

Jesus' Seven Letters to the Churches

Part 3 Pergamum: Compromise with the World

“Then to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Pergamum write: These are the words of Him Who has and wields the sharp two-edged sword: I know where you live—a place where Satan sits enthroned. [Yet] you are clinging to and holding fast My name, and you did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed (martyred) in your midst—where Satan dwells. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: you have some people there who are clinging to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to set a trap and a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, [to entice them] to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols and to practice lewdness [giving themselves up to sexual vice]. You also have some who in a similar way are clinging to the teaching of the Nicolaitans [those corrupters of the people] which thing I hate. Repent [then]! Or else I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). To him who overcomes (conquers), I will give to eat of the manna that is hidden, and I will give him a white stone with a new name engraved on the stone, which no one knows or understands except he who receives it.” [Revelation 2:12-17 \(AMP\)](#)

Portion for the Journey: This is the longest of the seven letters written to the churches. It is written to a church that had found governmental favor and became settled in the world.

vs. 12 Address: “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:” Some translations say “Pergamos” and either translation is correct.

The name of this city, Pergamum, has two meanings:

- **“united in marriage”** Many believe this represents the marriage of the Church and the world or the state (government). Watchman Nee believed Pergamum represented this condition of the Church from the 4th to 7th centuries after Constantine made Christianity the state religion and commanded all people to become Christians.
- **“high tower” or “fortified”** The reference to High Tower may be due to its geographical location being set high on a tall conical hill. Points to the position of the Church toward the world in the high position of authority and power when the church became married to the state.

The city of Pergamum was located 26 km from the modern coastline of the Aegean Sea. It was northwest of the modern city of Bergama in Izmir province of Turkey. The city is now in ruins but some artifacts remain. Pergamum was an ancient city of very high elevation, dating back to the beginnings of town life in Asia. It was a highly developed society and gave the impression “royal city” of great authority and power. They worshipped Rome and put their faith in the government. The city was filled with idolatry. Pergamum was organized for defense from foreign invasion. The mountainous physical setting also provided for strong fortification.

Notable Characteristics of Pergamum:

- Pergamum was the capital of the province for two centuries and the seat of supreme authority for four centuries. When John wrote to the believers in Pergamum, it was one of the most influential cities in the Roman Empire. It was the political center of power from which rulings were made affecting the whole world. It is significant that Pergamum became part of the Roman empire, not by conquest or compulsion but by spontaneous choice.
- Pergamum was known for inventing parchment which was a type of “paper” made out of durable calfskin. This parchment has allowed researchers access to letters and historical items that were preserved through this enduring material.
- Pergamum was a city devoted to the intellect. Pergamum was a city of inventions and inventors and center of learning, books and religious writings. Pergamum had the second largest library in the world consisting of over 200,000 books and drew many scholars, princes and priests.
- It also was known as a center for the arts. Noted for marble carvings, Pergamum excelled the other six cities in architectural beauty. It had a city theater that held 10,000 people and the acoustics were so good that a whisper from the stage could be heard all the way to the furthest seat. It was renowned for its advances in medicine and had the world’s first psychiatric hospital.
- It also had a healing center that was a cross between a spa and a hospital, called Asklepiion. This center allowed no one who was terminal to be admitted. The priests did not want anyone to hear that someone had died in the hospital. They had huge sign posted over the door saying “Death is not permitted here.”

The city of Pergamum was a wicked city, filled with pagan worship. It was an enemy to the Church and its author. Pergamum was averse to any effective Christian life and testimony. It exercised this authority in two ways:

1) **Civil administration:** Pergamum was the center of emperor worship where the Roman Emperor was worshipped as a god. There was an imperial cult in Pergamum in honor of Rome and Augustus as the ultimate deity. Those who refused to worship him or offer sacrifices to him were to be put to death. Worship of Trajan (Roman emperor from 97 AD to 117 AD; Worship of Severus (Roman emperor from 145 AD to 211 AD

2) **Pagan Religion’s:** The people of Pergamum worshipped a myriad of gods. The area was first ruled by the Greeks who had a long history of uniting their conquests by absorbing the religions of the area into Greek ideology. Syncretism was also very much encouraged by the Romans, believing that a melting together of cultures and religions increased Rome’s strength and reduced the risk of individual groups rebelling.

The Patron deities of Pergamum: Zeus (the Savior); Olympus (the savior god), Dionysos (Kings claimed to be descended from him; leader of the god of the royal family; god of vegetation), Asclepius (god of healing) and Athena (Victory- believing this goddess had given the state glorious victories; patron goddess of Athens). The animal cult worship of the god-serpent and the god-bull were also practiced.

