

The Lord's Word to His Church: Pergamum

Tonight, we're going to take a journey. We're actually going to take a flight, and we're going to originate this flight - we're going to take off in the book of Leviticus, and we're going to fly over the entire Bible and land in Revelation. So let's begin by having you turn to the book of Leviticus, and you might want to locate yourself at the 18th chapter for the moment. Why are we studying the book of Revelation and starting in the book of Leviticus? It's a fair question. Most people don't know much about the book of Leviticus. But, essentially, this book is instruction for the Levitical priests in Israel so that they could lead the people of God in proper worship.

The whole book of Leviticus was given by God to Moses for the nation Israel while they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. This is the second year after the exodus from Egypt, which happened in about 1445 B.C. Two years after the exodus they're still a long way from entering the Promised Land. But they have arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is the second year and it is likely the first month, and the book of Leviticus is given to Moses in that first month. In the second month, while they're still at the foot of Mount Sinai, the book of Numbers was given to them. Leviticus is God's instruction for His newly redeemed people. They have been redeemed out of Egypt. They have been rescued out of slavery. They were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. As such, they had been engulfed in pagan culture.

Egypt was a land of almost infinite deities. Their concept of worship was distorted, and clouded, and unclear, because they had been exposed to the madness of the worship of idols in Egypt. Their tendency as a people, even though they declared themselves for God by obeying the command of God to prepare for the angel of death, and thus they survived and were led out of Egypt by Moses and had come into the wilderness and to the mountain and received the law of God. Even though they are, in a sense, a duly constituted people of God, their tendency is to hold onto polytheism. Their tendency is to hold onto paganism. It's just very familiar, and that is why they build a golden calf. It's recorded in the 32nd chapter of Exodus, even after they had received the law of God in the 20th chapter.

Well, God will not permit them to live and worship like the Egyptians. God will not tolerate either Egyptian idolatry or Egyptian immorality, and so God gives the revelation of the book of Leviticus to define their worship, to describe for them what acceptable worship of God is, and it's very carefully laid out. The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe the sacrifices that they are to offer. Chapters 1 through 16 - over 125 times in those 16 chapters - instructs the people to be pure, and at the same time indicts them for any and all impurity. So the opening section of the book, 1 through 16, is about purity. It's about confronting sin, repenting, and offering appropriate sacrifice. From chapters 17 to 27, then, is instruction on the matters of personal holiness.

So in chapter 18, we're in the section which gives instruction on matters related to personal holiness. The motive is always the same: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." That appears again and again and again, actually about fifty times in the book of Leviticus - holiness is enjoined on the people because God says, "I am holy; I am the Lord; you be holy." So Leviticus, then, is essentially a manual for worship.

Now, why am I saying all of this? Because I want you to look at the 18th chapter - not all of it in detail. But I want you to look at the opening five verses. Now, you understand the context: these people, this massive humanity that could number as many as two million, have literally been redeemed out of Egypt. They have been rescued out of Egypt by God, by the power of God. A series of plagues came on Egypt and they were delivered. The Red Sea parted, they went through on dry land. God drowned the forces of Pharaoh - you remember the story. Then He brought them to the mountain, gave them His law, and now all of this instruction for worship.

And I think chapter 18, verses 1 to 5, sums up what this is all about: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses." By the way, that phrase, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses," is all through the book of Exodus, and particularly, the book of Leviticus, and even Numbers. "The Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: "I am the Lord your God"' - That is to say, there is no other God - ""I am the Lord your God. So you shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I'm bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the Lord your God. So you shall keep my statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.""

This is clearly saying, "You are now, you are now the people of the true and living God. You are now monotheists, not polytheists. There is only one God. You cannot behave the way the Egyptians behaved, and you cannot behave the way the Canaanites behaved." And it even lays things out. And I'm not going to read this, but you would benefit from reading it.

You see immediately in verse 6 the word "nakedness," and you see it three times in verse 7, and twice in verse 8, and it just keeps being repeated: "nakedness, nakedness, nakedness, nakedness, nakedness," all the way down to saying in verse 20, "You shall not have intercourse with your neighbour's wife, to be defiled with her." If anything defines paganism, it is nakedness. If anything defined Egypt, it was nakedness. If anything defined Canaan, it was nakedness. It was an idolatrous orgy. And additionally, verse 21, "don't give any of your children to Molech or you'll profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. And don't lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." And don't have intercourse with an animal. Whoa!

