
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

Revelation 2: 12-17: "The Church of Pergamum"

General idea: Again, John is reminding them and us who Christ is and what He has done. He is depicted here as the One in authority who can look into us, pierce us, and who knows who we are and what we want. Then, Jesus calls us to Him and away from our selves and selfishness. Just as a sword is sharp and piercing, so are our wayward ways when we seek to do life and run His church by our own means, apart from His ways and commands. Such thoughts and actions separate us from God and others, just as our judgment for sin, without receiving His grace, will separate us for eternity. God doesn't want us separated, but He will do this to protect His other children, just as He will separate those who seek to harm us. This is His protection, and it is our choice to draw to Him or draw to our inclinations and sin.

The people in this church at Pergamum were willing to die for the faith, but they were not willing to live for the faith. They were on a teeter-totter of loyalty, holding on to the faith through persecution on one side, while allowing those who were treating others with deception, compromise, and manipulation to continue on the other. We walk on dangerous ground when we say "faith" with our mouths yet do dastardly deeds with our hands. Even to tolerate those who are being deceptive and scheming to others is sin, and will cause extreme dysfunction in our churches. We can come up with all kinds of excuses why we need not attempt to stop such a person, as did the church in Pergamum. But, we need to take seriously the warning from Jesus, who is our Head. He does not want His people manipulated or lied to. Jesus does not want our churches to be places of contention and hurt. Rather, He calls us to make them safe havens of rest and comfort as we worship and mature in Him, and to be secure in Him and in companionship with others. If we are being manipulated or are manipulating others, worship and healthy relationships cannot be nurtured or grown. How sad that would be for us and our community to have a church of dysfunction rather than a place where redemption and sanctification are carried out.

Vs. 12-13: The church at Pergamum was tolerating false doctrines and people who were scheming against others, causing them to follow sin, trends, compromise their faith, and not reverence or trust in Christ. Even though they were faithful in persecution, their steadfastness was wavering to those who were deceptive. They were being what we now call "politically correct," that is, tolerating other ideas that were wrong or contrary just to be what they thought was mature and wise. Thus, they were in danger of being judged harshly if they did not repent. We have to see that we can be tolerant to a point, as long as it does not counter our character or the Word.

- *Pergamum*, now modern Bergama, has two meanings in the Greek. One is "citadel," as in the capital of Asia Minor at one time, and also is the root word for paper as in "parchment." It also has a nickname that means "sword," which Jesus uses to make His point (pun intended). Pergamum was built on a hill that was at an elevation of 1,000 feet and that was cone-shaped. Pergamum was a strongly pagan city with perhaps a few Jews living there. It was famous for having the second largest library in the world at that time; only the one at Alexandria in Egypt was bigger. At the time, it was prosperous and also famous for inviting the Romans in, giving them a foothold in Asia Minor. Thus, they were not conquered, but placated, just as compromise does with our faith.
- *Double-edged sword* refers to a small offensive "Thracian" dagger. It symbolizes God's ability and right to perform judgment (Isa 49:2; Heb 4:12; Rev. 2:12; 6:4, 8; 13:10, 14; 19:15, 21). For the Romans, this sword was the image of power, control, and used to enforce its laws and for capital punishment. In Scripture, *sword* also symbolizes war and refers to God's ability and right to make war on those who seek to fight against Him (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:13).
- *Satan has his throne*. This referred to either its pagan practices or the seat of the Roman throne for Asia. Pergamum worshiped the god Asclepius, who was Apollo's son, the god of medicine. In addition, this city was the official center of emperor worship and Rome's representation for Asia. They also had a huge 100 foot+ altar for Zeus. Perhaps Jesus referred to this as Satan's throne because they worshipped what was false. All its citizens were expected to worship these false gods, including worshiping the emperor. If they refused, they were persecuted by not being allowed to participate in the city life, festivals, and trade. This escalated to the Christians being executed for disloyalty to the emperor. And, this trend was exported to the other providences. Perhaps it was here in Pergamum that martyrdom started for Asia.
- *Antipas* was the first martyr in Asia. According to the Early Church Fathers, he was slowly roasted alive in a bronze kettle during the time of Domitian. (Another proof for a late date for Revelation.)
- *Faithful witness* is a name for Jesus, referring that Jesus is *reliable*. It also refers that Antipas was faithful to Christ in character and disposition, as we are all called to be (Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Prov. 14:5, 25; Isa. 8:2; Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Col. 1:15-18; 1 Tim. 6:13; Rev. 1:5; 2:10-13; 3:14).

