



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Revelation 2.12-17

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I. Introduction to this Study (learn more about this series at gspc.org/Gods-blogs)

This third week of our Lenten series, God's Blogs, we're looking at the blog written to the church in Pergamum, who experienced continuous persecution for their faith, though the Risen Christ knows where they live and calls them to be faithful there.

II. Connecting with One Another

Where do you live? Take some time discussing with others the specifics of your home, your street, your neighborhood, and your city. What makes these places unique? If you're using this study guide alone, take a few minutes to think through these details – or even write them down.

III. Study the Text

a. Read Revelation 2.12-17.

In his book [*Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life's Biggest Questions*](#), Pastor Tim Keller tells of a time when he was in a group who was invited to write down everything they found interesting in a given biblical passage in 30 minutes. After 15 minutes, he says, he was ready to give up. But he pressed on. After 20 minutes, he was again ready to give up. But he pressed on. And so on at 25 minutes.

At 30 minutes, the group was stopped. The convener of the group invited those in attendance to circle their most interesting "find." After then had done so, they were invited to raise their hands if they found this most interesting aspect in the first 15 minutes. No hands went up. In the first 20 minutes? A couple hands. In the first 25? A few more. In the last 5 minutes? The most hands!

Spend some time in a similar experiment noting what you find most interesting in these verses. Confusing? Challenging? Thought provoking? Convicting?

Share your favorite "find" with the group, if you're meeting with a group. If not, maybe at the dinner table?

b. Pergamum was home to one of the ancient world's most famous libraries, even rivaling the collection of Alexandria, Egypt at one time. Once, in an effort to perfect their 200,000 volume collection, rulers of Pergamum tried to recruit the chief librarian of the Alexandrian library, which prompted the Egyptian rulers to do two things: First, to jail their own librarian (so he literally "couldn't be stolen!") and second, to cut off the supply of papyrus to Pergamum.

As a result, Pergamum began developing their own parchment from animal skin. William Barclay writes, "So close was the connection of Pergamos with literary activity that the word *parchment* is in fact derived from the name Pergamos."

Is there a connection, then, of this incredible literary culture with verse 12? In other words, do any images come to mind that connect swords and words?

See Hebrews 4.12, Ephesians 6.17, Ezekiel 6.3, Isaiah 49.2, and Matthew 10.34. How do these verses connect swords and words?

- c. Pergamum was not only a great literary center. It was also home to an altar of the Greek god Zeus "The Savior", and a temple of the Roman god Asklepios "The Savior", the god of healing, in which non-venimous snakes roamed freely. The thought was that if they touched you, you were healed! You've no doubt seen an image derived from Asklepios worship (seen on the right). At least 40 modern day organizations include this "Rod of Asklepios" in their logo!



Some note a connection of similar thought in Numbers 21.5-9 (see also John 3:14-15). In this blog to the church at Pergamum, perhaps different "slithery" imagery is thought of from Genesis 3. Why do you think the Risen Christ would speak so boldly to this church? Were these other religious entities really *that* problematic to be considered satanic? Why or why not?

- d. In verse 14, reference is made to the teaching of Balaam. This rare allusion refers back to Numbers 22-25 (picking up the chapter after the Israelite/snake incident!), though the implications of this reference for Revelation 2 can be seen in Numbers 25.1-2. Many scholars believe this was a similar issue to the Nicolaitans referred to in verse 15, who were engaging in extramarital sex and attending ritualistic pagan celebrations.

Demosthenes, an ancient Greek speechwriter and lawyer once wrote, "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian of our household affairs." As such, it is commonly understood that, as William Barclay has noted, "chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity introduced into the ancient world." How does this influence your understanding of these verses?

(Perhaps it's beside the point, but bringing a couple strands of our study together, Numbers 31.8 tells us that this Balaam was killed "with the sword"!)

- e. Reread verse 16 aloud. Now, read it again, emphasizing the "you" and "them" as you feel is appropriate.

Who is the "them" you think the resurrected Jesus is referring to? Recalling our exploration above, how do you understand this second reference to a sword?

How should the congregation, as a whole, repent? What does that look like?

- f. Verse 17's reference to hidden manna recalls the understanding that, at the destruction of the temple, the prophet Jeremiah hid the manna that had been preserved from the wilderness wandering. There may be a connection with the food offered by God versus the food sacrificed to idols addressed earlier. What do you think?

For another interesting parallel, read John 6 (noting especially verses 32-35). How does this passage inform your understanding of manna, or the Bread of Life?

- g. Reference to the white stone in verse 17 could be inspired by a number of things in Pergamum: A kind of trophy given to the victor of Olympic games, pebbles used to vote on someone's guilt or innocence, as entrance into a Roman carnival, or as a precious stone worn as an amulet. Scholars see each of these as a possibility.

Spend a few minutes thinking through each of these possibilities. How could the Risen Christ be using each of these as metaphors to indwell with a deeper spiritual meaning?

- h. Think through each of the above aspects of what we've seen in Revelation 2.12-17 in light of Jesus' statement in verse 13: "I know where you live."

When the word "dwell" or "live" or "exist" is included in the New Testament, it is usually translated from the Greek *paroikein*, which refers to a sojourner or a stranger, living in a temporary residence. This is the case, of course, because Heaven is our true home.

But, in this passage, *paroikein* is not used. Instead, the Greek word is *katoikein*, which refers to "residence in a permanent and settled place."

That is, as William Barclay writes,

You are living in a city where the influence and the power of Satan are rampant – *and you have got to go on living there*. You cannot escape. You cannot pack your baggage and move off to some place where it is easier to be a Christian. In Pergamos you are, and in Pergamos you must stay. Life has set you where Satan's seat is. It is *there* you must live; and it is *there* that you must show that you are a Christian.

The word *katoikein* tells us that it is no part of the Christian duty to run away from a difficult and dangerous situation. The Christian aim is not escape from a situation, but conquest of a situation.

So, again, where do *you* live?

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to continue to equip the children, students, families and adults through the ministries of Good Shepherd, that they become disciples of Jesus Christ who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love,
- b. Thank God for the continued work of Good Shepherd's Congregational Representatives, who were able to reach a settlement agreement with Presbytery representatives for the church's dismissal from PC(USA),
- c. Pray that in the midst of Good Shepherd's dismissal, our congregation would continue to be centered in the good news of God's love and salvation for all people,
- d. Lift up our worship gatherings on Sunday, March 30th, when Good Shepherd will offer two identical intergenerational worship opportunities, including both the choir and the praise band, in the desire to have a kind of "family reunion."