Why all of this? Because that's how those people behaved. That's life in Egypt. That's life in Canaan. "Don't," verse 24, "defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled." Verse 26: "As for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments." You remember the word "My" was repeated back in verse 4, and it was repeated in verse 5, and it's repeated again in verse 26. Verse 30, "You are to keep My command, do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practised before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God."

And right into chapter 19: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God am holy."'" And verse 4, "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the Lord your God."

What is this? This is a call for separation: separation from sinful, pagan culture; separation from sexual immorality; separation from incest - there are all kinds of references to incest in that chapter - separation from bestiality, homosexuality. And the reason: "I am the Lord your God. I am the Lord your God. You don't do those things. You have been redeemed from those things." I just want to set that in your minds because that has always been God's standard for His people - always, always.

When you come to the New Testament, you read things like this in [James 4:4](#), "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God." Or, 1 John 2, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot worship God and conduct your life according to the very world from which you have been rescued. Paul says at the end of Galatians, "I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me. I am dead to that system, I have come out of that."

Back in 1993 I wrote another book - some of you may remember - called *Ashamed of the Gospel*, and the subtitle of that book: "When The Church Becomes Like The World." "When The Church Becomes Like The World." That book has hung around, and hung around, and been reprinted and re-covered; and it just keeps moving along because it speaks to a reality that is a contemporary phenomenon.

The church today, the church "of Jesus Christ," is working very hard to be as much like the culture as possible, instead of fleeing those things. For decades, it has been popular for church leaders to make people come to church and feel like they're at some worldly event. Church has become sinner-friendly instead of sinner-frightening. It's become affirming rather than convicting, sentimental rather than theological, informal rather than solemn, entertaining rather than edifying, deceptive rather than honest, frivolous rather than worshipful - you get the idea. Churches don't like the idea that they're an offence to the culture, and they think that if they can just get close to everything that people enjoy in the culture, they can somehow win them over.

How in the world did the church ever get to that point? What we read in Leviticus 18, which is kind of the heart and soul of the whole point of the book of Leviticus and the design of God for His redeemed people, is that we're to be completely separated from what characterises the world. We don't do what they do. We don't think the way they think. We don't talk the way they talk. This should be an alien environment, as we are set apart onto God.

How did we get here? Well, I guess we could say there are philosophical currents that have pushed us in this direction, like pragmatism. Pragmatism essentially is a philosophy that says the worth of anything is determined by its practical consequences - that's pragmatism. The worth of anything is determined by its practical consequences. That's a little different than another philosophical trend, utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism says usefulness is the standard of what is good. If it works, if it produces the desired effect, then we do it. This is the philosophy.

Some of you remember from your college classes. I took advanced European philosophy in college, and I remember names like Will James, John Dewey, and of course, Charles Darwin. We studied secular humanism, relativity. The church, strangely enough, has bought into the philosophy of pragmatism and utilitarianism and decided that if it draws a crowd, if it captures people's attention, it's good; and if it works, we're going to use it, even if it fails to be a separation from the world. So the church has adapted to the pagan world. Leaders in the church talk less about theology and more about methodology. They talk less about doctrine and more about strategy. As the pagan world becomes more hostile to the truth of God, as it becomes more hostile to the people of God, churches will compromise. They've already shown they will do that. They will compromise to be more attractive. They don't want to be persecuted, they don't want to be rejected, they don't want to be ignored, they don't want to be persecuted, and so they'll fall in line with the expectations of the world. They'll court the world by being like the world.

Now go to the book of Revelation, the 2nd chapter, and let's meet a church that was like that, a church in a town called Pergamum - in Revelation chapter 2, verse 12. It is the third church mentioned in the book of Revelation. There were seven early churches, actual churches in these seven towns, mentioned in chapter 1, verse 11: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. They were seven towns. That kind of was the postal route going through the land of Asia Minor. They were regionally important towns. In each of those towns, a church had been established.

The apostle John was familiar with those churches because he was a pastor at Ephesus, which was kind of the mother church of those other churches. The apostle John had been arrested, really two reasons: because of the Word of God, verse 9 says of chapter 1, and the testimony of Jesus. Because of his view of the Bible and his view of Jesus, because of his view of Scripture and his view of Jesus, he'd been arrested and sent to the isle of Patmos, which is a penal colony on a rock in the Aegean Sea. He was left there essentially till he died, to break rocks; and he was a man in his nineties.

