

# To the Church in Pergamum

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Date: 27 July 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back to God's Word, carrying on our series in the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 2, I'm reading at verse 12. Revelation chapter 2, verse 12.

When our third church of our series, we're getting through them. We arrive this evening in Pergamum. To the angel of the church in Pergamum write, the words of him who has a sharp two-edged sword.

I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you do not deny the faith, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold the teachings of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols, and practice sexual immorality.

So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon, and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

[ 1 : 20 ] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone, that no one knows, except the one who receives it.

Amen. As we're carrying on our short series, well, I say short, it's of course seven weeks long, all being well, as we follow through the seven churches of Revelation.

As we saw last week, we had the shortest segment, the church of Smyrna. As we said, Smyrna and Philadelphia is one of the two churches out of the seven where Christ finds no fault with them.

He has nothing to say to warn them. Well, that's not, of course, we see this evening. In the church of Pergamum, we do see, we're back to the same pattern we saw for the first two churches.

That there is a pattern of what is going well for them, but also some warning for them. So for ourselves this evening, last week we had no warning to listen to.

[ 2 : 27 ] This evening, as a church, as a gathering, we have a warning given to Pergamum that we must ourselves pay attention to. We also have encouragement to. Christ encourages this small suffering church.

And for ourselves this evening, let's also hear the encouragement and think how that encouragement also applies to us in our situation, in our circumstances.

We were last week, as we said, in Smyrna. We now keep moving roughly north, arguably. There's some discussion as to where the city actually began, but say northwards, we now hit the town, the city of Pergamum, and it was a city.

I don't know about yourselves, but sometimes I find myself, when I think back to the towns and cities of the Bible days, I forget just the scale and the size of these cities.

I always catch myself thinking as if they're small, wee towns. Pergamum, at a rough estimate, at a low estimate, they think there's about 200,000 people living there.

- [ 3 : 37 ] This is not just some small, wee town just north of Ephesus. This is a large city. 200,000 people in the city, and also including the surrounding area, the suburbs, we could say.
- This is a huge city of the day, second or third largest in the area. And this was a city which was known culturally on its day for one major thing.
- This was the city, that was the city of temples, the city of worship. You could be guaranteed, or almost guaranteed, no matter who you were, in the Roman Empire, in the large expanse of the Roman Empire.
- If you came for a visit to Pergamum, somewhere in this city, you would find a temple that would be one of your gods, or your god. You could travel from the east, travel from northern Africa, you could travel from west, and even, as far as they've excavated so far, there's evidence even of gods worshipped by the Celtic tribes, the Germanic tribes, Celtic tribes, whatever you want to call them, the far west people.
- There's evidence of temples to their gods found in Pergamum. Basically, north, south, east, and west, you would find your god there. Or at least a temple to one of your gods.
- [ 5 : 08 ] Pergamum, the city of the world, the city of the world, the city of the world, Pergamum, this huge city, it was a city full of worship, a city full of temples, a city full of very faithful people.
- Pergamum was a place, as you understand then, that context of constant pilgrimage. Just think how expansive the Roman Empire is, and think how much people travelled throughout the empire.
- If you wanted to worship like you did back home, you would head to Pergamum, find your temple, and worship your god there. It's a place of constant worship, constant bustle, constant praise, to a whole pantheon, a whole variety of gods.
- There was also the healing, there's a physical healing centre. There was, I guess we could say nowadays, medical schools in Pergamum.
- It was known for being a place of science, of the day, of medical schools. You would go there to train, to be a doctor of sorts. That would be one of the main areas you would go to.
- [ 6 : 22 ] You would go and train, spend years in this place. A place of worship, a place of pilgrimage, a place of healing.
- This was the health and religious centre of this area. We saw before the cultural areas, the popular tourist spots in previous weeks, and today we have Pergamum, the healing religious city centre.
- Also notably, Pergamum was the centre of one type of worship outside of Rome itself. Pergamum was the centre, and we know this properly, truly historically, we know this to be accurate.
- It was the centre, outside of Rome, the centre of emperor worship. In the centre of the city, there was a temple to the emperor.
- Now, of course, the temple was never named because the emperor would change the time and go on, but it was a temple to the emperor, whoever he may be, at that time. That's the context of this church.
- [ 7 : 36 ] We'll see in a second just why that context is so important to us. But as we said, the same pattern every week. As the letter is sent to Pergamum, who is the letter from? How does Jesus describe himself this week to this church?
- To the angel, we said that's to the minister, to the leader of the church in Pergamum, write, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.
- We'll go back to chapter 1 and verse 16, I believe, where we see Jesus being described in his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

