

WHEN THE CHURCH MARRIES THE WORLD

Revelation 2:12-17

Christ's Message To The Church Of Pergamum

Introduction: 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 John 2:16; Matthew 16:26

I. Why Should We Care If We Love The World More Than God? (12-13)

A. We Will Be Judged By God's _____, Not By Our Worldly Reputation (12)

¹² *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.*

B. We Are Called To Be _____ To Christ, Not Worldly Acceptance (13)

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

- Steadfast Faithfulness
- Persecuting Martyrdom

II. How Does The World Seduce Us To Love It More Than God? (14-15)

A. _____ Heresy (14a, 15; cf. Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 5:3-5; 2 Cor 6:17; Jude 3-4)

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

1. The Doctrine Of Balaam (cf. Num 22-25; 2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11)
 - Material Corruption (Num 24:11)
 - Manipulative Coercion
 - Marital Co-Mingling (Num 31:16)
 - Moral Compromise
2. The Doctrine Of The Nicolaitans

B. _____ Sin (14b)

^{14b} *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.*

III. How Do We Prioritize God Over The World? (16a)

^{16a} *Therefore repent.*

IV. What Will Happen Because Of Our Unfaithfulness? (16b)

^{16b} *If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

V. What Is The Reward For Remaining Faithful To Christ? (17)

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.'*

Conclusion:

1. In a sinful culture, God demands purity. (13)
2. In a worldly church, God expects righteousness. (14-15)
3. In a compromising position, God expects repentance. (16)
4. In a fallen state, God provides mercy. (17)

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WHEN THE CHURCH MARRIES THE WORLD

Revelation 2:12-17

Christ's Message To The Church Of Pergamum

Revelation 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. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷He 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.’

Introduction:

Ie/ Looking back at old Day Camp pictures – sweet and bitter. Sweet to see those who have grown in Christ. Bitter to see those (even staff members) that fell away from God. Not those who transferred to other churches, but have abandoned God altogether because they chose the world over Christ.

2 Timothy 4:2 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica

1. Worldliness

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Matthew 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

- “The world is and always will be a problem and a temptation to the Church. Satan is the prince of this world, and the Church of Jesus Christ is his great adversary. Satan’s business is to undo the work of the Church; one of the chief means at his disposal is to break down the barriers separating the Church from the world. Once the world gets into the Church its testimony is vitiated, its power is lost, its ministry is hindered, it stands in need of renewal. The Holy Spirit is quenched by the worldly Church.” (Harold Lindsell, *The World, The Flesh, And The Devil*, p. 194)
- “Worldliness is that state in which our thinking is governed by the mind and the outlook of the world....The man who is not a Christian is not guilty of it because he cannot be anything else. Worldliness can only be true of God’s people; it is that state in which their

thinking is still determined by the mind and the outlook of the world.” (D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare*, p. 363)

2. Pergamos

- **Name** – *per* = “completely, thoroughly”; *gamos* = “marriage”
 - permanence of marriage
- **Location** – The city was built on a mountain top, 1300 ft. above sea level. It was located in the Roman province of Western Asia Minor 15 miles from the Aegean Sea.
 - 55 miles north of Smyrna
- **History**
 - Legend claims that a son of Hercules founded the City
 - was the chief city of the Attalid kingdom who build Pergamos into an attractive city
 - its mountop location gave the army an advantage against potential invaders
 - Attalis III willed his kingdom to the Romans in 133BC
 - The Romans made Pergamos the capital city for the Province of Asia
 - Pergamos remained the capital city until 130 AD
- **Reputation**
 - Pliny, Roman author: “By far the most distinguished city in Asia”
 - “a royal city”
 - Large University
 - Galen, the 2nd most famous physician in the ancient world next to Hippocrates, was born in Pergamum
 - Amphitheater held 20,000 (remains are still there today)
 - Grand Library
 - 200,000 volumes gifted from Marc Antony to Cleopatra as a wedding present
 - <https://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-asia/library-pergamum-contender-greatest-library-ancient-world-007601>
 - second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt – remember, this was before a printing press
 - When Eumenes, the king of Pergamos, tried to hire the head librarian from Alexandria, the king of Egypt was offended, put the librarian in prison to make sure he wouldn’t go to Pergamos, then put an embargo on the export of papyrus from the Nile banks so Pergamos couldn’t write anymore books.
 - With necessity as the mother of invention, the people from Pergamos discovered animal skins as suitable writing material. They called it “The Pergamene sheet”.
 - Robert Thomas: “It also developed a well-known library whose collection rivaled that of the renowned library of Alexandria. At its start the library depended on **papyrus** material imported from Egypt, the only place the papyrus plant was grown in large quantities, but Ptolemy Epiphanes of Egypt learned of the project and terminated the export of papyrus to Pergamum about 180 b.c. In response, Eumenes of Pergamum developed a new writing material manufactured from animal skins and called “**parchment**,” a name that owes its derivation to the name of the city.¹⁰ Several kings continued the library project, which eventually grew to 200,000 volumes. It was later