That's how the world felt about Christians and Christian leaders. He knows what's going on in these churches. More importantly, the Lord knows what's going on in these churches. So the Lord gives to John as He reveals the book of Revelation, a letter to each of these seven churches to be taken back to those seven churches by seven messengers from those churches that apparently had come to see John. The letter to Ephesus extolled them for so many good things, and then said, "You've got one dire fault: you've left your first love."

The letter to Smyrna, no condemnation at all. Smyrna was a faithful church. Smyrna was a persecuted church. Chapter 2, verse 9: "I know your tribulation, your poverty. I know the blasphemy by those who say they're Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. You're going to suffer. The devil's about to cast some of you into prison. You'll be tested. You'll have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death and I'll give you a crown of life."

That was a faithful church; not a word about any flaw. They were persecuted. They were persecuted by being imprisoned. They were persecuted unto death. Their pastor, a man named Polycarp, was executed, burned at the stake. They were faithful.

The same hostility, the exact same hostility, was all over Asia - Asia Minor it was called - and it's the land that is now modern Turkey. Persecution was everywhere. It reached the town of Pergamum, of course; and let's look at the letter that our Lord sends to them.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 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.'" Powerful letter; much to say. This is an actual town, an actual place. Let me give you a little background.

Pergamum was about 100 miles north of Ephesus in the area called Asia Minor. Smyrna was halfway or so, or a little more than halfway. So that was the postal route, from Ephesus to Smyrna to Pergamum. It was 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was not on any major trade route. It wasn't a port city, yet it was considered by some to be Asia's greatest city. The Roman writer Pliny called it "by far, the most distinguished city in Asia." By the time John penned the book of Revelation, Pergamum had been Asia's capital for 250 years, since 133 B.C. when its last independent king bequeathed the city to Rome.

By the way, Pergamum survives today. If you go to Turkey, you'll find its ruins near a place called Bergama. Much of Pergamum was built on a large conical hill, towering about a thousand feet above the plain. Ancient cities tended to be built on a hill for defensive purposes. So impressive is the site that the famed nineteenth-century archaeologist Sir William Ramsay commented, quote, "Beyond all the other sites in Asia Minor, it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority. The rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, it dominates the broad plain of the Caicus River Valley so proudly and so boldly," end quote.

That which was most notable in Pergamum: there were – listen – 200,000 volumes in their library, handwritten. Of course, no printing press. It was said that the library at Pergamum was second only to the library in Alexandria. So impressive was Pergamum's library that Marc Anthony later sent it to his lover Cleopatra of Egypt. According to some legends, parchment, or velum, was invented by the Pergameans to provide writing material for their extensive library. It was a very educated place, a very literate place. Some historians think the Pergameans developed animal skin parchment to use as writing material; and parchment may derive from Pergamum in terms of linguistic orient.

Because of its massive library, it was an important centre for culture and learning. In fact, the physician Galen, second only in prominence to Hippocrates, was born and studied in Pergamum. The city saw itself as a defender of Greek culture in Asia Minor. There was a massive altar to Zeus there, commemorating the victory of the Pergameans over the invading barbarian Gauls. It was an important center of worship. There were a number of deities there of the Greek-Roman world. There were temples dedicated to Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus. But overshadowing all of those was a massive edifice devoted to the cult of emperor worship. Pergamum apparently built the first temple devoted to emperor worship in Asia in 29 B.C. in honor of Emperor Augustus. Quite a place.

Christians there were in grave danger. The city was full of idolatry, full of immorality, and the Christians were targeted because one day a year, every year, the people were required to offer a sacrifice to the emperor; and if they didn't, they would die. If Christians said, "Jesus is Lord. I will offer no sacrifice to Caesar," it may have cost their life. It is likely that Antipas, in verse 13, was martyred for refusing to worship the emperor. This is a vile, idolatrous, pagan, gross, immoral place; but highly educated and satisfied with itself. Now, to the letter.

"To the messenger" - the *aggelos*, meaning "the messenger" - "of the church in Pergamum write." "Give this to the one who will take this letter particularly and read it to the church in Pergamum." "The messenger" is the representative of that congregation - a leader, an elder, or a pastor - who will take back a copy of the book of Revelation and then read the letter specifically to that church.

