

## Pergamos – The Compromising Church

### Revelation 2:12-17

If Ephesus was called the loveless church, and Smyrna was the suffering church, Pergamos would have to be called the compromising church. We will see they were doing a lot of things right, but like most of the others there were issues that God had to deal with. And with Pergamos it was areas of compromise with the world. We as Christians have to be SO careful to keep ourselves from compromise or else the church and the message will become so watered down no one will be able to tell the difference between the saved and the unsaved, the holy and the unholy. And that was the danger in Pergamos.

Another temptation we face to compromise as Christians is using our freedom in Christ as an excuse to sin. This too was going on in Pergamos, and whenever this happens, the church is in trouble. How was it they were compromising? They were becoming more like the world morally and ethically. We as believers are called to have higher morals and ethics than the world, and that is what God is going to call Pergamos back to.

Pergamos was located about 55 miles from Smyrna in a northeasterly direction in what was called the Caicus Valley in Mysia. It was known for its ointments, pottery, tapestries, and parchments for writing. As a matter of fact, it had the second most famous library in the entire world that boasted over 200,000 volumes. Although it was also known for its political influence, it was MOSTLY known as a religious center, which of course led to multiple temples and idol worship. It was a rival city to Ephesus in its temples and gods, its primary god being Aescclapius, the god of Pergamos and the god of healing, which is probably why they had a university for medical study.

Pergamos was also the first city in Asia to have a temple for Caesar-worship and hence was known as the center of Caesar-worship. As a matter of fact, they had three temples to caesars before they were done. They were also known as a city of royal residents, as many kings lived there over the years. You can imagine the wealth and beauty that was there.

As we mentioned at the beginning of our Revelation study, each of the churches not only speaks of a literal, immediate church of their day, but also speaks of the church as a whole AND of different church periods throughout history. Ephesus, the loveless church, represents the first period and ran from approximately 33 AD to 99 AD. Smyrna represents the second and ran from 100 AD to 314 AD, which was the persecuted church. Pergamos, the favored or accepted church, is the third and spanned 315 AD to 590 AD. It represents a church and time in history when, unlike the time of persecution, it became popular to be a Christian. The church is always in danger when Christianity is popular because the chance of blending with the world becomes more and more tempting.

Speaking of Pergamos in a church history era, how did this happen? Constantine conquered with *cross* vision. Hence, he made Christianity a favored religion, which led to rapid growth due to social and political benefits and filled the church with unbelievers and those willing to compromise.

In verse twelve, Jesus once again uses an identifier from chapter one that will relate to them. He calls himself *He who has the sharp two-edged sword*. Why the sharp two-edged sword? Well, if you remember, the *sharp two-edged sword* in Scripture represents God's Word. And when we personally or as a church corporately are in compromise, the straightforward Word of God is the only thing that will get us back on track. Why? It lays out clearly what is right and what is wrong and leaves us with only the choice to obey or disobey. When compromise threatens the church or even our society the Word of God is the only answer.

In verse thirteen, he says, *I know your works*. This means *I know your works with perfect clarity*. He goes on to say that he knows where they dwell is where Satan's throne is. There was obviously a tremendous demonic presence here, and it was a very evil place. I often hear Christians say, *Well, you don't know how hard it is where I live!* And it IS no doubt hard or even demonic, but the Lord most definitely KNOWS how hard it is, and it is HE Who will give you the ability to overcome even there.

There are several possibilities here as to what He means by Satan's throne. It may have literally been where Satan was spending most of his time due to strategic advantage. There may be a place like that even today. It may have also been due to the temple of Aescclapius, the god of healing. His symbol was a serpent, which is suspicious in that Satan is referred to a serpent, so this is a possibility. And we still see the mindset for this god today in the new age movement as well as in the positive confession movement—the movement that believes if you say positive things enough times, they will actually come to pass. Of course, we see no scriptural backing for this belief. Still, it exists in parts of the church.

Here is how the temple of Aescclapius worked. You would go to this temple and walk down long halls with opening in the top that looked like air holes, and then people above would speak through them saying things like: *You are getting better. This illness is leaving you. You are going to be healed.* Then you would go to a hot tub and later get a massage. After that, you would see a play on being healed, and if that didn't work, they would do the next logical thing. You would stay overnight and let non-poisonous snakes crawl all over your body to bring healing. No doubt to summon the power of this serpent god.

The reference to Satan's throne could have also been due to a temple and an altar to Zeus. Zeus was considered the chief of the gods among the Romans and was referred to as *soter theos*, which means *savior god*. Since Jesus ALONE is Savior God, it may have been Satan trying to exalt his throne through this blasphemy. According to history, this altar was 100 feet wide at the bottom and stood 40 to 50 feet tall!

Another possibility is that it referred to the temple to Bacchus or Dionysius, which was the god of wine or drinking. The alcohol abuse related to this god only added to the sexual immorality already going on. Interestingly, this god was represented by a half man half goat figure with horns, which is still one of the symbols of Satan today.

Lastly, it may be because Pergamos was a center for Caesar-worship, the worship of a man, just like the anti-Christ will require under the direction and probable possession of Satan.

So, although we can't be 100% sure which one, if any of these, it was, there were certainly plenty of reasons to call Pergamos the throne of Satan. And no doubt it was a combination of ALL of these things.

In the next verse, The Lord tells them He has a few things against them. The first is that they hold to the doctrine of Balaam. What was this doctrine? If you remember, Balaam was the greedy prophet who prophesied for money and was hired by King Balak to curse the children of Israel. Hence, the doctrine of Balaam refers to doing ministry for financial gain. The church was allowing some among them to do ministry for money and out of greed. And God hated it.

