

## Seven pt3

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Seven / Revelation 2:12–17

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The church at Pergamum was a church that faced a choice similar to what we face today- do we hold fast to the definitions of righteousness we get from Jesus or do we strike out to invent our own definitions that better suit the culture we live in?

That question facing us today is probably the most challenging in this stage of shifting culture. There was a time- and a long period of time- where the definitions of good and right were pretty much mutually agreed on and in some cases aligned with some aspects of the Bible. Not all, but some. And if nothing else, that made for a fairly similar expectation throughout society where you had a level of homogeneity in expectation.

The problem of course was two-fold:

1. The playing field was unequal for many- racial minorities, women, the poor and other marginalized groups could play by the same rules and receive very different results- (sentencing disparities between cocaine arrests)
2. The public morality hid private sinful practice that allowed very evil people to excel under the veneer of public good behavior

So what we face today is a reversal of that. The more publicly and flagrantly you can violate biblical or at least societal norms that have been previously held the more celebrated you become. And that leads to anyone who raises their hand and says- “I’m not sure about that” to be labeled in the harshest of terms and in some cases be socially ostracized or “cancelled.”

**The pendulum has truly swing all the way to the other side. Freedom has trumped righteousness.**

That's Pergamum.

Turn with me to [Revelation 2:12-17](#).

So the message this time comes from the one who has “the sharp sword.” This sharp sword is also mentioned in [Revelation 1:16](#) and is generally agreed to be a reference to the Word of God- which cuts like a sword piercing to the heart with what? Truth.

And this church needs some truth.

Now they are in a tough spot- look at vs13

First, they live where Satan does- literally they are in a town where a temple of “Zeus the Savior” stands- and what could be more of a liar than a church of a false savior?

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

The most prominent feature on the citadel was the gleaming temple structure and altar dedicated to Zeus Soter, or Zeus the Savior. Attalus I, who ruled from 241 to 197 BC, also referred to himself as Attalus Soter, apparently a title that he took after defending the city against the marauding Gauls. **This temple and the altar to Zeus were unquestionably the most spectacular features** to greet the eye of the visitor coming through the valleys from any of three directions

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

the Lord may simply be indicating through John that **he is well aware of the efforts of Satan to destroy the work of Christ** and of Christians in the city of Pergamum through its various pagan affections

Second, one of their number- Antipas- has been killed for the faith.

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

In any event the church at Pergamum could obviously anticipate persecution, not so much from the Jewish sector as in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Sardis but **from the Roman establishment with its focus on the worship of the emperor and the pantheon of Roman gods.**

Yet they have stood strong- they have not run or disbanded or recanted.

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

The first expression literally states that “you have held on to my name.” The second says, “You did not deny my faith.” **In this more common reading, the initial phrase suggests personal faith in Christ while the second may include faithfulness to “the faith” (i.e., to all that Christ is and what he taught). In any case this affirmation is remarkable.**

Despite these good things- and these are all good, faithful actions they have done something that cannot stand and will lead to their destruction (v14-15)

They have given in to abusing their liberty and the grace of God to make compromises (Balaam). Specifically- they are not following the sexual standards of scripture and they are participating in syncretism- (Nicolatians- Gnostic idea that the body doesn't matter) incorporating some of the local religion into their worship of Jesus.

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

after Balaam left, record that Israel committed harlotry with the women of Moab. Little in chap. 25 suggests that Balaam had anything to do with this. However, Moses speaks in chap. 31: “Have you allowed all the women to live?” He [Moses] asked them. “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD’s people.” (15–16)

Here the reader is introduced to the fact that before Balaam departed, he had given to Balak counsel, which perhaps can be reconstructed as follows: "I cannot curse what God has blessed; but you have paid me handsomely, and I do know people very well. These folks have been in the wilderness a long time, and you have many beautiful women in Moab. I suggest you send your women among them, and my guess is that with their behavior they will bring down God's curse upon themselves." Balak followed this advice; Israel did exactly what Balaam had anticipated, and the children of Israel brought the plague and curse on themselves with their own actions"

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

Hemer has appropriately alleged that the apostle Paul had to war against two opposite philosophies during his own ministry: legalism and antinomianism. He further suspects that both **the Nicolaitians and those who were promoting the doctrine of Balaam may have been part of an early or incipient Gnosticism, making itself known primarily in the ethics of antinomianism**

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

What was going on at the Pergamum church may simply have been that there were people advocating and practicing an antinomian lifestyle, which included the "freedom" to eat that which had been sacrificed to idols.

Why?

We don't know, but I think I can hazard a guess- it made it a little easier to live where they live. And put them less at risk.

And in some ways who can blame them? Antipas was dead.

The price he paid for truth was high.

The price we pay for truth may be high as well. And **there is a difference between being antagonistic and steadfast**, and we should walk that line, but we have to stand firm for things that matter. We cannot compromise truth to stay on the good side of people who may hate us because we believe in truth.

How do we justify that? We abandon the Bible, or twist it, to suit our own ends and wind up blessing things God has cursed.

The writer David French puts it this way, *“...secular prophets” become even more influential than its Christian leaders, and it actively discards clear biblical commands for what it perceives to be the greater good. That’s not Christianity. It’s a primitive form of consequentialism, the idea that the morality of an action is to be judged solely by its consequences.*” (NYT op-ed 5/7/2023)

If we are going to be the followers of Jesus our current culture sorely needs, a remnant that God uses to preserve the culture and continue to redeem souls, then we cannot ignore the parts of Scripture that make us counter cultural...because **then we will not stand out...we will just fall in.**

And we cannot pick and choose which scriptures we do uplift- we must balance God’s grace with His justice with His mercy with His wrath...and stand for His truth in all situations, not just the ones that agree with the tribe we most identify with.

**In short, we don’t get to have a “tribe” beyond the tribe of the Gospel...when we find ourselves fitting too comfortably into another group, we need to start looking at where we have compromised to make that work. Jesus is an equal opportunity offender. And notice I said “offender” not “offensive.”**

The consequences of this are dire- the coming direct involvement of Jesus in holding the church accountable- with that sharp sword.

And the warning here is- if you don't repent, I am going to come and make war on those who refuse to be obedient. (v16)

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

They are serious, for he promises that unless repentance is immediately forthcoming, **the Lord himself will become their opponent and will fight against them with the sword of his mouth.** Whether the mandate to repentance is addressed to the antinomians themselves or to the church is not clear in the text. Perhaps the best option is to see the warning as addressed to both but with not much hope of repentance on the part of the antinomians.

That's a strong statement. I have God as my friend- before I followed Jesus I was His enemy. I know His power and His wrath. I don't want a war with Someone I am guaranteed to lose to!

We should seek to be on God's side.

And the promises of being on His side are great (v17)

**First**, hidden manna- He will sustain us, even when it makes no sense to everyone around us

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

the whole world will be amazed at the sustaining providence of God for his churches and for those who overcome

**Second**, a white stone- He will sustain not just our existence but our righteousness

### **Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

the color white is often associated with holiness, and more probably the white stone may merely be John's reference to the imputed holiness and righteousness of the overcomer. Scott sums up the matter, "It is the expression of the Lord's personal delight in each one of the conquering band

**Third**, a new name- He will bring us into His Kingdom and we will be made new and whole

**Revelation 3. To Pergamum (2:12–17)**

To assign to the overcomers at Pergamum a name that no one but the recipient of the name knew is not only to suggest the authority of the divine Christ over the believer but also to establish a personal intimacy with the individual believer

Which side do you want to be on? Whose truth sustains you?

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