We have no record of the founding of the church in Pergamum. According to [Acts 16:7](#) and [8](#), Paul, on his second missionary journey, went through Mysia - you can look at that. He went through Mysia. Mysia is very close to Pergamum. Maybe on his journey in that region, the Lord allowed him the opportunity to leave a gospel message that basically developed into a church.

[Acts 19:10](#) talks about Paul's two years in Ephesus and says, "so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." So it may well have been that it just spread from Paul's two years in Ephesus. But nonetheless, a church was established there. Engulfed in paganism. It was engulfed in immorality, engulfed in idolatry. They lived in danger, in imminent danger. And they also were sucked back into familiar sins. The temptations were all around them. They had been rescued out of that culture, but it was a powerful force. There was no separation of religion and the body politic; there was no separation between social life and religious life. It was all the same - all events, all festivals, all feasts, all ceremonies, all celebrations were connected to the worship of the false gods and all the immorality that went along with it. To pull yourself up and out of all of that was a very dramatic, dramatic thing. And so there they were living in this encroaching, massive force of paganism, and constantly struggling against the allurements of very familiar sins - and persecution, in fulfilment of what Peter wrote thirty years earlier.

He wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, [1 Peter 4:17](#), "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." He said it first begins with us; and judgment is going to begin with the church at Pergamum. This judgment tone appears here for the first time. Sure, there's a statement about the church at Ephesus leaving its first love, but this is very different. This whole letter comes across in a very striking way from the beginning.

Notice how our Lord introduces Himself as the author. To the church at Ephesus, He identified Himself as "the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands." That's very encouraging. He holds the pastors of the church in His hand and He moves among the golden lampstands, representing His church. The Lord is alive and working in His church, and holding onto the leaders.

To the church at Smyrna, another encouraging introduction: "the first, the last, the One who is dead and has come to life." The One who has the power of life. The One who's the beginning and the end. Another encouraging introduction.

But this one is not encouraging. Our Lord identifies Himself as "the one who has the sharp two-edged sword." That's part of the description back in chapter 1, verse 16, as are the other statements of introduction: "In His right hand, he held seven stars. Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." "Out of His mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword."

Now, if you got a letter from the Lord and it said, "Dear Bill, the one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this," that is a fierce introduction. What is that "sharp two-edged sword?" We see it again in the 19th chapter of Revelation, and there's no mistaking what it is.

Revelation chapter 19, and verse 15: "From His mouth comes a sharp sword," and this is speaking of the returning Christ called Faithful and True, the Word of God. "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations." It is a weapon. It is a weapon. This is not a promising introduction. The one who wields a deadly weapon. This is not positive. This is threatening; this is even terrifying. This is the first terrifying introduction.

As I said, the other introductions were comforting, encouraging. Pergamum was not only – listen – in danger from the world, but Pergamum was in more danger from the Lord for not separating from the world. Disaster and danger was all around them in the culture, but disaster and danger loomed over them from heaven. You see it is only, it is only a short step from compromise with the world to the judgment of the Lord. And "judgment," as I quoted [1 Peter 4:17](#), "begins at the house of God." So this is a letter of judgment on a worldly church, a church that would not separate itself from that culture from which it had been redeemed.

Now, we're going to give you four points to think about. First is commendation, commendation. We're going to do this quickly. Commendation, verse 13: "I know where you dwell; I know. I know where you are; I know what's going on. You dwell where Satan's throne is." End of the verse, "where Satan dwells." You dwell "where Satan's throne is." You dwell where Satan dwells. You live in Satan's town.

You say, "Well, what is that?" Satan is prominent there, very prominent. His throne is there, the Lord says. The church at Smyrna had to deal with a synagogue of Satan – that was Jews. The church at Pergamum has to deal with a throne of Satan that has Gentiles. Now, we all know that Satan is the arch-enemy of the church. He relentlessly assaults the church with hypocrites, false teachers, temptation, and even persecution. This church, this small body of believers, is literally fighting the lion in his own den. They're waging war at Satan's headquarters.

What exactly does that mean? What is the Lord saying? Well, we know this: there was an altar there to Zeus that dominated the acropolis. The acropolis is always the high place. It was not just an altar. When I say an altar, it was much more than that. It was massive. It was a monumental colonnade at the acropolis.

