

## Jesus' Letter To The Church At Pergamos

Text : **Revelation 2: 12-17**

### INTRODUCTION :

**A. We learn something from each of the seven churches of Asia that applies to us.**

1. We learned from the church at Ephesus :
  - a. It is important to stand for truth and to keep the doctrine pure.
  - b. It is important to actively serve God on a consistent basis.
  - c. However, neither doctrinal purity nor faithful service are of value apart from love.
2. We learned from the church at Smyrna :
  - a. God is aware of our circumstances and He cares.
  - b. We must stand faithful regardless of how great the pressure we are under.
  - c. The reward for our faithfulness will be far greater than the suffering we endure.

**B. The lessons we learn from the church at Pergamos ( *Some trans.* = Pergamum ) are particularly applicable to the world we live in today.**

1. Tolerance is one of the most highly prized virtues in Western culture today.
2. There are three kinds of tolerance :
  - a. Legal tolerance ... *Protecting the rights of all*
  - b. Social tolerance ... *Treating all people with respect*
  - c. Intellectual tolerance ... *Developing a mind so broad that it can accommodate every opinion no matter how false or evil without detecting anything to reject. (This is political correctness.)*
3. This kind of tolerance ( i.e. *of political correctness* ) is not a virtue.
  - a. It is the vise of the a-moral
  - b. It produces an unprincipled confusion of truth with error and goodness with evil.

**C. From the church at Pergamos we will learn that Christians can neither compromise with evil nor tolerate it within its ranks.**

1. Christians must be devoted to good and opposed to evil.

**Eph. 5: 11 - Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even reprove them;**
2. We must reprove evil knowing that it will cause people to say :
  - a. That we are trying to force everyone to accept our religion.
  - b. That we are intolerant, even hateful and unloving.

3. The fruits of “political correctness” are all extremely negative.
  - a. It leads to a general dumbing down of the teachings of Christ.
  - b. It results in the church becoming a social organization. ( *entertainment* )

**Jesus walks among the lampstands ( among the churches ) so he is aware of our circumstances. What do you think He would think of our current Western culture and of our relationship to it ? Our study of the church at Pergamos will give us some insight into how Jesus views us.**

## **I. Pergamos was the most powerful city in the province of Asia.**

### **A. It had an illustrative history.**

1. It was an ancient city, founded at least 400 BC.
2. It had been the capitol city of two dynasties before it became a Roman city.
3. The king died with no heir and willed his kingdom to Rome. ( *prevented civil war* )
  - a. War with the Celts was looming.
  - b. The citizens were wise enough to cast their lot with Rome. ( *133 BC* )
4. When the church was established there, it had been a capitol city for 300 years.

### **B. The wealth and power of Pergamos was not from its commerce.**

1. It never achieved the commercial success of Ephesus and Smyrna.
2. It derived its wealth from being the seat of government. ( *many wealthy residents* )

### **C. Pergamos projected the visual image of power, like a royal city.**

1. It sat 1000 ft. up on a high hill overlooking the expansive river valley before it.
2. It was high enough ( *Pergamos means elevated* ) one could see the sea. ( *16 mi.* )
3. From a distance it looked like a majestic throne setting on the mountain.

### **D. Pergamos was known throughout the Roman Empire as a cultural center.**

1. It boasted that it was the “last outpost of Greek civilization.” ( *uncivilized Celts beyond* )
2. Educational center of the area.
3. The second largest library in the ancient world was there.
  - a. 200,000 handwritten volumes
  - b. Largest was in Alexandria. ( *Their rivalry resulted in the invention of parchment.* )
  - c. Mark Anthony gave their library to Cleopatra as a gift.

**E. This great city was also know for its many temples and its pagan worship.**

1. It had temples to the most prominent of the Greek gods.

**Note :** *By this time worship of these was more cultural than religious.*

- a. Athena ... the goddess of the Greeks.
- b. Dionysus ... the bull god ( theriomorphic ) of the grape harvest & ritual ecstasy.
- c. Zeus ... The ruler of the gods.

**Note :** *The altar of Zeus was so beautiful, it's base is preserved in the Berlin museum. The base is 9 ft. high and is caved to depict the history of Greek civilization. The altar was 90 x 90 x 40 high. It sat on a precipice which protruded high above the city and could be seen from anywhere. There was smoke rising from sacrificed 24 hours a day.*

2. Pergamos was the headquarters for worshipping the emperor. ( **3 temples** )
  - a. They were the first in Asia to worship the emperor. ( **built 1<sup>st</sup> altar 29 BC** )
  - b. Being the capitol city and the headquarters, they were zealots all year round.
  - c. Zero tolerance for those who would not acknowledge Caesar as lord.
3. Pergamos was most widely known for the temple of Asclepius the goddess of healing.
  - a. Sick from far and wide were brought there for healing. ( 154,000 sq. ft. )
  - b. Included a hospital and a medical school.
  - c. Particularly offensive to Christians because she was called "Asclepius the savior."
  - d. The snake was the symbol of Asclepius. ( **origin of today's medical symbol** )
  - e. Adherents would sleep in a dark room with snakes hoping to be touched by one.

**II. Vs. 12 ... Jesus again introduces Himself in terms of chapter one.****A. Jesus is the one with the two edged Sword.**

1. This was the sword used by the Roman soldiers.
  - a. To the world, the sword symbolized Rome's power.
  - b. **Rom. 13: 1-7** ... God has given the power of the sword to the government.
  - c. Remember, the one who gives has the ability to take away.
2. The sword coming out of His mouth indicates that the power is in His words.

