

To the Seven Churches in Asia

The Pergamum Letter

Revelation 2:12-17

Introduction

1. A common lie that is sold tells us that if we are not the active agent in a negative circumstance that we have nothing to do with it and will not bear guilt in relation to it.
2. Jesus disagrees – **Matthew 12:30** – some may not consider themselves as being directly against Jesus, but they certainly aren't for Jesus either.
 - a. Jesus says that all you must do to work against Him is to do nothing for Him.
 - b. Negligence is destructive on many levels.
3. A form of negligence that inevitably leads to great destruction of self and others is the tolerance of evil.
 - a. Some hear things that are grating, but they say nothing to oppose them.
 - b. Some see things that are jarring, but they do nothing to confront them.
 - c. Though they are in total disagreement, their silence speaks volumes for the opposing view.
4. Pergamum was a church that held fast to Jesus' name and refused to deny His faith (**Revelation 2:13**) despite great tribulation, yet this was tainted by their tolerance of error among them.
5. Such was a type of unfaithfulness to Jesus and placed them in great danger for compromising the name of Jesus, and the faith they held to.
6. In an environment pushing for tolerance, we must make an overt and outspoken stand for truth, and against error and immorality.
- I. Christ's Portrait (**v. 12**)
 - A. He Who Has the Sharp Two-Edged Sword
 - a. **1:16** – out of His mouth.
 - b. This sword represents piercing judgment, but such that is intimately connected with His word.
 - c. (**v. 13**) – the martyrdom of Antipas is very likely to have been by official activity of the Roman empire.
 - i. Rome brought the sword of capital punishment down on some in Pergamum.
 - ii. The sword which is preeminent is that of Christ – **cf. John 19:10-11** – His is the ultimate word/power of judgment.
 - B. A sword that discerns, divides, and destroys – **Hebrews 4:11-13**

- a. Pergamum had not denied Christ despite immense persecution, but it was important that they understood His sword could be brought down on them still.
 - b. The significance of this self-identification of Christ is that Pergamum is tolerating error and its promotors.**
- II. Christ's Praise **(v. 13)**
- A. Their Works
 - a. **They were an active church** – the martyrdom of some of her members (Antipas, others?) does not just happen.
 - iii. An inactive church will not rouse any interest or opposition.
 - iv. It is only active Christians who attract attention, whether positive or negative.
 - b. That they were active is even more impressive when considering the environment they were active in.**
 - c. **"and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is"**
 - v. **Throne** – "by metonymy, for what the throne stands for *dominion, rule, kingly power, sovereignty*" (ALGNT)
 - vi. Satan's throne represents his comparatively heavy influence and dominance – a hotbed for Satanic activity – idolatry, emperor worship, immorality, persecution, etc.
 - vii. "probably refers to Pergamum's being the official Asian center for the imperial cult" (ISBE)
 - viii. "A very large theater was erected at the top of the Acropolis, near the library and beside temples of Dionysus, Athena, and Demeter. The most splendid monument of Pergamum was the "altar of Zeus," 12 m. (40 ft.) high" (ibid.)
 - 1. Cultural influence, and immorality.
 - ix. "it was the political capital of the province and the seat of pagan deities and emperor worship." (Hailey, 130)
 - 1. More than mere social pressure would be official political pressure to engage in the religion of Rome – emperor worship.
 - B. They Hold Fast to Christ's Name
 - a. **Name** – "the name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e. for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds etc." (THAYER)

