

Revelation 2:12-17

To the Church at Pergamum

<p>[12] To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:</p>	<p>1. The Church:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pergamum 	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.</p>	<p>2. About Christ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has the sword, the authority to accurately judge. 	<p>Jesus' very words have the power to accomplish the judgment he pronounces. (See 1:16.)</p> <p>Jesus' judgments would be the opposite of Satan's "judgments." (Satan condemns the righteous; Jesus condemns the wicked.)</p>
<p>[13] I know where you live --where Satan has his throne.</p> <p>Yet you remain true to my name You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city --where Satan lives.</p>	<p>3. Their Strength</p> <p>Their circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in "enemy territory" <p>Their resolve to stand up for Jesus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining loyal to Jesus and his teachings • Continuing to trust Jesus, regardless of the circumstances <p>A praiseworthy example: Antipas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • willing to stand up and live for Jesus • willing, if necessary, to face death in "enemy territory" 	<p>These Christians did not allow circumstances to become an excuse for sin. This "worst case scenario" shows that we, too, can have victory during trials.</p> <p>In this world, controlled by Satan, people who belong to Jesus are like "aliens" in enemy territory - 1 Peter 2:11. This is because they have become citizens of <i>God's</i> country - Ephesians 2:19... and that is what counts!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">**SEE THE NOTE AT THE END OF THE OUTLINE**</p> <p>Satan doesn't mind when the distinctions between his kingdom and God's kingdom are blurred. But he can't stand it, when those distinctions are openly expressed. He hates it, when God's people are willing to stand up and be different.</p>
<p>[14] Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:</p> <p>You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.</p>	<p>4. Their Weakness</p> <p>Enemies infiltrating their ranks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some who follow the ways of Balaam... tempting others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to compromise spiritually (attacking the purity of their relationship / union with Christ) - to compromise physically (attacking the purity of their relationship / union with their spouse) <p>[Both of these are attacks against purity, faithfulness and loyalty.]</p>	<p>When there is persecution, there will always be the temptation to compromise "principles" for "peace," or to blur the distinctions between right and wrong, in order to gain acceptance. "Peer pressure" is nothing new.</p> <p>These people, who were encouraging attitudes of compromise, were like "secret agents" sent in by the enemy (Satan), for the purpose of destroying the church.</p> <p>We must remember that our <i>views</i> will affect our <i>actions</i>... and others will be tempted to follow our example. These people were like a cancer, destroying the purity of the church, and weakening its resolve to "stand up and be different" in a world that opposes the truth.</p>

<p>[15] Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.</p>	<p>4. Their Weakness [continued]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some who follow the ways of the Nicolaitans - doing what God hates (see Revelation 2:6) 	<p>Note the contrast: God's people: They were openly opposing Satan's kingdom. Satan's people: They were secretly infiltrating God's kingdom.</p>
<p>[16] Repent therefore!</p> <p>Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.</p>	<p>5. Their Duty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> REPENT and deal with the problem... OR ELSE, Jesus will! 	<p>We, as the church, should jealously guard our purity - comparable to Paul's attitude expressed in 2 Corinthians 11:2.</p> <p>The church, as Christ's "bride" (Revelation 19:7; 21:9) is to belong to Jesus alone. If we try to belong both to Jesus and to idols (which includes <i>anything</i> we put ahead of Jesus), we will arouse his jealousy and bring judgment upon ourselves - see 1 Corinthians 10:19-22. "Flirting" with the devil is <i>not</i> an option for Christ's bride!</p>
<p>[17] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p> <p>To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.</p>	<p>6. A Promise to All</p> <p>These are blessings for <i>all</i> who are willing to remain pure, faithful and loyal to Jesus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual, life-giving "food" from God: an unseen source of strength (given by the Spirit, through the Word) Special approval by God (perhaps also a symbol of victory) 	<p>Those who do not overcome - those who choose rather to compromise - will <i>never</i> experience <i>either</i> of these blessings: The blessings will be hidden and unknown to them.</p> <p>FOOD - God gives what the idol's food will <i>never</i> provide.</p> <p>APPROVAL - God's eternal approval is a lot better than the temporary "approval" that Satan offers.</p>

**** NOTE FROM VERSE 13:**

These trials, deep in "enemy territory," involved a struggle of *eternal* significance. They were much more serious than the merely *physical* trials that most people focus on (and complain about). [Of course, Satan can use physical trials, as one of many "weapons" in his spiritual warfare. But if we fail to see the deeper spiritual issues, we are in danger of losing the battle.]