We'll be taken back to that reminder. As Jesus begins to address this church in Pergamum, he reminds them as to his power. He is the one who has the sharp two-edged sword.

He is the one who has full authority, whose word and whose action is sovereign. The one who by what he says, of course, by what he does, he is perfect, he is righteous.

[ 8 : 53 ] But also, there's even more to this. As we see the wording here of the one who has a sharp two-edged sword, and here we see God's word that is so accurate and is so, in God's providence, so beautifully relevant, not just to us, but to the ones who received this.

Of course, Pergamum, the Christians there, the normal Christians, they received this letter. And in Pergamum, we know for certain, we have inscriptions, we have texts from the temple, the emperor worship temple, that the emperor was named, was called, one of the ways you'd praise him was by saying that he is the one who wields the double-edged sword.

And you praise the emperor by saying, oh emperor, how great you are, how amazing you are, how wonderful you are, you wield the double-edged sword. In other words, you have all the power, you have all the glory.

And Jesus here, as he reminds the church in Pergamum just who he is, he says, you Christians who are living in the center of emperor worship, the one who claims for himself military might and military power, I remind you that I, and I alone, am the one who has the sharp two-edged sword.

For all the military might and the emperor had military might, for all the fear and terror this man could install and instill, Jesus alone is sovereign in his power.

[ 10 : 30 ] Jesus alone wields truly the sharp two-edged sword that is his holy, eternal word. And he uses the sword.

It's not just there for effect. It is one who has the sword and who will use the sword both to protect his own holy name but also to protect his people, his holy people.

We'll see that later on as we come to verse 16. When Jesus' church is threatened, Jesus will use that sword to protect his people, to protect his church.

We said that in previous weeks. We said it even from the church, the church of Ephesus, where Jesus threatens and warns them that if he does, if they do not repent, he will remove from them the candlestick, the lampstand from among them.

as we said, that he warns the Ephesians, repent or I will remove the church. I will remove your witness and your presence in the area.

[ 11 : 41 ] And here to the Christians in Pergamum, he is saying to them, we'll see in a second later on, that he is the one who will deal in full righteousness with those who are making a mockery of the gospel, even those who call themselves his people.

But we'll see that in a second. Verse 13, I know where you dwell. Here he commends them, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, yet you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith.

Even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. even a curse reading of that verse tells you the main emphasis.

What is repeated in this verse? And again, where you see repetition in scripture, it is always there to draw our attention to the element that's being repeated. I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, in the final section there, where Satan dwells.

These poor Christians, this poor church, they are serving the Lord in a place where Satan has his throne.

[ 13 : 04 ] Now, what do we mean by that? What is that? How do we understand that when we know that Satan is not the throne on earth? It is not. In a literal sense, it can't be. It's not. But in one sense, it is a literal sense.

Again, what is going on in Pergamum? It's a place of continual night and day sacrifice and worship. Sacrifice and worship to every single God you can imagine.

And God is very much there of a small g. Every so-called God, every false God, every idol is being cried to, is being made covenants with.

There is so much worship being poured out in the streets of Pergamum day and night towards false gods and idols. And there we see Satan is reigning and ruling in that.

