

Revelation 2:12-17 — Pergamos — The Compromising Church

We are now in the second section of the Book of Revelation, which deals with “the things which are” (Revelation 1:19).

Revision—Ephesus and Smyrna

Chapters 2 and 3 contain personal messages from Jesus to each of the seven churches. So far we have studied the first two.

Ephesus — the loveless church (A.D. 33 - A.D. 100)

Smyrna — the persecuted church (A.D. 100 - A.D. 312)

The first letter was addressed to the church of Ephesus. Ephesus was the loveless church. This represents what the early church became by the end of the first century. It was characterised by good doctrine or teaching, and the testing and identification of false prophets and false teachers. It was also known for its good works, labour and patience during trials. However, it wasn't a work of faith, nor a labour of love, nor a patience of hope. They were missing faith, hope and love. They had left their first love — their hearts had grown cold towards God. Their motive for serving was something different — they had become idol worshippers in the sense that something or someone else had become more important than God. Their affections were elsewhere. They needed to repent and return to their first love. This can happen so easily to any one of us. Even busyness can cause us to drift away from God.

Jesus commands them to repent. He tells them to do three things; remember, return and do the first works (bible, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism. This will cause us to be fruitful again.

The second letter was addressed to the church of Smyrna. The church of Smyrna characterised or represented the church from about 100a.d. to 312a.d. Smyrna was the persecuted church. They were materially poor and were dying for their faith because they refused to worship the Emperor. But Jesus called them rich. They were rich in faith, hope and love. They were a rich poor church. Rich in the things of God, but poor in the things of the world. Jesus instruction to them was, “stop being afraid... become faithful unto death.” We need to learn to trust that whatever God brings across our path, no matter how difficult, is for His glory and for our good — we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus as His Spirit changes us from the inside out. For many Christians, even today, following Jesus will cost you your life. We need to be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, remembering that Jesus has overcome death.

The Letter to the Church of Pergamos

The third letter is addressed to the church of Pergamos. Here is the overview

Ephesus — the loveless church (A.D. 33 - A.D. 100)

Smyrna — the persecuted church (A.D. 100 - A.D. 312)

Pergamos — the compromising church (A.D. 313 - A.D. 600)

The church of Pergamos characterised or represented the church from about 313a.d. to 600a.d.

Background on Pergamos

This was the political capital of the Roman Province of Asia the Less. When John wrote, Pergamos had been the capital city of the region for more than three hundred years. The city was a noted centre for culture and education, having one of the great libraries of the ancient world, with more than 200,000 volumes. It was also an extremely religious city. It had temples to the Greek and Roman gods Dionysus, Athena, Demeter, and Zeus. It also had three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman Emperor. Therefore, the church here suffered in the same way as the church in Sardis, with Christians being martyred because they refused to burn a pinch of incense to the Emperor once a year and call the Emperor Lord.

However, there were also problems, as is indicated by the name.

The Greek prefix *per*, seen in words like “pervert,” means opposition. The suffix *gamos*, seen in words like “monogamy” or “bigamy,” means “marriage.” *Pergamos*, then, means “objectionable marriage”—a fitting description of the next phase of church history....

Here’s how it all happened (modified from Jon Courson’s commentary on Revelation): The year was A.D. 312. The last of the ten Roman emperors who had persecuted the church was dead, ushering in a power play for the reins of the empire. To this end, one young hopeful prepared to engage in a huge battle. According to legend, he saw a cross in the heavens and heard a voice saying, “In this sign conquer.” And as a result, young Constantine fell to his knees and became a born-again believer.

According to history, however, what really happened was that, substantially outnumbered, Constantine noticed that Christians were not enlisting in anyone’s army. Realising that if he converted to Christianity, he would have access to a potential infusion of new troops, he became a Christian. And the Christians responded by siding with him.

But it would turn out to be an unmitigated disaster. As a result of Constantine’s Edict of Toleration, which forbade persecution of Christians, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. In fact, soon all Roman babies would be legally required to be baptised into the Christian faith. Yes, the Christians were in power, but, understanding the political expediency of concession, Constantine compromised with the pagan priests and traditions that permeated Rome.

