***A Warning against Hedonism  
  
RV15-01***

We are studying Revelation 2:15-17 in the letter to the Pergamum church. The church at Pergamum represented a local church attitude of toleration toward false pagan religious practices for the sake of avoiding antagonisms. Goodwill with the followers of Satan was pursued at the expense of being a source of spiritual enlightenment to the pagan world about them. Goodwill was pursued at the expense of moral authority and separation from evil in the New Testament world. Goodwill was pursued at the expense of disloyalty to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is, of course, understandable that it is very tempting for Christians who live in an antagonistic society to seek to be neutral toward evil for the sake of gaining favors. Well, this resulted in Pergamum in a very serious condition because there were some Christians who were actually involved in idolatry and in fornication. Some of this was undoubtedly approached through the relationship of intermarriage with the heathen. That brought compromises and influence of doctrine of demons which were being taught and practiced in Pergamum. This was the same condition, this letter has pointed out to us, which existed in Israel of old under the influence of Balaam, when he involved the children of Israel in the worship of idols and in the practice of illicit sex with the Moabites.

In the midst of such compromise with the religious world system of Satan, we must observe in this letter that some Christians did stand tall and true for the truth of Bible doctrine, and completely loyal to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They refused, obviously, to perform the annual ritual, which was required of people in the Roman Empire at this time, of burning (once a year) a pinch of incense, and repeating the statement, "Caesar is Lord;" the word "Lord" meaning "deity." Obviously, consequently, they were marked for antagonism and for persecution.

These Christians who stood tall and true for the truth of doctrine, refused to hide the fact that they had a revelation from God in written form by which they could judge the emperor and the nation itself. These Christians, who stood tall and firm, refused to pretend that all religions were equally acceptable to God. They did not mind standing up. It would be comparable in our day to somebody standing up and saying, "Anybody who believes the doctrine of salvation as taught by Muhammad is going to go into the lake of fire. Anybody who believes the doctrine of salvation as taught by Joseph Smith of the Mormons is going to go to the lake of fire." So there were Christians in the church of Pergamum who stood up and said, "Anybody who believes in the principles and doctrines of emperor worship is going to be doomed forever in the burning which God has prepared for eternal punishment.

**A Warning about the Nicolaitans**

So that's the picture that we have in this church. Now we come down in Revelation 2:15-17 to the final remarks in the letter to this particular church. We begin with a warning. We again come to this group that we know so little about, and that we wish we knew more about, called the Nicolaitans. Revelation 2:15: "So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." The word "so" is the Greek word "houtos." This is a word that means "in this way" or "thus." What it refers to is verse 14. The word is pointing back to verse 14 to what it has said about those in the Pergamum church who are following Balaam's doctrine of cooperation with religious viewpoints that are contrary to Scripture. As Balaam told the people of Israel to cooperate with the pagan societies, so this same thing is taking place in the church in Pergamum. That's the point of this word "houtos." The condition of enticements to evil, that Balaam created for Israel in the Old Testament, now exists in the Pergamum church.

That's a sad condition: when you can say about a local church that what they do is an enticement to evil. Every local church has to indeed be very careful to try to avoid being guilty of that. It is so easy to swing into the mainstream of what is acceptable in our society that we can, as a local organization, sometimes be guilty of doing things that cause people to be enticed to do that which is in violation of God's will; of God's principles; and, of God's absolute standards. So this is what was happening in the church in Pergamum.

It says, "So have you." The word "have" is the Greek word "echo." This is the word that indicates an existing condition. It is in the present tense which indicates that we're talking about something that was a continual situation in the Pergamum church. It is in the active voice which indicates that this was functioning. The church was taking part in this situation. It's in indicative mood – a statement of fact. The stress upon the church itself is indicated in the Greek text by adding the personal pronoun "you" ("su"), which is in the second person, which is referring particularly to the Pergamum church. "Thus, ('in like manner') have you also." This is the church in Pergamum, indicating a similarity to a condition to Israel of old.

