

**Welcome To The First Church Of Indiscriminate Toleration
Pergamum
Revelation 2:12-17**

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Of the seven cities Jesus has John write to, so far, we have covered two of them.

1. Ephesus – example of the apostolic or new church which becomes doctrinally challenged yet retains doctrinal purity at the expense of love
2. Smyrna – An example of the church under persecution, under Rome and today

Now we come to the third church in the list, Pergamum – an example of the church that just wants to get along. A picture of the church immediately after Constantine stopped persecution. This is the church of compromise.

Something we need to remember as we look at the next city in line, is what Jesus is doing. He is verifying current combat actions based on the original instructions He provided just prior to and after His death, burial and resurrection. Are those specific instructions that He gave still being followed.

The book of Revelation will provide a blow by blow plan and description for us as to how YAHWEH overturns the rebellions we read about in Genesis 3, 6 and 11. Jesus has been and is the commander of the Lord's hosts and as such, He has been and is still involved in combat operations.

Recall the instructions He gave to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi? Jesus laid out instructions in detail in Matthew 16 showing where the assault against the enemy was to take place and where He expects us to be finding new followers of Jesus Christ. We tend to forget that there is a real war going on in the unseen realm.

Matthew 16:13–23

When Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven! And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." Then he instructed his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him: "God forbid, Lord! This must not happen to you!" But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's." (NET)

The site was famous in the ancient world as a center of the worship of Pan and for a temple to the high god Zeus, considered in Jesus' day to be incarnate in Augustus Caesar. (Heiser 2015, 284)

Jesus is standing right at the place known as the “gates of hell,” and He is saying to the enemy, on their



(Bolen 2012, Used with Permission)

turf, right in front of the mountain that the fallen watchers came down and corrupted mankind in Genesis 6, that we, as His church, will be taking folks who were literally on their way to hell and turning them into believers.

Jesus wanted to make it clear to the enemy that the war was about to be expanded. This is something they did not quite get yet.

Fast forward a few weeks and now Jesus, after being resurrected, gives marching orders to His followers. Basically, operations orders as to how the battle will be going down.

Matthew 28:18–20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

How have His followers been doing? Is faithfulness to His word evident? It is report card time. Jesus is checking in to see how His followers, the church is doing. He has been watching. He is deeply involved in all they do.

One more thing we have been considering as we look at each church, each church is not only an existing historical church in Asia Minor; they are also not just pictures of a chunk of church history, they are also a reflection of how the battle is going. Not just the battle at that immediate moment, but for the church through time including today.

Just as we see with the church today, the churches Jesus writes to all have a level of persecution running through them, but there are other things taking place in the churches as well. Satan is working through various potential battle plans to see what will work and in what environment in his attempt to thwart the plans of God and prevent Jesus from returning to planet earth in the future. Each church reflects how the work is going on, on both sides of the equation. How is the church doing with the battle as well as how the enemy is doing in his efforts to thwart the plan of God?

Unfortunately, they also reflect, as we see in church history, the overall effectiveness of the enemy at various times. But they also reflect the power that Jesus provides to His followers as we reflect the simple fact that in Him, we are indeed overcomers. With Jesus on our side, nothing can stand against us as long as we rely upon Him.

Now we come to the church at Pergamum. The word Pergamum comes from two root words meaning high as well as marriage.

As you travel north from Smyrna, you would follow the coastline another 40 miles and then move inland along the Caicus River valley. About ten miles or so inland from the Aegean Sea is the town of Pergamum. Pliny the Elder provides some background.

Here rises the river Caicus already mentioned. Teuthrania was a powerful nation in itself, even when the whole of Æolis was held by the Mysians. In it are the Pioniaë, Andera, Cale, Stabulum, Conisium, Teium, Balcea, Tiare, Teuthranie, Sarnaca, Haliserne, Lycide, Parthenium, Thymbre, Oxyopum, Lygdamum, Apollonia, and Pergamum, by far the most famous city in Asia, and through which the river Selinus runs; the Cetius, which rises in Mount Pindasus, flowing before it. (Pliny the Elder 1855, 1477-1478)