The Pergamum church is said to be dwelling where Satan himself dwells, where Aesculapius, the serpent-son was worshipped. The city’s pagan priests went on the attack against believers. They wrote a letter to the Roman Governor and complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out

of the city and hindering the worship of their gods. Antipas' name means, 'against all.' He stood against all satanic worship. In AD 92, as a punishment the governor ordered Antipas to offer sacrifice of wine and incense to a statue of the Roman Emperor and to declare that the emperor was lord and god. Antipas refused and was sentenced to death on the altar of Zeus. The pagans had created a hollowed out bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice in which the victim was placed with his head where the face of the bull would be. A fire was built under the bull and the persons' movements and cries made it appear the bull had come alive. Antipas died praying for the Church to the very end. This altar was located and dismantled in the 19th century and taken to Berlin where it was placed on display in 1930, just in time to inspire one of the most brutal dictators and persecutors of Jews and Christians the world has seen.

vs. 12 Author: *"The one who has the sharp two-edged sword, says this..."* A two-edged sword was an incredibly effective weapon in time of battle. In contrast to a single-edged sword, this sword was incredibly balanced and could cut in two directions with ease. One of the most significant aspects of a sword is its power to cut or to separate. This sharp two-edged sword represents the powerful Word of God. God's Word is the representation of all Truth. It is the Word **spoken by the LORD's mouth** and given to us as a spiritual weapon. It takes great skill to wield such a sword without cutting oneself, but it is said this sword has perfect balance. This principle may be seen in the perfect balance of all aspects of God's character and His ways. He is a God of love and mercy but He is also a God of judgment and wrath. These aspects of His character seem to be contradictory but the Word shows us perfect balance and symmetry to all that He is and all that He does. His Word has a two-fold ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world with its sin. [Isa. 11:4](#); [Eph. 6:17](#); [2 Thes. 2:8](#); [Heb. 4:12](#); [Rev. 1:16](#); [2:16](#); [19:15,21](#)

vs. 13 Commendation: To the believers in Pergamos He begins by praising them for their faithfulness in the midst of tremendous spiritual warfare. He understands where they are dwelling and the opposition that is facing them. We can take incredible comfort from hearing His words, *"I know..."* (See letter to Smyrna).

v. 13 He said, **"I know where you dwelleth"** The word **"dwells"** is used twice in this verse. First in reference to the church in Pergamum and also in reference to Satan's dwelling place. The Greek word for dwell, 'katoikein' refers to a settled place of permanent habitation. It means to dwell fixedly or have one's permanent residence in a certain location. This is an unusual word to use with reference to Christians. Typically, the word for 'dwell' used would be 'paroikein' which carries the idea of a stranger or sojourner, one who is only a temporary resident. As believers, we need to be cautious that we do not make this world our home and become so settled in that we fail to remember our citizenship is in heaven and we are of a kingdom not of this earth. [Heb. 11:10](#); [Phil. 3:20](#)

Watchman Nee wrote, "The church sojourns on earth as a passer-by, just as our Lord, too, was once a stranger in this world. How pitiful that the church has now lost her character as a sojourner and has instead a dwelling, that is, a position here. This shows how the church has become worldly, and her dwelling place is in Pergamum—which means 'high tower,' that is to say having a superior position, influence and glory."

"The world is a bridge, the wise man will pass over it, but not build a house on it."

~~Unknown Author~~

v. 13 “...a place where Satan sits enthroned...” We must never forget that the world lies in the power of the evil one. Pergamos was a location where Satan was said to sit on his throne, implying this was the seat of his power. The kingdoms of the world belong to Satan and this world can never be our home. **1 John 5:4,5, 19; John 12:31; 15:19; 17:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 12:2; James 4:4; Col. 3:1-4**

v. 13 [Yet] **you are clinging to and holding fast My name, and you did not deny My faith**, even in the days of Antipas My witness, My faithful one, who was killed (martyred) in your midst...” The warfare had been very intense both spiritually and physically as the church faced persecution from the pagans and the government. Antipas’ name means ‘against all.’ He paid the ultimate price for standing firm for the sake of Christ. **Matt. 16:24-25** warns us we cannot serve two masters. There is the high cost of being His disciple which may include laying down our lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Antipas is referred to as “my faithful witness” a phrase that Jesus used to describe Himself in **Rev. 1:5** and 3:14. The word for ‘martyr’ and the Greek word for ‘witness’ is ‘martus.’ In many cases to be a true and faithful witness for Christ means that you will be a martyr for the faith.

