

12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

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, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

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

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

APPLICATIONAL SUMMARY:

1. To the church in the city of all religions: I know you hold my name and didn't renounce faith
2. But you have compromisers there
3. Repent or be judged
- 4, Listen
5. Overcome, and I'll give you something better

“Dear Pergamum...”

12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

If you lived in ancient times and got real sick, chances are if you could travel you would make the journey to the capitol of Asia Minor – a city called Pergamum.

Because in Pergamum was the closest thing they had back then to a hospital, and people came from around the world to be healed there.

Back then they didn't separate the science from the superstition, and so the hospital was really a temple of the snake god Asklepios.

You go there, see the doctor, and lay down on the floor where millions of snakes slithered around, and let them crawl all over you all night.

And the diffused healing power of Asklepios (whom they called "savior") distributed among the snakes would pull the sickness right out of your body.

"I would rather stay sick."

Maybe, but when people get sick enough they get desperate, and will try anything. (That's why the faith healers on TV continue to flourish even though their healing doesn't work).

As you approached Pergamum, the first thing you would see is a huge, cone-shaped hill next to the city, covered with temple after temple after temple.

This was a city where the religions of Greece and the religions of Rome met...and married (syncretism).

Pergamum was the city of all religions.

The Zeus cult was really big there. The Dionysos cult was real big there, Athene...

It was a huge center of Caesar worship. They were the first city to be granted permission to build a temple for the worship of a living Caesar.

In Smyrna they had to burn incense to Caesar once a year. Here it was much more of a daily issue.

They were into pluralism – big time. They loved religious diversity.

Sound familiar?

So how do you think they felt about Christianity there? Do you suppose they embraced it and said, "Oh good – another religion."?

They were big into tolerance for all religions. So do you think they were tolerant of Christians?

Ask Antipas, whom they killed by putting him in a brass pot, and putting it over a fire until he died from his burns.

Life was brutal for the Christians there.

And if you wonder why, all you have to do is look at v.13.

EVALUATION

I know...
Praise

13 I know where you live-where Satan has his throne.

Don't think Satan's throne is in hell. That's the place of his incarceration.

His throne, the center of his whole operation, is on earth. And at this time was in the city of Pergamum.

It was the capitol of ecumenism – all the religions coming together.

And I believe that's why it's called Satan's throne, because ecumenism is at the center of the Devil's work.

If you wonder where Satan puts most of his energy, it's probably not with the drug addicts or criminals. It's easy enough to get people to do that kind of thing just by appealing to the flesh.

But that which proves to be most effective for Satan, and that which requires more of a thought-out, complex strategy, is false religion.

If you really want to see the Devil at work, rather than going to a séance or something, go to an ecumenical prayer service, where all false religions are accepted and discernment is not allowed.

It's really no surprise that the first martyr mentioned in Revelation was killed in this city. The more a culture values tolerance and acceptance of all religions, the more hostile they tend to be toward Christianity.

That may sound ironic, but it's not ironic. It's exactly what you would expect, because at the core of Christianity is the insistence that there is one, narrow way – one true God – one set of true doctrines – period.

It's Jesus Christ or eternity in hell – no discussion.

They say "All religions lead to the same place." That's close to the truth – all religions but one lead to hell.

But preaching a message like that in a place that is in to tolerance can get you roasted alive in a brass pot.

This morning we are going to read the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in that city.

What do you supposed happened to that church in a climate like that?

v.13 – “I know you live in the city that is the headquarters for Satan’s whole operation, **Yet you remain true to my name.**

Lit: **You grasp my name.** *krateo*

We saw this word in ch.1, and remember I told you it’s that same word in Php.2 when it says Jesus **did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but He emptied Himself...?**

Rev. 20:2 **He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.**

“You have seized and tenaciously clung to My name.”

It’s a interesting choice of words. The picture is of the culture pulling and pulling at you, constantly trying to break your grip on Christ’s name.

