglects prayer and spending quality time alone with the Lord together with regularly gathering with other likeminded saints, they will be vulnerable to fall prey to these false doctrines. Even though many would not admit to openly believing these false doctrines, yet their actions prove they are being seduced by such ideas. Those who no longer love God's Word or pray as they ought often have lost the power of a tender conscience and find nothing wrong with looking at movies that openly depict sexual impurity, nudity and vulgar language.

They claim that they have Christian liberty to indulge in such things and that they are not in bondage to law or religious rules, believing it matters not what they see as long as they do not practice such things. This is pure deception! Christ tells us that sin begins in the heart and if our eyes are looking to lust, we are committing adultery or fornication, before the act actually occurs. Our children will be destroyed if they grow up in homes where their parents permit them to watch any form of sexual impurity or listen to any kind of music or language that is putrid and lacking truth and purity.

Such is exactly what happened to this compromising group of believers in Pergamos. They felt it was acceptable to participate in the pagan parties of their day, to watch the adulterous practices of those who attended such parties and feast at the tables where false gods were being given homage and their deeds being practiced. But Christ condemned such actions and does today as well. Today, we can fall prey to this very false doctrine by allowing the television or rented video to pour into our homes and into the hearts of our children the sexual impurities of this evil age we live in.

Should this happen it is a sure sign massive deception has gripped such a heart. Be warned dear one, if any form of these false doctrines finds a place in our lives, we too will face the condemnation that these believers faced and though we may not readily admit to it, we will be embracing the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing Jesus hates! The results will be disastrous, breeding licentiousness and all kinds moral decay, both in our lives and in the lives of our children.

Christ's Call to Repent and His Promise to those Who Overcome As we see in all the letters to the churches in Asia Minor, Christ commands repentance whenever there is moral failure that is threatening the spiritual life of His church. This church is no exception. They are guilty of embracing two false doctrines. Each of these doctrines affected their behavior resulting in moral decay. God's only Word to such a condition is to repent. This group had to accept the Lord's rebuke, admit to their guilt and be willing to make adjustments to their lifestyles.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the call to repent is not just to admit to guilt or acknowledge a compromising heart. This is good but not enough. True repentance involves more than just acceptance of guilt and confession of sin. It requires a change in the way a person thinks. This results in a change in ones behavior. Then, when our behavior changes our priorities must change too. This church was in deep need of getting rid of the evil influences that had crept into their lives and into the lives of their children.

In their places they needed to begin new habits that were godly and pleasing to the Lord. They were deceived into going to the altars of the false gods of their day and had allowed the family altar of prayer, reading and pondering God's Word and honest confession of their faults and sins to fall apart. Because this group of compromising believers had rejected God's Word and embraced a life of pleasures and worldly pursuits they rejected the call to pray daily with other believers.

I'm sure they made no time to pray often because they had lost sight of their deep need and were carried about by the many desires of the flesh. They had become spiritually blind, unable to see the Lord or their true condition. In their blindness they were being condemned by the Lord and being called to repent! These believers had to stop embracing a lifestyle that was leading them away from God's call to pray and be a witness and martyr for His name's sake. They needed to stop believing the lie that it was acceptable to the Lord to be entertained by the worldly pleasures, theaters, and sexually explicit activities of their day.

Tragically they had embraced a false liberty that allowed them to indulge in worldly fun, entertainment and fellowship with ungodly people. Since they had become so busy with all kinds of events, God's word was being choked and unable to bring forth lasting fruit in their lives. Just like Jesus said, they had become deceived by the illusions of riches, by the desire for things and much busyness and their hard hearts were making it easy for Satan to steal the Word from them. What a dangerous place to be in!

It is even more dangerous to be in such a place and not know it, thinking all is well. All this happens, dear one, when our hearts become cold and hard, distracted and divided and we drift from a reverent and passionate love for God's Word; which empowers us to devour God's Word and pray, both in private and with those who share the same passion, often and without ceasing! God warns such a people that if they do not repent He will come to them and fight against them with the sword of His mouth.

God is not going to punish those who are repenting and changing their ways, trusting in the Lord's help and grace. He is not going to fight against those who are admitting to guilt and together with other broken hearted believers are praying and looking to God's Word for help, guidance and life, and making the necessary changes in their lifestyles. But he will fight against those who hear His call and refuse to repent and in pride of heart and arrogance of mind continue life as usual.

To those who are repenting and overcoming these many temptations, God promises the right to eat of the hidden manna together with being given a white stone with a new name written on it. What a promise God gives here. The manna is a picture of Christ Himself and the white stone is the promise of being changed by the power of God into the very image of Christ's moral likeness! To those who turn from eating at the tables of devils and worldly pleasures and forsake the sinful practices of such places, God will give Christ as both their spiritual food, who will satisfy their deepest need, and Christ as their moral life, who will express in them the beauties of God's moral perfections, a new name; meaning a new nature!

Let's be prayerful about this message from our Lord and remember some important lessons. Christ is able to preserve for Himself a faithful group of believers who will be true to His name and to His Word and the faith, even if they may live in the very center of Satan's seat and power. To those who are compromising by embracing false teachings that permit them to hold to sexual impurity and fellowship with ungodly and worldly entertainments, God condemns and commands repentance, a complete change in the mind and behavior!

If such a call is ignored and rejected, Christ warns that He will come and fight against such with the sword of His mouth. Today, may the Lord give us an ear to hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church, together with a heart willing to obey His every Word.

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