transported by Cleopatra to Alexandria, where it remained until destroyed by the Saracens in a.d. 642.¹¹” (*Revelation 1-7*, p. 180)

- **Religion** – There were 3 major religions:
 - 1) **Asklepios**, the god of healing, medicine
 - Depicted by the symbol of a snake
 - Asklepios was considered their Savior
 - The large temple dedicated to Asklepios was one of the most famous hospitals of the day.
 - To be treated at this hospital, you first were seen by a priest. The pregnant and the dying were turned away. Those accepted were bathed, a sacrifice was offered, a lecture of the temple rules was given and worship of Asklepios was mandated.
 - The patient would have to pray to the god and leave gifts on an altar. Healing was attributed to Asklepios, not the doctor. Medicine, psychology, exercise, massage, diet, herbs, mineral baths and superstition was the medical combination. Non-venomous snakes were used to lick the patient’s wound.
 - The modern symbol for medicine, the serpent wrapped around a staff, is the same symbol that represented Asklepios.
 - The Magian cult were driven from Babylon and went to Pergamum
 - The Magian high priest was called the “Chief Bridge Builder” because he spanned the gap between man and Satan & demons. The Latin title is “Pontifex Maximus”, which is now used by the Pope. This title and concept can be traced back to the Babylonian mother/child (Nimrod & wife Sumerimus & their child)
 - Julius Caesar would become the Pontifex Maximus because he would be the supreme religious and civil leader
 - Their hope was expressed in a phrase called “Asklepios Soter” (savior, healer)
 - 2) **Zeus** – the altar to Zeus was one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient World - he was called “Soter” (Savior)
 - 3) **Emperor Worship** – A temple was erected to worship Rome and Caesar Augustus in 29BC
 - 4) Other religious temples to Athena & Dionysus (Bacchus) were there
- Robert Thomas: “Pergamum used much of its plentiful wealth to build temples devoted to idol worship. Statues, altars, and sacred groves filled the city (Walvoord). A 1,000-foot-high hill, the earliest site of the city, was covered with such temples and altars.⁶ The primary local deities to whom temples had been erected were Zeus, Athena, Dionysos, and Asklepios. Zeus, the savior-god, and Athena, the victory-bearing goddess, were testimonials to the Greek spirit and influence. The other two, reflecting more of an Anatolian spirit, were more dominant in the religious life of the city. Dionysos, the god of the royal family, had a mystical name “Bull.” Asklepios, like Dionysos more of an animal-god, was associated with serpents. The shrine of Asklepios, who was noted as a “god of healing,” attracted people from all over the world. Feeding a living serpent in the temple was the manner of practicing this worship.² The sick spent the night in the darkness of the temple where nonpoisonous snakes were allowed to roam. If a person was touched by one

of these snakes (i.e., by the god himself), he was cured of his illness.⁸ (Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, Moody Press, 1992, p. 180)

- **Modern Day** – Pergamum is now a small village called Bergama in Turkey. Its Christian testimony continues even to contemporary times.

