

March 10th, 2024  
 Revelation 2:12-17 The Church of Pergamum

### Revelations 2:12-17

**12** “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. **13** “‘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. **14** But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold (*follow*) the teaching 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. **15** So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **16** Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and 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 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.’

### [Show Revelation Chart]

- We are currently in what is called the “**Church Age**”
- The New Testament, starting from Acts 2. There were 120 in upper room praying and worshipping when the, people encountered the permanent indwelling among the believers at Pentecost (Pentecost was the celebration of the beginning of the early wheat harvest). These disciples witness the **birth of the New Testament church**. Jesus commands this expansion of His church:

Jesus has kept His promise and the church has been growing for 2,000 years. The ***Church Age will end when God's people are raptured out of the world*** and taken to be with the Lord.

## Revelation 1:19

Write therefore the things that you **have seen**, **those that are** and **those that are to take place after this**.

- The things that you **have seen**: Chapter 1 (Appearance of Jesus)
- “Those **that are**”: Chapters 2-3 (The Church Age)
- “Those **that are to take place**”: Chapters 4 - 22 (Future Events)

What is interesting is that God starts to talk doesn't talk about the end times, but talks directly to Christians and to the people inside the church.

## Letters to 7 Churches (Revelation 2-3)

**Literal in Existence:** Each church was an actual church located in Turkey during the 1st Century A.D.

**Spiritual Relevance for Today:** Each church addresses similar spiritual issues relevant to Believers today.

Last Sunday, we had talked about persecution of Christians for over 300 years and then it suddenly stopped and became a state religion overnight.

### **End of Christian Persecution:**

A.D. 100 - End of Apostolic Age (John who is the last apostle dies)

A.D. 312 - Emperor of Rome, Constantine made Christianity a **state religion**

So for over 300 years, you had heavy persecution on Christians and millions of believers died for their faith. So some scholars indicated that ***over 6 million Christians died for their faith***. And then Constantine comes into power and gives freedom to the Christians.

**So, how did this happen overnight?**

**[Show the symbol of Chi-Rho the Greek symbol for Christos]**



**Constantine I vs Maxentius (Battle of Milvian Bridge):** Battle of Milvian Bridge, (October 28, 312 CE), major battle in a Roman civil war between Constantine 1 and Maxentius. After the collapse of the Roman Empire's Second Tetrarchy (joint rule by four governors), Constantine and Maxentius asserted competing claims to the imperial throne. At Maxentius's goading, Constantine invaded the Italian Peninsula. A lightning campaign saw Maxentius killed in battle at the Milvian Bridge on the outskirts of Rome.

***Constantine's victory confirmed his role as ruler of the Western Empire.***

According to ancient sources, Constantine converted to Christianity just before the battle, which affected his decision to end Christian persecution and establish ***Christianity as the most favoured religion within the Roman Empire.***

Constantine's vision of the cross in the sky with the inscription that read, "***By this symbol you will conquer***"

### **Constantine**

- Constantine supposedly had a dream in which Jesus instructed him house the symbol he had seen ***as protection in battle.***
- The next day, he had the ***Chi-Rho drawn on the shields of his men*** which he ended up winning the battle. (Side Note: This is why you see a cross on the shields of those that went to the crusades)
- He believed it happened thanks to the ***help of Jesus Christ through this symbol*** and Constantine continued to use the Chi-Rho symbol prominently in all his battles.
- Several years later, he declared ***Christianity a legal faith in the Roman Empire.***
- It was this turning point at the Battle of Milvian Bridge was the turning point for ***Christianity becoming a widespread.***

But eventually what actually happened was that the ***persecuted Christian Church became more Roman looking then it did***

**Christian looking.** And this church eventually became the Roman Catholic Church.

Remember when Constantine took over the entire Roman empire, he became the sole authority or in some sense a small little god. So if he said that you will become a Christian, you became a Christian, even though you believed in **Zeus, Diana, and many other gods**.

Now you had million of people there were not really a follower of Jesus, they just followed the religion **as if Jesus was another pagan god**. “**Hey we followed Zeus and Diana, so let's just add another god**.” So this was the physical change but not the spiritual transformation.

**And that's what many people follow today.** I tell people all the time, just because you go to church, that doesn't make you a Christian. Just because your parents were Christians, that doesn't make you a Christian. Just because I am a Pastor, that doesn't make my kids a Christian. Christianity is solely based on a personal surrender and belief in Jesus.

