TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

Revelation 2:14-16 “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Review

This is an actual letter from Jesus to an actual first century church to be delivered by a messenger *(angelos).* It has, however, application for anyone who will listen. “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Jesus Describes Himself

Revelation 2:12b “These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.”

Revelation 2:16 “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Revelation 1:16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Revelation 19:15a Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

Commendation

Revelation 2:13 “I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives.”

The church of Pergamum refused to renounce their faith in Christ in an extremely hostile environment, even when Antipas was martyred.

“Where Satan has his throne” and “where Satan lives” probably refer to the enforced worship of Caesar as “god,” which is probably why Antipas was killed. There were also other major pagan temples to Zeus and to Asclepius, worshipped as a serpent, in the city.

“I Have A Few Things Against You”

Revelation 2:14 “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.”

Numbers 31:16 “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD’s people.”

Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel. But God would not let him speak a curse on Israel, so Balaam told Balak how to defeat Israel. He essentially said, “If you can entice them to sin, God will destroy them.” The Israelites were enticed to sin, but Moses and those who were faithful stood up against those who were sinning, and only 24,000 died in the plague God sent. Numbers 22:1-25:18

The First Century followers of the teaching of Balaam said it was OK to participate in idolatry, and the immorality that went with it, as long as one continued to declare his allegiance to Jesus. Elijah challenged the people of his day in I Kings 18:21b “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

Revelation 2:15 “Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”

Probably followers of Nicolas from Antioch (Acts 6:5), one of the seven chosen in Acts 6 to take care of widows. He became a Gnostic. Gnostics believed the body was inherently evil. Some practiced severe asceticism (Colossians 2:18-23). Most were extremely immoral. The denied the incarnation and put their faith in visions and dreams instead of the Word of God. They had their own “scriptures.”

A Strong Warning

Revelation 2:16 “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Tolerating false teaching that leads to sinful lifestyles is itself sin. The church in Ephesus was commended for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans.

I Corinthians 5:9-11 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

I Corinthians 5:12&13 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”

The lesson in the account of the sin of Achan in Joshua 7:1-26 is pretty clear. When God’s people tolerate sin in their midst, God judges His people until they judge the sin. God judged His people when they were enticed to sin on the advice of Balaam until God’s people judged those who were sinning. God is not saying He will come and deal with the followers of the teaching of Balaam and with the Nicolaitans in a “surgical strike” that doesn’t hurt anyone but those people. He is saying He will fight against them and since they are tolerated by the church there will be serious “collateral damage.”

A Lesson for Us All

Revelation 2:17a “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Promises for Overcomers

Revelation 2:17b(NASB) “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.”

According to I John 4:4&5 overcomers are those who believe Jesus is the Son of God.

Deuteronomy 8:3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

The hidden manna is probably spiritual nourishment from God available only to overcomers, the children of God. Jesus taught in parables that believers understood but that unbelievers did not.

In the ancient world, when one wished to join a society, often those who were already a part would vote by putting either a white stone for yes or a black stone for no into a container. The concept survives in the expression to “blackball” someone.

The white stone signifies acceptance, the new name personal intimacy. In one of the commentaries the author talked about meeting a famous woman and her husband and calling her by the name her husband called her. After he did so several times, the woman said, “Please don’t call me that. That is not my given name. That is the name my husband calls me. Call me by my given name.”

Things to Remember

Remaining true to Christ under persecution is to be commended.

Satan cannot destroy the church. But if he can entice the church to sin, God will punish it and even destroy it if it doesn’t repent.

Often the great danger in the Christian life is not renouncing Christ, but continuing to proclaim loyalty to Christ while adopting ideas that are contrary to the truth and that lead to ungodly behavior. The people in Elijah’s day were serving God and Baal.

As long as a church condones sin within it, God will deal with the church. If the church deals with the sin and removes the offender, God will deal with the offender.