

The Voice of Truth # 475

Pergamos, The Church Married to the World

We come now to the message the Lord Jesus Christ sent to the church at Pergamos, the compromising church, or the church married to the world. With Bibles in hand, let's read Revelation 2:12.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, these things, saith he, which hath the sharp sword with two edges, I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.

In this letter, as in all others, we first have the fact that it was addressed to the pastor at Pergamus. Second, we have the one set forth here who is doing the speaking, He that hath the sharp two-edged sword. Third, the conditions set forth, I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is. Fourth, a commendation that Christ paid the church, and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days when Antipas was my witness, my faithful one, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. Fifth, Christ's condemnation, I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some which hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Sixth, Christ called a repentance, that is a self-judgment, that they may recover themselves. Seventh,

he sounds a warning note, if you don't repent, I will come to thee quickly, and will fight against you with the sword of my mouth. He brings the letter to a close with a promise to the overcomer that he will give them hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name written.

Briefly, let's notice some things about the city of Pergamos where this church was located. It was not a commercial center like Ephesus and Smyrna, but a city of fashion and idolatry. It was noted for its splendid temples of pagan gods and goddesses. The most magnificent pagan temple was that of Asclepius the patron god of Pergamos, who was a god of medicine or healing. History tells us that he was commonly looked upon as the savior and was symbolized by the form of a serpent.

The altar erected to the pagan god Zeus was 100 feet square and reached an elevation of 800 feet above the plain. Christ pointed out that this church was located and dwelt where Satan's throne was. Satan's throne was first in old Babylon, where idolatry had its beginning after the flood under the reign of Nimrod. But by this time, Satan had moved his throne to Pergamos, and then when the kingdom of Pergamon was donated to the Roman Empire by her last king on his deathbed, Satan moved his throne to Rome, carrying all the pagan idolatry to Rome. That is where Satan's throne is today, at Rome, from whence idolatry has spread throughout the entire earth and is growing in leaps and bounds today. Such was the city where this church was planted. What Satan could not do at Smyrna by persecution, or even at Pergamos, he attempted to accomplish at Pergamos by patronizing the church. That is, to break down their loyalty to Christ by bringing the church into definite union with the world. God's standard for his Church is a complete separation from the world. The only hope and strength and power the Church has, lies in her Redeemer, the Lord God of Heaven, and for Christ to walk in the midst of his people he demands holiness and separation from the world. The Church cannot condone sin, error, or false doctrine, and at the same time enjoy the blessedness and glory of the presence and reality of the Lord God of Heaven. This is a great lesson we need to learn today. How many are laboring without the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ?

So, Christ opened the letter to the church at Pergamos with these words, listen, **these things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges**. Then in verse 16 he says, **I will fight against them with the sword in my mouth**. But here he speaks of a sword he seems to be holding in his hand. And he stands with a sword drawn, with all authority to use it. These words are in contrast to Satan's authority. Because he said, you dwell where Satan's throne is. We have the authority of Christ over against the authority of Satan. Christ stands in the midst of this church speaking to her pastor with all the authority of heaven as the resurrected Christ, ready to use his authority to set things straight in the church.

The church was slowly being drawn away from the reality of Christ and his authority as the head of the church, and he stands with drawn sword ready to pierce, cut, sever, kill, put to death everything that is of the flesh. It is a sword which cuts into souls, penetrates consciences, divides between true and false, whether in doctrine, sentiment, or life. It's a sword that makes havoc of the hopes and good opinions that saints or sinners have of themselves. It pierces, wounds, lacerates their self-security, cuts right and left across everything that is contrary to God, breaks pride, self-sufficiency, destroys the hope of the self-righteous, and brings everything under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Christ of God walk in the midst of our churches today and lay bare hearts, convicting, rebuking, exhorting, wherever needed. Pastors, come out and take your stand with Christ and for Christ, no matter what it costs. Will you?

When Christ lays bare human hearts, they will not have his truth. He says, I will come unto them quickly and will fight against them with a sword of my mouth. When the church drifts away from the truth of God's word and will not repent, the only thing left for them is the sword of judgment. Since God saved me 22 years ago, I have found that the average church member does not love and will not have the truth, nor will he endure sound doctrine. So the only thing left for Christ to do is to unsheath his sword of judgment. Is the church so married to the world today that she will not divorce the world? Does the church love the praise of the world so much that she's unwilling to give it up and return to Christ? If so, my friend, the only thing you can expect is the sword of judgment. Take your Bibles, and read the second chapter of Acts, then turn and read the third chapter of 2 Timothy. See the contrast between the early church and the church of today.

Ask yourself the question, where am I living today? In the second chapter of Acts, or in the third chapter of 2 Timothy? Am I born again, washed in his blood, filled with his Spirit, walking in the blessedness and power of God's Holy Spirit in service? Or, am I ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, that I am a lost, guilty sinner on the road to hell, and do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Redeemer? Brother, you are either saved or lost. If you're saved, you're either living in the fullness and power of God's Holy Spirit in a life of separation and a life of holiness, or you are living a defeated life, which means you're living in known sin and are unfaithful to the God who saved you. Now, where do you stand? Do you know Him? You settle that question in your own heart.