“I feel your pain,” he said. “Let’s find common ground. Let’s meet halfway.” So a marriage took place that was perhaps most clearly illustrated by the coin issued not long after. Christian symbols were stamped on one side of the coin and pagan symbols on the other. From A.D. 313 to A.D. 600, church and state worked together as a political power—and as a result the church began a downward spiral of compromise and sin, becoming weaker and weaker as it conformed to the world.

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.” ’

Revelation 2:12 NKJV

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

Here Jesus describes Himself to the church at Pergamos as “**He who has the sharp two-edged sword.**” In Revelation 1:16, John observed of Jesus “*out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.*”

The **Sharp two-edged sword** reminds us of the passage in:

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.

Jesus would use this **sharp two-edged sword**, the word of God, to confront and cause separation among the Christians in Pergamos — *who would repent of their false doctrine and who wouldn’t.*

Now Jesus explains what he knows about the church at Pergamos. First He commends them for what they are doing right.

Revelation 2:13 NKJV

“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.

v ¹³ **I know your works:** Jesus said this to each church. It is true of each one of us. *He knows our **works**, and will reward us when we finish this earthly life.*

v ¹³ **And where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is:** In many ways, Pergamos was a stronghold of Satanic power because of many factors including that it was a centre of pagan religion and also the political centre for the worship-demanding Roman government. There was also a massive altar to Zeus, referred to as “Satan’s throne,” which was designed for human sacrifice.

v 13 **And you hold fast to My name:** Despite the fact they lived in such a difficult city, the Christians of Pergamos held fast to their faith in Jesus (**hold fast to My name ... did not deny My faith**).

v 13 **Did not deny My faith:** Jesus praised the Christians of Pergamos because they did not deny *His* faith. It is always important to make sure that the faith we hold on to is the faith that belongs to Jesus — that is our faith is in Jesus. It's easy to put our faith and hope in a person, or a church or money or even ourselves. But those things will always let us down eventually. Our faith needs to be in God alone.

Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you: One specific man among the Christians of Pergamos received a precious title — **faithful martyr**. Guess who else was called by this title? This same title was held by Jesus also (Revelation 1:5). What this means is that **Antipas** was a man who followed Jesus, who was a disciple of Jesus, who was like Jesus. When we get to heaven there will be many saints like Antipas who will be rewarded and commended by Jesus for their continued faith in Him.

Story of Antipas:

The year was AD 92.

He was the bishop of Pergamum (Pergamos), ordained by the Apostle John, and his faith got the attention of the priests of Asklepios — the god of healing represented by a snake.

“He had cast out so many devils that the demons had been complaining to pagans, saying, ‘You’ve got to do something about this Antipas’.”

The pagan priests went to the Roman governor and complained that the prayers of Antipas were driving their spirits out of the city and hindering the worship of their gods. As punishment, the governor ordered Antipas to offer a sacrifice of wine and incense to a statue of the Roman emperor and declare that the emperor was "lord and god." Antipas refused.

“If you reject the divinity of the emperor, then that is the equivalent of rejecting the city of Rome,” and as we learned last week, believers were killed for this.

Antipas was sentenced to death on the Altar of Zeus, also know as the throne of Satan. Most of that altar still survives today, and surrounding it are some of the world's most famous marble friezes.

At the top of the altar was a hollow bronze bull, designed for human sacrifice. This was where Antipas was executed. Quote:

“They would take the victim, place him inside the bull, and they would tie him in such a way that his head would go into the head of the bull. Then they would light a huge fire under the bull, and as the fire heated the bronze, the person inside of the bull would slowly begin to roast to death. As the victim would begin to moan and to cry out in pain, his cries would echo through the pipes in the head of the bull so it seemed to make the bull come alive.”

Even in the midst of the flames, the elderly bishop Antipas died praying for his church.

