

# Pergamum: The Church of Toleration and Affliction

Revelation 2:12-17

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  - b) How would you summarize Jesus' message to the church in Pergamum? What good things does He say? What correction does he have for them?
  - c) How have you seen engagement with culture done well as a church? What happens when a church steps too far into cultural traps in order to reach people? What happens when a church never engages culture?
  - d) Here is your "One Thing" for this week: Write a letter to Elijah Marlow, a member of our church currently serving among persecuted believers in India, and tell him you are in prayer for him. Also write a letter for anyone he comes across who is or has faced persecution. Place these letters on Matt's desk and they will be sent to India shortly.

# Pergamum: The Church of Toleration and Affliction

Revelation 2:12-17

## Introduction

In my life I've lived in some very dark spiritual areas in our world. Throughout China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and hundreds of other countries, to openly follow Christ and not pledge allegiance to another religion or a current day emperor would spell death for you as a christian. We look at churches in these regions and we fear for them. We care for them. We raise money for them and we pray for them.

Yet every time I return from a place in this world where Christianity is hated... I realize we are in more trouble here than we realize.

Our battle here isn't against persecution. It isn't against a government that demands absolute fealty. It is against the infiltration and toleration of all the comforts, indulgences and practices of our world in our churches.

We're not in danger of persecution. We're in danger of allowing the world to infiltrate our very midst as the body of Christ and thus fall into the world and not even realize it is happening.

That's our battle. That battle along with the battle of persecution is the battle of a church 2,000 years ago in the ancient city of Pergamum.

Open your Bibles to the book of Revelation 2:12-17. We're going to be looking at the church in the city of Pergamum. As you may recall, the book of Revelation may be separated into three different sections. Written by the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos in, most likely, A.D. 95. John was given this message by God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This message that John received and has written down for us to read can be separated into three sections.

The first section is what we know as "Things seen." In chapter 1 of the book of Revelation, John records that which he has seen. Mainly, a vision of Jesus Christ.

The Second section is a section based on "Things that Are." This is the section that we will settle into today as we open our Bibles to Revelation 2. The section "Things that Are" is made up of 7 letters written to 7 churches. These letters are written for their commendation - to encourage them in their works. However, as we will see today, these letters are also written for their refutation, for their correction.

The third section of the book of Revelation begins at chapter 4 when we begin to look at "Things to Come." Today, and for four more weeks in this series, we will be in the section of "Things that Are."

It's important to note that these were historical churches. The church of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea did exist. These letters were given directly to the messengers of these churches, likely the pastors, because real issues existed in these real churches.

It is also important to note that the message given to these churches doesn't expire at these churches. Pastor Jace made the point that it is possible that after John wrote this letter on the Island of Patmos, the seven leaders of these churches took the writings of this book and distributed them to each church on their way through Asia Minor.

Ephesus was the church who lost its first love. Smyrna was the persecuted church and Pergamum is a compromising church. There are certainly truths that we can take away from these three letters and the four to come here at Cornerstone Church in Casper and in our personal walks with Christ.

Whether we are the smart church with no passion, the church facing persecution or the church allowing the teachings of the world to enter our midst, we have things to learn from these letters.

We will be using the same outline that we have seen in the previous two churches as well as the next four churches.

Follow along with me as I read our passage together and we will then dive into the first words of verse 12.

## Revelation 2:12-17

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:  
The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:  
13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

## Destination (2:12)

**And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:**

### The Messenger

As we have discussed in the previous weeks, this word “angel” isn’t to be understood as an angelic being, but this word simply means messenger. This is the same Greek root word used in Mark 1:2 to translate the prophecy of Isaiah regarding John the Baptist - “A messenger preparing the way for the Lord...”

It is highly likely that once this book was recorded by John, the messengers or pastors of these 7 churches then took this message and distributed it among the seven churches.

### Geography of Pergamum

We’ve mentioned the name Pergamum a few times now. I don’t want to spend too much time talking about the physical location of this church, but it is important to know where this church is, especially since Jesus specifically tells them in verse 13 that **“He knows where they dwell.”** This means that there is something special to be noted about the location, culture, history and context of this city.