What is Satan's main goal? What is his main purpose? Is that, essentially, as we said before, in various ways, but just to be concise, that he is happy as long as God is not being worshipped with respect to our Lord, but not to Satan, he's not fussy how he achieves that.

[ 14 : 24 ] He's not fussy what that looks like. He's not fussy what idol you worship. He's not fussy how you do it or when you do it. As long as we're not worshipping God, he is quite happy with the outcome there.

And in Pergamum, we see time after time, temple after temple, street after street, full of faithful, ardent, well-meaning worshippers, worshipping these false gods.

These idols, we read in Isaiah, these idols who have been so carefully and lovingly crafted. These idols, these false gods, who these people are placing all of their genuine hope into.

Genuine people who are trying their very genuine best to worship these gods and they hope these gods will listen to them. And they're praying to lumps of wood and lumps of metal.

But also we see there's more than lumps of wood and lumps of metal. Yes, in one sense, idol worship is idol worship. They're praying to created stuff. And idols, of course, have no power.

[ 15 : 35 ] Idols are not real. But in one sense, they are real. When you pray to an idol, when you bow down and when you say your prayers to this lump of wood or lump of stone or lump of metal, the material doesn't hear you.

The material has no meaning, has no help for you. But you're worshipping Satan and doing that. And you are worshipping. And the idol, in a sense, does hear you.

Because as you worship the idol, you're worshipping the one who created the idol, the one who loves the existence of that idol, which is, of course, the prince of the power of fear, Satan himself.

And here we must be careful. And that's not beyond what Scripture says. Again, idols are not real. But also, we know ourselves because no one, if he speaks, I think of one person I spoke to in Edinburgh.

He, actually, I attended the church, I attended in Edinburgh, but he wasn't a Christian. He had a faith, he was Hindu of sorts, and he had an idol in his room.

[ 16 : 53 ] I was speaking to him one day just in conversation, trying to get his story, and just wanting to get to know him as a person. He was saying, you know, I know that idol is wood.

I know that idol can't do anything for me, but when I pray to the idol, I'm actually praying to my God who's represented in the idol. And there is truth. When you pray to idols, when people worship idols, if they're thinking at all, they're not praying to the actual thing.

They're praying to what that thing is represented, which is the God they're worshipping. Demons. Demons and Satan himself is behind these objects.

I'm not going too far in saying that. In fact, I'm probably not going far enough, but that's enough for this evening. Demons and Satan is behind and are behind these objects. Again, the pulpit is no place for personal accounts and personal stories, but I'm sure you've heard before point, I'm going to answer it from ministers before, but be assured that there are places in this world and areas in this world where you can feel a real sense of evil.

And those of us who know it, you know it. If you've experienced it, you've experienced it. There are places and times where you will be very much aware that you're somewhere in someone's house or in someone's presence and you know that person is taken up with false worship.

[ 18 : 26 ] They are almost surrounded by what feels like a cloak of evil. And you're almost guaranteed that person is worshipping some form of idol. They're worshipping some form of false god.

That is the situation of the poor Christians here in Pergamum. As Satan appears as an angel of light, as Satan uses whatever methods work for him, but dear brothers and sisters, thinking back to the account of the Exodus, when the priests of Pharaoh performed some of the same miracles as God or as Moses did, as God worked through Moses, they weren't doing tricks, the priests.

They weren't doing wee magic tricks. They were, through the power of the evil one, at least able to copy some of the miracles that God was doing through Moses.

Now they did it in small ways, in different ways. Satan cannot, of course, match up to God's power, but in small ways, up to a certain point, they're able to do miracles, to do these amazing feats.

Don't think for a second there is no power in evil. Satan cannot create, no, but we covered before in Ezekiel, where we saw he does make.

[ 19 : 50 ] He is accused in Ezekiel of being one who crafted things together. Now we didn't touch on that in detail, it wasn't the scope of our text, it's also not text this evening, but just to say don't think for a second that there's not power in evil.