It was a huge court in a horseshoe form. It was 120 by 112 feet. It had an altar, an actual altar in the middle that was 18 feet high. The base, according to historians, ran for about 446 feet around that horseshoe. And all the way around was a frieze, or a carved work of art, depicting the battle of the gods and the giants. It was a massive edifice to Zeus. One of the great works of art in the Greek world, really dedicated to Satan. There is no Zeus; there's only Satan. It's an altar to Satan. It was Satan's throne.

There was also there an unforgettable and amazing monument to Asclepius, the god of healing – you may know that name – the god of healing. The idea was that this god in this town of Pergamum could heal people from all their diseases, and people came from all over the world to the temple of Asclepius. Now, Asclepius was depicted as a snake. You even see him on the figure that represents medicine. He's depicted as a snake.

In that temple, non-poisonous snakes lived everywhere and slithered all over the floor of the temple. If you wanted to be healed, you came to the temple and you laid yourself down on the temple, maybe sleeping on the temple floor, with the hope that with the snakes crawling over you, they would impart to you the healing power of Asclepius. So you could take your pick. The throne of Satan could be named for Zeus. The throne of Satan – the snake, the serpent – could be named for Asclepius. But in any case, it was for Satan. [Revelation 12:9](#) calls Satan "the great dragon, the serpent"; "the great dragon, the serpent."

There was another element, the emperor cult, which really dominated everything. This was the most, the most powerful influence in Pergamum. During the reign of Diocletian, some Christians were executed for failing to obey the emperor when the emperor told them to carve images of Asclepius. The combination of all of this mass of idolatry was, "This is the throne of Satan. This is Satan's throne."

You think it's tough in L.A.? And you've got windows and doors, and you're isolated. This was everywhere. Despite all of the satanic power and influence, a wonderful commendation: "You hold fast My name." "You are faithful to My name – My name, the Lord Jesus Christ."

They clung to the Lord Jesus Christ. They clung to the Savior. They never wavered. They were like John who was imprisoned, as I saw, in chapter 1, verse 9, for "the testimony of Jesus." And they were also like John who was imprisoned "because of the Word of God." They "did not deny My faith." They held onto His name. They were faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. "And they held onto My faith."

That's not subjective, that's objective. That's *the* faith, "once for all delivered to the saints." They were faithful to Christ and to sound doctrine. They were Christ lovers, and they were truth lovers like John. In fact, they were so faithful to Christ and so faithful to sound doctrine, the gospel, "even in the days of Antipas." Those must have been days when Christians were being killed, and Antipas, very likely, was their pastor. "My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Domitian's reign of terror ran from about 81 to 96; puts it right through this time period. Tradition says that Antipas was roasted to death inside a brass bull – cooked. We don't have any-more information on Antipas.

But notice the "My's" in that verse: "You hold fast *My* name." You "do not deny *My* faith in the days of...*My* witness, *My* faithful one." Personal possession of His. The truth is His. The people are His. The witnesses are His. He is "My witness." That's the word *martus*, from which we get *martyr*. Started out meaning "witness." But because so many Christians were killed for their witness, the word *martus* became *martyr*, *martyr*. It was used of Stephen in [Acts 22:20](#). So this is a marvellous commendation. I mean this is a tough place to live. You think it's tough in America; you don't know anything. This would be like living in an ISIS camp, trying to be a Christian church.

But, from the commendation comes a condemnation, verse 14: "But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." Just on the surface of it, you have some people there who are messing around with idolatry and immorality. It's sort of like Balaam, and it's what the Nicolaitans advocate. You've got people being sucked back into the very familiar sins from which they've been delivered.

Antipas, of course, paid the ultimate price; others were faithful. But there were some - that's why as you go through the reading of this; you see the pronouns shift from "you and them," "you and them." He writes to "you," but speaks of "them." So among "the you" were "the them." Let's look at the two things that He uses as illustrations.

First, you have "some who hold the teaching of Balaam." Don't name your children Balaam. Don't name your dog Balaam. Balaam means "a corrupter of the people." Balaam means "a swallower of the people." Balaam means "not of the people." Balaam means even "a madman."

