

- *Jesus speaks to the church at Pergamum*

- *The command and description (i) and (ii)*

- *Unlike Smyrna Jesus does have some criticisms*

1. *Jesus gives encouragement even to weak churches (iii)*

- *He is sympathetic to them*

- *He is appreciative of their trust in Him*

- *Holding on to the faithfulness of Jesus*

2. *But Jesus must warn his people against compromise (iv)*

Balaam – the money loving prophet who undermined Israel by promoting immorality

Our Lord Jesus Christ always knows how to handle us. Sometimes he encourages us and says, 'I know your tribulation . . . ' But sometimes he has a sharp two-edged sword with which to pierce our sinfulness or our compromise. Always he knows how to mix rebuke and encouragement. In a third letter Jesus speaks to the church at Pergamum. It follows the same order that we have seen already. Again there is (i) and (ii), the command and the descriptive phrase concerning Jesus. ¹²*'To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The words of the One who has the sharp two-edged sword.'* We may have noted that, when speaking to Smyrna, Jesus did not have a word of criticism to share with the church. They were suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus is kind to those who suffer for his sake. The church of Smyrna may have had weaknesses in it, but if so Jesus says nothing about them. It is rather different with the church at Pergamum. They too were a suffering church, yet Jesus had some criticism of them. Although Jesus will speak sympathetically, yet he has a sharp, piercing word for the Christians at Pergamum

1. **Jesus gives encouragement even to weak churches.** When he comes to speak to the church at Pergamum, first there is again (iii) a word of commendation. ¹³*'I know where you live. It is where Satan has his throne.'* Jesus expresses his sympathy. He has some criticisms of the church but he has not abandoned them. He does not despair of them. He is sympathetic to them in their very severe predicament.

Jesus is appreciative. *'Yet you are holding firmly to my name. You did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was put to death in your city, where Satan dwells.'* They persistently trusted Jesus, holding on to the faithfulness of Jesus. This is what 'faith' is; it is holding on to the faithfulness of Jesus. The people in Pergamum were holding on to Jesus' faithfulness even when terrible threats were all around them. One of their number had been killed, but the church went on believing in God and trusting to Jesus' reliability.

2. **But Jesus must warn his people against compromise.** Again we have (iv) a word of criticism. Jesus is faithful in speaking of a serious weakness among them. ¹⁴*'But I have a few things against you. You tolerate there some people who are holding on to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel, persuading them to eat food sacrificed to idols and to practise immorality.'* ¹⁵*In the same way you tolerate also those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans which is the same kind of teaching.'* They were 'holding' to Christ's name but at the same time were tolerating people who were 'holding' to the teaching of Balaam. They were trying to hold to two contradictory things at the same time. Balaam (whose story is found in Numbers 22–24) was the money-loving prophet who persuaded Balak, the king of Moab, to encourage religious harmony with Israel. His idea was to send good-looking Moabite girls to invite Israelite men to their licentious and idolatrous religious festivals! Balaam knew this would make God angry and would lead to total loss of power and victory in Israel!

- Various groups that promoted pagan worship

- Impossible to continue two contradictory things

3. Jesus puts to them the remedy

- Repentance before God comes against them

- Appeal (vi)

4. Jesus gives them a promise (vii)

- To those who overcome a reward – God’s approval

- New empowering

Now in Pergamum the same thing was happening again! There were various groups – Jesus mentions two and ‘Jezebel’¹⁴ was a third – that persuaded the Christians to take part in immoral pagan worship.

But Jesus warns his people against compromise. They were wanting to hold to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and yet at the same time compromise with pagan idolatry and pagan lifestyle. But it cannot be done, and it is dangerous even to try. Back behind Pergamum’s religion and lifestyle is Satan¹⁵.



3. Jesus puts to them the remedy. Again we have (v) an exhortation to repentance. ¹⁶*‘Repent therefore. Or else I will come to you suddenly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.’* God will start conducting a holy war against us if we who are his people deny what we believe and compromise with what we know to be pagan wickedness. Jesus will speak a word and things will happen. His word – both his teaching and his living decisions – has a sword-like quality. He stabs our consciences, cuts down our plans, slays our false ideas. Better for us to repent than for him to start crusading against us. So there is here again (vi) an appeal that the message should be heard. ¹⁷*‘He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*

4. Jesus gives them a promise. Finally Jesus again gives (vii) a promise to those who conquer. *‘To the person who overcomes, to him I will grant the privilege of eating from the hidden manna. To that person I will give a white stone, and upon the stone there will be a new name written, a name which no one knows except the person who receives it.’* The manna stands for the supplies of God’s grace. The white stone seems to be a jewel or precious stone given as a gift. God rewards the overcomer. The jewel is the approval of God. The new name is his rewarding us by newly empowering us. The new name is the new status of the Christian¹⁸. We remember the new names of Abram, Sarai and Jacob in the Old Testament. They were given after periods of persistent faith. Steady loyalty will bring God’s new empowering.

¹⁴ 2:20

¹⁵ 2:13

¹⁸ as in Isaiah 62:2; 65:15

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