

Text: Rev 2.12-17

Pergamum is the next church in Revelation 2. I've called our message:

I Don't Like Your Friends

Well, we will see what that's all about.

You can see from the map on the screen that Pergamum lies further to the north, above Smyrna. Pergamum = modern Bergama.

- Capital of the Attalid kingdom, pre-Roman era
- Built on top of a high hill (well-fortified and defended)
- Willed to Rome by King Attalis III in 133 BC
- Became capital of province of Asia (all the cities of Rev 2-3 in Asia)
- Home to three notable pagan shrines/temples
 - Worship of Asklepios, snake god of healing
 - Worship of Zeus, ruins include an elaborate temple to him
 - Worship of Caesar, with temples to Augustus, Trajan, and Severus

No doubt church in Pergamum faced a difficult environment with so much business, politics, and life wrapped up in these pagan religions.

“The early believer lived in a completely pagan environment as a misfit, a gear that did not mesh with the ordinary life of the community.”¹

I. The voice of Son of man (12)

What aspect of the vision of Christ in chapter 1 is emphasized here? (See 1.16)

The sharp two-edged sword

What does this image represent?

incisive judgement by His word

II. The commendation (13)

How is their dwelling place described?

Where Satan's throne is

¹ Marshall Neal, *Seven Churches: God's Revelation to the Church Today* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1977).

Considering the idol worship in Pergamum, this description is no surprise. What actions did the Pergamum Christians take, despite their location?

They held fast the Son's name and didn't deny the faith

To what extent were they willing to remain faithful, and what example is given?

They were faithful until death, Antipas given as an exemplary martyr

III. The condemnation (14-15)

Two things are mentioned negatively. What are they?

1. **Tolerating those who held the teaching of Balaam**
2. **Tolerating those who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans**

Balaam was a prophet (non-Israelite) who was hired by the Moabites to curse Israel as they were about to enter the promised land. He failed to curse them, but was successful in getting Israelites involved in immorality and idolatry in the "incident of Peor." Later, Balaam died when Israel fought against Moab.

What sins are mentioned in this toleration of Balaam?

Eating things offered to idols, committing immorality — those who followed Balaam in this seem to want the believers to "get along" with their culture

The Nicolaitanes are also mentioned in 2.6, as people whose deeds the Ephesian Christians hated. Here it is their teaching that is condemned. They seem to be a different group than the Balaamites. Yet again, what is the Pergamite problem with them?

They are tolerated, though their doctrines are anti-God

What is wrong in the Pergamite spirit that inspires this toleration?

(various) disloyalty to God, fear of man

IV. Call to Repentance (16-17)

What warning is given to those who won't repent? (16)

The Lord will come and wield his sharp two-edged sword on them

Again, the appeal is to "the churches" – what does the plural indicate here?

The warning is for all churches, not just this church in Pergamum

The imagery of the “white stone” is obscure, commentators have lots of guesses. In context with the hidden manna and the new [secret] name, what do these promises represent?

The Lord's acceptance and sustenance of the faithful

Conclusion:

“You know it is far more dangerous for the church to be patronised by the world than when the world is openly arrayed against it.”²

“What God hates the Christian ought to hate as well. The modern tendency to blur distinctions of moral and theological character and to manifest unconcern in those areas had its counterpart in the early church of Pergamos. The word of Christ to this church on this point constitutes a stern warning to modern Christians to examine their morality and faith and to demand freedom to follow the Word of God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit where this conflicts with the standards of men.”³

“In a hostile environment and with a compromising church, it is possible for individual Christians to remain true to Christ, resisting the evil that seeks to destroy the testimony of the church.”⁴

May God grant that we individuals can keep our church faithful and keep out those who would pervert the mission and gospel of the church.

² H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 1930 rev. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1920), 48.

³ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 69.

⁴ Neal, *Seven Churches*, 52.