Though the "Overcomer" may be put to death by Satan's "sword,"
 it is a death that will have no lasting effect.

However...

Woe to the person who earns the consequences of Jesus' "sword"!

Revelation 2:12-17 Supplementary Study Information

Background about Pergamum

Pergamum was a wealthy and cultured city. It was an educational center, with one of the largest libraries of the ancient world located in it. (Coincidentally, parchment, a forerunner of paper, was invented at Pergamum.) This city was also a religious and political center, with a great focus on emperor worship, along with many other forms of idolatry.

Today there is a small village in the area, with a small Christian testimony.

Verse 12

SHARP DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

(See notes for 1:16.) This is the heavy sword of judgment. Each of these words is strongly emphasized, in the original Greek. This sword is definitely no toy! Jesus will use this sword of judgment (his word) to fight against those who refuse to repent (2:16). Though people may try to blur the distinctions between the genuine disciples and the fakes, he will cut through all the pretension and make that distinction visible to all.

Verse 13

I KNOW

He cares and understands; he encourages those who remain faithful, but he is ready to judge those who turn against him. [The KJV adds, "I know *your works*," which parallels the opening statements found in most of the other letters to the churches. (Whether or not we include the phrase "your works," the over-all message remains the same.)]

WHERE YOU LIVE

They *live* (v. 13, beginning) where Satan *lives* (v. 13, end). But since Christ *lives* in them (Ephesians 3:17), they can overcome Satan. Such people look forward to the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will *live* (2 Peter 3:13).

This word "live" is also translated as "dwell." The phrase, "those who dwell on the earth" is found nine times in the book of Revelation. In most instances (at least after chapter 4) it is a reference to those who will experience the judgment of God.

SATAN'S THRONE / WHERE SATAN LIVES

Like Smyrna, Pergamum was also a major headquarters for emperor worship. (In it was the oldest temple dedicated to emperor worship.) Also, one of the other "gods" worshiped there (Asclepias, the "healing god") was symbolized as a serpent - a term used to describe Satan, in see Revelation 12:9 and 20:2. These Christians were surrounded by evil; yet they did not let their "environment" detract from their loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus.

In later chapters, the "beast" is described as having a throne (13:2 and 16:10), which he receives from the "dragon" (Satan). All other verses about thrones in the book of Revelation make reference to God's throne (the majority, about 30 verses) or to thrones that his servants will have (a few verses).

HOLDING FAST / REMAINING TRUE (to something)

This phrase is connected both to the praise and to the condemnation Jesus gives them.

- Connected with praise: The majority of the people were holding on to Jesus' name (and what his name stands for).
- Connected with condemnation: There were some who had let go of Jesus (or who had never held on to him, in the first place) and were holding on to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (see v. 14-15). You cannot hold on to both, though some were apparently trying to do so.

JESUS' NAME

The name represents the person. Jesus' name stands for who he is. They accepted the full significance of who Jesus is, and refused to say, "Caesar is Lord." For them, saying, "Christ is Lord," was their *only* option.

Remaining true (holding fast) to Jesus would include a willingness to hold fast to Jesus' teachings and to the way of life that comes from those teachings. These people at Pergamum accepted not only who Jesus *is*, but what he *says* - and that impacted their day-to-day living: not just their "religious" activities, but everything that has something to do with the expression of love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40).