Then it says, "Them that hold." The Greek word is "krateo." The word "krateo" not only means "to hold something," but it means "to hold it firmly." It means to grasp it with a determination. It indicates in this case a solid point of view – a very determined belief. This is in the present tense, which indicates that this was again the continual attitude of a large segment of the congregation in the Pergamum church. It is active, which means that the people have decided by deliberate choice to come to firmly hold this point of view, which reflected the same conditions and the same attitude and outlook that were true in Israel under Balaam's influence. This is a participle. It's a spiritual principle being stated here. You have people who possess a determined attitude. This attitude is also indicated in verse 14. The same verb is used up there about compromise with the world for the desired benefits under Balaam.

**People Act upon what they Believe**

In verse 14, he says, "But I have a few things against you because you have them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." That same word "krateo" is used there. They held it with a determination. Now the Lord Jesus says that in the church at Pergamum, they had the same kind of determined hanging on to a doctrine. The Greek word for "doctrine" is "didache." The "didache" is a teaching. That's what the word "didache" means. The word "doctrine," of course, means a teaching. A teaching is the basis here of one's actions. It's a principle of belief. This is a very important thing for us to understand – that people act upon what they believe.

Sometimes you do things reluctantly because you're not sure you believe that the principle upon which you're acting is true. That's why modern psychology and psychiatry has gone so far astray in attributing so strongly people's actions and what people do to something that happened to them in their past. That's utter stupid nonsense. That has very little to do with it. But there are some psychiatrists who believe that people do certain things as adults because their mother permitted them to have diaper rash as babies. So they grew up with a certain psychological problem that can be traced back to their diaper rash. Instead, people act upon teachings, and that's what causes people to do what they do. They believe certain things, and then they act upon it.

It is true that in a moment of passion and emotion, a person may do something that he doesn't believe he should do, and that he would not normally do. But under normal controlled conditions, what you do is the result of what you believe. So this tells us a great deal about these Christians in Pergamum. And don't forget that we are talking about Christians. These people were acting in a way that God, the Lord Jesus Christ, had to condemn. But they were acting this way, and bringing themselves under condemnation, because they had some wrong thinking. They had some wrong mental viewpoints. They had some wrong beliefs, and it was bringing down the judgment of God upon them.

**Hedonism**

These people, that the Lord is particularly referring to and for which he condemns the Pergamum church, were tolerating a doctrine which He describes as the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We will remind you again that the Nicolaitans were a New Testament heretical sect of whom we have little historical record. The church fathers were closer to that time period and, therefore, reflected what had been passed down to them concerning the Nicolaitans. There is a certain amount of validity and of truth in this sort of tradition that has been passed down. The sparse historical references that we have to the Nicolaitans seems to pretty firmly establish the fact that they were practicing hedonism. Hedonism means that you do everything that's pleasurable. You spend your whole life finding out what is pleasurable, and that's what you spend your life pursuing. Also, they were engaging in sexual immorality. Perhaps this was from the view that was promoted by the Gnosticism of the New Testament day – that the body was evil. And one way of dealing with the evil of the body under Gnosticism (you may recall) was to indulge the evil of the body. They just let the body do every vile, obscene thing that it wanted to do in order to simply exhaust the evil that is in the body.

Well, it seems that the Nicolaitans fell into Gnostic temperament and principle of indulging the evil that they viewed as being inherent in the body in order to destroy it. In any case, the church at Pergamum lacked the utter hatred of the practices of the Nicolaitans, which you will remember, is one of the things that the Lord Jesus said he was so pleased with about the Ephesian church. In Revelation 2:6, the Lord said, "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate." In the Ephesian church, they hated the principles of hedonism and the principle of sexual immorality and indulgence. In the Pergamum church, it was now being tolerated.

These departures from biblical standards of morality easily occur when a Christian becomes integrated with Satan's world society. That is the problem of going along with the world. When you go along with the world, you pick up its ways. The old expression says, "When you lie down with dogs, you come up with fleas." The same thing is true about the world. When you lie down with the world, you come up with the contamination of its evil. This is what was taking place. This is what comes through to us from Scripture. In the Pergamum church, they were trying to get along with the world's system, and keep the world from being mad at it. They did not want to come in conflict. They wanted to be cooperative and tolerant with the world. As a matter of fact, they wanted to look as much like it as possible.