That's why I always ask, “**if you were to die tomorrow would you know for certain that you would go to heaven?**” if you are not certain, then simply ask God, God will you be real in my life? Will you reveal yourself to me and let me know that you are truly real? Then, when you are ready, read **Romans 10:9-10** and ask God.

So here you have overnight by Constantines rule, you have the entire Roman empire, rule that Christianity is no longer a threat. For 300 hundred years and millions of lives dead for their faith is **now elevated to a new status for Christians**. You have now a protected status and eventually to a **privileged status**.

What happened from 312 - 606 AD This was what was going on inside the church.

- They started to pray for the dead (**Purgatory**)

- They started to worship saints and angels (**Communion of Saints**)
- They started to worship Mary the mother of Jesus.
- Many Catholics ask the saints and Mary or pray through them for help.

**Purgatory:** Purgatory is “a place or condition of **temporal punishment** for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are not entirely free from venial faults (**sin**), or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.” To summarize, in Catholic theology, Purgatory is a place that a Christian’s soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life.

Think of Purgatory as “**in-between**” space between heaven and hell.

Another definitions of **Purgatory**: “refinement,” “purification,” and “fire.”

### **Expand Catholic Church Buildings**

During the Roman Catholic Church expansion (New Buildings), they would put a monk who is skilled with sales. They would have a ***metal jar and tell people that they can give money to release their family member or a friend out of Purgatory and into heaven.*** Their sins would be forgiven, but they would have to hear the coins hitting the side of the metal jar which is the signal or sign that they have been released to heaven. I remember a Catholic friend, who gave \$5,000 to the Catholic Church, so that his family member was forgiven of their sin and into heaven.

This is what the Catholics would call “**indulgences**” (the money), along with prayer for their family or friends in purgatory.

### **Romans 5:8**

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,  
Christ died for us.

Jesu died for our sins and once and for all. To say that we must also suffer for our sins after death is to say that **Jesus' suffering was insufficient**. To say that we must atone for our sins by cleansing in Purgatory is to deny the sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

### 1 John 2:2 Amplified Bible

And He [that same Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins [the atoning sacrifice that holds back the wrath of God that would otherwise be directed at us because of our sinful nature—our worldliness, our lifestyle]; and not for ours alone, but also for [the sins of all believers throughout] the whole world.

The idea that those who are saved by grace through faith have to suffer for their sins **after death is contrary to everything the Bible** says about salvation.

**Prayers to Saints:** This address the question why Catholics Pray to Mary (Mother of Jesus) and to other saints like the Apostle Peter:

**Communion of Saints:** *As Catholics, we believe that our life doesn't end at death but simply changes. Those who have lived good lives and died in the faith of Christ will, as the Bible tells us, share in His Resurrection. While we live together on earth as Christians, we are in communion, or unity, with one another. **But that communion doesn't end when one of us dies.** We believe that the saints, the Christians in heaven, remain in communion with those of us on earth. We call this the Communion of Saints, and it's an article of faith in every Christian creed from the Apostles' Creed on. But what does the Communion of Saints have to do with praying to saints? Everything. When we run into trouble in our lives, we frequently ask friends or family members to pray for us. That doesn't mean, of course, that we can't pray for ourselves. We ask them for their prayers even though we're praying, too, because we believe in the power of prayer. We know that God hears their prayers as well as ours, and we*

*want as many voices as possible asking Him to help us in our time of need.*

Today you have: the largest of all branches of Christianity, with about 1.3 billion followers worldwide. Roughly one in two Christians are Roman Catholics, and one out of every seven people worldwide. In the United States, about 22 percent of the population identifies Catholicism as their chosen religion.

So you had In 313 AD the emperor Constantine I, issued the Edict of Milan (agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire and gave Christianity legal status and a reprieve from persecution), which granted religious toleration and freedom for Christians. Then in AD 380 by Theodosius I, made Christianity the state church of the Roman Empire.

**Edict:** A decree or proclamation issued by an authority and having the force of law

You know what is very interesting is that when you look at Europe or the western world, Christianity is dying. Even in the United States you have **over 4,000 churches closing each year**. But what you do see is that wherever you see Christians being persecuted, you see a dramatic increase of Christian faith. You look at the underground churches in Iran. They have some of the fastest growing Christian churches.