Also called Pergama or Pergamus. Its ruins are to be seen at the modern Pergamo or Bergamo. It was the capital of the kingdom of Pergamus, and situate in the Tcuthranian district of Mysia, on the northern bank of the river Caicus. Under its kings, its library almost equalled that of Alexandria, and the formation of it gave rise to the invention of parchment, as a writing material, which was thence called Charta Pergamena. This city was an early seat of Christianity, and is one of the seven churches of Asia to whom the Apocalyptic Epistles are addressed. Its ruins are still to be seen. (Pliny the Elder 1855, 1477)

Pergamum became “the finest flower of Hellenic civilization.” It boasted a library of more than 200,000 volumes. Legend has it that parchment was invented there when the supply of papyrus from Egypt was cut off in reprisal for Eumenes’s attempt to lure a famous librarian by the name of Aristophanes away from Alexandria.⁴ Until Attalus III bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133 B.C. the Pergamene kings continued as enthusiastic patrons of Hellenistic culture. (Mounce 1997, 78)

While Julius Caesar was in power, Pergamum enjoyed a second golden age. Upon his death the city was given to Marc Antony (40 BC-AD 14), who gave all 200,000 books from the library to Cleopatra. Augustus Caesar defeated Antony and gained the city, during which time the first temple of the Imperial cult was constructed.

It was a center of worship for four of the most important pagan cults of the day—Zeus, Athene (the patron goddess), Dionysos, and Asklepios (who was designated Sōtēr, Savior). The shrine of Asklepios, the god of healing (also known as “the Pergamene god”), attracted people from all over the world.⁷ Galen, one of the most famous physicians of the ancient world, was a native of Pergamum and studied there. (Mounce 1997, 78)



(Bolen, Pergamum acropolis great altar of Zeus 2012, Used with Permission)

Many of the items which were in Pergamum have been taken down and physically moved to Berlin, Germany to the Pergamum Museum.

The actual altar to Zeus, where the sacrifices would have been offered, would be behind the portico at the top of this imposing facade in a square courtyard that was itself surrounded by porticoes. (deSilva 2018, Pergamum)

Jews often identified the pagan gods with demons, claiming that those who worshiped idols were really worshiping demons. John exhibits a similar perspective in Revelation 9:20-21, as does the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:19-21. Identifying the Greeks' chief god, Zeus, with the chief demon, Satan, would have been a natural extension of this.

When compared to the other gods worshiped in Pergamum, the altar to Zeus is the number one candidate for "Satan's throne."

Consider this, the Pergamum Museum in Berlin was not completed and opened fully to the public until 1930. A man by the name of Albert Speer spent time at the exhibit in Berlin, Speer became the architect for Adolf Hitler.

The basic outline of the Zeus altar was utilized by Speer at Zeppelin Field in Nuremberg and was the site for various Nazi rallies. Suddenly Greek mythology does not sound so mythological. There are Zeus breadcrumbs throughout history to follow.

That most blasphemous of all desecrations of the Jerusalem temple occurred in 168 B.C., when Antiochus ordered that swine, the most ceremonially unclean of all animals, be offered on the temple altar of burnt offerings. And to make the sacrilege still worse, he insisted that those animals be offered to the pagan god Zeus. Because he had declared himself to be Theos Epiphanes (meaning, "the manifest god"), and even more explicitly Zeus Epiphanes ("the manifestation of Zeus"), he was actually demanding worship of himself in place of Almighty God. (Kampen 2000, 148-149)

Matthew 24:15–16

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." (NASB95)

If you follow some of the breadcrumbs

- Genesis 3
- Marduk – King of the Gods under Babylon
- Baal – Canaanite King of the Gods, lived on Mt Zaphon, Jebel al-Aqra in south Turkey near the Mediterranean on the border with Turkey and Syria
- Zeus – King of the Gods for the Greeks and similar cultures
- Jupiter – Roman name for Zeus
- Satan

It will be the final "abomination of desolation"—Antichrist—who will demand worship by the entire world, with death being the cost of refusal. And there will be Jews unwilling to worship the beast or his image, faithful Jews like the Maccabees in the days of Antiochus. (Kampen 2000, 149)

Revelation 13:2

"And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority." (NASB95)

The throne of Satan = altar of Zeus.

Antiochus Epiphinaes wanted to eliminate Judaism thinking he was a manifestation of Zeus (Satan)
The antichrist, when revealed and demanding worship will be empowered by Satan (Zeus)

There are other candidates in Pergamum to be Satan's throne, but I believe it is the altar to Zeus.