I. Why Should We Care If We Love The World More Than God? (12-13)

A. We Will Be Judged By God's Word, Not By Our Worldly Reputation (12)

¹² *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'*

- **Q:** What is the sword emblematic of?
 - "sword" = *rhomphaia* {*hrom-fah'-yah*} – Strong's:
 - 1) a large sword
 - 2) a long Thracian (barbaric tribe) javelin, also a kind of long sword worn on the right shoulder
 - *rhomphaia* – 5x in NT
 - 1:16 & 19:15 – the *rhomphaia* proceeds out of Christ's mouth
- **Q:** Why is a sword coming out of Christ's mouth?
 - war of words & theology, not flesh & blood
 - judgment will come through words (Jn 5:24ff & 12:48)
 - *makaira* – 4x in NT – short, double edged sword
 - Heb 4:12 – Word of God sharper than any 2 edged sword
 - Eph 6:17 – sword of the Spirit
 - emblematic of the Word of God bringing judgment
- **Q:** Why does the sword have 2 edges?
 - the skillful and precise wielding of judgment by Christ
 - suggested that one edge is salvation and another edge is judgment

B. We Are Called To Be Faithful To Christ, Not Worldly Acceptance (13)

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

- An Arabian proverb that says, "He who lives all of his life trying to please and appease everyone will die in sadness." (Cited by Skip Heitzig, Skip, *You Can Understand the Book of Revelation*, Kindle Locations 547-548, Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition)

1. Steadfast Faithfulness

^{13 a} "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name,

- though there was tremendous pressure and temptation from this wicked city, they did not deny their faith in Christ
- Christ is trying to encourage them in their faithfulness
- Build on the good aspect of their spiritual life

- Pergamos – The Synagogue/Throne Of Satan
 - "synagogue" or "throne" = *thronos*
 - from *thrao* (to sit)
 - assigned in the NT to kings, hence, kingly power or royalty

- Robert Thomas: "*Thronos* refers to a chair of state and implies some special authority or consecration. *Tou Satana* is a subjective genitive: Satan controls and gives power to his throne." (Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, Moody Press, 1992, p. 182)

- Thomas gives 7 possible explanations on why Pergamum holds the title of the throne of Satan
 1. Temple of Asklepos – serpent prominent symbol reminding them of Satan (Gen 3:1; Rev 12:1), Asklepos also called "Savior"
 2. Altar of *Zeus Soter* – seeing Zeus as the Savior
 3. Leading in Persecution – martyrdom of Antipas demonstrated Satan's hatred of God
 4. Figurative general influence against the church – but there is no reason to look for a figurative interpretation here
 5. Pergamum is the worst of these 7 pagan cities (Lenski) – most significant Greek gods were worshipped there – Zeus, Athena, Dionysius (wine), Asklepos. The false teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans was there. Persecution of Christians existed there.
 6. Pergamum is connected to the future Day of the Lord – where the Antichrist would hold his seat of power (Bullinger) – reading into Rev 13:2; 16:10 – but martyrdom has also occurred in past, not just future.
 7. Emperor worship – imperial cult headquarters
 - Thomas: "A temple erected to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma had stood in the city since 29 b.c. (Moffatt). Later a temple was erected in honor of Trajan, giving the city the title "twice *neokoros* (i.e., temple warden [or sweeper])" (Mounce). A special priesthood was also devoted to this kind of worship. Throughout the Apocalypse the specter of Caesar-adoration is in the background. Emperor worship is constantly viewed as an agency of Satan's power (Moffatt; Beckwith)." (p. 185)

2. Persecuting Martyrdom

^{13b} and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

- Antipas, a martyr for Christ's sake
 - Perhaps the pastor
 - Possible leader of the Christian resistance against Roman persecution
 - he was called to sprinkle a few grains of incense on a fire and say "Kurios Kaisar" (Caesar is Lord)
 - Tradition: because he didn't, he was roasted alive in a large bronze bull bowl until his death during the reign of Domitian
 - Jn 8:44 calls Satan a murderer