The Greek Bible has another word here that is not translated here in our King James Version. That's the word "homoios." This is an adverb and it means "likewise" or "in the same way." We would translate verse 15 in this way: "Thus, you also have them." Remember that the "thus" looks back to the conditions of Balaam in the Old Testament: "Thus, you also have them who in the same way." That's "homoios." There it is: "in the same way:" "Hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." It is saying that you have the same condition existing that existed back in the Old Testament in Balaam's day with what he was recommending to Israel: "Get involved with the pagan societies around you – you in the same way, as those who in the same manner are holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans," which was the modern updated version of Balaam's doctrine and Balaam's principle.

At the end of verse 15, if you have a King James translation, you see the words, "Which things I hate." That is not in the Greek text. We must assume that some scribe in copying this text remembered what he had just written a few verses before in Revelation 2:6 about the Lord hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, and when he came upon copy the comments in Revelation 2:15 about the Nicolaitans again, he slipped in that expression from verse 6. It doesn't belong there in the Greek text, but certainly what he has said there is true. We know that from verse 6. God hates hedonism. God hates the indulgence of immorality. And what God hates, Christians should hate as well. You are not only to hate it terms of yourself, but I mean hate it in terms of every expression of that in our society.

God says, "I hate what these Nicolaitans stand for, and the principles that I hate, you as My children should hate as well. You and I need to be a lot more careful about recognizing the things that our God hates so that we have the same attitude toward it. Incidentally, one of the great things that David said in one of his psalms was that those who hate the Lord are the people he hates. How do you like them bananas? Those who hate his lord are people that David hates. So you can go around and be a cute little Christian who says, "Well, you don't hate people. You just hate what they stand for." David says, "I hate what they stand for, and I hate them for standing for it too, because my God hates them."

God is a very emotional God, under complete control and under complete orientation. You and I better jack up some emotions and have some occasions when we are just infuriated. To the people in Pergamum, the Lord Jesus Christ is coming across loud and clear, and very firm, and very severe, because this church was another church which finally was destroyed and went out of existence. The Lord was giving it a chance to survive. But this modern practice of ours, of blurring the distinctions of doctrine and blurring the distinctions of biblical morality serves Satan's cause, just as they did in the New Testament times under the Nicolaitans. Christians are so obsessed today with projecting an image of love. They are so obsessed with getting the world to like them and getting the world to honor them, that they cannot cooperate with God. But there are some times when the people of the world, whether it's in business; in social life; in education; in religion; or, in anything else, have gone too far. In honor and Christian character and a sense of personal esteem and a sense of responsibility for indeed the well-being of people, there comes a time when you stand up to the world and you square off, and you have a shootout. But no, what have we learned? That we always try to keep on good terms with the world.

David said, "When you reject my God, you have rejected the things He stands for. I stand for the things that my God stands for. When you have rejected my God, you have rejected me. So the next time you see me, don't you grin at me. Don't you smile and be cute with me. Don't you ask me for social amenities or social relationships. Don't you ask me to join you in things. When you have rejected my God, my God hates that rejection, and I hate it."

That's what was happening in Pergamum. Get it in perspective in its updated version because that's what's happening to us today: the practice of blurring the distinctives of doctrine; and, the practice of tolerating violations of biblical morality just because we're so obsessed with cooperating with each other, including other Christians with whom we ought not to be cooperating. That's why we as Christians do not go hat-in-hand to the world asking for favors. The world is indebted to us for the fact that we are the salt. We are the stabilizing factor in society that is saving it for any hope that it has. We don't go hat-in-hand asking favors of the people of the world. When you do, the world will be eager to jump to give you its favors, and you will pay the price. You'll be right in the boat of the Nicolaitans that Jesus Christ so strongly condemned.