### **[Show the Seven Churches in Asia Minor]**

**Brief Recap of Smyrna:** And this was happening to the church in Smyrna

#### **Revelation 2:9-11**

**9** “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you

may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. **11** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

The Christians in Smyrna was in the times of persecution and they struggled a lot but they held onto their faith and received the crown of life. And Jesus tells us, that if you **conquer over your fears, your testing, and your tribulations** (endure and persevere), you will not be hurt by the second death, because you are "**born again**" to heaven.

So we went through the church of Ephesus, Smyrna, and now you have Pergamum.

### **The Ancient Pergamum (Key Highlights)**

- It once rivaled Alexandria, Ephesus and Antioch in culture and commerce. It has the most scientific advancement in the field of medicine which medical doctors still use to this day.
- **Temple of Zeus**, (the foundation of the altar believed to be associated with the temple, known today as the **Great Altar of Pergamum**), was moved to Berlin.
- Pergamon also hosted the city's famous library. While the estimated **200,000 documents** of both papyrus and parchment. It was certainly one of the largest collections of written material in the ancient world and was famous throughout the Roman Empire.

### **[Show the temple of Zeus]**

Now the temple of Zeus (is the sky and thunder god in ancient Greek religion and mythology, who rules as king of the gods on Mount Olympus) and **this gives you an idea of the spiritual nature of Pergamon**. On top of the 800 ft high mountain and in the middle of the city is a large **40 ft statue of Zeus**. Here are people from all over the world come and worship the god Zeus.



And since people of Pergamum with one of the greatest library in the Roman Empire, **they were the people of the word**, highly intellectual people and they read a lot of books.

So what is very interesting is that Jesus' title for the church of Pergamon is "**A sharp two-edged sword.**" Now remember, at every church, Jesus comes with a unique title. So for Pergamon, He is a "sharp two-edged sword."

### **Revelations 2:12**

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: '**The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.**'"

### **Ephesians 6:17**

and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the **word of God**,

So we know that the sword is the "**Word of God.**"

**Hebrews 4:12** tells us what what this sharp two-edged sword does.

### **Hebrews 4:12**

For the **word of God** is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

So God is telling us that when Jesus comes again, He will be the **living Word** and "**active, piercing the division of soul and of spirit.**" Meaning, Jesus is coming as the judge to our soul and our spirit. And He will separate the soul and spirit. What this means for Christians today means that **His Words are spiritual discernment**. We can discern the things of God in our soul, and the things of the flesh in our human spirit. Only God and His Words can help us discern between soul and spirit.

So you have Jesus as the Word and you have Pergamum as the word (library) and some of the smartest people there. What Jesus is saying is that no matter how smart you are with all those books, **when Jesus comes again, He will discern the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.** That's is why He comes as the sword.

Pergamum was that the people their had great knowledge of intelligence and science, so in another words, they had a lot of pride. Plus they had Zeus, the king of gods and it is interesting that Jesus chooses the **king of gods in Pergamum as Satan's throne.**

So the Christians living there existed in **Satan's stronghold, the home of the pride.** People in Pergamum worshiped Zeus, the chief god of the Olympian gods, the best medical science, and the best library in the Roman Empire.

### Revelation 2:13

“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.**

Residents of Pergamum also worshiped the Roman emperor; Dionysius, the god of wine and vegetation; Athena, the goddess of Athens; and Asklepios, the god of healing.

With all those different Roman and Greek gods and you have Zeus as the king of gods, **Jesus is making it clear that this is the Satan's throne and where he dwells.** So with all the different gods, it made it **difficult for Christians** to declare that they worshiped Christ. If you don't, then you will be ridiculed and persecuted.

Did you know that Christians can be in a place of Satan's throne, today? Did you know that you are living where Satan dwells? Look around us and you are witnessing some crazy things going on around

the world right now. Satan definitely has a dwelling place going on right now. For some Christians, your home and your room, can be where Satan dwells. If you have so many things around you to distract you and hinder you from getting closer to God, ***then you are in a place where Satan dwells.***

**Question:** Is your surrounding and environment a place that helps you get closer to God or taking you further away?

That's why it's so important for us as Christians to be in the Word and prayer, before we move on with the rest of the day. That's why Jesus said to the Pergamum Christians that they did a great job, ***they professed the name of Jesus as supreme, and they did not deny the faith.*** Antipas, mentioned was a faithful witness, and was martyred. Even with their close friends death, they did not dissuade the believers at Pergamum from worshiping and serving Jesus.