Balaam, according to Deuteronomy 23, is an Old Testament character. He was a renowned sorcerer from a place called Pethor in Mesopotamia. He was a sorcerer. He was aware of the God of Israel. He was aware of the God of Israel. Everybody was aware of the God of Israel because of what the God of Israel had done in delivering His people from Egypt. But Balaam was a sorcerer who was in it like all sorcerers - for the money. And so he made his rather esoteric services available to anyone who paid him. So Numbers 22 to 24 tells the story - we won't go; I'll just rehearse it quickly.

By the way, he was later - Balaam was - killed in a battle with Midian, Numbers 31. He had a short career. But here's the story. Israel arrives in their wanderings at the border of Moab. This is near the end of their wanderings. The king of Moab is a man named Balak. You see his name there, Balak. Balak is afraid of Israel. Everybody knows what happened when they went out of Egypt. Everybody knows the power of their God. And so Balak finds this sort of available, floating, esoteric sorcerer named Balaam, and he tries to hire him to put a curse on Israel. And he wants Balaam to curse them so they can't take possession of his land, the land of Moab.

You remember the story. Three times Balaam tries to curse Israel. He can't do it. He can't succeed. So he develops another strategy. If he can't curse them, he decides he will corrupt them. So he got a bunch of Moab's women to seduce Jewish men into intermarriage; and thus he pulled those men into idolatrous, immoral life in Moab, into paganism. And they went back into eating things sacrificed to idols, and back into committing idolatry, just the very things they had seen in Egypt. Such unions brought the men of Israel into blasphemous union with Satan.

The curse didn't work; the corruption did. Blasphemous union with the world, with darkness, with false gods, with immorality, sin - it destroyed Israel's power and removed their protection. The plan was successful. However, not to the degree that the king of Moab hoped because God, in Numbers 24, intervened, severely chastened Israel and the leaders, halting their slide.

So the point that our Lord is making to them is, "You have some people there who are acting like Balaam, and they're seducing you to go back into the very culture you've been delivered from, to participate in their idolatry and their immorality." Some in Pergamum were falling to the seducing sirens of the devil's culture, Satan's culture.

Practically speaking, what did it look like? Some in the Pergamum church were attending pagan feasts with debauchery, immorality, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and then coming to church. And apparently the church had not taken action to confront and correct it.

And, secondly, verse 15, "You have also some who in the same way laid hold of the teachings of the Nicolaitans." They have already been mentioned, as you will remember. They were around in those days.

What specifically was their issue? Well, the best way to describe it is it was the same as those following the error of Balaam. Whatever it was, it was drawing people back into the world from which they'd been rescued; back into the culture, back into the idolatry, back into the forms of thinking and behaviour from which they had been delivered - corruption by compromise with the world, corruption by compromise with the world - Christians participating in the sins of paganism, Christians participating in that which was the world's.

Two of the early church Fathers - Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria - wrote this about the Nicolaitans: "They live lives of unrestrained indulgence, abandoning themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." The church at Pergamum had people in the church living like pagans, and the church had tolerated this teaching and this compromise, corrupting the household of the Lord. They weren't separated.

So the commendation and the condemnation. Then comes a command, verse 16, pretty straightforward: "Therefore repent." "Repent." Turn and go the other way. Stop. Stop tolerating worldly compromise. Stop tolerating an unequal yoke. This issue is moral corruption from the surrounding pagan world: uncleanness, immorality, indulgence in the sins of the culture. "Repent, repent, repent."

If you have people in your assembly who are coming to worship Christ and then go right back out and fall into the sins of the culture, you must confront them. The church today must not fail to exclude unbelievers from the fellowship of the body of Christ. We're always glad when unbelievers come and hear the message, but you can't participate with the people of God until you are a child of God.

And the church must confront professing believers who are living sinful lives, who claim to have been delivered and redeemed out of the world but are literally living the way the world lives. They have to be confronted. The church must do that. And if we don't do that, look at the "or else." "I'm coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." "I'll come to you, the church, and I'll make war against them." Literally, a church on the brink of judgment. Not only in danger of the culture around it, but in greater danger of the Lord above it.

Now, of course, we want to reach out. Of course, we want to welcome unbelievers to hear the gospel and be redeemed. Of course, we want sinning believers to be given grace and forgiveness upon forgiveness upon forgiveness - 70 times 7. But we don't tolerate that as if it's acceptable, and we don't live as close to the corruption of the world as we possibly can. But we live in danger, great danger. Not only danger from the culture, but danger from the Lord. If we don't deal with worldliness, He will. Today's tolerant, non-confronting churches be warned. You face judgment from the Lord Himself.