First, Pergamum is located in present day Turkey. The name Pergamum literally means citadel. The ancient city is located roughly 20 miles up a fertile valley from the Aegean sea. If you are familiar with our missionaries Pat and Terry Woodward, you know that they work with refugees on the Island of Lesbos. That Island is roughly 40 miles due east of this ancient city. Pergamum was constructed on a high hill, roughly 1,000 ft. overlooking the valley below. At the time that this letter was written, we were already into the reign of Domitian, the 11th Roman Emperor, the city of Pergamum was likely to be home to over 150,000 people. The city had stretched from the mountain top down into the valley and massive construction projects were underway.

In fact, today the modern city of Bergama sits in the valley below this ancient city. A population of 100,000 Bergama certainly doesn’t hold the same status that the ancient city of Pergama once held for over 500 years.

In case you’re wondering, their forecast today is partly cloudy with a high of 54 degrees. The closest ski resort is a 2 hour 28 minute drive on your way towards Izmir, the modern city of Smyrna.

## History of Pergamum

In ancient times, this city was a very important city in Asia Minor. You may remember that when Alexander the Great died, he separated his empire under a series of generals and successors. The region of modern day Turkey, Asia Minor, was left under the control of a man named Lysimachus. Pergamum, being the place where the treasure was stored, naturally became a powerful city. In fact, under the Seleucid Empire, Pergamum was made the capital of an expanding vassal state across the region.

Five kings of Pergamum came and went between 263 B.C. and 133 B.C. when the last of those five kings, Attalus III died he ended his reign by giving the kingdom over to the protectorate of Rome.

So from 133 B.C. until present time, the city of Pergamum was under the rule of Rome.

Some interesting physical facts about Pergamum that you may want to know...

During this time, a massive library was compiled of over 200,000 transcripts. In ancient times, this library was only rivaled by that of Alexandria. In fact, in 41 B.C. Mark Antony actually moved this entire library to Alexandria as a gift to his romantic lover, Cleopatra. I don't care who you are or what you got your wife for Valentines day - you've been outdone, son.

Pergamum is also known for its intense idol worship. The acropolis of this city, which is the high point where the temples of worship are set, is littered with temples of worship to Pagan Greco-Roman gods such as Zeus, Demeter, Athena, Egyptian gods and the god of healing Asklepios.

## Status and Future of Pergamum

Pergamum, given its history and development, quickly became the Roman center of governance for this province. This means that legislation, trials and all sorts of government works are happening in this city. Think of it as a regional capital.

By the time that the book of Revelation was written in 95 A.D. this city had already adopted a major identity as the first city to build a temple to a Roman Emperor. They began construction, on the acropolis, to a Temple dedicated to Augustus, Rome's first Emperor in 29 A.D. - only two years after Augustus was made Emperor.

The cities Smyrna and Ephesus followed suit in this new form of Emperor worship by building temples of their own and then shortly after John wrote the book of Revelation Pergamum built another temple - this time to Emperor Trajan - to cement their status as the prominent city engaging in Emperor worship. At this time, this was certainly an the identity that Pergamum had chosen to take on as a city.

Here sits Pergamum in 95 A.D. Paul had traveled through the region, if not through this very city 40 years earlier on his 3rd missionary journey. This church somehow began either from Paul or another church leader. The city of Pergamum continues to be one of the most prominent idol worshiping cities in the region and has become an increasingly difficult environment for Christians to thrive in and John is now writing a letter to help support them. Yet even within the greeting, we know that Jesus has some tough words for this church.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: **The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:**

### “Two Edged Sword”

There are three other references to the phrase “**sharp two-edged sword...**” in the book of Revelation. The first is in Chapter 1 where John is writing what he sees about Jesus and again in chapter 19. All four uses reflect the judicial authority of Christ in this picture of the two-edged sword. Clearly, this introduction doesn’t sound good for the church of Pergamum.

Pergamum - being the regional government, would understand this reference to justice. Jesus is placing himself as the ultimate judge over Pergamum, Rome and every other empire between this point and his second coming in chapter 19.

### Commendation (2:13)

**I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.** (where his throne is)

### “I know where you dwell”

Ephesus - “Your works”

Smyrna - “Your Tribulation”

Thyatira - Laodica “Your works”

**Pergamum - “Where you dwell”**

For such a drastic change of course from the other letters, there must be something here to pay attention to. Something about this location is worth mentioning over the other churches and their locations.