FAITH (TRUST) IN JESUS

They trusted Jesus, not only for their salvation, but also for the outcome of the persecution they were experiencing. They trusted Jesus in *all* of life, no matter what happened to them. They might not have had Romans 8:28 to read (as we do), but the truth of that verse was lived-out in their lives.

ANTIPAS

Nothing else is known about this person, other than the fact that he was willing to die for Christ. "Antipas" could have been his real name, or it could be a symbolical name given him by Jesus. The name means "against all." He was willing to stand up "against all" that Satan tried to do to him!

- As a witness, he was willing to testify about Jesus and to live a life that was in line with what he testified.
- As one who trusted Jesus, he committed to Jesus the final outcome of all that happened.

Note that this praise wasn't directed only to Antipas, but to *all* in the church, who were willing to hold fast to Jesus and his ways, regardless of the consequences. They had the attitude that Jesus exhorts us to have, in Matthew 10:28.

Verse 14

A FEW THINGS AGAINST YOU (as a group)

At this point, this was a small issue, compared to the extent of their faithfulness. However, they needed to deal with it - and they weren't doing so. If they didn't deal with it properly, it would eventually grow into a big problem. It would be like a cancer in their midst.

Purity is a *necessity* in the church; it's not just one of many legitimate options. If those who held to these false teachings refused to repent, they would need to be removed from the church. To be unwilling to remove them would be to dishonor Christ.

TEACHING

Each of us is going to hold on to some type of teaching. The only issue is what those teachings will be. Are you going to take the *time and effort needed*, to make God's Word the basis of the teachings you hold to, or are you going to have something else as the basis of those teachings? (This second option comes, by default, to all who are unwilling to pursue the first option.) Remember that the teachings a person accepts will affect his actions, whether those teachings are knowingly or unknowingly accepted.

- Read Psalm 1. This is how you make God's Word the basis of the teachings you hold to. The word "meditate," found in verse 2, means "to think about it, to reflect upon it and to apply it to your life." (A few translations will use a phrase, such as, "think about," instead of "meditate.")

TEACHING OF BALAAM

Read Numbers 22-25 and 31:1-16, for the account of Balaam. Balaam *claims* to be faithful to God, and some of his words actually sound quite godly. Yet when we look deeper, we discover that his actual god was wealth (even though he claims otherwise - see 22:18) and his method of operating was through compromise. God used him to pronounce a prophetic oracle against the Moabites (and various other nations), even though Balaam relied on idolatrous techniques (sorcery and divination) to obtain that oracle. (In 24:1, we read that he had been using such practices, but God's Spirit so powerfully overruled, that he stopped doing so, for the rest of the prophecy.)

- It is important to remember that God used Balaam *in spite of* his sin, not *because of* it. Balaam would have brought down curses upon Israel, if he could have done so - and made a lot of money while doing so. But God prevented it, and turned the curse into a blessing. See Joshua 24:9-10 and Nehemiah 13:2.

Balaam's compromising nature becomes very evident, when we discover that the events of Numbers 25 (where we read about how the Moabites seduced Israel into sin) were instigated by Balaam, according to 31:15-16.

- The WAY of Balaam - 2 Peter 2:15. A focus on his actions: He was willing to commit sin for money. (According to v. 16, such conduct is insanity! His *donkey* was smarter than he was!)
- The ERROR of Balaam - Jude 1:11 A focus on his attitude: He had a love for money, which made him willing to compromise on moral and spiritual issues. (Jesus says we *cannot* love both God and wealth - Matthew 6:24.)
- The TEACHING of Balaam - Revelation 2:14. He led people astray by encouraging them to compromise with sin. (Of course, since he did not view things the way God defines them, he wouldn't have called it "sin.")

People who hold to such views can teach even when they aren't teachers: They can teach by way of example. Their willingness to compromise (especially when they seem to benefit from it) can tempt others to do the same, to "bend the rules" or to "sin a little," whenever they think it would result in personal advantage.