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies

II. How Does The World Seduce Us To Love It More Than God? (14-15)

A. Tolerating Heresy (14a, 15)

^{14a} But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, ... ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

- "This church was having problems with the correct doctrine of Jesus Christ, which led to lewd behavior. In response, Jesus comes to them with the ultimate standard of the truth—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God." *Heitzig, Skip. You Can Understand the Book of Revelation (Kindle Locations 552-554). Harvest House Publishers. Kindle Edition.*

1. The Doctrine Of Balaam

- Balaam – Num 22-25
 - when Israel traveled through Moab, King Balak was afraid that he would be overrun by Israel, so he asked Balaam to help him remove the threat of Israel
 - Balaam was an opportunist
 - Thomas: "Balaam is derived from two Hebrew words, בָּלַע (bāla', "he swallows") and אָמ (ām, "people"). Interestingly, according to the derivative meanings of the names, the two groups troubling this church were "swallowers of the people" (i.e., the Balaamites) and "conquerors of the people" (i.e., the Nicolaitans; cf. discussion at 2:6)." (*Revelation 1-7*, p. 190)
- The Way Of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15)

2 Peter 2:15 "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness."

- The Error Of Balaam (Jude 11)

Jude 11 "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah."

- way of Cain – rebelled by knowingly offering an unpleasing sacrifice to God
- error of Balaam – accepting bribes for religious purposes
- rebellion of Korah – rebelled against God's leader, Moses

- **The Doctrine Of Balaam (Revelation 2:14)**

- a. **Material Corruption**

- covetousness
- hiring oneself out religiously with the motive of personal gain
- merchandizing oneself religiously
- the way of Balaam who "loved the wages of unrighteousness"
- Balaam wanted a huge payoff from King Balak by telling him what he wanted to hear

Numbers 24:11 Balak: "I said I would reward you handsomely, but the Lord has kept you from being rewarded."

Q: Give some modern day examples of this religious prostitution?

- b. **Manipulative Coercion**

- Balaam thought he could coerse God to curse His Jewish people and foregoing His covenant promises because of their evil
- But Balaam forgot that God is faithful to his promises
- God used a donkey to prevent him from cursing Israel

- c. **Marital Co-Mingling**

- since Balaam couldn't curse Israel, he tried to corrupt them by marrying the beautiful women of Moab
- he advised King Balak to tempt Israel into marrying the daughters of Moab
- this would defile their place of separation and remove a pilgrim identity
- as Israel lost it's permanent marriage status through its religious adultery, so the church stands to lose its permanent marriage (*per – gamos*) because of loving the world

Numbers 31:16 "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the Lord."

Q: What lures a believer to date or marry a non-Christian?

Q: Why is it wrong in God's eyes?

d. Moral Compromise

- while Israel was in Shittim, the men became immoral with Moabite women. They also made sacrifices to Moabite gods.
- Moses was told by the Lord to kill these men

2. The Doctrine Of The Nicolaitans

2 views:

- 1) followers of Nicolas (apostate early deacon of Acts 6:5), antinomian sect that promoted licentious living, free love (love the one you're with)
 - 2) etymology of "Nicolas" = "one who rules the laity" or "laity-conqueror" – a heresy that exalted clergy over laity
- they believed in antinomianism, licentious living – no law, accountability

Q: What motivates this type of attitude with professing Christians?

- influenced by Gnostics – body evil, spirit good
 - believe that they can live it up in the flesh, because as long as the spirit is good, they will do well in heaven
- In response to the theological liberalism that crept into American denominations, national and interdenominational Bible Conferences were loosely held to promote theological orthodoxy. Across denominations, Bible believers gathered and a fundamentalist movement would begin to swell.
 - With the denominations being run by unbelievers teaching heresies, what should believers do scripturally?

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and **avoid them**.

1 Timothy 5:3-5 3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. **From such withdraw yourself.**

2 Corinthians 6:17 Therefore **go out from their midst**, and **be separate** from them, says the Lord,

Jude 3-4 3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to **contend for the faith** that was once for all delivered to the saints. 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.

B. Compromising Sin (14b)

^{14b} 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.