We see right here in the text that Jesus is pointing out that this is “where Satan’s throne is.”

## “Where Satan’s throne is”

He is at work in the world - in all the other cities that Jesus sends messages to through Asia Minor. Even in Smyrna we see the Synagog of Satan - but there is obviously something different about Pergamum. This is where Satan has his throne.

What makes Pergamum the throne of Satan? Great question. I’m not sure I have an answer but here are some of the most likely of the many options that scholars discuss.

- 1) Persecution (Brief)
  - a) Some scholars would argue that due to the special reference of Satan in Smyrna and in Pergamum and the fact that both churches had faced persecution and killing, that Satan’s throne is a reference to a stronghold of persecution against the church.
- 2) Worst of the Seven Churches (Brief)
  - a) This view is believes that if you’re just looking at the seven churches that John was writing to, the city of Pergamum definitely seems to be the most emboldened by ido worship and sinful acts.
- 3) Asklepios Temple
  - a) This view is that this throne is the seat of worship of Askelopis, whose traditional image portrayed the god holding a serpent, an image that would remind Christians of Satan. The prominence of this god caused Pergamum to be known as the center of this kind worship throughout Asia Minor.
  - b) Similarities between Christian worship and Asklepion worship.
    - i) The priesthood of this cult allegedly possessed precious medical secrets that would impart physical health.
    - ii) Asklepios was often referred to as a “savior” by its worshipers.

(1) These are both obvious advances by Satan to setup the Asklepion religion as an anti-christ type religion.

- 4) Zeus Temple
  - a) Yet Asklepios wasn’t the only false god who was often referred to as a “savior.”
  - b) The temple of Zeus was certainly the most dominant on the acropolis above the city. This temple could have easily been identified as the main reason why John identified this city particularly as the throne of Satan.
  - c) However, Zues worship had been going on for over 300 years in this city. It certainly wasn’t the most dominant or shiney temple on the hill anymore.
    - i) However, there was one more thing that may have been asserting dominance around this time that seems to be the most logical reason why John was referring to Pergamum as the throne of Satan.

## 5) Emperor Worship

- a) Pergamum was proud to be the first city to erect a temple dedicated to the worship of a Roman Emperor.
  - i) As I mentioned earlier, this temple was dedicated to Augustus just two years after he became Emperor in 27 B.C.
  - ii) In fact, they were so proud of this practice that when Smyrna and Ephesus also built temples to Roman Emperors, Pergamum built a second temple, this time to Emperor Trajan earning the city the title “twice neogoros” or Temple Warden.
- b) Scholars argue, and I agree, that this is the most likely reason why Pergamum is referred to as the city where Satan’s throne is. All throughout the coming chapters of Revelation, we constantly see “Caesar” like adoration in the background as the world order and antichrist come on the scene.
  - i) This is also likely why Smyrna, who also had a temple to Emperor Tiberus at this time, and Pergamum had advanced cases of persecution. Normal Greco-Roman gods required worship once a year. Emperor worship turned into an almost daily occurrence.
- c) It is likely that John saw Pergamum as the leading city of an Empire desiring absolute control and obedience which is playing the role as dominant judge and authority hence being the greatest threat to the church.

So, is it the persecution that bears Pergamum the status of Satan’s throne? Is it that it is the worst of the seven churches? Is it Asklepios? Is it Zeus? Is it this new form of Emperor worship that sets it apart as Satan’s throne?

I think the answer is Yes. All of these things are evident that Satan’s grip on this city is incredibly strong and Jesus knows what this church is up against.

Yet with all of this, Jesus has something great to say to this church.

### “You Hold Fast My name”

Here we see a specific reference to a guy named Antipas. We really don’t know who Antipas was. He was probably a leader in the church - this could have been their pastor - we don’t know. Yet we do know that there was strong persecution here in Pergamum and it is likely that this is coming from the hands of the government as they have the ability, regionally, to levy punishment of death.

Some church historians also hold that Pergamum is the place where the church leader Polycarp, the disciple of Irenaeus, the disciple of John, the author of this book, was martyred in 155 A.D.



I'm not sure if I would stand behind this statement completely, but it seems that life for a believer in Pergamum in 95 A.D. is a lot like life for a christian under the reign of the Antichrist that we see later in the pages of Revelation.