- Most likely, their compromise began subtly and masked with what appeared to be good intentions - and instead of viewing their actions as sin, they would have probably described them in terms that sounded good. (In modern terms, they may have viewed themselves as being "positive" and "open-minded" - in contrast with the others, who they would have labeled as "negative" or "narrow-minded." After all, having *not* accepted God's ways, they wouldn't view their own ways as sinful.)
- How often do we act as though it is OK to sin "a little" - especially when we think it will have "positive" results, or if we think it will cause people to accept us? (This sinning "a little" can include simply *not* doing what is right - see James 4:17. We need to *act* right, not just *believe* right.)

One of the reasons this was a problem at Pergamum: Genuine Christianity will offend those who hate Christ - and those people will often respond to the truth in a hostile manner. When people who are faithful and true to Jesus are being persecuted by their enemies, they may have the temptation to give-in to compromise, to blur the distinctions between Jesus' kingdom and Satan's kingdom, or to yield (even if just a little bit) to Satan's ways, in order to gain acceptance and to lessen the persecution. Those who are *less* faithful (or whose "conversions" were actually superficial) may quickly give-in to this temptation. Their doing so may increase the pressure on the others to do the same.

Eventually, increasing compromise can result in a situation in which the truth is so diluted with error, that it begins to look appealing to those who have no intention of abandoning their sins. Historically, there have been numerous times in which the compromise was so great, that it became popular for people to become "Christians" (in a superficial sense), even though they still had a love for sin, and really had no interest in becoming disciples of Jesus.

WHAT HE TAUGHT BALAK (the Midianite king)

He taught Balak how to ensnare others - to entice or trap them and to cause them to "stumble."

TO ENTICE / TO BE A STUMBLING BLOCK

To be a snare or a trap, to cause someone else to sin. Woe to people who cause others to stumble (Matthew 18:7; Luke 17:1); they will be "weeded out" of the kingdom (Matthew 13:41).

FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

False teaching usually begins with something that is true (or at least partly true). But it fails to give attention to other truths that must be *equally* emphasized, in order to avoid error. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:25-27, Paul tells us that it is OK to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols (= the first truth in our example)... but only as long as we make no association with that idol (= the second truth that must be equally emphasized). Once an association is made between the two (the meat and the idol), we must not eat the meat (1 Corinthians 10:28-29). In Pergamum, they kept the association between the meat and the idol. In the end, they not only viewed the meat as acceptable, but also the idol and other practices associated with it.

Many people make professions of faith *without* having genuine repentance in their hearts. Without this repentance, it is easy for such people to still have an attraction to the sins they used to practice. The compromiser may want "heaven" (however he may define it), but he also wants his old ways - and will find it easy to attempt to go after both. When

persecution arises, the temptation may be even greater for compromise, for the more the person accepts the ways of the persecutors, the less they will be persecuted by them.

COMMITTING SEXUAL IMMORALITY

God created physical things in a way that would reflect spiritual truths. Even human sexuality was created to reflect spiritual truths. In Ephesians 5, we read that the physical union of husband and wife was designed to reflect the union of Christ and the church (5:22-33). There was a similar concept expressed in the Old Testament, in the intended relationship between God and Israel (Isaiah 54:5-6; Jeremiah 3:14). In both cases, unfaithfulness to God was compared to adultery or prostitution (examples - James 4:4 and Ezekiel 16).

Throughout Scripture, sexual sin (which is unfaithfulness to one's spouse or future spouse) is often associated with idolatry (which is unfaithfulness to the true God). The same heart attitude - the sin of unfaithfulness - is present for *both* of these sins. People who claim to belong to God, but who "flirt" with sin, have the same heart attitude as those who claim to be faithful to a spouse, but who flirt with a person they're not married to.

- Today, we don't tend to bow down to idols... but we do have a tendency to *not* take seriously the things God says - especially when it relates to our need to be *pure* from sin. We tend to develop a "God concept" that allows us to feel comfortable, *without* giving-up the sins we so strongly desire. We justify what we do, rather than turning away from it.
- As far as sexual sin is concerned, it is no coincidence that it occurs so frequently among people who *claim* to be "Christians."
- *Many* passages in the Bible emphasize the absolute need to strive for a *pure* life, one that is *separated* (or set apart) from sin.