The Temple to Athena, which was above the Altar to Zeus, also now in Berlin



(Bolen, Pergamum acropolis from below 2012, Used with Permission)

As you can see, there are temples everywhere in Pergamum
The economy and the culture of the city was based heavily on all of the pagan cults found in the city.
Zeus, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus as well as emperor worship
In the middle acropolis level, we find even more

Then at the lower level, you find the stadium, aqueducts as well a temple to Serapis
This second-century Serapeion was converted into a Christian basilica (or church) in the fifth century AD.
One of the particularly striking architectural features of the Serapeion is the evidence it gives us of cultic ventriloquism. The apparatus has been uncovered here that showed how an ancient priest could make cult idol of Serapis seem to speak to its worshipers. (deSilva 2018, Pergamum)

From the lower city, you could then travel via a sacred road to the Asclepeion.
This was a resort dedicated to Asclepius.



(Bolen, Pergamum Asclepium courtyard 2012, Used with Permission)

For those involved with the Asclepius cult, the method of healing involved a variety of components, including:
isolation of the sick for three days;
purification through baths and abstinence from sexual intercourse and various foods;
the sacrifice of a piglet to Asclepius.
Another central component was the hope that the god would visit the petitioner in a dream and offer instructions for healing. Hundreds of votives and facsimiles of the human body dedicated to Asclepius have been found. (Kelley 2016)

The statesman and hypochondriac Aelius Aristides spent over two years at various such establishments over the course of his life, seeking divine illumination of the way out of his ailments, both real and imagined. (deSilva 2018, Pergamum)

Again, I fall into the camp that the throne of Satan which we will see in this section of scripture is the altar of Zeus, but with all of the altars and gods that were worshipped there, pick one or all. Some commentators pick all saying that the overwhelming burden of them being there makes this Satan's base of operations in the region. The one thing that comes through loud and clear, there are a lot of alternative distractions for a citizen of this city.

Each temple would have its own market connected to the sacrifices brought in. There would also be various festivals taking place throughout the year.

Athletics were huge and as such Demeter would have a large presence. The city had a huge presence with the worship of Caesar, and they did not build to Domitian, but to Trajan.

Patriotic citizens would be sure to take a pinch of incense annually and go to the temple to say Caesar is lord. It was just the thing to do.

This was not a free city, but it was the capital of the province and as such this is a city where the proconsul had the power of the sword.

Revelation 2:12–17

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘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. ‘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. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 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.’” (NASB95)

Jesus starts, once again, with the acknowledgement to the angel, the divine being who has accountability for this church then He moves in to address the church which is in this town.

Right at the outset, Jesus makes it clear that He is the one with the power of the sword, not Rome.

In a city as devoted to the Romans as Pergamum, and the place of residence of the proconsul who possessed the power to put people to death and whose very symbol may be taken to be a sword (Rom. 13:4), it was a salutary reminder that there is a power greater than that of any earthly governor. (Morris 1987, 70)

We talked about swords a bit earlier, here the sword is a ramphia. Jesus is letting the church know that He is the final judge, not the proconsul, not Rome.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (NASB95)

Why would He be insistent on making sure the church in Pergamum know this?
Let's see what the report card has in it

As believers who are on assignment here on planet earth, the assignment:

Matthew 28:19–20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

We are on enemy territory and we are not working from a home field advantage, this is not our home.

John 14:2–3

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (NASB95)

We do not dwell on the earth, our home is not here. Those who “dwell on the earth” are discussed a lot in this book and there is a difference between those who are earth dwellers versus those who are not.

Because the true church consists of those who are not earth dwellers, we are expected to exercise loyalty to our king who paid it all for us on the cross. We are going to see that there is a loyalty problem here in Pergamum. As we recall our Bible, we recall other loyalty problems in the scriptures, chief among them, the nation of Israel who were to be loyal to YAHWEH but were not.

Unlike Israel, Jesus makes note of where it is the church in Pergamum lives, as we saw in the background, they live in demon central.

There is something else also related to the world of the church in Pergamum that Jesus will deal with as we move through the letter. In Ephesus, we made note of the union problems caused by people turning to Jesus from idol worship, trade guilds also existed in Pergamum.