Application:

Antipas lived **where Satan's throne** was. Yet he stood against the attacks and the evil around him. He fulfilled the meaning of his name, because **Antipas** means "Against All." We also must stand *against all* the attacks of the enemy, *against all* the temptations that come our way, and *against all* the tribulations that are on our path.

Martyr is an interesting word. It is the ancient Greek word *martus*. In classical Greek *martus* never means a *martyr* in our sense of the term where we use it to describe someone who dies for their faith. It always means a *witness*. A *martus* was one who said: 'This is true, and I know it.' It is not until New Testament times that *martus* ever means *martyr*." *So what a martyr is is someone who is willing to demonstrate to the world that what they know and believe about Jesus is true, and they know it.* We don't have to die to be a witness. We just need to be faithful to our calling as Christians. When we walk the talk, living by the power of the Spirit, that is the greatest evidence that what we say we believe is true.

What does this look like? What are the main attributes of someone who is a faithful witness, who is mature in their faith, someone who is consistently walking in the Spirit?

Ephesians 4:1-3 NLT

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

John 13:34-35 NLT

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

So Antipas was not just a brave soul who was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, but His life was a witness of Christ's love. He was not just motivated by love for God in his death, but also in his life. *The secret to Antipas's ability to make the ultimate sacrifice is that he had been practicing dying daily. Dying daily is the secret to a life wholly devoted to God.* We need to die daily to ourselves, our sinful nature. It's all about saying, "not my will but yours be done."

Luke 9:23-24 NLT

Then Jesus said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way (or deny yourself), take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

The key word here is daily. We must daily feed on the Word of God, daily pray and regularly fellowship with others. We must daily say no to temptation. We must daily be willing to suffer for the kingdom of God. Every day we must decide to deny ourselves by putting God's will ahead of our own. There is no such thing as Sunday Christian. Either you're living for God, or you're not.

Now we see Jesus rebuking the church for what they are doing wrong.

Revelation 2:14 NKJV

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.

v 14 **I have a few things against you... You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam:** Balaam was a prototype of all corrupt or false teachers or prophets so it's worth looking into who he was and what he did.

What is this doctrine or teaching of Balaam? Here is a quick version before we read a part of the story in Numbers 22:

Balaam was a so-called prophet. He was asked by the Moabite King Balak to pronounce a curse on the people of Israel, who had left Egypt but had not yet entered the promised land and were wandering around the wilderness for 40 years. God forbade the prophet Balaam to go to King Balak. But Balaam went anyway, and after having a conversation with his donkey, he ended up on a mountain overlooking the encamped Israelites upon whom he was to issue a curse. After three failed attempts, realising he couldn't curse them, Balaam resorted to an alternate plan. "If your women seduce the Israelite men," he said to Balak, "they can introduce idol worship to them through which Israel will thereby bring a curse upon herself" (Jon Courson).

Numbers 22:1-41 NLT

Balak Sends for Balaam

Then the people of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. ² Balak son of Zippor, the Moabite king, had seen everything the Israelites did to the Amorites. ³ And when the people of Moab saw how many Israelites there were, they were terrified. ⁴ The king of Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This mob will devour everything in sight, like an ox devours grass in the field!" So Balak, king of Moab, ⁵ sent messengers to call Balaam son of Beor, who was living in his native land of Pethor near the Euphrates River. His message said:

"Look, a vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt. They cover the face of the earth and are threatening me. ⁶ Please come and curse these people for me because they are too powerful for me. Then perhaps I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land. I know that blessings fall on any people you bless, and curses fall on people you curse."

⁷ Balak's messengers, who were elders of Moab and Midian, set out with money to pay Balaam to place a curse upon Israel. They went to Balaam and delivered Balak's message to him. ⁸ "Stay here overnight," Balaam said. "In the morning I will tell you whatever the Lord directs me to say." So the officials from Moab stayed there with Balaam.

⁹ That night God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men visiting you?"