There is. It's limited, it's not holy, it's not creative power, but there is power in evil. Satan and his angels have a certain level of power to do certain things and you hear that.

There's some Christians who have come, genuine Christian, reformed believers, one who is now a pastor in America in a church that's confessional, that is actually psalm singing, that is good, reformed church, and this pastor was once a medium.

He was once a wizard, a warlock, he once did magic and received real psychic revelations from his spirit guides.

Now this man, of course, is now a Christian, but he will say he didn't once charge for these revelations, he didn't once make things up, he would see someone in the street and know almost everything about that person's life and could tell you all about them.

[ 21 : 11 ] He would grab you and tell you that your father is sorry for the time he XYZ, this long dead father, or your granny wants to say to you and he would name a person's grandmother and where she lived and everything and he would receive these things and share these things.

Of course, he now is clear that that came from evil, it came from demons, it came from Satan himself. There is power in evil. And the Christians in Pergamum were dealing with real evil.

They lived in a place where Satan's throne was. And despite that constant evil, despite being the constant heavy presence of an evil area, an evil city with demonic worship going on night and day all around them, what does Jesus say about them?

You held fast. You held fast my name and do not deny my faith. Even the days of Antipas my faithful witness.

There is nothing in Scripture about this man. Antipas, we don't know from biblical sources about him, but his account is actually recorded in secular sources about 150, 200 years after Revelation was written.

[ 22 : 36 ] The tradition was given that Antipas was a Christian who was a doctor. He was actually a lecturer. He was a real man. We have secular knowledge of that.

He was a lecturer of sorts in one of the medical colleges of Pergamum. He was a Christian, part of this congregation. He loved his Lord and he would share the gospel to his students.

Well, the governor of Pergamum told him to stop doing that. Stop sharing the gospel to your students. This is not what we believe. It's amazing, isn't it? Pergamum, you could worship every god you wanted.

almost literally apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. That wasn't allowed in Pergamum. Nothing changes. Antipas said, no, I will keep praising my Lord and keep worshiping my Lord.

Antipas was tortured and killed. In fact, he was tortured and killed in a horrific way. He was put inside a giant brass effigy of a bull and slowly burnt her, boiled alive.

[ 23 : 42 ] That's Antipas. that's the life and the end, the horrific end of a man who loved his saviour, who right to the end would not give up faith in his saviour.

Yet you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

They saw Satan and his people fight back even to a point of horrifically killing one of their own members of their church and yet in the face of the death of the member of their congregation they just keep on going.

They kept on serving faithfully. But again, our saviour is honest and faithful service is good but also there are still problems in this congregation.

I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold the teachings of Balaam who taught Balaam put a stumbling block for the sons of Israel so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

[ 24 : 49 ] You also have some of the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The issues of this church can be summarised perhaps in two main ways.

Two main issues. This church who has held fast and done so well they still have some religious compromise and we can say some moral compromise.

Religious compromise and moral compromise. The sin of Balaam again to eat the food sacrificed to idols.

The actual account there of course is a sermon for a different day for us but just in short they're there this church who lives in an idol filled town and they're eating food sacrificed to idols.