Most trades in the Roman world formed guilds that served as the security network for their members. The guild ensured one’s livelihood, provided support during illness, and even handled the affairs of burial for their dead. Each guild had a patron deity whose worship was an integral part of membership. To fail to participate in the worship and sacred meals of the deity would result in removal from the guild and loss of one’s livelihood. (Mulholland Jr. 2011, 440)

This workplace background will cause issues for the church throughout Rome but in a city like Pergamum, with such a heavy cult presence, it begins to look like a lot of questions for the day to day activities of the believer. Jesus though points out that even in that type of environment, the church is holding fast to His name.

The gods were amplified humanity, not divinity. Like the Greeks, the Romans had no infinite god. This being so, they had no sufficient reference point intellectually; that is, they did not have anything big enough or permanent enough to which to relate either their thinking or their living. Consequently, their value system was not strong enough to bear the strains of life, either individual or political. All their gods put together could not give them a sufficient base for life, morals, values, and final decisions. These gods depended on the society which had made them, and when this society collapsed the gods tumbled with it. (Schaeffer 1982, 85)

As we have previously studied, the gods were fallen divine beings who were demanding worship and they could not even agree among themselves as to how to go about doing that. Rome saw that and as a result turned to Caesar worship as a means of unifying the citizens.

Because Augustus established peace externally and internally and because he kept the outward forms of constitutionality, Romans of every class were ready to allow him total power in order to restore and

assure the functioning of the political system, business, and the affairs of daily life. After 12 B.C. he became the head of the state religion, taking the title Pontifex Maximus and urging everyone to worship the “spirit of Rome and the genius of the emperor.” Later this became obligatory for all the people of the Empire, and later still, the emperors ruled as gods. (Schaeffer 1982, 86)

Genesis 3:5

“For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (NASB95)

When encouraging worship of themselves began to fail, the fallen divine beings moved to encouraging the worship of men, Genesis 3:5 all over again. Christians upset the balance of society by worshiping only one God and refusing to worship man.

Antipas is specifically noted by Jesus as the first faithful witness, *martus*, who was killed. We have the blending here and identification of what being a faithful witness truly means. It means being as faithful as Jesus.

The church did not, and he did not deny Jesus, even with this even taking place in the city, the church remained faithful and did not deny Jesus.

His description as my trustworthy witness, however, raises his isolated death to a new significance in the cosmic battle against Satan, setting it alongside the death of that great trustworthy witness, Jesus Christ (1:5). Indeed, his identification as ‘witness’ probably moves us one stage closer to the early Christian usage of *μάρτυς* for ‘martyr’ (cf. *Mart. Pol.* 14:2). (Boxall 2006, 59)

We do not know of anything else about Antipas other than the reference here by Jesus

If Antipas was officially executed, it might have been in such an amphitheater—perhaps this very one. Antipas was, of course, the martyr named in the oracle to Pergamum in *Rev. 2*. It was certainly the site of later second-century martyrdoms—for example, the martyrdom of Papyrus, Carpus, and Agathonice during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. (deSilva 2018, Pergamum)

A witnessing church, residing in the world, as we all do, will be a persecuted church. We see that from what we learned about Smyrna and from what we learn here as well. We also learn that the way the world pushes back, is by offering up some of the things of the world.

1 John 2:16

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” (NASB95)

Revelation 2:14

“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.” (NASB95)

To fully understand this, we need to know our old testament just like the church and the Jews did. So who is Balaam and what does this refer to. What is the church tolerating?

Some background. Balaam was a prophet for hire and Balak, the King of Moab hired him to curse Israel. On his way to go and do that, Balaam was stopped by the angel of the Lord and the result was a discussion of this fact with his donkey (Numbers 22)

Numbers 22:26–31

“Then the angel of the LORD went farther, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she crouched down under

Balaam. Then Balaam was angry, and he beat his donkey with a staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "You have made me look stupid; I wish there were a sword in my hand, for I would kill you right now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am not I your donkey that you have ridden ever since I was yours until this day? Have I ever attempted to treat you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his sword drawn in his hand; so he bowed his head and threw himself down with his face to the ground." (NET)

Balaam did not curse Israel, instead he blessed Israel, however, he did provide a method for Balak to get to Israel. He knew that faithfulness was required for Israel to remain in the blessing of the Lord, all that needed to happen was something to challenge that, and what better way to do it than with the young women of Moab?