Jesus knows us intimately; He knows our situation, our struggles and our opportunities. He wants us to take hold of His grace and love so we can focus upon Him and lean on Him both in our jubilations and also in our struggles. The

key in this passage is to stay faithful in our Christian identity and our leadership of others, and to remain loyal to Christ. We are not to allow our doubts, fears, or state of affairs to occupy His place in our hearts and minds.

Vs. 14-17: Balaam was a Midianite prophet, depicted in the book of Numbers, who knew and served God. However, he chose greed and his own desires over what God had gifted him with, and he used his gifts inappropriately. He lusted after riches and thus became a mercenary of greed who enticed the Jews to sin and compromise their faith and virtue, for which they were judged. His rationale was that war could not defeat God's chosen people, but if his people were subverting them to compromise and dishonor God, God would take away the Jew's blessing and then they could be defeated. Balaam symbolizes gluttony and the seeking of evil, and was considered worse than an invading army. He was a man who wanted it both ways—God's and his. This was just what the church at Pergamum was struggling with. Thus, this church, as did Balaam, engaged in what was futile and foolish (Num. 17; 22-25—especially 23:7; 24:5-9; and 31:1 - 18; 31:8-16; Deut. 23:4; Josh. 13:22; Micah 6:5; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14).

- *To the teaching of* refers to following a person and not the Lord, or following human reasoning, pleas, rational, or logic, and not God's Word. No matter how good or bad a Bible teacher might be, we are always to test the word of people against His Word. We are to follow Christ and not people; we are to learn from people, team up with and honor them, but not venerate them so that we take our purpose and direction from them rather than from God. Here, the Christians were being taught to compromise and placate to the city rules, forsaking God's precepts and call.
- *Balaam* was also a Jewish proverbial saying for being foolish, seeking greed, and dishonorable character. He is the archetype of a false or corrupt teacher who deceived people and/or caused others to bow to worldliness.
- *Entice* means to subvert and manipulate someone to do what is against their values, usually from personal agendas and bad motives that are against God.
- *Food sacrificed to idols* referred to participating in pagan religious festivals and immorality (Acts 15:20, 29). Whereas, in 1 Corinthians 8:1-8, just eating the food left over from a sacrifice (which was freely given or sold in the public meat market) to avoid starvation was not wrong.
- *Sexual immorality* was common in paganism, and was reprehensible to pious Jews and Christians. It also refers to spiritual unfaithfulness.
- *Otherwise, I will soon come to you* refers to *if you do not get right with God, you will be judged*. It does not refer to the final judgment; rather, it involves chastisement, discipline, or censor. This does **not** mean if we fail at our churches, God will come back and usher in His Kingdom sooner!

- *Sword of my mouth* means to fight with the Word of God (Heb. 4:12).
- *Who overcomes* means to not fall prey to temptations or compromise one's faith, and to abstain from pagan practices. By forsaking evil feasts, we can participate in heavenly feasts (1 Cor. 10:14-22).
- *Hidden manna* refers to the contents of the Ark of the Covenant that was lost in 586 B.C. (Jer. 3:16). Jewish tradition says that the jar of manna was hidden by Jeremiah, and in the final days, would be found. (From apocryphal literature, 2 Macc.4; Book of Baruch). This also refers that Jesus is the Bread of Life (Ex. 16:33-35; Psalm 78:24; John 6:32-58; Heb. 9:4).
- *White stone* means acquittal. In courts, a black stone was used to write out a person's guilt and a white stone meant the person was innocent. It was also used for medical prescriptions, referring to healing and restoration. This also meant a pass for special festivity like an expensive ticket to a special event. The theme here is that God wants us to repent so He can acquit us and restore us. He does not want to judge us unless that is the only way because we refuse Him and refuse to change our wrong ways and sin (Gen. 17:5-15).
- *New name* denotes the authority God has over us. By renaming us as He did with Peter, He restores us to being new (Gen. 2:19-20; Isa. 62:2; 65:15; Matt. 1:25).
- *Known only to*. Knowing a person's name means we have knowledge of and influence on them. In ancient cultures, it also meant gaining power over a person. It also refers to His protection over us (Mark 5:9).