Well, the result today is a Christianity which is corrupted by evolutionary humanism, and a Christianity with which God does not have anything to do with it all. You know, sometimes people don't like you to criticize certain religious groups, like if you say something about the Mormons or the Roman Catholic church or the Muslims. Well, they need to realize that God doesn't have anything to do with the Mormon Church. God doesn't have anything to do with it all. God doesn't have anything to do with the Roman Catholic Church. It's just a religious group that connects it with Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ has no connection with it. God has nothing to do whatsoever with the Muslims. You're not even talking about something that God has anything to do with. So it's really quite stupid for you to say that you think it doesn't please God to say these things about these religious groups that are trying to serve Him.

When a local church, such as the church of Pergamum here, begins to violate the principles of doctrine and of God's standards of absolute righteousness, then the time comes finally, as it did in Pergamum, where God simply cuts out. He simply detaches Himself. Sometimes when it happens in a local church, the church will fold up. But very often, it can have enough resources that it keeps going. You have churches all over the Dallas Metroplex area that are doing great business and that have all the accouterments of church operation, but God has nothing to do with it. The Lord Jesus Christ has no connection with those local organizations whatsoever. He doesn't have any more connection with that than He does with some Buddhist temple that's clanking and gonging its way through some religious ritual; burning its incense; and, carrying on. God has nothing to do with it.

That's easy for you to understand. You can say, "Well, yes, I can see that He doesn't have anything to do with some Buddhist operation." Well, I can guarantee you that He doesn't have anything to do with a system that corrupts sound doctrine and that corrupts His standards of right and wrong. So forget it, and understand that you are dealing with something that has nothing to do with the Word of God.

Continuing: "So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans." May God forbid that that should be true of us. As Paul has taught us, we're not victims of the sin nature anymore. We're not under its sovereign control. But you have a body that's calling for all kinds of desires that the sin nature is fanning into action and inflaming. The Word of God says this is what the Nicolaitans did. They said, "Give in. Indulge that immorality. Indulge that attitude." God says, "I hate this. This is not to be the path of my people."

Verses 16 and 17 conclude this letter with a divine warning and a divine promise. In verse 16, we have first an appeal: "Repent or else I will come unto you quickly." The word "repent" is the Greek word "metanoeo." "Metanoeo" means simply "to change the mind." We would describe this as an about-face. It is a call here to change their mental attitude toward the doctrines of Balaam and the doctrines of these Nicolaitans, both of whom seem to be in the same similar category of neutrality toward evil – a soft pedaling of antagonisms toward pagan doctrine. This is in the aorist tense, which means that there is a certain point at which a person has to make the decision. He has to make the decision that he is no longer going to go along with this kind of compromise. It is in the active voice, which means that an individual personally has to exercise his will to make this choice. It is in the imperative mood, which means that it is a command from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Pergamum Christians were holding a tolerant or neutral attitude toward the doctrinal heresies of the pagans which Jesus Christ will not tolerate, and toward which He will not be neutral. The pastor-teacher, evidently, at the church at Pergamum (or the several churches there) did not seem to go along with this. We don't have any indication that he was guilty of this compromise which is described, but apparently he was guilty of the fact that he did not denounce the practice which was taking place on the part of some of the members. The Pergamum congregation then was to deal with those members who held the principles of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. They were to separate themselves from their practice, and they were to condemn this promotion of demonism.

The Lord Jesus says, "You must do this. You must separate yourself from this evil. You must change your mind (your attitude) about your toleration of this evil, or else I will remove Myself from you." Of course, that's exactly what God does. Many times God simply removes Himself from a religious group, which perhaps at one time started on a firm foundation of biblical truth. There are denominations that exist today that when they began, were very biblical, and were very oriented to the Word of God. Gradually, the liberalism that began in Germany seeped into that denomination and into its theological schools, and gradually those groups completely drifted away from a biblical frame of reference; perverted the doctrine of salvation; perverted the doctrine of grace; and, finally came to the place where the Lord Jesus Christ actually simply walked off from them. He simply left them and simply abandoned them. They had had their warning through the Word of God. They refuse to repent. That's what apparently happened by and large here in Pergamum. Jesus Christ simply walked off and left these people. And that does not necessarily mean that the organization goes out of business or goes out of operation. These groups simply continue. They use the same religious words, and they use the same religious terminology, but God absolutely has nothing to do with it. God is not even involved in what they are doing. He has totally separated Himself from it.