Now we know that Paul argues elsewhere that there is some times where eating food sacrificed to idols is permissible but common sense allows here that for the Christians in Pergamum where they cannot afford to have their witness compromised where all the food they would encounter would be food somehow blessed or dedicated to one of the gods the many gods and they are compromising they are compromising by eating food that's been sacrificed to idols there's religious compromise they are not going out of their way to find food that's not been sacrificed to idols they've been too perhaps spiritually lazy and physically lazy to go and to find our food instead of they're just giving up and having a food that's closest to them that's being made and served closest to them and by doing that see eating food sacrificed to idols is not just a quick meal this was you saying that you're one of the worshippers one of the devotees of this god so every time they would eat food sacrificed to idols they are without even perhaps realising it or meaning to they are saying that they are worshippers of this god or that god essentially they are compromising time and time and time again it is easier for them to compromise and to go and find our food there's religious compromise but also we see there's a moral compromise they might eat food sacrificed to idols also and practice sexual immorality sexual immorality there is just one word in the greek and that word is pornea pornea i guess in english the most obvious example of that is pornography but pornea in greek is a wider term we covered this before in church but obviously church in the morning with the children and families a bit more careful how we say this but god's word is blunt and clear and so must we be pornea is a broad category it takes in all sorts of we can say conventional sexual sins of adultery and of lust but it stretches out to all the categories of sexual depravity you can possibly imagine and by saying that and by using that term it tells us that this church is perhaps these members of this church are engaging in things which Christians should not even be thinking about never mind engaging in and one of the biggest problems I would argue that we have as a church not

[ 28 : 53 ] Tolstair but a church in a general sense of Christians is that we always think these sections of scripture don't and won't and will never apply to us but it doesn't apply to anyone in this room you can't preach about gossip because no one hears gossip you can't preach here about lust because no one hears lusting or adultery because no one hears about falling into that sin you can't preach about pornea because there's no one here who's involved in sexual immorality and by saying that by thinking that we don't touch these things and God's people fall into these sins and cause great as we know ourselves in recent history cause great distrust to the gospel cause great gospel damage and destroy congregations the truth is like the Christians here in Pergamum we're no different we are liable to fall into religious compromise we're so liable of following just the thoughts and the feelings of the day we live in but also we see the same with moral compromise the first danger we say is this will never be us we said this before on a

Sunday morning but the truth is that within us we are capable of doing every sin it was Calvin I think it was Calvin in our hearts is the seed of every sin where it could grow up and flourish and you think well I don't think that's true well it's not true until it becomes true in your life we all have the capability to perform take part in engage in and carry out any of the worst sins in the world around us and the second we begin to understand that and to ask the Lord to keep us from that we become safer in our walk and we become better in our service towards him the Christians in the church of Pergamum engaged in moral sin they engaged in religious sin and Jesus is clear you must repent therefore repent verse 16 again we're not cut off because of our sin they have wronged against God theologically morally they have sinned sexually they have sinned in their hearts in their bodies in their minds but we're not cut off the Christians in Pergamum are not cut off therefore repent as one wee sentence it's a beautiful sentence isn't it that reminds us that

Christ is still forgiving he is still the saviour who takes people in regardless of our messy make of things if I just jump to the next phrase I will come to you and war against them with the sword in my mouth that's terrifying there's no hope there there's no help there but first Jesus says repent therefore repent if not if there's no repentance Jesus comes back and says I will war against them those who don't repent with the sword of my mouth Christ will have a holy church God is not mocked sin done in secret is always brought to the light sin done in darkness is always brought to the forward one day Christ purifies his church that's not a joyous reality but it's one that is true it's joyous in one sense but the truth is the fact that Christ keeps his church holy means there are scandals after scandals and we know ourselves and there is pain after pain if we're not repenting

Jesus will come and war against us with the sword of his mouth he will keep his church holy he will keep his church right how does Jesus comfort the Christians of Pergamum these battered Christians battered and living life surrounded by these faiths and these false religions and the demonic presence of these gods to the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna there's three promises here some of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone for a new name written on this stone that no one knows except the one who receives it hidden manna this white stone and the new name you can take each one of these things and delve into them some do and some find themselves quite lost quite quickly but if you take them and the grammar tells us to do this these three are one really what is

Christ offering his people those who persevere he's offering them newness hidden manna of course it goes back to the exodus account but God's simple blessing to his people we are promised celestial food we are promised access to where celestial food is in other words we are promised to eat the food of heaven to find and to feel and to see the blessing of heaven to those who persevere access to eat in the courts and the banqueting halls of glory also I'll give him a white stone there's a thousand opinions on this one commentator had 25 different interpretations of a white stone 25 interpretations all seem quite genuine I've got two actually for this evening now there's no right answer here our church fathers going right back to the start have had different opinions on this so

