

The Compromising Church

Revelation 2:12-17

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Review: Rev 2:8-11 – The Persecuted Church, Smyrna

- Better to be a spiritually rich, materially poor Christian than a spiritually poor, materially rich Christian
- Persecution is to be expected by spiritually rich Christians; this testing makes us more like Christ
- The Crown of life is a special reward for enduring persecution in this world.

Revelation 2:12 – To the church at Pergamos.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

What do we know about Pergamos?

This was the political capital of the Roman Province of Asia the Less. When John wrote, Pergamos had been the capital city of the region for more than three hundred years.

- The city was a noted center for culture and education, having one of the great libraries of the ancient world, with more than 200,000 volumes.
- It had temples to the Greek and Roman gods Dionysus, Athena, Demeter, and Zeus.
- It also had three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman Emperor.

This city was especially known for the worship of the deity known as Asclepius. Represented by a serpent, Asclepius was the god of healing and knowledge.

- There was a medical school at his temple in Pergamos. Because of the famous temple to the Roman god of healing, sick and diseased people from all over came there for relief.
- Sufferers would spend the night in the temple which had harmless snakes. If the sufferer was touched by one of the snakes, it was considered to be the touch of the god himself bringing healing.

What is the significance of Jesus being described as *He who has the sharp two-edged sword*?

In Revelation 1:16, John observed of Jesus, *out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword*. Now, Jesus “showed” this **two-edged sword** to the Christians in Pergamos.

- The description of the sword in Revelation 1:18 helps us to associate it with the *mouth* of Jesus. Jesus will

confront this church with His word, and they will feel the **sharp** edges.

Jesus would use this **sharp two-edged sword** to make some separation among the Christians in Pergamos.

Hebrews 4:12 – *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Rev 2:13 – What Jesus knows about the church

I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

What is significant about Jesus knowing their works?

Jesus said this to each church. It is true of each one of us. He knows our **works**, even if there isn’t much to know.

Where did they dwell in Pergamos?

where Satan’s throne is: In many ways, Pergamos was a stronghold of Satanic power...

- Pergamos was a center of “Asclepius Savior.”
- Pergamos had a huge throne-like altar dedicated to the Roman god Zeus.
- Pergamos was the political center of the worship-demanding Roman government.

What was praiseworthy about the Pergamos church?

And you hold fast to My name: Despite the fact they lived in such a difficult city, the Christians of Pergamos held fast to their faith in Jesus (**hold fast to My name... did not deny My faith**).

Who specifically did Jesus praise?

Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you: One specific man among the Christians of Pergamos received a precious title (**faithful martyr**). This same title was held by Jesus also (Revelation 1:5).

What does it tell us that all we know about *Antipas* is in this passage?

Antipas is one of the great almost-anonymous heroes of the Bible. While being a person of obscure note in the world, Jesus still took notice of him.

- **Antipas** lived **where Satan's throne** was; yet he stood against the attacks and the evil around him.
- He fulfilled the meaning of his name; **Antipas** means "Against All."

What is a Martyr?

Martyr is the ancient Greek word *martus*. *Martus* didn't mean a *martyr* in our sense of the term; it meant a *witness*.

- A *martus* was one who said: 'This is true, and I know it.'
- It is not until later that *martus* came to mean means *martyr*.

How are Christian martyrs different from Islamic martyrs?

Christian martyrs don't seek to be killed. Muslim martyrs believe they are earning passage to paradise if they are killed while murdering infidels.

Revelation 2:14-15 – The Problem at Pergamos.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

What problem did the Pergamos church have?

You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam: Balaam was a prototype of all corrupt teachers. According to Numbers 22-24 and 31, Balaam combined the sins of immorality and idolatry to please Balak, the king of Moab, because he could not curse Israel directly.

What did the doctrine of Balaam cause people to do?

When Balaam counseled Balak, he taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. The stumbling block was connected with idolatry (to eat things sacrificed to idols) and sexual immorality.