What Balaam was advocating was doing something that the people would wind up compromising and make decisions that were unfaithful.

Numbers 25:1–9

"When Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to commit sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab. These women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods; then the people ate and bowed down to their gods. When Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, the anger of the LORD flared up against Israel. The LORD said to Moses, "Arrest all the leaders of the people, and hang them up before the LORD in broad daylight, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you must execute those of his men who were joined to Baal-peor." Just then one of the Israelites came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the plain view of Moses and of the whole community of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up from among the assembly, took a javelin in his hand, and went after the Israelite man into the tent and thrust through the Israelite man and into the woman's abdomen. So the plague was stopped from the Israelites. Those that died in the plague were 24,000." (NET)

Balaam had introduced into the nation, adultery, both physically and spiritually. In Israel, as we saw from Numbers 25, there was a price to be paid and discipline did take place. Here, the church is tolerating what is going on and has not disciplined anyone for it.

The word that is translated stumbling block is the Greek word skandalon. We obtain the English word scandal from it. The cause for stumbling, the thing which the church is putting up with is a scandal.

In Jewish midrash the story of Balaam served two purposes: his acceptance of Balak's bribe exemplified a mercenary spirit (alluded to in 2 Peter and Jude) and his responsibility for the defection at Baal-Peor made him the father of religious syncretism. (Thomas 1992, 190)

The Christians in Pergamum staunchly withstood external pressures to compromise from pagan governmental and religious authorities but had permitted an apparently subtle form of compromise to develop internally. (Beale 1999, 248)

Remember, we had made note before of what normal workday practices were and what they involved. Good union members participated in temple worship which included festivals, banquets with meat from animals sacrificed to false gods, and it also involved engaging with temple prostitutes.

This way they could keep their day jobs, maintain their families, and have money to support the church. What a deal.

Is this a problem today?

Proverbs 29:18

“When there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but the one who keeps the law, blessed is he!” (NET)

1 Peter 2:11–12

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (NASB95)

What do we have in our life that has us be followers of Balaam? Where have we compromised?

We put up with false teachers, the Bible calls them both false teachers and false prophets. Peter also warned of them and they are here proclaiming the word of Balaam and the Nicolaitans too.

Revelation 2:15

“So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” (NASB95)

They didn’t hate the teaching as the Ephesians, they tolerated it.

2 Peter 2:1–3

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (NASB95)

Israel had the same problem prior to going into captivity.

They preached blessings without repentance, prosperity without piety. They had a theology of success, but not a theology of suffering. They preached about the good life in this present world and gave no thought to the world to come. (Lutzer 2018, 37)

The church in Pergamum was all about having their best life now.

What options do we have? The same that Jews in Babylon had, the same the church in Pergamum had. We can isolate ourselves from the world and form our own little Christian world. This has been tried time after time. How many want to become Amish? Strict Mennonites anyone? Or, do we enter into our Christian ghetto of branded this and that and never come out to encounter the real world except when we drive to our favorite restaurant?

What some did in Pergamum is what many do today, in fact some whole churches do, allow themselves to be assimilated by the culture. As a result, we live a life that is so indistinguishable from the world that no one can tell the difference.

Spiritual assimilation is always the path of least resistance; it is the most natural and cowardly way to live. It allows the culture to exploit our natural tendency to get all the world has to offer with only a nod in the direction of the God we say we love. (Lutzer 2018, 57-58)

There is a third option for us, the same one Jesus has already discussed with the Ephesians, it is called repentance. We need to recognize that we are busy cutting deals with the world, so busy in fact that we do not even recognize that we have done so. We need to remember that we are at war. In a war, where we are the foreign troops and we look just like the ones who are working for the enemy. We can decide to infiltrate and remain loyal.

“When Satan attacks the church, he starts very subtly by causing us to lose our first love. Then we begin to compromise with the world. As our love cools, it becomes easier to fall into the trap of the world’s system. By not loving God, we are prone to love what’s around us.

If you are courting the world, what is God’s battle plan for you? Not confronting the powers of darkness, but obeying Christ’s command to repent. If you really love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, your desire—above all things—will be to maintain His honor.” (MacArthur 1992, 50)
The Ephesians were told by Paul what they needed to do. They got it, they were all for doctrinal purity and they kept themselves pure as well. They had a love problem, and did you notice that Jesus was ready to remove them from being a church over it.