They were commended for two specific reasons:

1. Clinging to and holding fast to my name: The Greek word for “hold fast” is ‘krateo’ (G2902) means: 1) to use one’s strength, to have power, to powerful, be master, to rule, to get possession, to become the master and obtain, to take hold of, seize, to lay hands on in order to get into one’s power, 2) to hold in the hand, to hold fast, ie. not to discard or let go, to keep carefully and faithfully, to continue to hold or retain. (See Portions for the Journey study “Cling to the Lord and Follow No Other”)

2. You did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas (intense persecution). We see in this phrase that “you did not deny My faith” the idea of not rejecting or recanting one’s belief in the face of torture and death. It is also translated “disowned” in **Acts 3:13**. This was the same word for ‘deny’ that Jesus used when He warned Peter he would deny Him three times. In **Matt. 10:33** Jesus said that whosoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father, who is in heaven.” **2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16; 2 Peter 2:1 1 John 2:21-24; Jude 1:4** (See Portion for the Journey “Contend Earnestly for the Faith”)

vs. 14 -15 Criticism: “**But I have a few things against you,...**” The strategy of the Romans and Greeks were to infiltrate and combine all religions to achieve a peaceful society. The Lord criticized the church in Pergamum for their toleration of heresies, idolatry and immorality taking place within the Church. These two heresies sought to persuade Christians there was nothing wrong with a prudent conformity to the world’s standards. He does not say that the true believers were engaging in false teachings but that they had false teachers in their midst and did nothing about it. They exhibited toleration of the ways of the world, including immorality and idolatry, as well as those who taught a mixture of truth and heresy. They did not expel from their midst those who taught false doctrines.

The most common term for Christian in the New Testament is ‘hagios’ which means ‘different or separate.’ The Church is meant to be salt and light to the world, but the world must not be allowed to influence the Church. There is a delicate balance that the Christian needs to maintain, to come out from among them and be separate, but also to bring Christ to the world. The Nicolaitans and those teaching the error of Baalam were following a doctrine of compromise in order to avoid persecution. These false teachers were urging Christians to be conformed to the ways of the world and to stop being different. **Matt. 5:13-16; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:9-12**

Christians typically referred to themselves in a manner that defined their sense of being ‘set apart’ from the world around them.

- **Sojourner:** A person who is passing through or temporarily living in a foreign land. For example, the Israelites were sojourners in the wilderness during the exodus from Egypt.
- **Foreigner:** A person who lived among the Jews but was from another ethnic group.
- **Resident Alien:** A term used by early Christians to describe themselves. A resident alien is one who lived in a place but was not a citizen of that place.

In Smyrna, they were persecuted by the synagogue of Satan, religious leaders operating under Satanic influence, but in Pergamum, they were confronted with the Throne of Satan in their midst. The danger was not from persecution from the outside but from infiltration from within by heretical teachings. The saints were in peril of entering into an alliance with the forces under satanic dominion.

1) **“you have among you those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.”** Balaam was a Midianite who followed pagan practices but mixed it with some knowledge of the one true God. He was self-conceited and covetous. Unger’s Bible Dictionary writes that the way of Balaam is the covetous conduct of the typical hireling prophet, solicitous only to commercialize His gift. Balaam was hired by a pagan king to curse God’s people. Balaam encouraged the corruption of Israel by intermarriage with the pagan world. The doctrine of Balaam was the teaching of a mercenary seer to gladly abandon godly separation in favor of worldly conformity. Balaam taught Balak to corrupt the people who could not be cursed by tempting them into sexual immorality with Moabite women. The goal was to unite the Jews with the pagans contradictory to God’s command that His people needed to be separate. [Num. 31:15, 16; 22:5](#)

2) **“Thus you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”** Nicolaitans were a sect or party that rose up during the Apostolic age holding to an extreme form of Gnosticism. The Nicolaitans claimed that their bodies were physical and therefore evil, so only what they did in their spirit mattered. They felt free to engage in all forms of sexual immorality, eat food offered to demons, and anything that pleased their bodies. The name “Nicolaitans” means ‘conquering the laity’ or ‘victorious over the people.’ The name comes from a Greek word (G3534) meaning a conquest, to triumph over, victory. Intrinsic in the meaning of the word is the idea of not only conquering the people, but those who lust after positions of power and leadership. This group claimed to have a superior status that permitted them to engage in idolatry and immorality. The LORD particularly hated their works. There are two references to this group in the Word, in His letter to Ephesus the LORD commends Ephesus for hating their works as He Himself. The second reference is in this letter to Pergamum where He rebukes them for not hating their work and in fact, having some who held to their teachings. [Ps. 1:1-3 AMP](#)

Dangers of Marrying the Church and the State: History is full of examples of the misuse of power by the Church when the church was given authority and political power. Constantine ended persecution of believers by through “marriage of the Church and the State.” He made it a law that the Roman Empire was a Christian nation and turned the church into a political arm of the government. He began bankrolling the building of fabulous churches and appointed bishops in every city and gave the church incredible political power and authority. This power brought great corruption into the church. The Roman Catholic church began a conquest of nations and held incredible authority over them, including

control of powerful armies that were used to enforce the will of the church. Crusades between 1096 and 1291 were initiated to reconquer Jerusalem from Muslim rule through organized military campaigns which forced conversions by the sword and those not submitting to the church were ruthlessly murdered. They also began campaigns against Christians who did not follow Roman Catholic practices. In England, those who did not practice the Queen's religion were burned at the stake. Even John Calvin, had those who disagreed with him on points of doctrine killed.