- b. His Divine Nature – **1:17** – He alone. (**cf. Isaiah 44:6**)
 - c. His Rule – **1:5**
 - d. His Authority – **Acts 5:29**
 - C. They Do Not Deny Christ's Faith
 - d. Following His name – what He has established and revealed based on everything His name covers.
 - e. **Jude 3** – the faith for all delivered – they have contended for it.
 - f. **1 Timothy 6:20-21** – they have not departed from it for false knowledge.
 - g. **Colossians 2:6-7** – they are established in it and walk in it.
 - D. They Do This Despite Great Persecution
 - h. Antipas is not known except what is revealed here.
 - i. **"in the days in which..."** – a period prior to John's writing – perhaps a period of great persecution, Antipas being one of several killed for Christ.
- III. Christ's Protest
- A. **"a few things"** (i.e. in comparison to His praise – numeric, not substantive)
 - a. Oligos – "puny (in extent, degree, number, duration or value)" (STRONG)
 - b. This does not minimize the severity of Christ's protest – if anything, it strengthens it.
 - i. **"Few"** is in relation to the ratio of their activity, and the praise that Christ gives them – i.e. there is not much that He is protesting, but what He is protesting is so great in significance it puts all that they are doing good in jeopardy.
 - c. **"things"** (neuter form) – he is not referencing people, but the activity of the church in *"having"* those who hold a certain doctrine.
 - i. **"have"** – "of a binding or close relationship with a person have (a husband), be married (JN 4.17); have (a friend) (LU 11.5); have (a master) (CO 4.1)" (ALGNT)
 - ii. **It denotes fellowship in some form and/or degree.**
 - iii. **"YOU (the church) have there THOSE (the false teachers)"** – a distinction is made.
 - 1. The church is not holding to the doctrine by practice or teaching.
 - a. They **"hold fast"** to Christ – *krateō*
 - b. They have there those who **"hold"** to error – *krateō*
 - 2. **THEY HAVE NOT DENIED CHRIST'S FAITH. (v. 13)**
 - 3. But they **"have"** those who hold doctrine contrary to the faith – **Galatians 5:9; 2 John 9-11** – this is serious.
 - B. They Have Those Who Hold the Doctrine of Balaam (**v. 14**)

- a. **“the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before...Israel”**
 - i. Balaam’s teaching was given to Balak who relayed it to Israel.
 - ii. That teaching was not to commit idolatry and sexual immorality, but **the teaching itself was a stumbling block that led to such actions.**
- b. We read of Balaam twice in the New Testament other than here:
 - i. **2 Peter 2:15** – His ways, namely, greed – not telling his doctrine.
 - ii. **Jude 11** – emphasizing his greed, but such manifested in his use of error – not specifying his error.
- c. The account of Balaam:
 - i. **Numbers 22** – Balak, king of Moab, intimidated by Israel coming out of Egypt, sends for Balaam to curse them, knowing the efficacy of his words in times past.
 - 1. Asks God, who says not to curse for they are blessed.
 - 2. Balak sends more nobles with promises of honor and granted wishes, but Balak says he couldn’t go beyond God’s word regardless, but to stay, and let him ask God again.
 - 3. God tells him to go, knowing the greed of his heart.
 - 4. On the way, God almost slays him by an angel, but his donkey stops him, and Balaam goes forward anyway.
 - 5. 3 times Balaam offered sacrifices, and blessed instead of cursed Israel.
 - a. **Numbers 24:1** – seeking to use sorcery to curse them.
 - b. **Numbers 24:10-11** – 3 times you have blessed them – Balak withheld honor given to Balaam.
 - 6. **Numbers 24** ends with a 4th prophecy of Balaam blessing Israel.
 - ii. **Numbers 25:1-3, 6** – despite the blessings pronounced on Israel by God through Balaam, THE NEXT SCENE DEPICTS THEIR BRAZEN UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD – how? Why?
 - iii. **Numbers 31:16** – the women caused Israel to trespass **“THROUGH THE COUNSEL OF BALAAM”**
 - 1. **“Balaam...taught Balak”** – Balaam’s counsel to Israel through Balak.

- d. What doctrine could Balaam have presented to Israel through Balak to convince them of doing something so fundamentally against God's will in such a brazen manner? **("in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all")**
 - i. **Numbers 24:10, 12-13** – Balak called to curse, but Balaam blessed and reminded him that he said he would not be able to curse them no matter what.
 - ii. **A DOCTRINE OF FALSE SECURITY** – the covenant people of God are safe no matter what they do!
 - iii. **Balaam might have counseled Israel through Balak – "It doesn't matter what I do, or how hard I try, I can't curse you but only bless you. If you want to enjoy the vices of Baal and his followers you can, and you won't be harmed!"**
- e. The doctrine of Balaam – libertinism, antinomianism, cheap grace.
 - i. **2 Peter 2:18-22** – using fleshly lusts to allure, and easing the conscience with false words of security – **"they promise them liberty"**
 - ii. **Jude 4** – grace turned to lewdness.
- C. They Also Have Those Who Hold the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans **(v. 15)**
 - a. Ephesus hated their deeds – **Revelation 2:6**
 - b. Pergamum implicitly did too – **"hold fast to My name...did not deny My faith"** – but they had those who held their doctrine! **(v. 15)**
 - c. What this doctrine is cannot be known for sure.
 - d. **"Thus"** – *houtōs* – "in this way (referring to what precedes or follows)" (STRONG)
 - i. I.e. while the verse distinguishes the doctrine of Balaam from that of the Nicolaitans, it shows they are intimately related.
 - ii. The details may slightly differ, but it is still a doctrine of **FALSE SECURITY WHICH LEADS TO IMMORALITY AND UNFAITHFULNESS.**