Paul provided guidance for how to infiltrate and remain loyal

Ephesians 6:10–13

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” (NASB95)

In a culture like ours, where toleration has become the primary virtue, it is easy for the community of faith to “Christianize” tolerance and allow all sorts of destructive perspectives and behaviors into its fellowship. Since the surrounding culture cultivates and promotes toleration as the ultimate level of maturity and caring, who would want to be accused of being “intolerant?” This is even more the case when we consider that Ephesian-type churches tend to manifest a brand of intolerance that rightly brings the world’s scorn and ridicule down upon them. If the Ephesian church represents the intolerance of cold orthodoxy, the Pergamum church represents the toleration of mild heterodoxy. (Mulholland Jr. 2011, 440)

The church in Pergamum had married the world. They were all about getting by in the culture. This became a picture of the church after they were no longer looking over their shoulders to see where the next persecution would come from. But Pergamum was under persecution-of course they were.

There were those in the church who did not compromise with the world, but they were okay with it, they were tolerant of those who had decided to do so. They allowed their message to be watered down.

Revelation 2:16–17

“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. ‘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.” (NASB95)

The one thing we pick up from the churches addressed so far by Jesus, the solution is not complicated and centers around the “r” word. This is a word many forget about, a simple word with a hard set of actions attached to it- repentance. The root word from the Greek means to change one’s mind. Here it is in the imperative verb form and active. It is a decision that as believers who have strayed, we must make; we have to make.

1 John 1:8–10

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” (NASB95)

The message here in Revelation is repent, repent now or that sword I talked about earlier, will be used on you. Jesus wants to make it clear - there is no compromise with the flesh, there is no compromise with sin, there is no compromise with the world.

Ever.

Jesus is so serious about it that He reflects the spiritual and physical warfare He is engaged in, that which He engages with the enemy on our behalf every single day. But for the church of compromise, the church which marries the world, He considers that a church which has gone to the other side. Ouch.

Jesus says no repentance = keep tolerating the world in your midst
If that is the case, then He will be making war against that church. He becomes our enemy. The verb form is that of a future event, one which will take place and will result in an end. This is not something that will be long term as the Lord uses the term “come quickly.”

The phrase *en tachei* (1:1; 22:6; cf. Rom. 16:20) can mean ‘quickly’ in the sense of ‘with suddenness’ rather than ‘within a short time’, but the related adverb here (*tachy*) does carry a sense of imminence. (Paul 2018, 89)

Just as before, Jesus again uses the language we saw with the priests and dedication of their hearing. It is becoming more and more evident that one of the duties of the church is to be listening to what the Lord says. We need to be in His word every day, hearing what He says and then doing what He says. We need to have His views and attitudes to the world and the culture that we live in.

Jesus is deadly serious about how we live for Him, and we should be too.

Again, a reference to the overcomer.

Hidden manna is promised as well as a white stone with a new name that only the recipient will be aware of.

The most satisfactory understanding of the white stone derives significance from the free doles of bread and free admission to entertainments that people of the Roman Empire received from time to time. These were in exchange for “tickets,” which often took the form of white stones (Alford). Such a white stone with one’s name on it was the basis for admission to special events. It was also a well-established custom to reward victors at the games with such a token enabling them to gain admission to a special feast. This practice coincides with the victor’s participation in the feast of Rev. 3:20 (cf. also 19:9) (Lee). The “hidden manna,” the other part of the reward in v. 17, suggests a reference to the Messianic feast. The white stone is, then, a personalized tessera, which would serve as his token of admission to this great future feast (Mounce). This furnishes sufficient incentive for faithfulness to Christ in the meantime. (Thomas 1992, 201)

Matthew 22:2–14

“The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to summon those who had been invited to the banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, “Look! The feast I have prepared for you is ready. My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”’ But they were indifferent and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest seized his slaves, insolently mistreated them, and killed them. The king was furious! He sent his soldiers, and they put those murderers to death and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but the ones who had been invited were not worthy. So go into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ And those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the wedding guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ But he had nothing to say. Then the king said

to his attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!' For many are called, but few are chosen." (NET)

Next week, the church at Thyatira, a picture of the orthodox church and papal Rome

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