

PERGAMOS

The Compromising Church

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 573.



Leap
of FAITH
Hebrews 11:1



Revelation 2:12–17 (NKJV)

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

13 “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight 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 I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”

The Greatest City In Asia Minor

- Called “*the greatest city in Asia Minor*,” Pergamos had the first temple dedicated to Caesar and was a rabid promoter of the imperial cult.
- This is probably what is meant by “*Satan’s seat*” in Revelation 2:13. The city also had a temple dedicated to Aesculapius, the god of healing, whose insignia was the entwined serpent on the staff. *(This is still a medical symbol today.)* Satan, of course, is likewise symbolized as the serpent *(2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; 20:2)*.



Approval (v. 13)

Revelation 2:13 (NKJV)

13 “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Fellow Suffers Of The Gospel

- Like their brothers and sisters in Smyrna, the believers in Pergamos had suffered persecution, and one of their men had died for the faith.
- In spite of intense suffering, this church had remained true to God.
- They refused to drop incense on the altar and say, “Caesar is Lord.”

Fellow Suffers Of The Gospel

- The Lord's description of Himself (*"He which hath the sharp sword," Rev. 2:12*) would surely encourage the people, for the sword was also the symbol of the Roman proconsul.
- It was more important that the church fear Christ's sword than the Roman sword (*Rev. 2:16*).

Accusation (vv. 14–15)

Revelation 2:14–15 (NKJV)

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

We Are Not Faultless

- Despite their courageous stand against persecution, the believers in Pergamos were not faultless before the Lord.
- Satan had not been able to destroy them by coming as the roaring lion.

1 Peter 5:8 (NKJV)

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.



We Are Not Faultless

- but he was making inroads as the deceiving serpent.

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NKJV)

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

- A group of compromising people had infiltrated the church fellowship, and Jesus Christ hated their doctrines and their practices.



Nicolaitans

- These infiltrators are called “Nicolaitans,” whom we met already at Ephesus ([Rev. 2:6](#)). The name means “to rule the people.”
- What they taught is called “*the doctrine of Balaam*” ([Rev. 2:14](#)). The Hebrew name Balaam also means “*lord of the people*” and is probably synonymous with Nicolaitans. Sadly, this group of professed believers “*lorded it over*” the people and led them astray.

Nicolaitans

Matthew 18:6 (NKJV)

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Nicolaitans

- Understanding the story of Balaam helps us interpret this insidious group more accurately (*see Num. 22–25*).
- Balaam was a true prophet who prostituted his gifts in order to earn money from King Balak, who hired him to curse the people of Israel.

Nicolaitans

- God prevented Balaam from actually cursing the nation—in fact, God turned the curses into blessings!—but Balak still got his money’s worth.
- How? By following Balaam’s advice and making friends with Israel, and then inviting the Jews to worship and feast at the pagan altars. “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em!”

Be Careful Of Wrong Company

- The Jewish men fell right into the trap and many of them became “good neighbors.”
- They ate meat from idolatrous altars and committed fornication as part of heathen religious rites.
- Twenty-four thousand people died because of this disobedient act of compromise (*Num. 25:1–9*).

- Why did this bit of ancient history apply to the believers at Pergamos? Because a group in that church said, “There is nothing wrong with being friendly to Rome.

James 4:4 (NKJV)

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- What harm is there in putting a pinch of incense on the altar and affirming your loyalty to Caesar?” Antipas refused to compromise and was martyred; but others took the “easy way” and cooperated with Rome.

1 Corinthians 5:5 (NKJV)

deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- The Lord accused the Christians in Pergamos of sinning, of committing “spiritual fornication” by saying, “Caesar is Lord.”
- Of course, this compromise made them welcome in the Roman associations and protected them from Roman persecution, but it cost them their testimony and their crown.

Psalm 78:5 (NKJV)

For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children;



- Believers today also face the temptation to achieve personal advancement by ungodly compromise.
- The name Pergamos means “*married*,” reminding us that each local church is “engaged to Christ” and must be kept pure.

2 Corinthians 11:1–4 (NKJV)

1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!



- We see in Revelation that this present world system is pictured as a defiled harlot, while the church is presented as a pure bride.
- The congregation or the individual Christian that compromises with the world just to avoid suffering or achieve success is committing “spiritual adultery” and being unfaithful to the Lord.

1 Peter 2:19–21 (NKJV)

19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Admonition (vv. 16–17)

Revelation 2:16–17 (NKJV)

16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight 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 I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” ’



- Antipas had felt the sword of Rome, but the church at Pergamos would feel the sword of Christ—the Word—if they did not repent.

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

- This is not a reference to our Lord's return but to a present judgment that comes to a church when it is disobedient to the Word of God.
- The Lord had presented Himself as “He has the sharp two-edged sword” *(Rev. 2:12)*, so the church could not have been ignorant of its danger.
- Instead of eating “things sacrificed to idols” *(Rev. 2:14)*, the believers in Pergamos needed to feast on God's holy food, the bread of life found in Jesus Christ through the Word.

Matthew 4:4 (NKJV)

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ ”

John 6:32 (NKJV)

Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

- In those days, a white stone was put into a vessel by a judge to vote acquittal for a person on trial.
- It was also used like a “ticket” to gain admission to a feast.
- Both would certainly apply to the believer in a spiritual sense: he has been declared righteous through faith in Christ, and he feasts with Christ today and will feast with Him in glory.

Revelation 3:20 (NKJV)

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

- Let's not be the compromised church!