Turn to verse 13. He says, **I know thy works**. I know all about your labors, your prayer life, your home life. I know about your witnessing for me. My eye is ever upon you. I know whether you're doing it for my glory or for self-esteem and self-praise. I thank God, He knows all about me, that nothing is hidden from His eyes, from His knowledge. I live moment by moment, conscious of Hebrews 4:13, **neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do**. My friend, he knows all about my sins, my unfaithfulness, my rebellion, my wicked pride, my sinful lusts, my unholy desires. I am glad he does, because I do not try to hide anything from him. I am constantly confessing them unto him. On the other hand, I am glad he knows and sees ever penitential tear, ever longing, and affection of my heart toward him. I know he hears my prayer and beholds every longing in my soul. He is my judge as well as my redeemer, and I thank God that I can come to him, unburden my heart to him about every burden. My constant cry is, Lord, to thee be all glory, praise, honor, and blessing.

Following these words, Christ said, I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is. Isn't it marvelous to know that Christ knows the exact place and condition in which his church is planted, and the circumstances the church works under? Isn't it marvelous that he knows every condition and situation of every one of his children who live and labor in his vineyard? In Pergamos, where Satan's throne was, there was a very unwholesome atmosphere for believers to live in. It was the authority of Christ over against the authority of Satan. How many times

do we find ourselves in unfavorable surroundings, having to live or work with ungodly men, where prayer is ridiculed, the Bible made fun of, Christ scorned, salvation by grace called crazy, the name of God taken in vain, having to associate with skeptics, infidels, profane and godless men and women? Christ says, I know all about that. I see where thou dwellest. I take note of that.

I've often said all you have to do in the city of New Orleans is to take a few godly people out, put a tin roof over her and a smokestack and shovel in the brimstone, and you'd have an inferno. But because of its wickedness, you can live the best Christian life here of any place I know outside of hell, because you have so much to fight. But on the other hand, you can go to hell the quickest under religious covering, because it is a city given over to idolatry, where pleasure and money is god. Listen, my friends, Satan is a midget in the sight of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is greater than all the powers of wickedness and depraved humanity, and where sin abounds, grace did much more abound. There is no excuse for any child of God to not walk in the power and victory of Christ. We saw the synagogue of Satan in Smyrna, but in Pergamos it's the throne of Satan. In Smyrna, Satan veiled behind religion, opposed the Church and born-again believers. Today, Satan still operates behind the veil of religion, which Christ called the synagogue of Satan. But Satan's throne was in Pergamos, and the danger that threatened that church was not direct opposition under the cloak of religion, but get it, it was patronage, getting the believer to calm down his testimony and enter into alliance with the world. If you should ask me where Satan's throne is here in the South, I'd not hesitate to say it's in New Orleans, and he's doing the same thing here he did in Pergamos. He's patronizing religion and leading the religious leaders to tone down their testimony and to enter into an alliance with him. When Satan can get the church to blunt her testimony and patronize the world, letting the world into the church, the church loses her power. And unless she repents, she cannot enjoy the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, but must face the sword of judgment. The devil lurks behind mammon, which is the sum total of the fleshly life or worldly power characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. There's one word I wish I could shout around the world, and that it could fall in the hearts of everyone listening to me, and that word is separation, separation, separation. Come ye out from among them, separate yourselves.

The church is defeated today because of her love for the world. She's married to the world, walks with the world, fashions herself after the world, and has therefore become the harlot bride, which is nothing more or less than the adulterous wife of Satan. Brethren, come out from among them, be ye separate. Dare to be different. Dare to stand alone. Especially you young preachers. You've got everything to gain and nothing to lose. Are you going to stand by and let our religious leaders lead us down to hell in this hour? Come ye out from among them. Be ye separate. If you have to seal your testimony with your blood, separate yourself and walk with Christ. Will you do it?

Christ said, as I look upon you, I see two things I love. One, **you hold fast my name**. Second, **you have not denied my faith**. That was a blessed commendation. Many of the members still believed in the virgin birth of Christ. They still held Christ as God of very God, the Son of God, that he is deity, they still held salvation in none other except the name of Christ. How blessed that name! Many had disowned him, many had gone to the world, many had denied him, but a blessed few held fast to his name, to his person, and work, and they exalted the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then he said, **You have not denied my faith**. They still believed Jesus was the author and finisher of faith. They still believed in the truth of God's eternal word. But then in verse 14, Christ said to his pastor, **I have something against you**. That is, you have members there who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. When the children of Israel had reached the land of Moab, and King Balak wanted to curse them that he might destroy them, He sent for the prophet Balaam to come and curse them, offering him a great sum of money. Jehovah warned him not to go, but the love of money got the best of him. Three times he tried to curse the children of Israel, but each time God overruled and blessed them. Finally, he told the king, God will not let me curse them. They are his elect, I must return home. But being anxious to get that large sum of money, he said, you come and see me. And when King Balaam came to see him, then he offered this suggestion, you go back and get the women of Moab to invite the men of Israel to your religious feast to eat meat sacrificed to your gods. Persuade them to enter into unholy alliances with your women, even to