[ 35 : 03 ] Don McLeod from Grava won't tell you what is right here but two what I would find are valid opinions a white stone we know for certain was given to one who was often acquitted of a crime it was a sign that the jury found you innocent also also interestingly a white stone shaped in certain ways was used as a ticket it was your entry to the theatre to the shows to access to the event that was taking place either way it's an object that shows you have been faithful that you are supposed to be where you are that tells you this object it just shows in physical form that you've been faithful to the end and that you have access this is where your ticket to glory that you persevere to the end my brother my sister and the

Lord says I will give you full entry to partake of the hidden manna and also receive this new name of course the slave as he begins his life as now a free man on this stone which is almost this entry ticket to glory there's the sign of a new name this new start this new start as a free person the Christians in Pergamum a lifetime under



Satan's constant attack surrounded by demonic worship they needed that promise didn't they of heavenly food heavenly rest a new start that lasted for all eternity brothers and sisters we perhaps aren't quite as attacked as the Christians in Pergamum but we are here this evening as people who dwell and who live here and who spend our time here and we are surrounded also by those who worship idols we are surrounded also by those who follow after the prince of the air who follow after the evil one we often experience I'm sure those of us here who have known the Lord for some time times of great spiritual oppression times of great evil even being sensed around us and we like the church in Pergamum we have the hope that one day we will receive access to the banqueting halls of glory that heavenly manna we will receive as it were the white stone of entry and on that stone we will receive this new name this new start which tells us we will have an eternity spent with our saviour free from the burden free from the darkness free from the demonic presence of this world to live in freedom and safety and peace of

Jesus forever Amen can I ask Andrew a word of prayer please forever Amen Lord our God it's so hard for us to read that some people in this world we live in can look to other gods false gods and not look to the God of heaven who is eternal and above all things but it shouldn't really surprise us when we look at our Bibles and we see in the days of the judges the kings the prophets that even your own people Israel looked to idols and followed after false gods as well so Lord we can't deny we know and see the warnings in your world that we should always watch our own hearts help us to look to our Lord Jesus that we might follow him every day that we might trust him and look to him and help us Lord to turn away from having idols in our own lives things that we don't think are idols that we put our trust and hope in things like career and family and other things in this world that we give so much time and put so much effort into but Lord we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in

Christ Jesus and help us to read to him each day and to trust him and to watch out every step as we walk in this world we pray for the community we live in here in Tulsa we pray we realise Lord that there are many who do not know you we pray for them we pray that you would speak to them through different situations different circumstances different ways that you might bring them to question their own lives and their own walk and that they might look to Jesus as well we pray for the preaching of your word we thank you Lord for the power of the word as we come to hear it each and every week and we pray for this coming Sunday as we listen to your word again we pray for those who have not as yet trusted in you we pray that you would work in their hearts and you would speak to them through the truth and that they might know for themselves that they need to come to

[ 41 : 21 ] Christ who is a forgiver of sin so Lord help each one of us to look to you to trust in you and not to put trust in our own efforts trusting in our own strengths and we know we are weak and we are cynical so we can be led astray very easily so we pray Lord that you would help us to avoid the steps taken in the church in Pergamon as we see them going astray and not following you wholeheartedly so be with us now as we finish we thank you for the way your work speak to us we pray Lord that you would be with us each and every day and that you would help us now to conclude this evening and praise to your great and holy name and we ask all this for

Jesus sake Amen Let's conclude by singing that great psalm of hope and that help Psalm 121 Psalm 121 I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence thou come my need my safety cometh from the Lord to heaven and earth have made thy foot shall not let slide while he slumber that thee keeps behold he that keeps Israel he slumbers not nor sleeps Psalm to God's praise Hung to let home to han to all to love what person there Bye to him to what Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.