Verse 15

TEACHING OF THE NICOLAITANS

The Ephesian Christians hated the ways of the Nicolaitans; the Pergamum Christians accepted them. It was the issue of opposition (the good example of Ephesus) vs. tolerance (the bad example of Pergamum).

In 2:6, the focus was on their *deeds*. Here the focus is on what they *teach*. Again, this teaching can be by way of example. Though there may have been teachers that held to such views, people can be role models for others, without ever expressing a "teaching." The things we do can teach principles and attitudes, that can influence the way others live.

In this passage, the focus is on their influence - which would include actions, as well as attitudes. Certain people had accepted the Nicolaitans' practices as their perspective on life. Though we don't know the specific details of their view, it probably involved some type of focus on pleasure and indulgence - perhaps under the guise of "Christian freedom."

Verse 16

REPENT (or else...)

Jesus speaks to the entire group. Not only are those directly involved in these sins required to repent, but the others in the church are not to tolerate or accept such sin in their midst.

Five of the seven churches have sins that they need to deal with. In each instance, they are told to *repent* - to change not just their *ways*, but also their *attitudes* about those sins. Repentance involves a complete turn-around.

I WILL COME

Literally, "I am coming." It could happen at any moment, without further warning - just like Jesus' second return!

Three times in these seven letters, Jesus mentions that he will come. Twice, it is a warning for those who need to repent (2:5 and 2:16); once, it is an encouragement for those who are faithfully living for him (3:11). Jesus' coming can be something to look forward to, or something to dread - depending on whether we are living for, or against, him.

FIGHT AGAINST THEM...

Here, Jesus' warning focuses specifically on those who were directly involved in the sin. If they repent, there will be hope for them. If not, the consequences will be horrible. For those who refuse to repent, it means war! (The word "fight" means to "wage war," and is translated that way, in Revelation 19:11.) They can try to fight and argue against God... but guess who will win in the end! Once again, a reference is made to Jesus' sword of judgment. The very words that come from his mouth have a power that surpasses any power on earth.

Jesus warns us that, in the end, there will be many wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6). However, the only war we need to "worry" about is the one in which *Jesus* is our opponent. Make peace with him, while you can!

THE SWORD OF MY MOUTH

Refer to v. 12. Jesus' very words will accomplish justice: The Word of God will save us or destroy us, depending on how we respond to Jesus - who he is and what he has done. (Here the focus is on destruction of those who have turned against Jesus, through compromise.)

Verse 17

EAR / HEAR / OVERCOME

As with all the other letters, the principles taught in this letter apply to *all of us*. We must *overcome*, either by avoiding this sin, or (if we are guilty of it) by repenting of it.

People who are willing to compromise might not experience the persecution that others may have to endure. But at the same time, they will never receive the blessings given in this promise. The "manna" will remain hidden from them, and the white stone (with a new, or special, name on it) will never be received by them.

HIDDEN MANNA

This refers to the spiritual sustenance given us by the Spirit, as he uses the Word of God to build us up in our salvation. It would be a source of strength and life for those who remained faithful, and would help them to grow in Christ, but it would be something that the compromisers would never see (or obtain). (Note the contrast: The compromisers get to eat the idol's food - something that would have no eternal benefit to them; the overcomers get to eat "bread from heaven" - spiritual nourishment that builds them up for eternal life.)

This "hidden manna" does not refer to physical food - not even to the bread of the "Lord's supper: (which can be seen by anyone who has eyesight). Instead, it refers to a "spiritual food" that the compromisers *can not see* (or comprehend) - perhaps even to Christ himself, in the sense of John 6:32-33.

"Manna" originally referred to the bread-like food that God sent his people, Israel, as they were traveling through the desert wilderness (on their journey from Egypt to the promised land). [Read about it in Exodus 16.] This, along with many other things that happened on their journey, were intended to teach them spiritual principles. These events would have taught them things about God and their relationship to him - *if* they had been willing to listen.

