

REVELATION

Revelation 2:12-17 (The Church of Pergamum)

white/beautiful blouse(lipstick/mustard) we like things/expect things to be clean, tidy, unsullied
-What is it about our nature as humans that we are drawn to things being unsoiled, unpolluted, & uncontaminated – like a virgin snow/clean pair of underwear. What does that say about our new?

Ephesus – major metropolis (Lead city; Lead church=Jesus to Eph.=lead well); Smyrna -Beautiful, wealthy (=persecution)=Jesus reminded the Smyrnans that He had conquered death=don't fear!

Pergamum – a city on a hill; the 2nd most important city in Asia Minor, 200K people; a large mountain-side city with a large population. It was a city with it's Acropolis high on top of the mtn with a massive fertile valley below to support farming. Known as one of the most beautiful valleys in the world.

*The 2nd largest library in the known world (only Alexandria was bigger) -200k vol./Parchment

A. Center of learning & knowledge – a receptacle for global information -like a modern university;

B. Center of medicine, Med. Sch., psychology. Hippocrates (Hippocratic oath -do no harm);

=temple priests of Asclepius -the form of a Snake, known as the “Savior” would administer help to pilgrims suffering from disease; ancient hospitals (healing of the body was a spiritual act of faith)

C. Center of Pagan worship: Pergamum was known for its Pantheon of Temples & Emp. Worship.

*The Alter of Zeus (Pergamum alter) was one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world (now Berlin);

=Pergamum was a globally important city as a seat of political power, education, medicine

READ Revelation 2:12-17

¹² “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: Jesus self identifies as: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: Jesus’ words are like a sword that both defends Truth and cuts into falsehood/lies & idolatry. =What Jesus is about to share is both a warning and refers to judgment. Sword=deadly! This is deadly serious why?? –b/c souls are at stake! & God’s rightful glory is being robbed (not just in the pagan city), BUT in the church too! impurity

Commendation:

¹³ ‘I know where you dwell, (the city of Pergamum) where Satan’s throne is;

You have your favorites -things you prefer (coke/water brand; clothes; TX =brand of guns ☺)

=apparently satan does too. Twice Jesus states that Satan favors this city =his sphere of activity

-Education center (wants to make sure that one doubts the existence of the One True God)

A. Philosophy reigns; knowledge reigns =source of true enlightenment =GNOSTICISM

B. Pagan worship reigns: (Massive temple complex of false gods and idolatry: Temples of Zeus, Apollo; Aphrodite; Dionysus; Athena; Asclepius-the god of healing (first place clinical psychology in modern world) -Nothing about the knowledge or power of the One True God -Yahweh.

C. Pergamum Alter (Massive temple complex to worship the “creator god,” “King of gods”=ZEUS), this would have drawn people from all over the world (like Artemis’ Temple) pilgrim/worship -1100ft high (Eiffel Tower) – towers over the valley as the beacon of pagan worship. Resembles a THRONE=a seat of power. Actual place of worship to Zeus/false god & spiritual place of satanic act

¹³ ‘I know where you dwell (where you are living/doing life; “I know” your cultural context)=hard

*Jesus is commending the faithful Christians at Pergamum, knowing they face a huge cultural challenge with the Pantheon of Temples and Idolatry everywhere; and that Satan has favored that town and asserted a demonic stronghold over the city. [Beautiful; high; towering; gleaming] = an ancient marvel... a wealthy center of education, political power, & worship (for body & soul)

AND these are a *perfect distraction* from the ultimate truth (One True God & Jesus as Son of God).

***Idols of power, position, education, health, & the worship of that which is altogether FALSE**

where Satan's throne is; a comment about either the Pergamum Alter to Zeus; Temple worship of the emperor, or the Pantheon as a collective of Idolatry/pagan worship. =All FALSE gods!!

***(Notice that Satan's hangout is not a dark dingy alleyway, a gutter, a filthy sewer – NO it was a beautifully adorned marble city that stood for progress, power, education, health, & worship!)**

and you hold firmly to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas,

-Jesus is commending this church for not disbanding even under the worst circum./persecution

***Antipas was the bishop of Pergamum who was burned to death inside a bronze, bull-shaped altar for refusing to renounce Christ. Publicly killed to stamp out Christianity. =Demanded full loyalty**

Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. Antipas

Faithful leader/martyr for the local church who gave his life for the sake of Christ's Name/glory!!

=Jesus names this martyr pastor/bishop of Pergamum & the model he set to die *for God's glory*

-Satan attacked the pastor, the leader of the church w/hopes of destroying/persuading Ch to flee

-John 10:10 = only ONE playbook **but many applications**.....

...If satan could not destroy the church from outward attacks, he attacks from within

Correction: The Church allowed the purity of the gospel message to be stained w/impurity and immorality *which continued*. **These new leaders allowed the spiritual cancer to spread...**

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have *some* there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak 'to put a stumbling block [temptation to sin] before the sons of Israel,' to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

Jesus is calling out the false doctrine & false teachers who permit & encourage immorality in ch.

-In allowing some in the church to *continue* in **known** and **unrepentant sin**, the church had allowed sin/impurity to taint others, confuse others, and tempt others into sinfulness.