Finally, a commendation, a condemnation, a command, and then commitment, verse 17: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." And that appears in virtually all these letters. At the end of each letter, you can see that's how it ends: "You need to listen. If you can hear this, if you have ears to hear - that is, if you understand the truth because the Lord has enlightened your heart and your mind - listen to this important truth. If you have ears, listen. This is the Spirit talking. This is the Holy Spirit of God talking." This takes the lesson of each church and stretches it beyond that church to all who have ears who have been opened by the Lord in regeneration to understand the truth. "All believers in all times and all places for all history, listen to this. If your ears have been opened by the Lord, listen. Repent."

And then here comes this commitment; it's a magnificent commitment - "To him who overcomes." What is that? "To a true believer." [First John 4:4](#) and [5](#) talks about it's our faith that makes us over-comers. So to those who are over-comers by virtue of true faith, to true believers, the over-comers - and they're called that in each of the letters - the Lord makes a commitment to give us three things. If we are not just false professors really courting the world; if we are true believers desiring separation from what we've been redeemed out of, He gives us three things.

First: "To him, I will give some of the hidden manna," or "I will give of the hidden manna." You know what manna was, right? That honey bread that the Lord put in the wilderness day after day after day. He created it on the spot to feed His wandering people. It is supernatural sustenance, supernatural food. It finds its culmination in Christ who is the Bread of Life. The promise is like the bread in the wilderness that fed Israel through their wilderness wandering. It was memorialised, by the way, in a jar that was then placed inside the ark of the covenant so the people wouldn't forget. God will provide all your sustenance and provide it all through One who is Himself the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise guarantees that we will be blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heaven-lies in Christ.

Secondly: "I will give you a white stone," "a white stone." The best understanding of this is in the ancient world of athletics, victors were given a white stone. They were given a white stone as a symbol of their victory. We would say today that when you are a victor of a great event, you receive a medal. That medal is engraved to indicate your triumph. The Roman custom was to give white stones to a victor, and that white stone in the victor's hand became his ticket to the great feast of victors. When the feast was given, he would come and his entrance would be granted if he had a white stone. More than that, this identifies you as an overcomer, a victor, more than a conqueror. And it means you have complete access to all the lavish provision that God has.

But there's one more thing. On that white stone is "a new name written...which no one knows, but he who receives it." I've actually had people ask me, "What is that name?" No one knows. Why? It's a new name identifying you. The victor would have his name engraved on the stone, and that would be his access to all the regalia that belong to those who triumphed. The Lord is going to give you a new name.

You remember I said this morning that "when Christ humbled Himself, God exalted Him, and gave Him a *name* above every name"? That's going to happen to us. When we go into glory as over-comers, we'll have the white stone, we have triumphed in Christ. We'll have access to the marriage supper of the Lamb and all the joys of heaven. And we'll have a new name - a completely new, eternal, perfect identification - and it's a name because each of us is distinct. Each of us is a person in and of ourselves, who will be loved. That's hinted at when our Lord in verse 13 says, "Antipas, My witness." "Antipas, My faithful one

who was killed among you.” The Lord knows those that are His. And by the way, that might be the name that He wrote down in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world began.

So the Pergamum church faced a crisis. The church, holding fast to Christ, holding fast to sound doctrine; but among them were the worldly. The church is told, “Repent. Remove the worldly compromise or expect a terrible reality of the Lord Himself declaring war on your church.” What a warning - the church is courting the world – what a warning. What a blessing to us to know that the Lord promises to those who trust in Christ, genuinely, that we’ll have all we need in Christ. We’ll have a victor’s stone and access to all eternal joys; and we will be known with a name that will be only ours.

Father, we thank You that we’ve been able to look at this text tonight. The implications, of course, are far-reaching; and certainly as a church, we want to be the church that is faithful living in the midst of paganism. We don’t want to be a church where people leave their first love. We don’t want to be a church where people participate in the world and its corruptions and idols.

We want to be faithful. We want to be penitent. We want to confront sin, deal with sin graciously, lovingly, mercifully, but directly. We don’t ever want to think about the fact that You might come and make war against us because we have courted the world. May we be so distinct that it may be manifestly evident that we have been rescued *from* the world and all its idols, and all its immorality, and all its corruption. That’s the church we desire to be for Your glory. We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.