- Orthodoxy leads to Orthopraxy (straight teaching to straight practice)
- False Teaching leads to Immorality
- Bad beliefs leads to bad behavior

III. How Do We Prioritize God Over The World? (16a)

^{16a} Therefore repent.

- Repent Of Your Compromise Of Loving The World
- “repent” = *metaneo* – to change your mind
 - aorist imperative – immediate, urgent response
- turn from your love of the world
- repent of a lawless attitude (Nicolaitans)
- repent of your religious prostitution (Balaam) – selling out to the world

Q: What indications are there that we have compromised with the world?

Q: What’s the difference between being “in the world” and “of the world”?
(17:14-16)

Q: What are some of the results the Scriptures tell us about when we don’t love the world?
- hated by world (Jn 15:19)

Q: There is a church growth movement today that is trying to reach the world by giving them what the world wants. What is the fallacy with this motivation? Examples?

IV. What Will Happen Because Of Our Unfaithfulness? (16b)

^{16b} If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

A. War

- Remove The Unbelievers From The Church Body
- “will fight against them”

- “them” = unbelievers
 - not that an unbeliever can attend your church service
 - but that they are not to be included as part of the ministry or body of Christ

B. Judgment

- “sword of my mouth” – judged by Word of God
-

V. What Is The Reward For Remaining Faithful To Christ? (17)

¹⁷He 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.'

- “conquers” = *nikao*

A. Hidden Manna (17a)

- **Q:** What is hidden manna?
 - God fed Israel manna in the wilderness
 - Pot of manna kept in the Ark of the Covenant
 - Fed by the Word
 - Fellowship with Christ, the Bread of Life – Jn 6:35

John 6:35 *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

- **Christ Supplies A Result That Benefits Us Spiritually**
 - Bread of Life
 - “bread” = staple
 - Christ is the staple for spiritual life
 - Many folks are seeking a spiritual staple in their life – look to yoga, meditation, pantheon of gods, lucky charm, superstition, horoscope, Mary
 - Christ might seem intangible to some seekers
 - But He is offering Himself to everyone – worldwide
 - He may not fit in your pocket or be an appropriate statue on your mantle, but He belongs in your heart and life
- **Christ Supplies A Result That Benefits Us Eternally**
 - Never hunger or thirst
 - Ie/ Chinese food gets a bad wrap – hungry in an hour
 - With anything the world offers, it will never sustain
 - Yet we invest our lives in things that don't sustain
 - Education is good, but not the answer forever
 - Good jobs aren't sustaining (look at the economy)

- You can't depend on an earthly relationship to sustain your life (even if never divorce or breakup, death is a factor)
- Possessions rot & break down (new car off lot depreciates)
- Christ will sustain us forever
- We won't have to look for more education, another job, another relationship
- Jesus is all we need forever
- **Q:** Why is this hidden?
 - Covered now, to be unveiled later

B. White Stone (17b)

- could be a diamond given to someone special
 - reference to the Urim, worn by the High Priest – probably a diamond
 - ie/ engagement
- white stone given to a victorious athlete which was a ticket to the awards celebration
- jury ballot: white stone was a favorable vote, black stone was an unfavorable vote in a jury
 - God is demonstrating his favor/grace towards us

C. New Name (17c)

- I don't know if this means I'm not Steve anymore, but Kalel or Jorel
- But all the sin and worldliness attached to my name will be wiped clean

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Conclusion:

5. In a sinful culture, God demands purity. (13)
6. In a worldly church, God expects righteousness. (14-15)
7. In a compromising position, God expects repentance. (16)
8. In a fallen state, God provides mercy. (17)

Discussion:

1. How do you know when you're loving the world more than Christ?

2. Read James 4:4 and 1 John 2:15. How is love absolute (either absolutely love the world or God, no in between)?
3. Why are some believers tempted towards essential relationships with unbelievers (dating, marriage, business, best friends)? What dangers does this pose? What does God expect? Refer to 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.
4. What areas have you been flirting with in the world? How can we be *in* the world, yet not *of* the world?