## Antipas

Antipas lost his life for holding fast to the Name of Jesus.

The word used in this letter is literally μάρτυς martus (mar'toos) which is easy to understand where we get our english word martyr - a direct transliteration.

Most the time we come across this word in scripture, it is translated as witness as the NASB and ESV translate here in this verse.

However, if you were to look at this verse in the King James version, it specifically translates the word as martyr, introducing a new word into the english language.

We're starting to see a metamorphosis of this word from meaning "messenger" to our current meaning of "a person who voluntarily suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce" their faith in Christ.

I want to point out that this is the same word used in Acts 1:8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses (my martus) in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Antipas has literally carried out this word to full completion here in Pergamum.

Jesus is saying to this church that you watched My witness become My martyr, and you never deviated from your faith and you never denied My name. The faithfulness of that little church should be a challenge to all of us today.

Antipas paid the supreme price for not compromising. Some of us aren't even willing to sacrifice our popularity or our wrong desires for the sake of staying separated from the world. You have to ask, what in the world has happened to our sense of values? Here's a man who would rather die than compromise. We would readily compromise rather than change the simplest pattern of our selfish lives.

## Refutation (2:14-15)

So Pergamus had these wonderful words by Christ about their faithfulness and sacrifice, yet what we're about to read in these two verses is a very, very sad condemnation.

**But I have a few things against you, because you have there some (among you) who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitians.**

### “Few things”

I just hate hearing that. Such a good church. They are holding fast, not denying their witness of Jesus Christ. And yet there are these sad words that the Lord has something against them.

This church won't deny their faith. But they won't deal with sin. They allow people within their church to believe these things that are completely wrong and they won't do anything about it. They aren't comfortable in their persecution - it is obvious that they are being persecuted. But they are comfortable with the influence of the world in their midst.

### “Among you”

Unlike the false teachers in Ephesus, these people were from within the church.

**Some of the congregation was “holding fast” to faith in Christ, some were “holding fast” to the teachings of Balaam.**

Corporately, Jesus is commending the church holding fast in their faith, and corporately Jesus is refuting the church of their tolerance of those who are holding fast to this false teaching.

**The fault of the church as a whole was not the adherence to the teaching or doctrine of Balaam, but rather indifference to those within who were in sympathy with it.**

Then John directs their attention to two heresies - one Old Testament and one in a New Testament era.

### Teaching of Balaam

We don't have time to dive into detail what he is referring here as the teaching of Balaam. However, you can read for yourself that which I'm about to summarize in Numbers 22, 23, 24 and 25.

The Lord directs us to exactly the doctrine and teaching that he has in mind in using this Old Testament story as an example of what the church of Pergamum was allowing into their midst.

(v. 14) **“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some (among you) who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”**

So what is the doctrine here? Balaam was essentially a “prophet for hire.” Balak, king of Moab had all these Hebrews on his doorstep as they had just entered the promise land. Balak wanted to get rid of Israel. He hired Balaam to curse Israel. Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel and three times it failed. Finally, Balaam came up with another idea to earn his money. He would corrupt Israel.

So what did he do? He came up with a plot where the Moabite women would move in among the Hebrews and would sexually seduce the Israelite men and suck them into intermarriage. Once he had them intermarried, these Moabite women would suck these Israelite men into all the lifestyles of the Moabite people. If you could summarize Moabite culture it would simply be fornication and idolatrous feasts of gluttonous orgies and lasciviousness. So Balaam set out to work his plot to destroy Israel through intermarriage with Moabite women so he could bring Israel into a blasphemous union with Satan and idols and fornication. That would certainly destroy their power.

You want to know something? It worked exactly how he planned it.

**The doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that people of God can intermarry with the heathen and thus will become what the heathen are.**

People in this church are saying “we’re not supposed to be separate from the world” and “we’re supposed to intermarry with these people” and “it’s okay to go up to the temple and offer sacrifice to these false gods along with worshipping the true God” and it’s okay to mix old life morals and patterns with the life of a believer.

Now, when I say it that way - of course we know it is wrong! But how often do we do similar things?

Doesn’t Paul tell us in 2 Corinthians 6 that “**What fellowship has light with darkness?**” or 1st Corinthians 6 “**We were bought with a price, now glorify God with your bodies.**”

James 4:4 “**Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?**”

So you have people here in the church of Pergamum teaching that you can do all these evil, worldly things **and what is worse you have the saints in the church doing nothing about it!**

And so we have people here teaching that you can engage in worldly acts, specifically in sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols which was specifically forbidden by the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 (because again, it was a stumbling block).

There is a word today for what this church is struggling with. Syncretism.

- Eating food sacrificed to idols (syncretism)
- Acts of immorality (syncretism)

- Essentially, Balaam's fault was 1st, he prostituted himself out for hire. 2nd, he layed stumbling blocks in front of the israelite people ... and it worked.

Both of these cases draw out an emphasis of something being thrown in front of Israel with the explicit purpose to cause their downfall.

## Teaching of the Nicolatians

Then there is another thing in the text that the Lord has against them.

V. 15 **"So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolatians."**

We don't know much about the Nicolatians from Scripture. However, there is a small phrase in there that is very important.

**"In the same way."**

The Nicolatians were comparable to those who followed Balaamism. Some think that Nicolatians goes back to Acts 6 and the appointed deacon who later became an apostate. We don't really know that. Either way, this Nicolas was advocating a mingled lifestyle with the world.

Sometimes you hear people talking as if everything they can possibly think of engaging in is covered by grace. Don't worry about going to the bar and getting drunk. God's grace will cover it. Don't worry about cheating on your spouse, God's grace will cover it.

People go so far down this abuse of grace that everything you can desire in your sinful heart can be covered by grace.

Church, on once sense, they are right. No matter what you've done, you have not separated yourself too far from God that his grace through the shed blood of Jesus Christ can't bring you back.

But to say that once Jesus saves you by grace along that you can go on abusing that grace by DELIBERATELY stumbling back into the sins of this world - that is a gross abuse of God's grace and it is on the chopping block in this church where Jesus is saying if you don't get rid of this, I am coming with my sword and I will take care of business.

## Exhortation (2:16a)

**Therefore repent;**

**"Therefore Repent"**

**"Therefore"** shows the logical outcome of the Lord's hatred of the evils in their midst. This is meant to seem as a very logical action step in response to God's condemnation.

Unlike the church in Ephesus, **the church of Pergamum was guilty of unjustified tolerance that had not been purged.** Because of this, the Lord urges them to repent.

What is repent? Simply to turn away from a certain action - or in this case, nonaction.

But you say - isn't this the sin of just a few? How can the church be called to repent for the actions of others?

1 Corinthians 5 - When talking about the issue of sexual immorality within the church, Paul says this in verse 6. **"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"**

You can't tolerate just a little as it will soon consume the entire lot.

## Motivation (2:16b-17)

**Or else** I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war **against them** with the sword of My mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

### Negative then Positive Motivation

"Or else"

Literally translated "If However Not."

John is saying, if you don't do this - if you don't purge yourself from this sin - I will.

Essentially, repent, and if you don't I will come and wage war against them.

Same language used when addressing the church of Ephesus when addressing their issue. Jesus is being quite serious with the interactions to those in these churches. There is no mistaking the price that would have to be paid if they ignore his correction.

### Threatened Action

The action is threatened against "them" (αὐτόν - autos) a "Personal Pronoun" referring not to the church as a whole, but to the group under criticism of sinful actions.

However, even though the proposed action seems to be against those who are acting upon the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitons, the call to repentance is clearly directed to the church.

As displayed in 2:12, Christ has both the means and the reason to wage war against those in this church. His double edged sword is his justification for this threat.

In essence, this is a call to the church at Pergamum to demonstrate its genuineness by repenting of its lenience toward those in error who had become part of that local fellowship. Failure to do so would mean dreadful consequences for them.

## Command to Hear

“He who has an ear...” is used in each of the seven letters. Simply a command to listen and to devote high attention to the message at hand.

Jesus is a very kind judge. He won't back down from righteous action, but he will do all he can to help his listener understand the pending action and their option to repent.

This was the negative motivation. Now, the tone switches towards a more positive note.

## Promise to the “Overcomer”

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who **overcomes, (an overcomer)** to him I will give some of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.**”

### Overcomer

Who is an overcomer? Each time it is used in the book of Revelation it is referring to a Believer.

John, in his first Epistle - 1 John 5:4-5 he says “**For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**”

To the true believer here in Pergamum, Jesus offers hope.

### Hidden manna

You may ask, what does that represent? What does that mean? I think there is an important contrast here to be heard.

Remember, at the time of Balaam, the Israelites were still wandering around in the wilderness, being sustained from the manna from heaven. This contrast can also apply to the fact that both Balaam and the Nicolaitans are trying to get people to eat food sacrificed to Idols.

Manna, according to Exodus, resides in the Arc of the Covenant as a symbol of God's faithfulness. If contrasted with either of these ideas, we see that God is promising care and sustenance to those who are overcomers as well as the promise of “better than” of the food sacrificed to idols.

## White Stone

Then in closing, he says “and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

Again, you may ask - what is that? I don't know. But scholars have narrowed it down to a few good options and I'll share some of those with you.

First, some say that this stone is similar to the twelve allusion stones on the breastplate of the high priest. Each of these stones have a name of one of the 12 tribes engraved on it. The problem is these stones are traditional black, not white. However, there is a stone on the breastplate of the High Priest that is white. **This stone is called the Urim.** Hidden beneath the twelve stones, this stone was a precious diamond often taking on the color white. This stone is said to allow the High Priest to “know the will of God.” However, this stone is never mentioned to have any names written on it - so it is unlikely that this is what the white stone in Revelation is referring to.

Another thought that some have is that this is similar to the ancient practice of juries when reaching a judicial decision. **They would cast white stones in an urn to signify their acquittal** and a black stone to signify condemnation. While this may have some idea of the meaning, I agree with most scholars that this isn't the best example as these stones were simply used for voting and had no name written on it. Furthermore, the “Overcomer” that Jesus is referring to here doesn't really need acquittal, as they have already been redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus. So again, while a good thought - it may not be the best.

There is one more historically interesting item to note. It was a well established custom to reward victors of games with a special white token, with their name inscribed upon it, as admission to the special feast that followed the games only for the victors.

Obviously, if we think about this in the context of the book of Revelation, this has significant parallels to the great feast in Revelation 19. A beautiful reminder of the upcoming supper of the Lamb.

And the fact that this name written on this stone is unknown to anyone but the giver and the receiver of this stone shows such a wonderful personalization of this relationship between God and his Overcomers.

One final note I want to make. This “**new name**” that is inscribed on the stone is a very specific name. The word for “new” is specifically stating that this name is unused, new - not simply in contrast with something old.

Clearly the new name is the recipient's own name, a new one, reflecting his status as belonging to Christ. This name, the personal secret between God and the Overcomer, is the new, completely original name of adoption.

## Closing

Church, we don't want to be a compromising church. So we need to deal with issues lest the Lord comes against us and wages war with us with the sword of His mouth. We want our faith to be real and we want to hold fast to His name.

When pushed, we don't want to deny what we know is true. We want to be true witnesses like Antipas.

Yet more than not denying our faith, we want to deal with errors in our fellowship.

I lived in the Middle East for a while and have been in and out of persecuted countries quite a lot. Each time I come back to the states, the same thought enters my mind.

Our syncretistic ways in the churches in this country are more dangerous than the most radical persecution. ISIS can destroy a village, but the gospel will prevail - we

Jesus is saying - persecution, even death isn't your problem in this church. The fact that they were allowing worldly ways enter into their fellowship was the problem in this church.

You're one thing this week in your G-groups is to write a letter to Elijah. He is currently serving among persecuted believers in India. My recommendation is as you write these letters in your T-Groups, be considering your encouragement to Elijah and those he is working with that he can pass these letters of encouragement onto. Encourage them to hold fast to the teaching of Christ and to their faith and to not allow themselves to be corrupted by the desires of this world. Place these letters on my desk within the next week and we will get them onto India for you.

If you're hearing this message and you're thinking to yourself that you're not an Antipas, but you're one of these followers that is allowing yourself to fall prey to the teachings of this world.

Come talk to us. I, pastor Jace, and of the Elders would love to talk to you and help you onto the right path.

\_\_\_\_\_ will be up front after the service and would love to pray with you.

Let's pray.