We have many in the present-day church who are involved in the doctrine of Balaam, only now it is what we call the health and wealth doctrine. They falsely teach that God wants everyone healthy and wealthy, and that if you are not, you are out of God's will or in sin. And if THAT false teaching wasn't enough, they go even further to use that as a platform to take money from you. They encourage you to invest in their ministry so that God can give you back multi-fold. And while God does bless our giving, they are twisting this truth in order to get your money.

Notice also that he taught Balak, a pagan king, how to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. How did he accomplish this? By encouraging those to worship false gods through the eating of things sacrificed to idols and through the allurements of sexual immorality. Much of the false worship in that day was actually carried out through sexual immorality before a god, and by eating foods that had been offered to that false god during their rituals. Hence, those in Pergamos were being encouraged to compromise by engaging in false worship AND sexual immorality. God now rebukes them for it.

In verse fifteen, the Nicolaitans are mentioned again. This was the same group that the Ephesians had to deal with - the ones who were trying to create a church hierarchy and priesthood by making themselves greater than the people. When looking at this through the eyes of church history, this was the point where the church began exalting certain men among them higher than others, developing what we now call the papacy. It was from this competitive split that idolatry entered the church through the worship of saints and Mary. And sadly, this idolatry continues in the present day.

Now we see in verse sixteen that the sword analogy comes into play. Jesus says if they don't repent, He will fight against them with the sword, His Word. This is because His Word is the ONLY thing that will conquer and defeat false teaching. If they are not going to use it to overcome their faults, He Himself will use it. It is also interesting that when the Lord faced off with Balaam, it was a drawn sword that forced his donkey off the road. Had he not been diverted or caused to repent, changing his direction by the drawn sword, God would have killed him. Notice He tells THE CHURCH to repent and turn from what their wrongdoing or He will do this to them. The language means reveals that this is a command to repent with a sense of urgency. The only thing that will stop the downward slide of a church or society, which is becoming more and more corrupt, is the sword, the Word of God.

In our next verse, He again says, *He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches* but goes on to tell of the reward for those who do: He will give them of the hidden manna to eat. What was the hidden manna? Manna, as you know, was supernatural bread that came down from heaven from God. Bread in Scripture represents God's Word. The Lord is telling them if they repent and are faithful, He will reveal His Word to them. But I believe the hidden manna is even MORE special for those who obey. God instructed Moses to put a special jar of manna inside the Ark where God met with him, and it stayed hidden in the Ark closest to God. I believe it represents special insight and secrets that God will grant those who repent and walk in purity before Him. And since it was nearest to God, I believe the promise speaks of God blessing us with closeness to Him and special secret insight from Him if we do this.

How awesome to have God give us special secrets or insight into His Word that others are denied if we will only obey! Notice also He will give them a white stone with a new name on it. In this day, white stones were given to those who were found innocent during a court trial. The Lord was saying that if you repent and obey Me, you will be found innocent of sin before My throne. And concerning a new name, whenever we truly repent and walk closely with the Lord, we become new people. We get a new name that represents our new character. I believe God gives a new name to every believer that is fully committed to Him. Remember, He gave new names to His disciples, and if you are His disciple, I believe you will get a new name as well. Notice lastly, He says that no one knows that name except the person receiving it. This implies that our new name is a pet name or term of endearment like one we would give our children.

As we finish with the church of Pergamos, I believe we need to be warned. The church of America is, in large part, a compromising church. Not ALL of it, but a lot. If any of us have been convicted that WE are compromising in our walk with God, let us be quick to repent and not be judged by the sword of His Word.

Be warned that whenever you choose to set yourself, you WILL face opposition. Oftentimes from the church! You remember God's faithful martyr Antipas from verse thirteen? We don't know a lot about him, but according to church fathers, he refused to go along with the pagan culture of his day and was placed in an iron container over fire and roasted to death. But whatever his fate or story really was, it is interesting to me that his name means *against all*. What's my point? Even when some inside the church are going along with the mindset of the world, we must stand against all and continue to stand with God, even if it means our life.

**Group Study and Personal Application Questions:**

1. Why is it so important for the believer to keep from compromising?
2. How were the believers in Pergamos compromising when it came to their freedom in Christ?
3. Pergamos in church history followed the persecuted church of Smyrna and became a 'popular' church. Many now wanted to be a part of this church. Why is the church in danger when Christianity is popular?
4. How did Christianity become popular in the era of church history Pergamos represents (315 to 590 AD)?
5. The city of Pergamos became famous for its large library, political influence, and as a religious center with its multiple temples and idols. How could these areas lead a church to compromise?
6. V12 – What does the “sharp two-edged sword” represent and how does its use bring back a church or person who has compromised?
7. V13 – Jesus pointed out this was the place of Satan’s throne. What are the five possibilities this could refer to?
8. How are these five things represented in today’s church?
9. V14 – What is the doctrine of Balaam and how is it functioning in the church today? Why is this teaching so destructive?
10. V15 – Jesus mentions the Nicolaitans again (see the letter to the Ephesian church). What is this group? What happened in the corresponding era of church history in relation to the Nicolaitans?
11. V16 – We see the two-edged sword now come into play when Jesus told the church in Pergamos to repent. What would happen if they did not?
12. V17 – The promise of hidden manna is given to those who are faithful and don’t compromise. What is the hidden manna? What are the white stones?

If you choose to not compromise as a believer, you will face opposition. How does the story of the martyr Antipas from verse thirteen encourage those of who do?