- If the church in Pergamos had those who did hold the doctrine of Balaam, it showed they had tendencies towards both idolatry and immorality.

Why was avoiding sexual immorality a problem in the Roman culture?

Sexual immorality was simply taken for granted, and the person who lived by Biblical standards of purity was considered strange. Roman statesman Cicero said:

"If there is anyone who thinks that young men should not be allowed the love of many women, he is extremely severe."

To keep from **sexual immorality** in that culture, you really had to swim against the current.

What was the other problem at the Pergamos church?

You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans: In Revelation 2:6, Jesus praised the Ephesian Christians because they hated *the deeds of the Nicolaitans*. But the **Nicolaitans** also had their **doctrine**, and some among the Christians of Pergamos held **the doctrine of the Nicolaitans**.

What is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans?

The title *Nico-laitans* has the idea of a proud authority and a hierarchical separatism. The name *Nikao-laos* literally means "to conquer the people."

- According to ancient commentators, the **Nicolaitans** also approved of immorality.

Was Jesus' rebuke only directed at those who held to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans?

The rebuke was also against those who allowed them to continue (**you have there those... you have those**).

- The Christians of Pergamos were like the Christians of Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-9). They were too tolerant and accepting of false doctrines and immoral living.
- Satan couldn't accomplish much by persecution, because many did *hold fast*, like Antipas. So Satan tried to accomplish his goals by using deception.

Why is false doctrine tolerated?

Laziness... just ignoring something is easier than confronting it.

- Satan takes advantage of that human tendency.

How is today's church like the church in Pergamos?

Way too many churches are being influenced by our culture and compromising with the doctrines of men...

- Wokeness – tolerating LGBTQ & CRT doctrine
- Prosperity Gospel – thinking we are approved by God because of our prosperity but really spiritually poor.
- Theistic Evolution – a flat-out compromise with Naturalism.
- Universalism – Fundamentalism is just too offensive

Revelation 2:16 – What Pergamos should do.

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

What should the church at Pergamos do?

Repent: Turn from their sin. Five of the seven churches are commanded to repent.

- **Repent** is a command that applies to Christians, not just to those who first come to Jesus.

What would Jesus do if the church refused to repent?

I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth: Unless they do **repent**, the Christians of Pergamos would face the Jesus who has the two-edged sword.

1 Peter 4:17 – *the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God*

The sword of My mouth: When Jesus came **against** the Christians of Pergamos, He will confront them with His Word.

Revelation 2:17 – The promise of a reward.

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 to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

Who is he who has an ear?

Those followers of Jesus who know Him, are listening to Him, and willing to do what He says.

What is the lesson of the Pergamos church for us today?

The danger of false teaching and immoral conduct still faces the church today. So does the danger of *allowing* false teaching and immorality, as was the problem with the Christians in Pergamos.

What must be overcome to receive God’s blessing?

The one who overcomes this spirit of accommodation to false teaching and living will receive **hidden manna**. This is God’s perfect provision, the true bread from heaven (John 6:41).

What will Jesus give those who overcome?

I will give him a white stone: In the ancient world, the use of a **white stone** had many associations. A **white stone** could be a ticket to a banquet, a sign of friendship, evidence of having been counted, or as a sign of acquittal in a court of law.

- Jesus may have any one of these meanings in mind, but we know that it has the assurance of blessing.

What will be written on the white stone?

a new name... which no one knows except him who receives it: This is probably the believer’s new name, and the name itself is probably more important than the stone itself.

- this new, secret name shows what an intimate relationship we have with God. When a couple is close, they often have “pet names” for each other.

Another idea associated with the new name is simply the assurance it gives of our heavenly destination. It is as if your “reservation” in heaven is made.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- The church and Christians should stand out from the culture; if we do not, we need a spiritual check-up.
- Jesus has an issue with churches that tolerate false doctrine.
- The best way to confront false doctrine is with God’s Word.
- Compromising with the culture is a sign of apostasy.