**Heb. 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.*

**B. The two edges cut both ways ... protection and judgment.**

**III. Vs. 13 ... The God in the midst of the lampstands knows their circumstances.****A. Jesus knows where YOU live and where every other Christian lives.**

1. He is not unaware of the evil that surrounds us.
  - a. We live in the midst of the greatest wealth the world has ever known.
  - b. Satan tempts us with more pleasures than any generation has ever faced.
2. He has placed you in this place at this time for a reason.
  - a. Where the darkness is greatest, light is most needed.
  - b. Jesus placed you here to shine His light into the world. **Matt. 5: 14**
  - c. As Pergamos was set high for all to see and the altar of Zeus was above the city, Jesus set you on a lampstand to shine.

**B. The one in the midst of the lampstands is aware of how each of His lights shines.**

1. He was aware of the death of Antipas. ( "**Antipas**" means "**against all**." )
  - a. He was known only in Pergamos, not a famous person. ( *possibly an elder* )
  - b. History tells us that when he refused to acknowledge Caesar, he was placed inside a bronze bull and roasted to death.
2. When Steven was killed, Jesus stood in response. ( *note personal pronouns Vs-13* )
3. When Saul persecuted the church, Jesus said "Why do you persecute **Me**?" **Ax 9:4**

**C. Jesus knows every time you or I stand up for him or if we keep silent.**

1. **Matt. 10: 32-33** ... *If we confess Him before men, He will reciprocate before God.*
2. He understands your situation at work ... in the family ... in the community.

**IV. Vs. 14 ... The sword cuts both ways; Jesus sees that bad as well as the good.****A. Some among them "**hold**" the teaching of Balaam.**

1. Strong's Lexicon defines "**hold**" as : to keep carefully and faithfully.  
to continue to hold, to retain
2. Thus, these brethren have not made an isolated mistake; it is a practice, a lifestyle.

**B. The doctrine of Balaam is the doctrine of compromise.**

1. We read about Balaam in **Numbers 22-25, 31:16**. ( Cf- **I Cor 8-10** )
2. The Balaam sought to please Balak without directly disobeying God.
3. Politics is the art of compromise and Pergamos was a political town.

**C. They were participating in the sinful pleasures of the culture of Pergamos.**

1. They knew better, but found ways to justify their actions.

**Prov. 21: 2-** Every man's way is right in his own eyes,  
But the Lord weighs the hearts.

2. Every Christian must have the character of Antipas and refuse to compromise.

**Eph. 5: 11-** Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness,  
but instead even reprove them;

**D. Vs. 15 ... Some also hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.**

1. The bible does not define the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.
2. History is not clear, but most early historians define them like the Balaamites.
3. They were Gnostics and compromisers. Cf. - **Rom. 6: 1-2** , *Book of I John*

**V. Vs. 14, 15 ... Jesus recognized which members were committing sins and which ones were sinning by tolerating sin in the church.****A. "You have there some who hold ..." The whole church had not yet gone astray.**

1. God knows the heart of each and every person.
2. He knows who is doing what and why.
3. Thus, when sin is ignored, He knows why it's ignored.

**B. The church at Pergamos faced discipline not because all were Balaamites, but because they were tolerating Balaamites and Nicholaitans in their midst.**

1. Love demands that we reach out to erring brethren. **Gal. 6: 1-2**
2. The scriptures also demand that we protect the church from sin within.
  - a. We do not make issues about differences of opinion, but must do so with regards to those who practice sin.
  - b. **I Cor. 5** ... We dare not allow sin to spread through the church. ( *become accepted* )

**VI. Vs. 16 ... Jesus demanded immediate corrective action ... "repent."****A. This was not a suggestion, but a "Do it or else."**

1. Repentance requires a conviction of heart. ( *Remorse for past actions.* )
2. The sorrow for ones past actions motivate future actions to be different.

**B. There were two groups who were required to repent.**

1. The change of actions that was required of the church was to stop tolerating the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.
2. The change required of those practicing the erring doctrine was to conform to the truth.

**C. Vs. 16 ... The repentance was to take place upon the receipt of the letter.**

1. **"He who has an ear, let him hear"**
  - a. Every person responds to every message he hears.
  - b. The response is reflected in his actions or the lack thereof.
2. **"or else I am coming to you quickly,"** ( *One's response reflects his heart.* )
  - a. When God gives a command, one obeys ( *acts upon it* ) or rejects it.
  - b. He gives commands by His word and by those who teach his word.

**VI. Vs. 16-17 ... There are consequences to every decision one makes.****A. The result of rejecting God's commands ... WAR with God.**

1. The sharp sword of His word will judge those who do not obey. ( Cf- **John 12: 48** )
2. When God makes war **HE WINS.** *More powerful than any earthly adversary.*

**B. The results of overcoming the earthly pressure.**

1. Manna ... That which comes from God and sustains life.
  - a. **Read ... John 6: 31-35**
  - b. Hidden manna refers to the Jewish history of Jeremiah hiding the ark in a cave.
2. White Stone ... used in 4 ways and any could apply ( *mined in Pergamos* )
  - a. Given to one found innocent at trial.
  - b. Given to a freed slave as proof of his release.
  - c. Given to the winner of a contest as a sign of triumph.
  - d. Given to warrior who are returning home in victory.
3. Name ... Change of status ( *Remember how Abram became Abraham.* )

**CONCLUSION :**

- A. Apply to the Church and its individual members. **NEVER COMPROMISE.**
- B. God does not deliver us from tests, but insures our victory.
- C. All who cross the finish line uncompromised receive their reward.

**Lesson Text :****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.’