But this church wouldn’t let go.

It’s so easy in a culture like that to just let go. You walk into work or a party or some kind of context where it’s not going to be any fun to be identified with Jesus Christ, and so you just let go your grip on that name as you walk in the door...

How many Christians check the name of Christ at the door when they go to work or school?

The whole time you are there you’re just like everyone else. No one there associates you with Jesus Christ. A person would have to do some real detective work to find out.

Then when you leave, on your way out the door you grab hold of that name again, and you’re right back to being a Christian (in your imagination).

That was the temptation for these people, but they wouldn’t do it. They were Christians, and you could mock them, ridicule them, attack their children, burn down their homes, torture them or kill them but they would not loosen their grip on that name.

You did not renounce your faith in me even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death

Renounce means to deny, disassociate from, reject

Acts 7:35 **"This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?'**

Acts 3:14 **You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you**

1 Timothy 5:8 **If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

2 Timothy 2:12 **if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;**

Hebrews 11:24 **By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.**

And it's an aorist tense, which implies a moment in the past when things came to a head. There may have been a specific incident in which they were given the choice to renounce Christ or face an execution.

Either that or it refers back to a specific period of time when they were pressured.

But they didn't give in, and in Antipas' case it cost him his life.

We don't really know anything about Antipas. There is one tradition that says when things started turning really sour someone said, "Antipas, the world is against you." To which Antipas replied, "Then tell them Antipas is against the world."

He was then roasted alive.

There is also an account of some Christian stonemasons from Rome under Diocletian (about 150 years after this) who refused to cut a statue of Asklepios and were put to death for being followers of Antipas. (Mounce)

So perhaps Antipas spoke out against Asklepios.

What we know for sure is that Jesus called him **my faithful witness**. Antipas didn't deny Christ, and Christ won't deny Antipas.

Jesus gives Him His own title (the exact term He used for Himself in ch.1, where Christ Himself is the **faithful witness**.)

So this is high praise.

The word **witness** is *martus* (from which we get martyr – over the years of witnesses becoming martyrs, the word "witness" came to mean "martyr").

The word "witness" for them was just like it is for us – a courtroom term. A faithful witness is someone who gives true, reliable testimony in a trial.

That's what Antipas did.

"Antipas, if you tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth we'll kill you." And Antipas said, "OK."

I think a lot of Christians think of themselves as witnesses – they talk about witnessing and being a witness, but very often we act like we are witnesses for the defense.

Christ calls him “**My faithful witness**” because Antipas was a witness for the prosecution.

We are not witnesses for the defense. Christ is not on trial. We are witnesses for the prosecution. That’s why the defendants don’t like us.

in your city-where Satan lives.

The word **lives** refers to a permanent home.

This stands in parallel with the beginning of the verse. “**I know where you live...your city where Satan lives.**”

You and Satan both have the same home. That’s rough.

So again Christ praises courage in a church. (Remember – later in this book the cowardly are right at the top of the list of people who will be shut out of heaven).

This is a suffering, persecuted church in a difficult place. **And yet** at the beginning He introduces Himself in a very threatening way –

IDENTIFICATION

Thus saith the Judge & Executioner

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

That’s a pretty ominous way to begin a letter.

To Ephesus He says, “To you folks I’m the one who controls the fate of the churches.”

To Smyrna He says, “To you I’m the Giver of life.”

But to this church He says, “To you I’m the Judge and Executioner.”

In the vision in ch.1 it says Christ had *a* sword, double-edged, sharp. Here He says “I’m the one with *the* sword, the double-edged, the sharp.

We don’t talk that way in English, but the point is to slow the reader down and focus attention on each word.

“Dear Pergamum, I’m the one who the SWORD...the sword that is DOUBLE EDGED... and SHARP!”

These people knew about swords. Pergamum was a city that was granted *ius gladii* (“the right of the sword”). That was when Rome granted the proconsul of a city the right to execute at will.

And one of their members was executed.