When we get to the seventh letter, we will see how true that is, because there the Lord specifically spells out this particular point: that He separates Himself. He does it under the guise of saying that God simply vomits these people out of his mouth, which is a very vivid picture of God regurgitating, in complete nausea and disgust, that which is claiming to be done in His name. Such churches are actually guided by Satan, and their programs indicate this because they very often devolve very quickly into programs of human good to which the unbelievers of Satan's world can relate themselves. So churches have gotten into social action programs by and large who have completely cut themselves off from the living God, and their human good makes them think that they are still in the category of pleasing God.

The Greek language has a word which is left out, if you have a King James translation. After the word "repent" comes the word "oun." The word "oun" is a conjunction which means "therefore." It is expressing a consequence in view of the scriptural attitude which has been held in Pergamum: "Change your mind, therefore, in view of this problem that has been pointed out to you." Then we have the word "or else." In the Greek, this is actually the three words "ei de me." These are three Greek words which literally mean "but if not," if you were going to translate it literally. We would simply translate it as "otherwise." That's the idea. "Or else" is a good translation.

He says, "Or else, if they do not change their attitude about the toleration of pagan doctrines and interrelating themselves to it, He says that He will come." This is the Greek word "erchomai." This word means to arrive on the scene. It is in the present tense. But this is a present which the Greek uses in terms of a future. It's called a futuristic presence. That's why we translate it, "I will come." It refers to the arrival of Jesus Christ at some point in the future to exercise judgment upon the local church. Because this future event is so certain of taking place, it is expressed in the present tense because it is certain to happen. It is just as if it were already happening. This is middle voice, but it has an active meaning. Jesus Christ Himself does the coming. It's indicative mood – a statement of fact.

"Change your mind. Otherwise, I will come unto you." The word "you" here is indeed in the singular. It refers to the congregation in Pergamum as a whole, with its mixture of compromisers and non-compromisers. He says that this will take place quickly, which is this adverb "tachu." This means speedily. The correcting of toleration of compromise with the world's ways must be done at once. The longer involvement with the world system is permitted to continue in a local church, the harder it will be to turn that congregation back. The longer involvement with the world's viewpoint continues in the congregation, the more acclimated the members become, and the harder it is for somebody to stand up and say, "Hey, wait a minute. This is wrong. This is not the way God thinks." People, by that time, have become so used to the wrong views and found so much confirmation from the world, that they will look at the person who is trying to sound the warning as being the one who is out of line.

So Jesus says, "I will come to deal with this matter and I'll come to deal with it very quickly, because prolonged involvement with this sort of thing rapidly destroys a church's usefulness in the angelic warfare. So it has to be stopped quickly. So He says, "Change your mind, or else I'll come unto you very, very quickly.

When He comes, He's going to come for a certain purpose. That is discipline, which he describes in the last part of verse 16. He uses the word "and" to indicate what He will do when He arrives. What he will do, He says, is He "Will fight" ("polemeo"). "Polemeo" is the Greek word that actually means "to make war." It is the source, you can see, of the English word "polemics," which is doing battle with words, or arguing a certain point. Verse 12 of this letter, you will remember, introduced Jesus Christ to this church as one who has a sword. So it is fitting to use this word for making war at this point, because what Jesus Christ is saying is that He will declare war on the teachers and the followers of those who participate in moral evil, and those who cooperate with the false religions of the day.

So the Lord Jesus says, "This is a serious matter. You are undermining the ability of my congregation to function as a fighting unit in the angelic conflict. I will come and make war on you instead if you do not change your mind." I will make war against." That's the proposition "meta," indicating the objective of the divine attack. "Against them" is the Greek word "autos." It is in the plural. It is a significant word because it is indicating that the Lord Jesus is distinguishing between those who are involved with practicing the evils of the pagan religions and those who have refuse to get involved with it. So He is indicating by "autos" that He is talking about them – those in that congregation who were guilty of this kind of compromise. He distinguishes, for example, between those and such a man as we read about earlier in verse 13 – this man that He called the faithful Antipas, who actually gave his life. He was a martyr for the fact that he refused to participate in the emperor worship, and refused to seek the toleration of the pagans by compromising the doctrines of the Word of God.