The Church in America faces very similar temptations to compromise the Truth in order to avoid confrontation and face persecution. We need to hold true to the faith and maintain our focus on the work He has given us to do on this earth. There are movements within the church today who would seek to establish a marriage between the church and the state. Their goal is to remove separation of church and state. They seek to establish Christian control of government authority and are willing to use physical violence if necessary. Movements such as Christian Nationalism, New Apostolic Reformation and the 7 Mountains Mandate are gaining numbers daily. Their tactics are to fight if necessary to establish Christian government. Instead of using evangelism consistent to the Great Commission, they seek to legislate Christian morals but at the price of removing religious liberty for all other citizens. These movements are dangerous because they misrepresent the Name of Jesus and turn Christianity into a political agenda. The 7 Mountains mandate says Christians are not called upon to influence others to the Christian faith or demonstrate truth and love but that we have a mandate from God to colonize the earth through conquest. [Matt. 28:18-20](#)

vs. 16 **Instruction: "Repent"** Repentance means "to change the mind, to turn or return, but not necessarily to one's starting point." Repentance requires an acknowledgement of our actions in the light of God's Word of Truth. Finding true repentance for our sins requires a contrition of heart that recognizes not only one's sin and its ramifications but also demonstrates faith in God's ability and willingness to forgive. Ultimately, if we have true repentance, we will change our ways so that we are committed not to walk in that same path of sin. [Acts 3:19](#); [Mal. 3:7](#); [Acts 17:30](#); [Rom. 2:1-11](#)

- True repentance requires the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to send His light and truth into our hearts. Ask the Holy Spirit to... "Search me and know me..." [Ps. 139:23-24](#); [Ps. 25:4-5](#)
- Awakening of our consciences by the voice of God. We need to be sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit when we have sinned and respond quickly by running to the throne. [Phil. 2:12](#); [1 Tim. 1:5, 19](#); [Heb. 10:22](#)
- Realization that sin has caused a separation from God. [Ps. 32:3](#); [Isa. 59:1-3](#)
- It requires true recognition of our sin and expression of our sorrow, anguish that results in a pouring out of the heart before God. To see that through our sin we have harmed ourselves or others and that ultimately our sins are against God Himself. [Ps. 51:4](#); [Zech. 12:10](#); [2 Cor. 7:9,10](#)
- We cannot change ourselves or conquer many of the sins that beset us, but when we truly repent before the LORD, we can rely upon all of His power to protect us and enable us to find a way out from continuing in that sin. [1 John 1:9](#)

v. 16 " ...Or else I will come to you quickly and fight against **them with the sword of My mouth.**" The sword of His mouth is the sword of the Word of God. Truth is the weapon of our warfare by which to fight against error and false teaching. [Heb. 4:12](#); [Eph. 6:17](#)

vs. 17 **Promise:** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."

- **Hidden Manna Is a type of Christ**, spiritual food coming from heaven, a spiritual meat that come from the LORD that is available only to those who follow Him fully. Manna was a gift from heaven by which Israel was sustained while they were in the wilderness. It is a perpetual memorial of God’s love and care. Suggestive of the moral Excellence of Christ, hidden from man but revealed to those who follow His path wholeheartedly. **Gen. 1:29; 9:3; Job 36:31; Ps. 104:14; 136:25; 145:15, Matt. 6:26; John 6:49-51; Ps. 78:24, 25**
- **White Stone with a new name written on it:** A white stone was highly significant in its meaning at the time this letter would have been written. 1) In time of judgment a white stone was given to the defendant who was acquitted or pardoned. 2) In public games, a white stone was given to those who were outstanding in their performance. It entitled them to be maintained at the public expense their whole life. 3) White stones were also given along with invitation to public feasts or banquets. The white stone was presented to allow admission. 4) A white stone was given by the emperor as badges of friendship and alliance, a testimony that represented a contract of friendship had been made between two parties. A stone was broken and matching parts were exchanged. In this case the white stone would be a token of Jesus covenant with us, marked by the new name He will bestow which only He knows.

*“For you were called to freedom, brethren;
only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh,
but through love serve one another.
For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement,
“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”
But if you bite and devour one another,
take care that you are not consumed by one another.”*

Galatians 5:13-15

What is the Lord Speaking to me?

Responding to the Lord: