

“The Enemy Within”

Revelation 2:12-17

- I. The seven letters to the seven churches.
 - A. The seven cities make up the “mail route” for Asian Minor.
 - B. Not buildings but a collective of believers—most likely home churches.
 - C. Where we’ve been:
 - 1. Ephesus—a committed, hardworking, discerning church who lost their first love.
 - 2. Smyrna—A persecuted church pleasing to Jesus.
- II. Pergamum—the city.
 - A. Inland from the Aegean sea, 55 miles north of Smyrna, the “capital city of Asia Minor, a thriving university, possibly the first medical school and school of psychiatry.
 - B. Under the acropolis was the alter to Zeus—the chief god of the Greek pantheon.
 - C. The first temple erected for emperor worship—Augustus Caesar 29BC
 - 1. Caesar was to be primary Lord—the tension point for the church at Pergamum.
- III. The letter.
 - A. (12) The One who has the two edged sword—A *rhomphaia* the sword of judgement.
 - B. “I know where you dwell”—Jesus knows our situation, our condition, our dilemmas.
 - 1. Satan’s throne:
 - a. The alter of Zeus?
 - b. The presence of many pagan temples, shrines, alters and idols?
 - c. Literally the throne of Satan?
- IV. Jesus’ commendation.
 - A. “You hold fast to My name”
 - B. “You did not deny My faith”
 - 1. Antipas—a martyr for Christ.

V. The condemnation.

A. Holding to the teaching of Ballam.

1. The “doctrine of Balaam” Numbers 22-25
 - a. To get God’s people to compromise yielding God’s judgement.
2. The “stumbling block”—Satan’s tool of choice to get a Christian to compromise.
 - a. The “bait stick” in a trap.
3. Balaam’s stumbling block for Israel.
 - a. To get them to eat food offered to idols.
 - b. To get them to commit sexual immorality.
4. Result?
 - a. Numbers 25:3 **The anger of the Lord burned against Israel.**

B. Holding to the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

1. Who are the Nicolaitans?
 - a. “Nico” = Nike= conqueror = “Laitan” = people—Conqueror of the People.
2. Bottom line? Some in the church has compromised God’s values.

VI. Jesus’ Correction.

A. Repent!

1. Contrition of heart.
2. Confess your sin.
3. Change your direction.

VII. To the Overcomer—1 John 5:1-5

- A. Jesus will nourish the overcomer—manna- the bread of life= Jesus
- B. Acknowledge the Overcomer as His—by giving a new name.
 1. A white stone with a new name on it.

“The Enemy Within”

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I read an article this week that said this: *The church of the Lord Jesus Christ has struggled to understand a valuable lesson throughout her history: Her greatest dangers are almost never from the outside. They are always on the inside. The enemy within.*

I think that true... I realized I spend much of my thinking part of the week reacting to heresy I see coming out of the church.

*Our greatest threats to spiritual health and life are not opposition or even persecution from unbelieving, evil, and wicked men energized by Satan...the greatest toxin to the Christian church can be identified in one word.... **Compromise**....compromise within the church... corporately and individually.*

Nothing will poison the body of Christ... the corporate church... and each individual body that makes up the church like the poison called compromise. The letter to the church in Pergamum is a blatant warning regarding the danger and consequences of compromise...

We are travelling through the last book of the Bible... Revelation... we are in chapter two which began the seven letters to the seven churches... These are seven actual letters to seven actual churches that have been dictated to the apostle John by Jesus Christ Himself... these are the words of Christ.

The seven churches are seven key churches in Asia Minor which is Turkey... these are seven sequential churches that form the “mail route” of Asia Minor... when I say church I am not talking about buildings... I am talking about *the Ecclesia*... the called-out ones... Christians who have joined together in a corporate body.

Living life together... supporting each other... edifying each other to carry out the Great Commission Christ delivered... to share the gospel... make disciples...

These are most likely home churches... several in each city... in fellowship with each other... so when Jesus dictates to John **to the angel of the church in Pergamum write...** He’s writing a letter to all these home churches that have unified in Christ in the city of Pergamum.

We began several weeks ago with the letter to the church at Ephesus... a church that was commended by Christ for their perseverance in the faith... for their discernment and commitment... but they had “**left their first love**”... they were working hard for the Lord... but their love for Him had moved from the front to the rear.

Last time we read the letter to the church at Smyrna... an exceptional church... exceptional in that Jesus had no condemnation or correction for the church... it was a letter of encouragement... the church was going through much tribulation... they were poor... Jesus reminded them though they were poor they were rich with the crown of life.

Each one of these letters to each of these different churches has a crucial message to that church... these are real churches... but each of these letters are messages extended to all the churches and all Christians of all times: **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...** so these letters are for us as a corporate body of Christ and for us as individual Christians... the letter to the church at Pergamum begins:

Read verse 1

Last time I mentioned that it is important to know something about each of these cities these churches reside in... Each city is unique... and provides a context for the message... Pergamum also known as Pergamos... both are interchangeable... Pergamum is a fascinating place... so much we could look into...

Located about 55 miles north of Smyrna... inland about 15 miles from the Aegean Sea... it was not a port city... but it was on an important trade route to the interior of Asia Minor.

The name Pergamum could refer to papyrus, parchment or paper... which some ancient historians say was invented in Pergamum... But Pergamum is also a compound word coming from two Greek words... *Pergos* = tower, or heights... and *Gamos* – marriage... the idea that Pergamos was in an intense marriage with the world...

The city was in a valley under a 1000' mountain... on top was the "acropolis"... under the acropolis was an amphitheater that seated 10,000 people... what is important is that next to the acropolis was the giant 100 foot square altar to Zeus... the chief Greek god... in the pantheon of gods.

Pergamum had a very large university... with a spectacular library... Like Ephesus a huge library of over 200,000 books which it is claimed eventually was sent to Egypt by Marc Anthony to Cleopatra...

Pergamum was known for its medical school... some say the world's first medical school... You probably don't know the name Aesculapius who was the Greek god of healing and medicine... but I'm sure you've seen *The Rod of Aesculapius*... a symbol of a rod with a snake entwined around it...

Today it is the symbol of many medical organizations... AMA (American Medical Assoc.) Blue Cross... many others... I won't do it now... but you can trace the meaning of this rod back to the ancient Babylonian religion and Baal worship... but you really have to dig... fascinating!

Pergamum also is considered by many to be the birthplace of Psychology... there was a “School of Psychology”... let me tell you about it... they had therapy pools...mineral baths... meditation areas...they also had a “Therapy Tunnel”... I understand it is still there today.

A long tunnel...longer than this room... on top of the tunnel were holes every few feet... so you have all these psychological problems so you would begin “therapy” by soaking in a mineral pool... spend time meditating... then you would walk into the tunnel to the first hole...

Your “doctor of psychology” would be on top of the tunnel... you can’t see him... he talks through the hole to you... *I understand you have very, very serious problems....Oh yes! I am really messed up!*...you would walk a few more feet to the next hole.

The doctor would move to the next hole as well... *I know it seems really bad, but it can’t really be that bad.... You’re right, it can’t be as bad as I’m making it*...both move further through the tunnel to the next hole.

Actually, it’s a very nice day today, the sun is shining, the sky is blue, things REALLY are not as bad as they seem!... You’re right... it really is beautiful today...things are really not that bad.

You get to the last hole... the doctor says *You are totally healed from all your problems*...and you walk out completely free from all your problems!... that’s *light at the end of the tunnel!*

In 29BC... Rome approved for Pergamon to have a temple erected for emperor Augustus Caesar... If you remember back to the Ephesian church... Emperor worship had become a big thing...

This temple to Augustus Caesar was the first of the temples in Asian Minor dedicated for the worship of Caesar...Pergamos became the capital city of the Roman Province of Asia...it was the center for emperor worship by the time this letter was written...

Once a year...all the inhabitants of the city were to make their way to the alter of Zues and offer burnt incense...when they did that... it really was an offering to the emperor... you would place your offering on the alter recognizing Caesar as Lord...If you refused to do so... you could be tortured then executed...

Do you see the problem for the church?...A group of believers who recognize only One as Lord... Jesus Christ....so to that church **This is what the One who has the two-edged sword says:**

Remember that in the Bible there are two types of swords mentioned... Hebrews 4:12 says **for the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword**...comparing the Word of God to a sword... this sword is called a *machaira* which is a short sword... used in hand to hand combat...

In Revelation, six times a sword is mentioned... verse 12 is one of them... this sword is not a *machaira* but a *rhomphaia*... A *rhomphaia* is a long broad sword that is used to bring a final fatal

blow to the recipient... as a machaira represents God's Word... a rhomphaia represents God's judgement.... So throughout Revelation... when you see a sword... it is speaking of judgement.

Jesus here in verse 12 has a sharp two edged rhomphaia of judgement...(I am surprised at the amount of commentaries that get this wrong... saying this sword in verse 12 is "the Word of God"...it's not... it represents God's righteous judgement) and He says to the church at Pergamum:

Read verse 13

I know where you dwell...*I know where you live... I know your circumstances... I know....*

Before I go any further... isn't it great to know that Jesus knows where we live...I'm not talking about your address... but where we LIVE...what you're going through... He knows our circumstances... our situations... **He knows!**...that is comforting to me...

Jesus knows the situation...culture... the environment this church is trying to survive in...Historical sources report that Christians in Pergamum lived in existential danger 365 days of the year... *I know you are in the very heart of Satan's kingdom....* He says **you live right there with Satan's throne.**

Many have speculated what that means...

1. Was He referring to that alter of Zeus where you had to pay your offering to Zues?...Zues actually means "savior".

The pagan history behind this alter... the emperor worship and church history is more connected than you realize...this alter of Zues can be traced backed all the way to the origins of the Babylonian religion... which is the bane of Israel throughout the Old Testament.

You really can take it all the way back to Genesis 11, the tower of Babel... after God scatters the people all over the world... those who stayed on at Babel which became Babylon... eventually developed the Babylonia religion centered on the god Baal... Babylon always was a people in rebellion with the one true God...always an enemy with Israel.

Daniel 5 and Isaiah 46 foretold the fall of the Babylonian empire which took place in 439BC.

After the fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian empire and the destruction of its temples...the high priest of Baal in Babylon with his entourage, packed up all their religious stuff... their sacred idols, and fled.... to where?... Pergamum!

They got to Pergamum and set up the brass serpent as the emblem of "*the hidden wisdom*"...[if you really want a fascinating yet disturbing rabbit hole to chase down... follow this history to Rome... connected with emperor worship...where the title Pontifex Maximus is embraced...

The **ultimate Pontifex**...a pontifex literally was "a bridge"... a bridge between the people and god...the highest of priests... You can trace this all the way from Augustus Caesar to

Constantine... every Caesar was Pontifex Maximus...they were to be worshipped as gods... and you can trace it all the way into the early Roman Church...to this very day]

That all could be the idea of Satan's throne...

2. Could it be that they were surrounded by many temples, shrines, alters and idols.

3. Or could it actually...**literally refer to the throne of Satan?** The actual position of the enemy...the throne is in Pergamum!

Why couldn't it be?... Satan has to rule from somewhere... unlike God he is not able to be omnipresent... he can only be one place at a time... it seems like he's everywhere all the time... but that is the work of his demons...Pergamon could actually have been the very throne of Satan.

Well...that's where they are... tough place... but Jesus commends them...Their faithfulness... faithful to what?...

1. Jesus says *You hold fast to My name...you are conducting yourselves... your lives for My glory...you're living for Me... you represent Me... what you do reflects on Me.*

To hold fast to a name is identity... if you hold to the name of Christ... your identity... your name is identified with Christ... as a result... you desire nothing more than to honor that name above all names... Philippians 2:9 -11

Therefore, God also highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9 - 2:11

There's a lot in a name!

2. They did not *deny My faith in the days of Antipas My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.* Another piece of evidence these are letters written to real, actual churches... Antipas... a real actual man... who we know nothing about other than He was faithful to Jesus Christ... to the end...he was martyred...killed for his name being attached to Jesus Christ.

Notice...Jesus doesn't say... Antipas... a great worker... a successful business man... a great husband... one who handled his money well.... No... it was **Antipas, My faithful one...**

Yes, the purpose of this letter is to encourage this church in challenging Pergamum...but it was also to **correct something... the condemnation.**

Read verse 14

(14) What are the **teaching of Balaam**... commonly known as *The Doctrine of Balaam*?.. to understand this we have to go to the Old Testament book of Numbers... way back in the Pentateuch...the five books of Moses...the first five books of the Bible. [you don't have to turn there... I'll paraphrase]

Numbers chapters 22-25... is the story of Balaam... we don't talk a lot about Balaam...but he's quite a character in the Bible... mentioned no less than 60 times...after Israel came out of Egypt being held captive for 400 years...

They received the Law at Mt. Sinai...they were "Promised Land" bound but because of their disobedience and lack of faith God had them wander for 40 years in the wilderness...after the 40 years... the older Israelites died off... the younger ones took their place...a new...fresh generation takes over...

On their way to the Promised Land...a strong, mighty Israel... they journeyed through the land called Moab... The king of Moab...Balak... also mentioned in verse 14... did not like the fact that these Israelites entered into his land Moab (all this is Dan's paraphrase)

Now Balaam was a prophet...a prophet from Mesopotamia...He is called *God's prophet* in Numbers... but he was really not a prophet *for* God...he was willing to use his God given talents for illicit purposes... he was a prophet for hire...*a prophet for prophet*... Balak wants to hire Balaam to deliver curses the nation Israel...to condemn them....to tear them down.

These Hebrews have transgressed into MY land and I don't like it...Balak sends for Balam to come to him... so Balaam starts his journey to see Balak....now...this is the part of Balaam's story most of us know...

The Lord spoke to Balaam and told him to refuse to go to Balak...But Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab back to Balak... knowing Balaam's heart, the Lord's anger burned against Balaam for what He knew was Balaam's rebelliousness, and He sent an angel with a drawn sword to bar his way.

Although Balaam couldn't see the angel, his donkey could, and she tried to discontinue the journey by going off the path, crushing Balaam's foot against the wall and lying down on the path.

Angered by her behavior, Balaam used his staff to beat the donkey three times. Then in Numbers 22:28, we learn that **"the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, *what are you hitting me for?... 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?'*"**

Then Balaam and the donkey proceeded to have a conversation about the situation, with Balaam angrily berating the donkey, after which the Lord opened Balaam's eyes to see the angel and understand why his journey was stopped.

2 Peter 2:16 ...**but he received a rebuke for his own offense, for a mute donkey, speaking with a human voice, restrained the insanity of the prophet.**

Well...God relents and let's Balaam continue on... Balaam was to deliver seven prophesies to the Israelites... seven prophesies that would condemn and be against Israel... Numbers 23-24 record the seven prophesies...

Remember God's promise to Israel?... Genesis 12:2-3

2 And I will make you a great nation,

And I will bless you,

And make your name great;

And so you shall be a blessing;

3 And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Well... Balaam is about to curse Israel... but this is amazing... every time Balaam opens his mouth to deliver one of the condemning curses... oracles...God chooses the words!...instead of curses coming out of Balaam's mouth... blessings came out!

Balak is not happy...Balaam takes Balak aside and says *this isn't working!..God is too strong...too powerful....you can't defeat Israel by cursing Israel...We need to change our approach... we need to destroy Israel from the inside...let Israel destroy themselves!*

What we need to do is to get God Himself to curse Israel... we have to create a situation where the Israelis are living in contradiction to God's plan...His desires... Get them to something that goes directly against God's word... His laws...COMPROMISE

*If we can get Isreal to violate God's plan... it won't be us that curses Israel...God Himself will do it!... Remember... **And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."** Get Israel to curse themselves and God will curse them!*

they came up with this plan... Balaam presents to Balak a plan to put...as it says in 2:14... a **"stumbling block"** in front of Israel...

[You're going along great in your Christian life... you're in God's Word every day... your prayer life is getting better... your children are singing your praises...but this one thing... this one area in your life that you have a weakness for that could derail everything... a sin you've had under control... a temptation that pops up in your path....a **"stumbling block"**...and could result in you compromising.

Interesting Greek word we've translated **stumbling block**...*Skandalon*...sound familiar?... "scandal"...literally means the part of a trap where the bait is fastened to... the "bait stick"...

that “thing” that attracts, entices... then leads the prey into the trap.]...all this is what happens when God’s people “Compromise”...they let down their guard and are enticed into sin.

They know it’s a trap!... they see the bait stick AND KNOW that it is a stumbling block... but it looks so good!... so desirable...

Now know that at this time Israel was on a roll... they were unstoppable... everything was going great...God had been blessing them!...they’ve been on God’s plan...Balaam had a two part strategy...

1. To get them to eat food offered to idols... which is idolatry (Ex.34)...compromising their allegiance to God....putting something at a higher level of importance than Jesus Christ.

2. To get them to commit sexual immorality...which is compromising their God given morality...His standards.

We’ve got to put something in front of them that makes them stumble on their own...WHICH BRINGS ON THEM God’s judgement.... Balaam counseled Balak on the most effective way to weaken Israel.... was through seduction, using Moabite and Midianite women to tempt the Israelites into sexual relationships and into pagan rituals.

The Israelites who participated brought **God’s judgment upon themselves** (Numbers 25:1–9). ...how did they do that?....compromise.

(3) The anger of the Lord burned against Israel... Back to Revelation 2:15

The doctrine of Balaam is... you are compromised to the point **where God has to fix the problem**...the one with the two-edged sword in His mouth.... in the last couple of years some very high profile preachers have publicly fallen by their compromising in the area of God’s morality... through sexual sin.

One of those was one I highly respected, I’ve personally met, listened to him often, sat under him as he preached at conferences...a “godly” man... until it was revealed he was in a five-year sexual affair with a young woman nearly 50 years his junior.

Shocked us... all who knew him!... *how could this be?*... compromise... James 1:14 **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. COMPROMISE HERE...**

You are walking along just fine...everything is going swell... and then there is this stick hanging down with something you really desire.... For me it would be black licorice!... you grabbed the bait. **Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully matured, when sin has entered and fully has taken over the situation... it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.** This is God’s Word!

The doctrine of Baalam... this dynamic preacher/teacher had compromised to the point where God Himself had to expose him... Had to bring down judgement on him... we are surprised at

that.... Why would God set back this dynamic ministry by publicly revealing this man's sin?
[expound]

One more thing Jesus has against this church:

Read verse 15

Who are the Nicolaitans?... this is the second time we've run into this word... back in verse 6 where the Ephesian church is commended by Jesus for **rejecting the Nicolaitans** ...back then I avoided talking about the Nicolaitans saying that I would when we got to where we are now.

Apparently the Nicolaitans made their way up from Ephesus to Pergamum... Who are they?... nobody really knows... some hints... the word itself is a compound word... from "Nico" we get "Nike"... you've heard of that... the running shoe... which means "*The conqueror*".

"Laitin" refers to people... "laity"... put them together you have "*The Conqueror of the People*". Possibly the idea that these were powerful people, possibly political in nature who oppressed people with their power... political mixing theological?

A "*man-made priesthood*"... It could be an oppressive religious group lording their heretical doctrines over people... and some in this church at Pergamon have fallen under their spell... what they had done is compromise in God's truth... they've allowed false teachings into the church... enticed by the world.

Compromise is the act of making concessions... compromise is accepting standards that are opposed to God's standard... and you know it.

- Compromise doesn't happen quickly, you hardly notice the change
- You stray from standards you once held as important
- You often begin to see your compromise as an act that is "good" and "loving"
- Compromise leads you to accept what you once rejected... and even were repulsed by it.

What one generation tolerates, the next generation will accept; what that generation accepts, the next generation will celebrate. John Wesley

When Jesus delivers a condemnation to these churches... He also delivers a correction... here it is a clear and direct correction... one word... REPENT!... five of the seven churches are told to repent...

1. Contrition of heart—have regret and sorrow over your sin.

2. Confess your sin—"to say the same thing"

3. Change your direction—change your ways... quit going down that path get on the right one.

How serious is this?... if you don't... (16) **I (Jesus) am coming quickly and I will make war with you with the sword of My mouth....** Judgement!

Talk about quickly... I need to end quickly...

Not everyone in the church at Pergamum were compromising... they are called the **overcomers**.

Read verse 17

Every letter ends with a word to those in the church who are faithful... each week we've defined an "overcomer" with John's definition in 1 John 5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the One who gives new birth loves also the one who has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the overcoming that has overcome the world—our faith. **Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

Jesus has a reward for those who are overcomers.

1. Jesus will nourish the Overcomer—To him who overcomes I will give him some of the **hidden manna**...you Jewish scholars are thinking manna?... that's our reward?... that generous provision God gave Israel as they wandered in the wilderness.... Manna every day....six days a week....manna, manna, manna.

Manna... what is it?... yes!.... no what is manna... yes that's right!...it's like *who's on first*...literally the word manna in Hebrew means **What is it?**... this mysterious sustaining food that God generously provided to a people who did not deserve to be provided for.

Hidden manna reflects a Jewish tradition that says a pot of manna was actually placed in the Ark of the Covenant as a memorial for future generations... God provided food for His people to sustain them...

What I believe Jesus is telling His church in Pergamum... and all churches and all believers is that Jesus is in a sense the true manna.... Jesus is the bread of life:

Shortly after Jesus fed the 5000... the day after... they wanted breakfast... Jesus tells them this:

John 6

27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, set His seal." Therefore they said to Him, "What should we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign so that we may see, and believe

You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.**

Jesus will nourish the Overcomer... but He will also

2. Acknowledge the Overcomer as His—by giving a new name.—17- and I will give him (Overcomer) a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

Nobody knows what the white stone with the name on it is... several ideas...it is reported in some historical accounts of that time...if you were to go to an athletic event or a banquet... a white stone with your name on it would be your ticket to get in...

But we can say... to receive a NEW name is to receive Jesus’ victorious....kingly name... we’ll look at this great in a few weeks... but let me end with Chapter 3:12

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out from it anymore. And 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 My new name.