**The Sword of Christ's Mouth**

So the Lord Jesus uses this word "them" to indicate that there are some people in the congregation who are guilty of this. But there are many others who are not guilty of it. He is not coming after the innocent. He is coming after those who are guilty. He says that he will come quickly. He will make war against them "with." And the word "with" is actually the Greek preposition "en," which here means "by means of." It indicates the means. It indicates the weapons that the Lord will use in making war upon those who indulge in evil. The weapon that He uses, He calls "a sword." There are different words for "sword" in the New Testament. The one here is the "hromphaia." This is the large broadsword that the Thracians used. It is a sword that one actually used two hands to manipulate. It was handled in such a way that a person who was using this in battle was literally going down the line, cutting a swath of human bodies out of the way as this sword was swung from side to side. It is a symbol for the means with which Jesus Christ will attack the evil doers. This is the "hromphaia" sword, and it shows that Jesus Christ is going to flail people left and right.

This sword is connected with His mouth. The Bible calls it His "stoma." This is the word that is used to represent what Jesus said. It is the mind of Christ expressed verbally as we have it now recorded in the Word of God, the Bible. We have references in the Bible to the Word of God as being the sword of God. Just to remind you of a few of those, you have one in Ephesians 6:17, where we read in the last part of the verse, "And the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." So Bible doctrine is the sword that the Lord is referring to here.

You'll find this also in 2 Thessalonians 2:8: "And then shall that wicked one be revealed (that is, the man of sin, the antichrist), whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming. Here again, it is the Word of God. It is what Jesus Christ has to say that will be the basis of destroying the antichrist.

In Revelation 19:15, we read, "And out of His mouth goes the sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations." So when the Lord comes to judge the nations, it is going to be on the basis of what He has said. You may compare Isaiah 11:4 in the Old Testament that presents that same principle. So when He speaks about the sword of His mouth, He is referring here to Bible doctrine, which is the basis upon which God always judges a human being. God always judges on the basis of the declaration of doctrine. We have this confirmed for us in John 12:48 where we read, the Lord Jesus saying, "He that rejects Me and receives not My words, has one that judges him. The words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in that last day." So the Lord made it very clear that all the things he was telling the people in his day, and all the things he was using in the form of instruction, was what God was going to use as the weapon against them in judgments in time. So the sword of His mouth is the Word of God.

So verse 16 gives this warning: they are to change their minds. Otherwise, Jesus Christ says that He will come very quickly to deal with this congregation, and specifically he will make war upon those in the congregation with the Word of God. He will destroy them with the Word of God. He will destroy them with doctrine. In other words, doctrine can develop you, or doctrine can destroy you, because the Bible tells us that if you know to do right and you do not do it, then it is sin to you, and you have the brought judgment and discipline upon you. If you know the Word of God and then you violate the principles of the Word of God, you bring judgment upon you. He's going to come to this church. He has explained to them the truth – the problem that exists. Now the very words of His mouth are going to be the weapons with which He makes war upon them.

Verse 17 brings us to the reward: "He that has an ear, let him hear." "He that has" is the word "echo." "Echo" means "to possess." The reference here is to the capacity and the heart of these Christians in Pergamum whom He is addressing. It is present tense. It's a constant possession. It's active. They actually possess it. Possess what? An ear." This is the Greek word "ous." That's the noun that refers to the physical organ that you have on the side of your head. Everybody has ears for physical hearing. However, this has a spiritual symbolic meaning, because He is referring here to the capacity to receive spiritual instruction – to hear divine viewpoint with a positive response. There are many people who can sit under instruction of the Word of God, and they can hear the facts, and they can understand those facts, but they are so negative and so rebellious against what the Word of God is telling them that their spiritual ears are not capable of hearing and understanding and receiving what God is saying.