So why does Jesus identify Himself that way to this church?

Because this is a church that was facing judgment.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin (lit: who taught Balak to thrown down a *skandalon* in front of Israel) by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

To appreciate this, you have to know what happened with Balaam. It was a very, very important incident in the history of Israel, and it teaches us a lot about the nature of our security as God's people.

Ch.22-25 are a very important interlude in the story. By the time we get to Numbers 22 Israel has wandered in the desert 40 years, now they have arrived at the boarder of the Promised Land, and they are ready to go in and conquer it. So they make their way right up to the Jordan River and then stop. They are in the territory of Moab where Balak is the king. Balak sees 2 million Hebrews in his land, and is terrified. They didn't plan to do any harm to him, but he wasn't about to risk it. So he sends a message to the man who was probably the most famous and successful pagan prophet in the world: Balaam.

Balaam was a wicked, greedy, pagan occultist who would put curses on people for money – just the kind of thing Balak was looking for. At first Balaam refuses, but then evidently decides he wants the money, and is going to go curse the Israelites.

21 Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. 22 But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.

The thing that makes this so comical is the fact that Balaam is supposedly so good at perceiving spiritual realities and spirits, and he's oblivious. Just like the bogus psychics of our day, this great seer was blind as a bat to the most significant spiritual reality around – the angel of the Lord, who was able to be seen even by a donkey.

24 Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. 25 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again.

26 Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. 27 When the donkey saw the

angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff.

You can just picture Moses laughing himself silly when he was writing this. It just gets funnier and funnier...

28 Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" 29 Balaam answered the donkey, (that's the best part – he's so mad he doesn't even seem to notice that a donkey just spoke to him) "You have made a fool of me! (He thinks the donkey made a fool of him – I don't think it was the donkey) If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

That's an interesting thing to say given the fact that there is a sword nearby...but it's about to be run through Balaam, and the donkey is the only thing saving him from that.

30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said.

So now the donkey outthinks him. Not only is he not as spiritually perceptive as a donkey, but he gets out-reasoned by the donkey. He was some prophet.

31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

32 The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. 33 The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her."

Well, Balaam goes on his way, and when he gets there Balak takes him to go see the Israelites, and does the whole procedure that Balaam calls for for a curse.

But God has promised to bless His people, and He isn't about to allow this to happen, so He forces Balaam to bless them instead of cursing them.

This is a great illustration of God's protective care for His people.

God is protecting His people spiritually, and they aren't even aware of it.

John 10:28 **no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

Ro.8:32-39 **If God is for us, who can be against us?...**

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?..

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

...neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Well, Balak, needless to say, is unhappy with the service he is getting from this rent-a-prophet that he is paying through the nose for, and says, "No – don't *bless* them. *Curse* them!"

Another really funny thing to watch as you read these chapters is the exasperation of King Balak, who just can't seem to get Balaam to do the simplest task.

Balaam: "OK. Here's what we need to do...and they set up another pagan ritual he is going to use to curse Israel. And out of Balaam's mouth comes...an even stronger blessing!

So after that second blessing, **Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!" (23:25)**

"Please just be quiet. You can stop cursing now."

Well, it happens a third time, and the third one is the greatest blessing of all.

What is the point of all that? Is it just some comic relief that Moses throws in so we don't get board reading the Book of Numbers? Is there a theological purpose for this section?

Yes – an important one.

It stands as a great example to Israel of how their covenant-keeping God was faithful to protect them. They never forgot that.

Years later God reminded them of this. In Josh.24:9-10

When Balak...the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. 10 But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

Dt.23:4-6 is talking about Moab...

they hired Balaam son of Beor...to pronounce a curse on you. 5 However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

God didn't want His people to ever forget how He protected them:

Mic.6:5

My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered...that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."

So God preserved them.

But once you understand all that, (now here's the kicker) Numbers 25 comes as a shock.

