

Hold on to Jesus | Warning Signs #4

 www.pursuegod.org/cling-to-christ-warning-signs-4/

The ancient city of Pergamum was known for its many temples and idols to the Greek gods and to the Roman Emperor. The Christian church there suffered persecution for not bowing to these idols and worshiping the emperor.

Are You a “Hands-on” or a “Hands-off” Christian?

Though much of Jesus’s letter to the church at Pergamum challenges their unfaithfulness, he starts out praising their faith. There was once a time when the Christians at Pergamum even endured the death of one of their friends from persecution.

Revelation 2:13 *I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan’s city.*

A more literal translation of the phrase “remained loyal” from the verse above is “cling” or “hold tightly.” Jesus is saying: “you held onto your faith in me when the going got tough.” Even after their friend Antipas died for his faith, the Pergamenes “held on” to Jesus.

Like these ancient believers, many of us have endured hardship and kept the faith while struggling against poverty, sickness, death, and loss. But the problem for Pergamum – and the problem for some of us – is that even though they once held tightly to Jesus, they no longer were. They began taking a “hands-off” approach to their faith, so Jesus sent them a warning in [Revelation 2](#).

You Can’t Be Hands-on and Hands-off with Jesus

Jesus’s warning to the Pergamenes is also a warning for Christians today. After praising them for their past faith, Jesus says:

Revelation 2:14-16 *But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Like in verse 2:13, the Greek word used for “tolerating” and “following” the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans literally reads “hold onto.” Jesus drew a line in the sand for Pergamum. Would they allow those who “held onto” false teachings to reign in the church and thus become “hands-off” with Jesus, or would they “hold onto” Jesus like they once had and rid the church of false teaching? If they refused, the false teaching would eventually infect the entire church. Pergamum could not be both “hands on” and “hands off,” and neither can we.

Having a great spiritual heritage like Pergamum did does not exempt us from judgment or from the daily need of following Jesus Christ. What if we approached our marriages or jobs with this mentality – that because we got married at some point or we were hired at some point we are now exempt from loving our spouses and from doing our jobs today? We would destroy our marriages and lose our jobs.

Pergamum became susceptible to spiritual compromise with false teachers for this very reason. People are always going to have a focal point in life. If you're a Christian, that focal point is supposed to be Jesus.

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other.

Hold onto Jesus

Even if the warning to Pergamum doesn't directly apply to where you are right now, it easily and quickly could apply to you. There is a reason Jesus calls us to follow him every day.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me."*

Choosing to allow negative influences and bad habits to dominate our time, energy, and attention can quickly give rise to competing loyalties and spiritual apathy, like at Pergamum. We may soon find that we are "holding" most tightly onto the things in our garages, the money in our bank accounts, the successes of our sports or academic careers, our identities, our time and energy, or anything else at all. Any Christian, at any time, can find something to put in Jesus's place if they stop holding onto him first and foremost.

Identify the influence in your life that tempt you to release Jesus and live a "hands off" Christianity. Seek other believers to keep you accountable. Holding onto Jesus is not just a one-time decision, but a series of continuing decisions. If we forget this, we risk the same warning given to Pergamum 2,000 years ago.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Watch the video together or invite someone to summarize the topic.*
2. *What are the spiritual high points in your past that you can look back on? Why does do these times resonate with you?*
3. *Have you known someone who has kept the faith despite great trial? How were you encouraged by that person? If you experienced great trial, how did you get through it?*
4. *Have you ever seen or known someone who became "hands off" with Jesus? What happened? If things went bad, what could have changed the outcome into a good one?*
5. *Read [Matthew 6:24](#). Why do you think people so easily allow competing loyalties to sway their commitments?*
6. *Have you at times become "hands off" with Jesus? If so, would you describe this as your current situation? Explain.*
7. *What habits or temptations might cause you to stumble in keeping Jesus first? Why are these things uniquely challenging for you?*
8. *Who are some people who can help keep you accountable to living a "hands on" Christianity?*
9. *What is one step you can take to live a more "hands on" Christianity? What do you need to do to implement this step?*
10. *Write a personal action step based on this conversation.*