So He is addressing a specialized group who have ears specifically, He says, "Which can hear." The word is "akouo." "Akouo" is the word that means to hear in such a way as to obey; to listen; and, to pay attention. It connotes grasping what the blessings are that are in store for those who respond. He is going to spell out those blessings here in a moment. It's in the third person, singular. So here Jesus Christ is indicating individual Christians. He's not talking now to the congregation as a whole. He is now talking to the individual believer to be concerned for his own blessings that God has for him. A lot of Christians miss a great deal of blessing that God has for them just because they're not concerned to place themselves in a position where that blessing can come to them. A great deal of what God would do for them, they have put themselves in a position where he can do it for them. So the Lord Jesus here is saying that He's speaking to those who have the capacity to hear as individuals what He is saying in order to take this into account relative to what this means to them personally. It is in the aorist tense – at the point of every Christian who can hear. He has an ear that he should hear. It's active. He does the listening. It's imperative. It's a command.

He should hear something specific that he calls "what." It's "tis" in the Greek. This indicates the content of what the Holy Spirit has to say. He uses the word "spirit" ("pneuma"). The word "pneuma" here refers to God the Holy Spirit who is the one who teaches us what God thinks. He gives us divine viewpoint. He's the one who reveals the future blessings which await those who can respond with positive volition. What he points out here is that it is something that we understand: "You who have the capacity to listen to spiritual things (to receive spiritual things), I now command you to obey what the Holy Spirit says." The word "says" is this word "lego." The word "lego" is a word that stresses the contents of what is said. It does not stress the individual words that are in there. It stresses content. The point that he is making here is that the Holy Spirit's message, rather than the words themselves, is what you are to be listening to. That is significant. Obviously, if you are going to listen to the message, He is indicating it is something you can understand. God the Holy Spirit always communicates with an intelligible message. God the Holy Spirit always expresses Himself to us in a way that we can understand.

This is one of the primary condemnations of the charismatic movement today, because the charismatic movement violates this basic biblical principle that God always speaks an intelligible message. God never speaks to us in a way that we cannot understand what He has said. It is interesting that John here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses this word "lego" which stresses content rather than individual words. Satan always speaks in terms of non-content. Satan speaks in terms of nonsense. Sometimes you listen to what some of these cults and religions of the world teach, and you find that it doesn't make sense to you, because the content is nonsense, as well as indeed the very words by which they convey it. The Holy Spirit has propositions of truth to convey to us, which propositions we understand with our minds. We relate to them with our thinking, not with our emotions.

So here is a message that someone is to understand, that the Spirit of God is delivering, and that someone is the churches. This is the "ekklesia." The "ekklesia" is the word for "assembly." It refers to the local church organizations. The local church is God's agency in this age for conveying his divine viewpoints. The Lord's work in Satan's world is only as effective as this "ekklesia" organization is. The spiritual condition of the local churches determines the effectiveness of the Lord's work. In the city of Pergamum, things were getting pretty bad, because the church there was deviating in such a way in compromising with the evil of paganism that the Lord's work was now being hindered. Here, where it says, "The Spirit speaks unto the churches," He is appealing to the group. So now he has faced the local church organization as a whole, and He speaks to them. The Holy Spirit speaks basically to a congregation through the pastor-teacher. But the response has to be individual.

One thing that's interesting to notice is that this is the last letter with which a word of exhortation is given before a word is given to the overcomers. It has a word of exhortation before the word goes to the overcomers. The word to the overcomers is always to individuals. The word of exhortation is always to the group as a whole. What this indicates in these first four letters is that, while the conditions are bad, and while as you went around the circuit of these four churches, and as you apply this to the historical period of church history that they represented, you see a gradual breakdown and a gradual deterioration in the condition of the local church and its testimony. But it indicates that up to this point, the condition that yet exists here in the church at Pergamum, where they're beginning to want to have the favors of government as happened under Constantine and thereafter, that the condition is not yet so bad that they have reached the point of no return. So the local congregation in Pergamum as an organization can yet be saved. That's the point. They can yet respond. They have not degenerated beyond the point of no return. So before He speaks to individuals within that congregation, preserving themselves, he talks to the congregation as a whole. In this letter, the exhortation to the group comes first. There is still hope for your church. And then comes the exhortation to the individuals within that church structure.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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