Almost all of ch.24 is Balaam's third blessing on Israel, and then in the very next chapter the Israelites are being slaughtered by the tens of thousands!

They were dying because they were sick, and they were sick, because God sent a plague to kill them.

14,000 died in that plague. Can you imagine the project it was just to bury that many bodies? (100 per day for 8 months)

Does that strike you as a strange ending to a story that is designed to demonstrate God's spiritual protection of His people?

God was showing Israel that they could not be destroyed by some pagan prophet trying to make a buck.

They couldn't be harmed by a curse, by divination, by a false prophet – not even by the devil himself.

In fact, they couldn't be destroyed by anything...except one thing.

They were in God's protective grip, and no enemy or hostile force – human or demonic or anything else, could wrest them out of God's hand to hurt them.

Nevertheless, there was one way they could be harmed, and Balaam figured it out, tried it, and it worked.

Balaam figured if he could entice Israel to willingly turn away from God, He would judge them Himself. And that's exactly what happened.

He was able to persuade them to turn their backs on Yahweh and worship the pagan idols of Moab.

“How did he do that? How do you get a fiercely monotheistic nation like Israel to suddenly abandon the God that just brought them up out of Egypt with 40 years worth of miracles?”

Was it done through preaching? No.

Did the Moabites go door to door in pairs of two and share with the Israelites about the advantages of paganism? No.

Did they do it by force? No.

Did they trick them and deceive them into believing the wrong thing? No.

How did they do it? What caused the Israelites to turn their back on the God they worshipped all their lives?

It was the same thing that causes that to happen today. I have seen more people raised in the church, as committed as can be – gung ho for the faith, go from being like that to completely turning away in a matter of weeks.

And I've seen that happen many, many times, and every single time it was the same thing that caused it without exception – a romantic relationship with an unbeliever.

With men it's generally some physical involvement. With women it's generally a romantic attraction. But either way there is nothing that can bring a person to just drop everything they have believed like a hot potato like an attraction to an unbeliever.

That was Solomon's undoing, and that's what happened here.

Balaam just said, "Look, just send your women in there with their men (and don't worry about your women being converted to their faith – it doesn't work that way. Compromise doesn't lead to righteousness)."

"Send your most attractive women over there, and they will forget all about their God." That's exactly what happened.

Num.31:16

(These Moabite women) were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD's people.

God's protection against cursing is absolute, but there is one way to hurt His people – by persuading them to turn away completely and bring judgment upon themselves.

We do have security, but that does not extend to the point of us not being able to chose to sin and invite divine judgment.

And what you need to understand is that it all happened through compromise to false religion.

The biggest issue was not the sexual sin. That was just the means that was used to bring about the total apostasy.

Balaam was the father of religious syncretism (which is what the ecumenical movement is) – combining false religion with true religion.

And it was achieved through attraction to an unbeliever.

Syncretism is a huge problem in the Church today.

In the midst of all the cries for unity at any cost and ecumenical prayer services, we need people with the courage to stand up and say, “A religion that teaches salvation through sacraments is a false religion.

And to join forces with people who believe that way, and welcome them into our midst without repentance from that is syncretism (compromise).

A religion that teaches salvation through baptism is a false religion.

A religion that teaches all men go to heaven is a false religion.

A religion that denies the punishment of the wicked is a false religion.

A religion that teaches God doesn't know the future is a false religion.

A religion that teaches salvation through self-esteem is a false religion.

A religion that teaches that Jesus didn't pay for sin on the cross and had to go to hell to pay for sin is a false religion.

A religion that teaches you can be saved without the kind of faith that produces repentance is a false religion.

A religion that turns grace into permission to sin is a false religion.

And around the world the church has embraced all those people in its midst and welcomed those people as brothers and sisters in Christ!

That's going on among the leading evangelical churches here in Boulder County right now. And if you go into a group like that and say, “Hey, since we are trying to spread the Gospel, how about we define clearly exactly what the Gospel is?” that will be met with hostility.