=Participating in GrecoRoman orgies, idol feasts, & drunken debauchery (=abusing the holy design of covenantal union/sex btwn man/woman in Marriage; **conflating food & wine w/worsh.**

=Excess; self-indulgence; gluttony; license; selfishness =the neglect/abuse of God's design/*gifts*

Jesus is comparing these first century bad-actors in the church of Pergamum to the OT prophet Balaam in Numbers 22 who, for the sake of unrighteous gain, devised to curse the sons of Israel by (corruption from within the camp) tempting them to not obey God fully and lean into their own fleshly desires and lust. Against God's will, the Israelites lay w/ Moabite/Midianite women & then participated with them in pagan rituals of worship. (**Lust; fornication; Idolatry**)

-2 Peter 2:15 "**abandoning the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the reward of unrighteousness** (loved gain from wrongdoing).

***The doctrine/teaching of Balaam implies that a Christian can fully embrace the things of the world and still serve God. This is FALSE. God calls us all into holiness/Christlikeness!**

-James 4:4 "**You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**"

Pergamum was a church easily swayed by the pagan culture overwhelming her w/lies & tempt.

-Jesus is rebuking the church at Pergamum for allowing false teachers to lure & disciple spiritually immature Christians into believing that how they act & live does not matter to God!

=This is a **leadership** issue: God has called out, raised up leaders to model, train, hold 'em account.

=This is a **heart** issue: This is *NOT* about legalism (that salv. is tied to our actions/righteousness)

BUT...b/c our hearts are tied to mind/emotions=what we believe affects how we feel/what we do
Our hearts are bent toward willful sin/rebellion. We need **Truth; love & accountability**

This IS about faithful discipleship (learning & being transformed by Holy Spirit into holiness)
=sanctification AND the spiritual fruit of holiness/Christlikeness when confronted in sin.

*Jesus warns that Satan persecutes ch; then tries to tempt fr. within; *then* pressure to accept heresy

¹⁵ So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Jesus gets very specific in this heretical group in Pergamum trying to influence the church and bring heresy and division into the church. The Nicolaitans were a small but influential group from the early church -thought to be followers of Nicolas (one of the first deacons in Jerusalem) who led believers away into **spiritual license**: abusing holiness and embracing sexual immorality, self-indulgence, and heathenism within Christianity. [Irenaeus 160AD stated the "*Nicolaitans lived lives of unrestrained indulgence*"] **Jesus said He hated this!** Church, take note! How we live & how we lead MATTERS to Jesus; what we believe & tolerate matters!!

Call to Action:

¹⁶ Therefore **repent**; or else I am coming to you quickly, and **I will wage war against them with the sword of My mouth**. This is NOT the meek, gentle, humble & lowly Jesus -**BUT** the warrior King who will defend the honor of His Bride – to the death if necessary! Jesus is deadly serious about holiness in His church; His HOLY Spirit is to lead us into **holiness**/Christlikeness!

Jesus will clean house if necessary; false teachers BEWARE! Unfaithful disciples take notice!
When body is dirty=bathe; Jesus will purify His church & usually through pain/purging=effective

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

To the one who overcomes, ...spiritual rewards for the faithful:

- A. **I will give some of the hidden manna**, =spiritual nourishment found only in His presence. This is the divine food that comes only with those in a relationship w/Jesus & contrasts the food bought/eaten from an idol sacrifice which will rot. The more we spend time w/Jesus the more we receive eternal & spiritual nourishment from Him & His Word =**sufficient/plenary**
- B. **and I will give him a white stone**, (court acquittal OR a 1st Century invitation/ticket)
- C. **and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.**
 - o **Judicial acquittal**: In ancient courts, a white stone signified a vote of acquittal, while a black stone meant condemnation. The white stone promised to the overcomer perfect and final justification and absolution (salvation and cleansing)
 - o **Admission to banquets**: A white stone or token could grant access to a banquet or special event. For Christians, this would symbolize entry into the marriage supper of the Lamb -better than any pagan orgy feast. The **New name** inscribed on the white stone ticket represents the new life found only in Christ in contrast to the old, compromised, depraved life

Application

1. We are to watch our lives and doctrine, what we believe and how we live as Believers in the church – the world is watching as is the Lord!

-1 Tim. 4:16 **"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."**

2. We are to model and safeguard what is being taught in the Church. Who disciples matters!

Community Group Discussion Questions

1. **Jesus introduces Himself as the One with the sharp, double-edged sword (v.12).**
 - What does this image reveal about Christ's authority and how He deals with truth and falsehood in His church?
2. **Pergamum was described as the place "where Satan's throne is."**
 - Where do you see spiritual opposition or cultural pressure most strongly in our world today? In our city?
3. **Jesus commends the church for holding fast to His name even in persecution.**
 - What does it look like for believers today to "hold fast" when faith is unpopular or costly?
4. **But Jesus also rebukes them for tolerating false teaching (vv.14–15).**
 - What are some modern forms of "Balaam's teaching" or "the Nicolaitans' teaching" that tempt Christians to compromise truth for comfort?
5. **Compromise often begins subtly.**
 - What small compromises in faith, truth, or holiness are easy for Christians—or for you personally—to rationalize?
6. **Jesus calls His people to repent.**
 - Why is repentance an act of grace and not condemnation?
 - What helps you respond to correction with humility rather than defensiveness?
7. **Jesus promises hidden manna and a white stone with a new name (v.17).**
 - What do these symbols say about intimacy, acceptance, and reward for those who stay faithful to Christ?
 - How does that eternal promise strengthen your resolve to remain faithful today?
 - What is Jesus actually offering Believers who remain faithful?

Pictures of Acropolis; model of city; ancient theatre; Altar of Pergamum –
Alter to Zeus