¹⁰ Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent me this message:

¹¹ 'Look, a vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come and curse these people for me. Then perhaps I will be able to stand up to them and drive them from the land.'

¹² But God told Balaam, "Do not go with them. You are not to curse these people, for they have been blessed!"

¹³ The next morning Balaam got up and told Balak's officials, "Go on home! The Lord will not let me go with you."

¹⁴ So the Moabite officials returned to King Balak and reported, "Balaam refused to come with us." ¹⁵ Then Balak tried again. This time he sent a larger number of even more distinguished officials than those he had sent the first time. ¹⁶ They went to Balaam and delivered this message to him:

"This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Please don't let anything stop you from coming to help me. ¹⁷ I will pay you very well and do whatever you tell me. Just come and curse these people for me!"

¹⁸ But Balaam responded to Balak's messengers, "Even if Balak were to give me his palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the Lord my God. ¹⁹ But stay here one more night, and I will see if the Lord has anything else to say to me."

²⁰ That night God came to Balaam and told him, "Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But do only what I tell you to do."

²¹ So the next morning Balaam got up, saddled his donkey, and started off with the Moabite officials. ²² But God was angry that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, ²³ Balaam's donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road. ²⁴ Then the angel of the Lord stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again. ²⁶ Then the angel of the Lord moved farther down the road and stood in a place too narrow for the donkey to get by at all. ²⁷ This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat the animal again with his staff.

²⁸ Then the Lord gave the donkey the ability to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" it asked Balaam.

²⁹ "You have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

³⁰ "But I am the same donkey you have ridden all your life," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?"
"No," Balaam admitted.

³¹ Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed his head and fell face down on the ground before him.

³² "Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the angel of the Lord demanded. "Look, I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me."
³³ Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey."

³⁴ Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the Lord, “I have sinned. I didn’t realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will return home if you are against my going.”

³⁵ But the angel of the Lord told Balaam, “Go with these men, but say only what I tell you to say.” So Balaam went on with Balak’s officials. ³⁶ When King Balak heard that Balaam was on the way, he went out to meet him at a Moabite town on the Arnon River at the farthest border of his land.

³⁷ “Didn’t I send you an urgent invitation? Why didn’t you come right away?” Balak asked Balaam. “Didn’t you believe me when I said I would reward you richly?”

³⁸ Balaam replied, “Look, now I have come, but I have no power to say whatever I want. I will speak only the message that God puts in my mouth.” ³⁹ Then Balaam accompanied Balak to Kiriath-huzoth, ⁴⁰ where the king sacrificed cattle and sheep. He sent portions of the meat to Balaam and the officials who were with him. ⁴¹ The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see some of the people of Israel spread out below him.

In Numbers Chapters 23 and 24 we see Balaam try to curse the Children of Israel, but he can’t. God won’t let him. Why? Because the people are blessed, they are God’s people. Instead, Balaam blesses the Children of Israel and makes king Balak absolutely furious. But then Balaam gives Balak some nasty advice. We see the results of it in:

Numbers 25:1-3 NLT

While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. ² **These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods**, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. ³ **In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the Lord’s anger to blaze against his people.**

In summary, After three failed attempts to curse the children of Israel, when he realised he couldn’t curse them, Balaam resorted to an alternate plan. “If your women seduce the Israelite men,” he said to Balak, “they can introduce idol worship to them through which Israel will thereby bring a curse upon herself.”

So now we understand who Balaam is and what he did we can come back to the church of Pergamos and see how it applies there. Lets read the verse again:

Revelation 2:14 NKJV

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.

So, what happened is that, Balaam **taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel**. The **stumbling block** was connected with idolatry (**to eat things sacrificed to idols**) and **sexual immorality**. Therefore, within the church in Pergamos there were those who taught and practiced **the doctrine of Balaam**, meaning they were guilty of idolatry and sexual immorality.