Back to Rev.2

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to throw down a *skandalon* in front of Israel by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

In the Greek these are two noun governed by one article, which means they are considered two aspects of the same thing.

What is **the teaching of Balaam**? The teaching of Balaam is idea that you can intermarry with unbelievers and be just fine.

Pergamum had people like that, and the result was a group within the church that was eating at the pagan feasts.

“Wait a minute, didn’t Paul teach that idols are nothing, and it’s OK to eat meat sacrificed to an idol if it doesn’t cause anyone to stumble?”

Not in this context. If you just trying to get a good deal on meat at the market, it doesn’t matter where that meat has been. We are not superstitious.

But this isn’t talking about that. This is talking about participating in the whole ritual at the pagan temple – and that is definitely forbidden for a Christian.

The Christian has no business participating in the unbelieving culture.

15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

These people were booted out of Ephesus. But they found a home in Pergamum.

The word **hold** is the same word in v.13 translated **remain true**.

We discussed the Nicolaitans in our study of the letter to Ephesus (tape 154b).

The Nicolaitans believed the flesh can be used however one wishes.

This church had a propensity toward tolerating antinomians (people who say there is no law).

The Balaamites and Nicolaitans took completely different paths, but both ended up in the exact same place: “You can do what you want.”

Satan has a lot of different avenues to get you to the same goal.

This happens when a church becomes paranoid about legalism. That pushes them to the opposite extreme of permissiveness.

An antinomian is someone who just doesn’t like the idea of law in general. They say you shouldn’t live by laws. You shouldn’t seek to obey God’s laws. That’s just fleshly human rule-keeping.

Instead, throw out all the rules, and try to follow God by means of sheer devotion of spirit.

Throwing aside God’s laws and trying to live on pure devotion of spirit will tend to result in you being in bed with someone you are not married to.

Don’t’ ever let anyone tell you God’s law is not good – that we are no longer under and kind of law, that law is only part of the OT economy, etc.

Ro.7:12 the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

1 Cor.9:21 **I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law**

Jesus: “The good news is you held fast to My name even under persecution. The bad news is you have among you those who hold fast to false teaching.

How Did it Happen?

Pergamum sounds like such a good church. They clung to the name of Christ even when their lives were at stake. So how could a church like that end up tolerating people like this?

They were just like us – they were effected by their environment.

Pergamum was a huge cultural and intellectual center (See Mounce on v.12). They had a library of close to ¼ million volumes (second-largest in the world).

The biggest library in the world was down in Egypt, which was the major supplier of papyrus.

At this point they were getting concerned down in Alexandria. Not only was Pergamum building this rival library, but they were trying to recruit a famous librarian away from Egypt to come to Pergamum.

That was the last straw, and the Egyptians incarcerated that scholar so he couldn't go, and decided to cut off Pergamum's supply of papyrus. It was the great paper embargo.

(As a result Pergamum developed another medium to write on that was much better – parchment, which is animal skin.)

When you are involved in an international conflict over librarian stealing, you know you are in a literary, academic culture.

It's a very, very good thing to be well-read. And it's good to consider a variety of points of view.

But there is a pride that come from that, that can drive a person to think "The more different opinions I know, the smarter I am."

And the result can be a loss of discernment, which is when you become susceptible to error.

Sometimes when people become very educated and very well-read they stop thinking, and they start thinking the truth is whatever most of the books say (it happens to Bible scholars too).

In a culture like that even the church loses its will to discern.

I don't know if that's the reason or not, but one way or another this church had within it little pockets of people who taught heresy.

One of the things that generates more anxiety in my heart than anything else is the appetite the Church seems to have for false teaching.

Why do so many of these charlatans make their fortunes from the evangelical world?

Why do their books crowd the bookshelves of Christian bookstores (that is more the fault of Christians than bookstore owners – they just stock what there is a demand for).

Why don't we make the false teachers get their money by selling their garbage to the liberals? Why are we buying it?