So here is the Christians in Pergamum doing a great job of ***holding Jesus as supreme and holding onto their faith***, even when persecution was high. Even when their pastor Antipas was killed for his faith, they held on tight to Jesus, but they ***started to listen to spiritual leaders.***

### **Revelations 2:14-15**

**14** But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the ***teaching 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. **15** So also you have some who hold the ***teaching of the Nicolaitans.***

So here is Jesus scolding them for tolerating or following or holding on to the "***teaching of Balaam***," or the "doctrine of Balaam." Now if you don't believe in Jesus then that was fine, you listen to whoever you want, but if you say, you are a Christian, Jesus is saying, you need to "repent" for listening to these false teachers.

## **So what is the teaching of Balaam?**

In the Old Testament there was a prophet by the name of Balaam, who tried unsuccessfully to prophesy against the people of Israel.

### **Numbers 31:16**

Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord.

**Balaam**, a prophet from Mesopotamia  
**King Balak** of Moab who is the enemy of Israel,

When the frontal assault failed, Balaam took a back-door approach. So Balaam, a prophet from Mesopotamia, counseled Balak on the most effective way to weaken Israel. How do you do that? Sex! This was through sexual seduction, **using Moabite and Midianite women to tempt the Israelites into sexual relationships and into pagan rituals**. What will get you to focus away from God, sex and sexuality.

This was happening inside the church. So at Pergamum, Christians were tolerating, following, and holding onto the instructions of Balaam.

## **So what are some of the other teachings of Balaam?**

### **2 Peter 2:15**

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,

**Balaam's Way:** is a choice to promote falsehood for financial reasons. Like Ponzi scheme (is a form of fraud that lures investors and pays profits to earlier investors with funds from more recent investors). In China, you can get everything that is fake, even eggs.

### Jude 11

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's **error** and perished in Korah's rebellion.

**“Error”**: Balaam’s “error” was his willingness to accommodate pagan beliefs out of greed

In essence, if you give me enough money, I can put aside Jesus.

### Jude 4

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, **ungodly people**, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

So basically, you “who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality.”

The idea of the teaching of Balaam or the doctrine of Balaam is the attitude that ***one can be fully cooperative with the world and still serve God***. You can be gay and be a pastor today. The doctrine of Balaam teaches compromise, wanting Christians to forget they are called to be separate and holy.

### Revelation 2:15

So also you have some who hold the ***teaching of the Nicolaitans***.

These Christians hate Nicolaitans and so does Jesus. ***Who are the Nicolaitans and why does God hate their works?***

The name "**Nicolaitans**" is derived from the Greek words "**nikao**," meaning "to conquer" or "to overcome," (English you get the word “Nike” like the word “**Nike Shoes**”) and "**laos**," meaning “people.” Those who overcome people or those who conquer over people.

There was an issue with “hierarchy” in the church where man stands between man and God. Meaning that a man (human being) would be the bridge between man and God and not Jesus (**John 14:6**). ***In other words, you can only get to the Father through a human being.***

We see this today, where the catholic pope considers himself to be the bridge between man and God. So this was a spiritual form of Nicolaitans. So God is saying that “***you hate the works of Nicolaitans, which I also hate.***” So this is an acknowledgment of the good work that they are doing. You are decreeing the what is truth!

### **Revelations 2:16-17**

**16** Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and 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 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.**’ “

“**He who has ears to hear, let Him hear**” (Matthew 11:15). Of course, Jesus' invitation to hear means more than simply taking in audible sounds. **It means to heed: to accept and to obey.** That's why Jesus constantly tells us to “repent” of our ways and turn to Him.

Read verse 17: “**Hidden Manna**” was a welcome source of food to the Israelites during their journey through the desert en route to Canaan. The overcomers at Pergamum refused to eat food offered to idols, but they will **enjoy bread from heaven**. The feast Jesus prepares for His faithful servants exceeds by far anything the Devil offers us.

### **Revelation 2:17**

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.**' “

Many different reasons for the white stone: “**new name written** on the stone that **no one knows except the one who receives it**”

**First:** Jesus also promises a **white stone** with a new name inscribed on it. Only the ***recipient of the honor knows the inscribed name.*** We cannot say with certainty what this stone represents, but we can be sure the ***recipient enjoys approval from Jesus and fellowship with Him.***

**Second:** In ancient Greece, stones were sometimes used in jury cases to indicate a vote, with **black used for guilt** and **white for innocence.**

**Third:** More likely, however, this is a reference to the Roman custom of giving victors in athletic competitions a white stone inscribed with their name. This token served as their “**ticket**” to enter into an awards celebration later on, like an after party for the winners.

## Revelation Chart