- A different example: Physical circumcision was supposed to teach them about their spiritual needs - needs which Moses described as a "circumcision of heart" - Deuteronomy 10:16 and Romans 2:29.

As far as the manna was concerned, their need to rely on God for their *physical* food (in order to stay alive physically) was intended to remind them of their need to rely on God for their *spiritual* food (in order to stay alive spiritually) - see Deuteronomy 8:3. And just as this was true in the wilderness, so also it was true in the days of Jesus (and in our day).

- Example: John 6:25-59. The people wanted Jesus to give them physical food, just like they received manna in the days of Moses (John 6:31). But Jesus told them they needed to have a different focus. Physical food (even manna) would have only a temporary value - they would still die (John 6:49). They needed to focus on Jesus, the "bread of life," in order that they might live eternally.

After the Israelites had entered the promised land, the manna stopped forming (Joshua 5:12). However, a jar of manna was kept in the presence of God, in the tabernacle and later in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 16:32-33; Hebrews 9:4), where only the high priest would be able to see it. As a result, this physical manna (which was in God's presence) was "hidden"

from the people. Even this can serve as an illustration of a spiritual truth: In Christ, we now have access to God - from whom we can receive the spiritual nourishment (symbolized in the manna) that was once hidden from us!

- A similar thought: The treasures and teachings of the kingdom of God are *hidden* from those who reject that kingdom - Matthew 11:25; 13:35, 44.

WHITE STONE

A small pebble-size stone of special significance. Historically, white stone was imported into Pergamum, for the native rock was a pink granite. This means it would have been more costly, and would have been used for special purposes.

The fact that it is white may mean it is a symbol of purity, innocence or victory. However, there are two uses of white stones, common in Jesus' day, that may have special significance here:

The first use of white stones is referred to in Acts 26:10, where the word is used in reference to stones used in voting. The people "cast their votes (stones)." This stone would have indicated *approval* of something. In Revelation 2:17, this concept may be part of what is implied here - indicating that God would express his approval of those who remained faithful. Even though the whole world (including the compromisers) seemed to express *disapproval* of them, they had the only approval that counts for eternity.

Sometimes, in voting, a white stone would indicate approval; whereas a black stone would indicate disapproval. If, in Antipas' case, stones were used to indicate his fate, he would have received a *black* stone. We don't really know what happened, but if something like this *did* happen, then the concept of a *white* stone would have had an even greater significance to the Christians of Pergamum.

A NEW NAME ON IT

The second use, which is probably significant to our understanding of this stone, has to do with the inscription on the stone. Special stones were sometimes used as awards, perhaps like a trophy might be used, today. In such cases, something related to the award might be engraved on the stone.

Those who regarded Jesus' name (all it represents) as special (v. 13), will someday receive from Jesus a name that is special (v. 17). What will this name be? Some suggest it could be God's name, and would, therefore, indicate that the person belonged to God. Others suggest that it may be a special name given to the person himself. (Either way, it indicates a special relationship with God.)

- Sometimes such stones were used to invite people to special banquets. Whether or not this stone has that significance, we do know that all overcomers (all genuine Christians) will have a place at the "wedding supper of the lamb" (Revelation 19:9)!

There may be an allusion to prophecies in Isaiah, in which he mentions a future day, in which those who turn back to God and become his servants will receive a new name. This new name will be one that will describe their new character. See Isaiah 56:5 (a name that will last forever); 62:2 (given by God; see also verse 4); and 65:15 (the contrast between those who rebelled and those who chose to serve God).

Another example of names on stones: In the Old Testament, some of the priest's garments had stones (gems) sewn into them. These stones had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 39:6-14).

KNOWN ONLY TO HIM WHO RECEIVES IT

Only those who overcome will know and experience God's favor. If each name is unique to the individual overcomer (the second view, mentioned above), it could suggest that *each* overcomer will experience God's favor in a special way. In contrast, the compromiser will never experience it.