IV. Christ's Prescription

- A. Repent **(v. 16)**
 - a. **The call to repentance still begs the question, what is Christ's ultimate protest against Pergamum? What are they being called to repent of?**
 - i. They hold fast to Christ's name and have not denied His faith!
 - ii. **THEY DO NOT HOLD BALAAM'S DOCTRINE, NOR THE NICOLAITAN DOCTRINE** – they are not engaged in the **"deeds of the Nicolaitans"** **(v. 6).**

- b. **Their sin is one of tolerance** – they don't actively support the doctrine, and they are active in the immoral deeds the doctrine leads to, but they have not dealt with those who hold the doctrine.
 - i. **Tolerate** – “allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one does not necessarily like or agree with) without interference” (New Oxford American Dictionary)
 - ii. They do not agree with it, or even like it, nor its fruit, but they allow it to exist without interference!
 - iii. **Their sin involves failure to discipline and/or protect their members, and make a positive stand for truth against error.**
 - c. Withdraw from those who will leaven the lump – **1 Corinthians 5:1-8** – not in agreement, proud (false security?), deliver to Satan, leaven.
 - d. Note those who cause division and offense – **Romans 16:17-20** – note them, you may not be fooled but there are simple ones who will, God grants victory, but not through tolerance.
 - e. *There is an advance from tolerance to compromise and corruption seen in the letter to Thyatira* – Pergamum is not far from that if they don't repent.
- B. Or He Will Come and Use His Sword **(v. 16)**
- a. **(v. 16)** – **“fight against them”** – If they do not repent and deal with those hold the doctrine, Christ will come against them.
 - b. Jesus' words almost seem to indicate a greater deal of severity in the judgment. Their carrying out discipline may give these offenders an opportunity for restoration – **1 Corinthians 5:5** – **“that his spirit may be saved”**
 - c. **1 Corinthians 4:18-21** – right before calling them to repent and discipline the immoral brother.
 - i. If they would not do it, Paul would come with such discipline.
 - ii. However, his discipline would not only be toward that one, but the whole congregation!
- V. Christ's Promise
- A. He Will Give the Hidden Manna to Eat
 - a. Manna in the wilderness, a portion of which was kept in a pot in the ark as a memorial – **Exodus 16:32-33; Hebrews 9:4**
 - b. Divine sustenance, fulfilled in Christ – **Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:32-33, 35**
 - c. In repenting by dealing with the error among them rather than tolerating it, and overcoming such a temptation would lead to the growth and spiritual nourishment from God's word.

- i. **Cf. James 1:21** – filthiness and wickedness prevent the word from saving you.
- B. He Will Give a White Stone with a New Name Written On It
 - a. Many interpretations.
 - i. The accused were acquitted with a white stone.
 - ii. Slaves given a white stone to prove freedom.
 - iii. White stone given the winner of a race.
 - iv. White stone given to a warrior in victory.
 - v. “the theaters, for which the admission ticket was sometimes “a white stone” (Rev. 2:17)” (ISBE)
 - b. **White** – purity, victory.
 - c. **New name** – standing for all that one is – in relation to the one who gives the white stone – fellowship with Christ – newness in overcoming.

Conclusion

1. We must not let our pride, or our fear of offending others prevent us from standing against sin and error.
2. Even if we possess a great hatred for the error some hold, or the sin they walk in, if we sit idly by without confronting such, we are being tolerant and thus are guilty before the Lord we claim to serve.
3. Not only is this tolerance sinful by itself, but it will inevitably lead to the downfall of others and us.
4. We must overcome this temptation to tolerate error in our midst, and in boldness confront it with truth, even if it takes drastic measures of discipline.