Twisting God's truths to fit our whims and rationalizing our sin is blatantly evil. Do not allow this in your church! We have to be willing to prevent and discipline, even kick out manipulative and deceptive people in our churches.

Why would a Christian be manipulative and say he or she is serving Christ? Our human condition, our sinful nature, is susceptible to what psychologists call "Cognitive Dissidence." This Cognitive Dissidence is where we perform one behavior while at the same time harboring a contradicting behavior. This is a common, human characteristic that God desires that we root out. We cannot be healthy, and at the same time harbor contradictory views; this cannot be done. Psalm 10 tells us that we cannot have pride and God occupying the same heart, yet we keep trying! We cannot be a growing Christian, practicing prayer and spiritual disciplines, while at the same time, making judgments on our neighbors and friends or causing others to compromise and sin.

Let us not fall into the trap of putting on a performance—of acting out the Christian life. Let us not *play* a Christian; let us *be* a Christian. Let our actions

respond to the transformation of Christ's grace by living honest lives. We must allow Christ's amazing grace to root out all the evil within us, especially the hypocrisy that causes so much destruction, or else our church will be just like Pergamum.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Have you ever faced similar pressures that the Church of Pergamum faced? Perhaps, you have been forced to compromise your morals or be "Politically Correct" on a subject you know is wrong. How do you balance being "Politically Correct" and yet be a faithful and good witness for Christ?
2. Why would Jesus take the time to give encouragements and blessings, as well as condemnations to these churches? What are some encouragements, blessings, and condemnations your church would receive from Jesus?
3. How does it make you feel that Jesus can look into you and pierce you, and also know who you are and what you want? Does this give you more strength, or fear? If it is fear, why?
4. What does it mean for you to walk away from your self and selfishness? How important to you is loyalty to Christ for holding onto the faith?
5. How do our wayward ways pierce Christ, such as living life on our own or running His church by our own means apart from His ways?
6. Why would someone be willing to die for the faith but be not willing to live for the faith? What would cause someone to compromise his or her faith?
7. Why would being tolerant to those who are deceptive and scheming cause extreme dysfunction in your church? What would be some of the excuses

some leaders would use for not attempting to stop such a person?

8. What would happen if your church became a place of contention and hurt? Why is it so important that our churches be safe havens of rest and comfort so that people can worship and mature in Christ and be secure in Him and in companionship with others?
9. Can you compare what is going on in this passage with the postmodern “politically correct” ideologies, as in tolerating other’s ideas that are wrong or that are contrary to God’s Word? How would someone rationalize the compromise of morality as being mature and wise?
10. Jesus knows our situation, our struggles, and our opportunities. He wants us to take hold of His grace and love and succeed in our faith and life. How can this help inspire you to persevere when times are tough?
11. What would your church look like if most of its people took to heart and practiced the Fruit of the Spirit to their best abilities and endeavors? What can be done to make sure your leadership sets the tone for faithfulness?
12. What can you do to make sure that your purpose and direction in life is from God and not from people or trends? What can your church do to help instill loyalty to Christ in their hearts rather than allowing doubts, fears, or state of affairs to occupy His place in their hearts and minds?

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. Psalm 10:4

© 2006 R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Into Thy Word Ministries* www.intothyword.org

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. John 12:26