

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
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## *The Church of Inconsistency*

### **Revelation 2:12-17**

**Keywords:** Revelation, prophecy, End Times, Jesus Christ, Seven Churches

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** None

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In this letter to the Church at Pergamum we the incredible value Jesus Christ places on truth and sound doctrine in His Church. The Church is not a place to bandy about various thoughts or beliefs. It is a place to teach truth and only truth. Unfortunately, for Pergamum, it became too much like churches today—a place where both truth and error exist and even celebrated. Jesus brings His rebuke and correction into that situation.

#### **I. Introduction.**

##### A. Read 2:12-17.

1. New York is known as “The City that Never Sleeps.” Chicago is known as the “Windy City.” Las Vegas is “Sin City.”
2. Pergamum could easily be called “City of Satan.”
3. And in the midst of this city, the city of Satan, we find a church. And when we look at this church and we carefully consider what Jesus says and does say to this church we can learn much in the way of our place here in Kenosha and SE Wisconsin as well.

##### B. Pergamum (12a).

1. A major city that was quite wealthy.
2. It was a successful city and managed to be the capital of Asia for 4 centuries.
3. Use wealth to build many different temples for worship—the city was like Athens, filled with idols of every type.
  - a. Zeus—savior-god.
  - b. Athena—victory-bearing-god.
  - c. Dionysus—The god of the royal family.
    - (1) In Roman days the name was changed to Bacchus, which many of you may recognize.

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- (2) Associated with fertility and wine. Followers were known for their drunken reveling and sexual orgies.
    - d. Asklepios—its shrine was noted for healing and people from all over the world would come to it.
      - (1) A key form of worship would be the feeding a snake in the temple.
      - (2) The sick would spend the night in the temple and if a non-poisonous snake touched them they were supposedly cured. The snakes would be roaming throughout the temple.
      - (3) This temple still finds itself worked into the fabric of our society. The medical image of the snake wrapped around the staff is the symbol of Asklepios.
  4. Perhaps the most important note to be made about this city was that it was the first in Asia to have a temple devoted to the worship of the Roman emperor.
    - a. In any other city, a Christian faced persecution regarding emperor worship, but it was usually only once per years when it was expected that you give a pinch of incense in worship of him.
    - b. Note that the process was like this: you would take a small pinch of incense and burn it in the temple and then say, “Caesar is Lord.”
    - c. But it was a daily threat in Pergamum.
  5. It was also the inventor of “parchment” which was made out of animal skins and housed a huge library of 200,000 volumes which were later lost.
  6. It was more like a modern-day university town than a factory town.
    - a. It was a lover of ideas therefore. Think of it like Athens in Acts 17 where everyone loved to debate and discuss all the while never actually taking a firm stand in an absolute way.
    - b. Often this affects churches in similar environments. They want to put the Christian faith out into what is called the “market-place of ideas” but often fail to make the Christian doctrinal claims to be absolute. The result ends up to be the toleration of bad doctrine, bad ideas and a failure to maintain true doctrinal purity.
- C. The description of Jesus Christ (12b).

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1. The description comes from 1:16 and is connected to words—specifically words of judgment.
2. Understanding a historical point here helps us: Pergamum was granted “the right of the sword” which meant that they could carry out capital punishment at will. This is not something every city had and it was considered a true honor to possess.
3. With this in mind, consider the image that Jesus uses of Himself here.
  - a. One aspect is that it is reminding the readers that Jesus Christ, not the powers of this world, holds the ultimate power over life and death.
  - b. Cf. Revelation 19:15, 21.
  - c. This is both a comfort and a point of fear for the readers as it is immediately followed by vss 13ff.
4. Truth is both life-giving and death-dealing. It truly is a two-edged sword which cuts both ways.
  - a. Our age is one made up of lies within lies. It is true both on an individual basis and in a corporate one.
  - b. Everyone has something to hide and everyone has something they desire never to be revealed.
  - c. But on the day of judgment all of that will go away and only truth will remain:
    - (1) “If you say, ‘See, we did not know this,’ Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?” (Proverbs 24:12)
    - (2) “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.” (Matthew 16:27)
    - (3) Romans 2:5-8, 16.
    - (4) “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:14)
5. Gone will be our opinions and attitudes, only truth shall be present, both saving and destroying.

