**Letters to the 7 Churches: Pergamum**

*Revelation 2:12-17*

Context

In His mercy and grace, God saves us out of this world. The bible repeatedly reminds us of that truth and warns us not to put the temporal above the eternal.

**1 John 2:15**—*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

**Romans 12:2a**—*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind…*

**John 15:19**—*If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*

**James 4:4***—*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

By definition, worldliness is any preoccupation with or interest in the temporal system of life that places anything perishable before that which is eternal.[[1]](#footnote-1) The church at Pergamum did not follow the biblical warnings against being conformed to this world. There are many churches today that likewise drift into the same situation. They compromise and capitulate in ways that make it difficult to distinguish them from the world. The Lord of the church has something to say.

7 noted points for each of the 7 churches

1. **Identification of “The One”**

**Revelation 2:12**—*“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

**Revelation 1:16**—*In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*

**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.*

**Ephesians 6:17***—And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

**Revelation 19:15***—From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.*

*Those churches that compromise the standard of God’s holiness fall under the judgment of the Lord of the true church.*

1. **Identification of the church   
     
   Revelation 2:12a**—*And to the angel of the church in Pergamum…*

* Angel (Aggelos)—messenger. This is a representative from the church who will take the letter back to the church—likely an elder or pastor.
* There are no other specific biblical references to this church; however, there are some reference that are possibilities.
  + **Acts 16:7-8**—*and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;****8****and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*
  + **Acts 19:10**—*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

1. **Identification of the city   
     
   Revelation 2:12**—*“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

* 100 miles or so north of Ephesus
* It was the capital city and had been for some 250 years
* It is an ancient city; modern day Bergama
* It is built on a large hill surrounded by plains (strategic militarily)
* It had a huge library—over 200,000 handwritten volumes
* It became an important center for culture and learning
* They had many deity temples there: Athena, Asklepios, Dionysos, and Zeus. Worship to Caesar was even more prevalent
* Yearly, people would have to burn incense (identifying “Caesar as Lord”) and receive a certificate. Without a certificate would be paramount to treason and punishable by death.
* Christians identify Jesus alone as Lord and do not bow the knee to Caesar. This discovery and refusal cost believers their life.

1. **Identification of what they did well**

**Revelation 2:13**—*‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

* **Hold fast My name; Did not deny My faith**—Even in an incredibly difficult environment, they maintained their faith in the Lord.
  + **Matthew 16:18b**—*I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*
* **Satan’s throne**—could have been the altar of Zeus or worship to Asklepios (god of healing; depicted as a snake). Many came from around the world to seek healing. It could also have been Caesar worship.
  + **2 Corinthians 4:4**—*in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
* **Antipas, My witness** (martus), **My faithful one**—Likely one of the Elders of the church. Tradition has him martyred by being “roasted to death inside a brass bull during the persecution instigated by Emperor Domitian.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
* His witness would have been in stark contrast to the rebuke this church received.

1. **Identification of what they did not do well**

**Revelation 2:14-15**—*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.*

* **False teaching**—always prevalent in every culture, the church is repeatedly admonished to hold fast to solid biblical doctrine.
  + **2 Peter 2:1**—*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.*
  + **1 John 4:1**—*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
  + **Titus 3:10-11**—*Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,****11****knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*
* Balaam (Numbers 22-25); Balak (numbers 25; 31:16)—
  + **2 Peter 2:15-16**—*forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness*
* **Nicolaitans—**A man selected as a Deacon in Acts 6 to distribute food. He became a defector and false teacher. He taught that sexual immorality could be part of Christian worship experience.
  + **Acts 6:5—***The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.*

1. **Identification of how to change**

**Revelation 2:16**—*Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*

* **Repent** (Recognize, Repent, Refocus and Replace)—a change of mind that results in a change in behavior; 180° turn-around.
* *The church is to be the pillar and support of the truth (****1 Timothy 3:15****). We are not to tolerate heretical teaching or sinful behavior.*
* So serious was Christ’s rebuke that the entire church faced the consequences.
  + **1 Corinthians 5:6-7**—*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?****7****Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*
* Error will never be suppressed by compromising with it.[[3]](#footnote-3)
  + **2 Timothy 2:24-26**—*The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,****25****with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,****26****and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

1. **Identification of exhortation and promise**

**Revelation 2:17**—*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.’*

* Each of the 7 letters ends with “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Pay attention! Listen up!
* Promises are connected to “*him who overcomes*” (**1 John 5:4-5**)
* **Hidden manna**—honey flavored bread which was given to the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings (**Exodus 16:14**)
* Christ is the bread of life (**John 6:48-51**)
* **White stone**—One possibility: white stones were given to victors of athletic games with their name on it that allowed them entrance into the awards banquet.
  + **Deuteronomy 29:29**—*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

1. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11, p. 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p.87 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, p. 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)