A woman came to our church recently who was struggling in her marriage. I met her husband and found out they were going to a church that taught a heretical view of the Trinity (as well as other errors).

I confronted that pastor and did everything I could to get them out of that. She went out of state for several months, and now she's back, and she's completely submerged in the Word-Faith heresy.

It seems like there are so many people who just have an appetite for false teaching. It doesn't even seem to matter what kind of false teaching, just as long as it's false.

Someone asked me this week about a seminar her church is sponsoring.

The Grace Life Conference by Lee LeFebre, the head of Exchanged Life Ministries.

So I looked him up on the Internet to see what he teaches. The first thing that came up was a pamphlet on marriage.

"the one who does not love does not know God, for God is love"? Be assured that He is not saying you are not saved, but rather that you do not know God (Christ)."

"Now for those who are willing to count the cost, that is, the renouncing of all self-effort... He will manifest the fruit of the Spirit in a supernatural way that will require no effort on your part."

"(To solve marriage problems), just pray: "I give you permission to live life in me and for me... and do hereby give you permission to do whatever you wish to my marriage at risk."

So you can be saved without knowing Christ, you grow spiritually without any effort, and the closest you come to any effort is giving God verbal permission to do things for you.

(And this is the best church in that town!)

Of all the wonderful, profound, rich, solid, orthodox, sound teaching that has accumulated over the last 2000 years, why is there a market for this kind of garbage in the Church?

It's not just that a large portion of the Church has lost its *ability* to discern. They have lost the *will* to discern.

There is such indifference about it. That which causes Christ to draw His massive sword of judgment out of the scabbard hardly elicits a yawn from so many today.

You show them the heresy and they just say, “I’ll just sort out the good from the bad.”

To people with that attitude comes the command in v.16

EXHORTATION

The Command

Repent

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

I believe the **soon** coming has to be a double reference to both a temporal judgment of that church as well as the Second Coming.

Judgment on Satan’s throne is also implied (described in ch.19). God’s throne stands sovereign over Satan’s.

But the emphasis here is on the judgment of the church.

Notice the distinction the Lord makes between the church and the false teaches: **I will soon come to you and will fight against them**

He’s not talking to the Balaamites or the Nicolaitans. He’s talking to the people good people who did not buy in to any of that, and tells *them* to repent.

This church is not chastised for holding to false teaching. It’s chastised for having false teachers in its midst. It was a sin of toleration.

Pergamum was as city of 200,000 people, which means if 1% of the people came to church, it would have 2000 – meeting all over town in little house churches.

And still Christ holds the church as a whole responsible for the fact that there were pockets of heresy.

So the Lord calls them to repent. How? What are they to do as a church?

What they should have done in the first place: put the false teachers out.

The reason Christ appears in fearsome judgment with a deadly sword (like He did with Balaam) is because of a failure to carry out church discipline.

I don't want the Lord fighting against anyone in Creekside. I know what sin is like – its consequences effect far more than just the sinner himself.

Those of you who think church discipline is too harsh, I want you to take a close look at v.16.

Most people are alarmed and appalled at the idea of announcing someone's name publicly to the whole church in connection with some unrepentant sin, and, if they still don't repent, putting them out of the church and all of us having absolutely nothing to do with that person from that moment on.

Next time you are tempted to think that's too harsh, just read v.16.

You know what happens to people if we don't discipline them? Jesus disciplines them. He comes and fights against them with a sharp, double edged sword. That's a lopsided fight.

If you really have compassion on the person, you will do whatever it takes to prevent that.

You will be like Balaam's donkey and save them from that sharp, doubled-edged sword.

1 Co.11:31 **if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment** (by God)

Even in the case of Israel with Balaam. When they brought God's judgment upon themselves through compromise with the world, God sent a plague. And the only thing that finally ended that plague was when an Israelite finally took steps to bring discipline on the offenders.

Listen!

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Benediction: 2 Co.7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God