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6. The bible is described as being sharper than a two-edged sword in Hebrews 4:12.
  - a. It has this incredible ability to cut through, separate and ultimately reveal all things.
  - b. The imagery is that of separating what is inseparable such as the soul and spirit or thoughts and intentions.
  - c. Jesus, through His Word, even now is able to conduct such delicate surgery to deal with and remove the cancer of sin hidden in our hearts. He opens our eyes to the glory of our salvation and He shows us the subtle, yet wonderful safe position of refuge we have through our faith and trust in Him.
7. And in a moment you will see how this two-edged sword is key to the problems in this church at Pergamum. I call this church the “Church of Inconsistency.”

## **II. The Church of Inconsistency.**

- A. Three things the Judge knows about the situation (13):
  1. First—He knows about them and their situation.
    - a. Notice that they dwell were Satan dwells.
    - b. He is not unaware of the difficulty of their situation. This is similar to His words to Smyrna.
      - (1) Jesus knows their life is hard and is fraught with so many opportunities to abandon Him.
      - (2) He knows they face the reality of death.
    - c. Here we have a great image of the care of the Lord for his people but also how radical His call is to be a light to the nations.
    - d. Do not let this fact of Jesus’ awareness of your situation pass by your mind too quickly.
      - (1) It is far too easy for you and I to forget His constant, abiding presence. We get lost in our fears or sorrow and discouragements and yet He is ever with us.

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- (2) My mind went immediately to 1 Peter 5:7 where Peter tells us to cast all our cares upon Him for He cares for us. And the context there is in times of suffering and hardship.
  - (3) So much of your life is one of learning how to interpret things that happen. And a key way to help in interpreting your life is that Jesus knows you and your situation.
    - (a) He has not and will not abandon you. God has you where He desires you.
    - (b) He does not call you to be great, merely to be faithful where you are.
2. Second—He knows about Satan’s throne.
    - a. What is this? Really hard to be absolutely certain.
    - b. View 1—the worship of Asklepios who was traditionally shown as a god holding a serpent.
    - c. View 2—the great altar of Zeus the Savior which was throne-like, horseshoe shaped altar with sculptures of serpents. It was at the top of a mountain and was a huge, dominating part of the city as you approached it.
    - d. View 3—it was home to so many idols.
    - e. View 4—it was home to intense emperor worship.
    - f. I lean toward the final view but it is truly hard to be certain and it is not necessary to know for certain. Satan is the father of lies, he is the deceiver of deceivers and where false teaching exists, there you find Satan.
  3. Third—He knows about their faithfulness.
    - a. Held fast His name. What does this mean?
    - b. At question is does this refer to the content of revelation Jesus gave regarding Himself or does it mean a personal loyalty to Jesus Christ and therefore refusing to worship the other gods there?
    - c. I think that really it is both, though the emphasis is upon remaining loyal/faithful to Jesus in the face of great pressure to do otherwise.

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- (1) His name represents all of what He is and represents. It would be his deity and his humanness. It would be His lordship and that He alone is savior.
  - (2) Deuteronomy 11:22.
  - (3) Job 2:9.
  - (4) Jeremiah 8:5.
  - (5) 1 Corinthians 15:2.
  - (6) Hebrews 3:14.
  - (7) Hebrews 4:14
  - (8) Hebrews 10:23.
- d. Did not deny His faith.
- (1) Very similar to the above point, just from the opposite perspective.
  - (2) We believe what the bible says about Jesus and we reject what the bible rejects.
  - (3) We are people who believe the Word and what the Word speaks to us, for it is the faith/doctrine of our Lord.
  - (4) And because of this we also stand firm when we are presented with the very real temptation to recoil from our claim of faith when pressure is brought upon us.
- e. This is not something to pass over lightly. We do not face this much in our situation right now though it is rapidly changing before our eyes.
- (1) The church in Corinth had to deal with this because of the incredible influence of idolatry of every type in that city. Ultimately Paul made is crystal clear to them in 2 Corinthians 6:15-18, "Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, " will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come

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out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' Says the Lord Almighty."

(2) The entire book of 1 John drives home the idea of fidelity to the person of Jesus Christ. We are not free to define Him nor our response to Him in our terms. We cannot diminish in any way the consequences of calling Him Lord.

4. It is one thing to talk about this in the abstract but John brings up a key example in the life of a key man in the church there to drive home his point.

## B. Antipas.

1. Witness=martyr.

2. Same term as in Revelation 1:5 where Jesus is also called the faithful witness.

3. Antipas was a leader in the church there. Historical tradition tells us that he was roasted to death inside a hollow bronze bull on the Altar of Zeus.

a. Try to wrap your mind around that fact.

b. Here was a man who was killed for the Christian faith. And it was done in such a manner as to leave a deep, deep impression upon the minds of all other Christians there.

c. If this bronze bull was constructed like many others then it had openings created in it so that the screams of the person inside were amplified and broadcast out for all to hear.