committing fornication and adultery with them. Then you will bring the wrath of God upon them and make God destroy his own people. Balak took the suggestion, invited the men of Israel to their religious feast, and enticed them to eat meat offered to idols, and to commit fornication with the women of Moab, who were religious prostitutes. Here is a vivid picture of God's covenant people, his chosen, under the protection of Jehovah God, entering into unholy alliance with the women of Moab, partaking of idol worship. God will not condone sin, even in the lives of his own people. A plague broke out, 24,000 men died.

In the church at Pergamos were members who visited the religious feasts of the pagans, ate meat offered to idols, committed fornication with the women who had dedicated their bodies to the gods known as princesses, who are priestesses, who are nothing more than religious prostitutes. They reason from this angle, We are God's chosen people, living under grace and not under the law. We are saved and saved eternally by being God's elect. Therefore, God is more interested in what we believe than in how we live. Therefore, we can patronize the world so we won't be persecuted. This was Satan's way of deceiving them into believing they could win the pagans to Christ. You cannot enjoy the presence or the reality of Christ and regard sin in your heart. You cannot know salvation with its blessings and give an effective testimony and enjoy the pleasures of sin at the same time. There must come a separation. False doctrine leads to wrong living. And here we have the rise of antinomianism, and God was holding the pastor responsible. Let me say again, no church will rise any higher than a pastor in holy living, prayer life, Bible reading, and study, and spirituality. And I'll tell you, pastor, if you are saved, come out and take your stand and lead your church into holy living. First lead them to Christ for salvation.

In verse 15 Christ said you have another doctrine that I hate, that is the teachings of the Nicolaitans. We call your attention to this in our letter to the Ephesians, **but this thou hast that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.** Christ said I hate the deeds and the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. In the church at Ephesus were the deeds of the Nicolaitans. In the church at Pergamos, the deeds had become a doctrine. Literally the word Nicolaitans means 'to conquer the laity' that is 'lord it over the church'. Here we have the earliest form of a priestly order, which later divided the church into the priesthood and laity. The church at

Pergamos began to set up the order of the priesthood, or religious hierarchy, and began to call her preachers clergymen, which is a denial of the common priesthood of all believers. No wonder Christ said, I hate that doctrine.

Believers on earth are a kingdom of spiritual priests. Christ within the veil is our living high priest. Here in the early church, there were folks who taught there ought to be formed a priestly caste in the church to correspond to Levitical priesthood of Judaism, who should have charge of ruling and directing the program of the church, instead of having a body of born-again believers, with God's appointed pastors looking to Christ alone as head of the church. Christ said, I hate that teaching. And the reason was that he knew in a short time the head of the church, he, the head of the church, would be set aside for a man-made program directed by an order of men, in the church and out of the church. That is what we have everywhere today, and they have no regard for the Word of God. They have substituted tradition for the Word of God, and hold tradition above the Word of the Living God. I want to tell you, we face a dark hour today. The Primitive, or early New Testament Church, or assemblies of born-again believers, were under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit with Christ as their head. They met for worship. It was a constant praise on the part of the assembly to the Son of God for redeeming them with his own precious blood. Christ never intended for the church to leave the simplicity in Christ and be dominated by a religious hierarchy of any kind. Where will you go today to find assemblies praising the Lord for redemption in Christ, salvation by his blood, looking for his imminent return? Where is the simplicity in Christ, spoken of by the Apostle Paul? Let me make this statement with all the vehemence of my soul, Christ hates anything that comes between him and his church or his child. He is jealous over us with a godly jealousy. He must be Lord of all or not Lord at all. Christ is the all-sufficient one and we need none other. We are complete in him. And that he says, unless you repent, I'm going to come to you and fight you with the sword of my mouth, I will come quickly and fight you with the words of my mouth. I will cut you asunder with my word, I will not tolerate error or false doctrine of any kind.

The church did not repent, but kept drifting away from the simplicity in Christ, there at Pergamos. And we're told that today, Pergamos is a mere tomb of former greatness, half-buried arches, columns prostrate in the sand, and a few thousand

Turkish and Greek huts remain to mark this sensuous, idolatrous city where the faithful and apostates suffered and where so much pagan glory reigned. History seems to bear out this great fact that when once a church or religious body begins to drift away from the simplicity of Christ, there is no hope of it returning to its primitive state in Christ but is headed for judgment. This holds true in nations.