

## PERGAMOS: THE COMPROMISING CHURCH Revelation 2:12-17

### (Main Idea of the Biblical Text)

Christ commended the church at Pergamos for its faithfulness yet rebuked them for their theological compromise.

### (Main Idea of this Study)

Believers should be watchful of compromise in our lives while at the same time we are aiming to be faithful to the Lord.

#### I. Christ is Characterized by Judgment (12).

##### A. The judgment of Jesus is true.

- *Pergamos*-see video.  
Many writers have noted that "Pergamum" comes from the Greek word, *gamos*, that means "marriage." This letter pictures a church "married" to the world rather than to Christ.
- *the sharp two-edged sword*-Jesus was personified this same way in 1:16 and will be characterized throughout Revelation as one who speaks God's Word that is true and piercing. This was also a messianic promise from Isaiah. Isaiah 11:4: But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, **and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.** Revelation 1:16: He had in His right hand seven stars, **out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword**, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. Revelation 19:15, 21: Now **out of His mouth goes a sharp sword**, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 21 **And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.** And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

##### B. The judgment of Jesus is thorough.

Roman officials who had the right to carry this sword had the power of life and death in cases of capital offenses. But here only Jesus has that right and ability.

#### II. The Church is Commended for Faithfulness (13).

##### A. We must be faithful where we live.

- *and where you dwell*-The Pergamum Christians had held firmly to their commitment to Jesus Christ and their witness for Him, even though they lived in one of Satan's strongholds.
- *where Satan's throne is*-This phrase is striking but mysterious. Where exactly was Jesus referring to? There are five possibilities:
  - The acropolis-a rocky outcrop above the city that from a distance resembled a throne.

- The idols, altars, shrines, and temples of Pergamos.
  - The altar to the Greek god Zeus savior on top of the mountain. The legs in the sculpture were serpent's tails, and such a structure epitomized idolatry and paganism.
  - The cult of Asklepios-the god of healing symbolized by a serpent entwined around a staff. (Today's symbol of medicine.)
  - The imperial cult/worship of the state embodied in the Roman emperor.
- Either way we do know that Satan's evil was particularly active in Pergamum and was a continuing obstacle for the church.
- *hold fast to My name*-This is a PRESENT tense. It shows the significance of the name as representing the character of a person. Believers trust by calling on His name, worship by calling on His name and persevere by calling on His name. The church was fiercely loyal to Jesus.
  - *did not deny My faith*-aorist tense; action occurred at a particular point in the past. They had not denied Christ during past times. They were faithful to Christ.

**B. We must be faithful in our witness.**

- *Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you*-We know nothing about this man. The title given him is the same that was used for Christ in 5:1. The term "witness" can mean "martyr." Tradition said that Antipas was roasted in a brazen bull during the reign of Domitian. What do we know is that he was FAITHFUL WITNESS for Christ and it had cost him his life.

**III. The Church is Condemned for Compromise (14-15).**

**A. We must not compromise our morality (14).**

- *I have a few things against you*-Not good! Christ rebukes the church.
- *who hold the doctrine of Balaam*-Numbers 22-25. Balaam told Balak that he could overcome the Israelites if he would involve them in Moabite religious feasts that included sacred prostitution (Numbers 25).  
Numbers 31:16: Look, **these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam**, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.
- Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel-"stumbling block" is *skandalon* in Greek which also can be translated "scandal." Here it refers both to immorality and idolatry.
- *to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality*-These two sins involved pagan worship practices. Not only were there pagan meals where the food was sacrificed to idols but often sexual immorality was the normal and expected worship practice at these pagan assemblies.

**B. We must not compromise our theology (15).**

- *you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*-They are first mentioned in 2:6 regarding the church at Ephesus. Nicolaitans means "conquer the people" in Greek. Because they are mentioned with the doctrine of Balaam, many have come to believe that it was also a group involved in

idolatry and sexual immorality. Both were rampant in the Roman world. Heretical doctrine that leads to sexual immorality is a bad mixture.

- *which thing I hate*-a backhanded rebuke to the church. Jesus hates compromise!

#### IV. The Church is Corrected with a Warning (16).

##### A. Christ warns us to repent.

- *Repent*-This is an AORIST ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. There is an ongoing emphasis in Revelation concerning repentance (cf. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19).

##### B. Christ warns us of rejection.

- *I will come to you quickly*-The coming could refer to temporal judgment against the church or to the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world.
- *will fight against them with the sword of My mouth*-They would die by "the sword" proceeding from Christ's "mouth." Balaam had died, ironically, by the Israelites' sword (Num. 31:8). This judgment would be by the unyielding standard of God's revealed Word—that clearly condemns such behavior.

#### V. The Church is Challenged by Its Reward (17).

##### A. Christ will nourish us.

- *I will give some of the hidden manna to eat*-The story of the manna in the wilderness is found in Exodus 16 and Jesus said he would give His disciples a "greater bread."  
John 6:32-33: Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, **but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.** For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

John 6:49-51: Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. **This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven.** If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

But what is "hidden manna?" Most likely it is a reference to Christ who has already accomplished our deliverance from sin but the fullness of this reality will not be expressed until the time when Christ "will raise them up" (John 6:54). Christ is "hidden" at this time but will reveal Himself at His second coming.

##### B. Christ will receive us.

- *And I will give him a white stone*-White predominantly represents purity or holiness in the Bible. But the real question here is what is the white stone John refers to? The word "stone" can refer to a pebble or small rock. The exact meaning and significance is unknown. Here are several possibilities:
  - a jewel in OT or Jewish tradition.

- a stone used to cast of a vote of “not guilty” in the court systems of the first century.
- a token of membership, membership or recognition.
- an ornament or small piece of jewelry thought to give protection against evil, danger, or disease.
- a token for gladiators for their service.
- an allusion to a process of initiation into the service of the Greek god Aesculapius.
- simply as a writing material whose form or color was significant.

Simply, it was a token of the Lord’s personal delight in the people of Pergamos for their repentance from compromise.

**C. Christ will acknowledge us.**

- *and on the stone a new name*-John writes that when Jesus returns He will have a name written on Him that no one will know but Himself. Revelation 19:12: His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. **He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.** God gave new names to Abraham and Jacob after they were spiritually or morally changed. Some say the name on the stone is the name of Christ because at His name every knee will bow (Philippians 2:9-10), and names in the ancient world were the real essence of who a person was. Revelation 3:12: He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. **I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God,** the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. **And I will write on him My new name.** To receive the new name is to receive Jesus’ victorious, kingly name and may be seen as a final reward for identification and unity with Christ.