4. And it is in this context that Jesus praises this church. They knew Him, trusted Him, and were being faithful to His name in the midst of a very difficult situation. And He knew this.

5. But . . . .

## C. Complaints and Charges (*alla* — a strong complaint):

1. They are a tolerant church at the same time. And it is here that I believe we see a close correlation between this church and the churches in America so we must take notice.

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2. Before we get into the issues related to these two false teachings I want you to look at verse 14 carefully to see exactly what it says.
  - a. It is not saying that the church there as a whole is practicing these things, nor is it even saying that the majority of them are doing them.
  - b. Rather, the issue is that there are some in their midst who are teaching these things.
  - c. Quick comments:
    - (1) It is always wrong to tolerate open sin in the midst of a church. 1 Corinthians 5 makes that clear regarding the ultimate degrading influence it brings.
    - (2) But it is always worse to allow for false teaching to come into the church for the effects become much greater much faster.
    - (3) What is likely happening here is that there is that love of knowledge that comes with an intellectual environment like Pergamum. And along with this comes an attitude of tolerance toward other views.
    - (4) Jesus makes it clear though that this is not an option for any church. They are always to be moving toward doctrinal purity and faithfulness.
3. The teachings of Balaam.
  - a. He was a prophet of God and yet he betrayed his calling and the result was the death of 24,000 Israelites.
  - b. But behind even this was greed.
    - (1) Balak, the king of Moab paid him to pronounce a curse on Israel.
    - (2) But God prevented this from happening and a blessing was given instead.
    - (3) Balak was very angry, but Balaam then gave the counsel regarding idols as a temptation to get himself back into good graces with Balak.



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- (4) You can read about this in Deuteronomy 23.
- c. Because he was prevented from harming Israel by cursing them he instead came up with the idea of corrupting them by having women from Moab seduce many of the men of Israel, bringing with them their paganism and idolatry.
- d. It is interesting that Balaam is mentioned two other times in the New Testament and always in a bad way. He became the poster child of false teaching, corruption, and religion for profit.
- 4. The teachings of Nicolaitans.
  - a. Again we are not sure what the actual teachings were, but that is not what is important.
  - b. Just like the terrible influences of teachings similar to the falsehoods of Balaam, this church was also tolerating this type of teaching as well.
  - c. We do have this information regarding the Nicolaitans, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria – wrote this about the Nicolaitans: “They live lives of unrestrained indulgence, abandoning themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.”
- 5. So here is a church that is doctrinally sound and loves the truth. But it is also a church that is missing the point regarding tolerance for bad teaching and the result is that the church is harming itself.
- D. The command—repent.
  - 1. What would be a proper show of repentance here? I ask this because Jesus doesn’t bother to tell them what they are to do. It is assumed that they know what should be done.
  - 2. The casting out of false teaching and false practice.
  - 3. Notice how this command is given to “you” but the warning of Jesus making war is against “them.” Basically, either the leadership of the church deals with this problem or Jesus will do it.
- E. The promise.
  - 1. Hidden manna.
    - a. It speaks of spiritual life and nourishment from above.

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- b. God promises to sustain us as we rest and trust in Him.
2. White stone.
  - a. We are not sure what he is referring to here.
  - b. The best understanding is that in those days people could receive free refreshments and admission to various entertainments in the Roman Empire. The “ticket” was a stone that had their name on it.
3. Putting these two together there is a possible image of those who overcome having admittance to the great future marriage supper of the lamb.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. Doctrinal purity is valued by our Lord.
- B. Tolerance in the church regarding sin and false teaching is never acceptable.
- C. There is no place on earth that should be devoid of the gospel presence.
  1. A city defined by Satan, filled with false teaching, and yet in it there is found a church.
  2. Not a call to flee and find a better place, a safer place, but a call to be pure in the midst of impurity.
- D. As our nation continues to rush towards a total rejection of truth the church must work hard at maintaining and proclaiming truth. No apologies.

### **IV. Benediction/Doxology.**

Peace be to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

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## Small Group Questions

- How does one become sound in doctrine and yet tolerant of bad doctrine and sin?
- What are some of the pressures that you see pressing in on Missio Dei Fellowship from outside influences? How are you helping in resisting them?
- Pray for the elders of Missio in light of this sermon.