What would have caused them to do this? What was the culture like in the ancient Roman Empire? Was the Roman Empire extremely sexually immoral like the Moabites? Here's a quote:

“Sexual immorality marked the whole culture of the ancient Roman Empire. It was simply taken for granted, and the person who lived by Biblical standards of purity was considered strange. To paraphrase the Roman statesman Cicero, “If there is anyone who thinks that young men should not be allowed the love of many women, he is extremely severe. I am not able to deny the principle he stands on. But he contradicts, not only with the freedom our age allows, but also with the customs and allowances of our ancestors. When indeed was this not done? When did anyone find fault with it? When was such permission denied? When was it that what is now allowed was not allowed?” To keep from **sexual immorality** in that culture, you really had to swim against the current.”

Remember how from 313 to 600 A.D. Christianity had become the official state religion, there was no more persecution, everyone was baptised as a Christian, they had the coin with the Christian symbols on one side and the pagan symbols on the other. *This was an objectionable marriage, a joining of the church to the world. This was compromise. **The church should be in the world, but the world should not be in the church.*** Just like a boat should be in the water, but the water should not be in the boat. When the water gets into the boat, the boat sinks. The majority of the people in the church during these years were both sexually immoral and/or spiritually immoral and idolators, because they allowed themselves to be influenced by the culture around them. ***The church had lost its purity and its power.*** They were now comfortable and had become complacent. Their idols would have been money and power, because the church was also the government. Remember that Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Revelation 2:15 NKJV

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

We looked at the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans** last week. Here is a quick summary. The title *Nico-laitans* has the idea of a proud authority and a system of hierarchy where the priests or leaders would have power over the people. The name *Nikao-laos* literally means “to conquer the people.” We also learned that the **Nicolaitans** also approved of and practiced sexual immorality and greed.

v 14, 15 **You have there those... you also have those:** The rebuke was not only against those who **hold the doctrines of Balaam** and **those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans**. The rebuke was also against those who allowed them to continue (**you have there those ... you have those**)—those who held to the doctrine of Balaam didn't necessarily hold or agree with the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but they didn't do anything against it. They just tolerated it (and vice versa).

The Christians of Pergamos were like the Christians of Corinth as Paul wrote to them in 1 Corinthians 5:1–9. They were too tolerant and accepting of false doctrines and immoral living, and Jesus had to rebuke them. This is important.

What Satan couldn't accomplish by persecution, he accomplished by using deception leading to compromise.

Satan's strategy was first *violence*, then *alliance or compromise*. ***It's very important that we root out false teaching from our churches because our relationship with God will only be as good or as strong as our doctrine.*** Why? Bad doctrine or bad teaching leads to bad living, whether it be the two extremes of legalism or licentiousness. Sin always separates us from God.

Revelation 2:16 NKJV

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

What does Jesus tell the church at Pergamos to do?

v 16 **Repent:** Five of the seven churches are commanded to repent. **Repent** is a command that applies to all Christians throughout their lives, not only to those who first come to Jesus. Remember repent means to turn away from sin and turn to God.

v 16 **Or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth:** Unless they do **repent**, the Christians of Pergamos would face the Jesus who has the two-edged sword. Judgment will begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), and the tool that Jesus will use is the Word of God. We will come back to this.

Revelation 2:17 NKJV

“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.”

v 17 **He who has an ear:** The danger of false teaching and immoral conduct still faces the church today. So does the danger of *allowing* false teaching and immorality, as was the problem with the Christians in Pergamos. We need to stand up to or overcome to false teaching.

The promise of a reward

The first reward is the hidden manna.

v 17 **To him who overcomes:** The one who overcomes this spirit of accommodation to false teaching and living will receive **hidden manna**. This is God's perfect provision, the true bread from heaven. Remember how in the wilderness, God sustained the children of Israel for 40 years with manna. Jesus refers to this in John chapter 6. Verse 58 is a quick summary of what Jesus was saying:

John 6:58 NLT

I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.”

We can feed on the lies and poison of the false teachers, false prophets and the world which leads to death, or, we can feed on Jesus. If we keep ourselves pure and stay true to God's word, we will experience the sweet satisfaction and contentment that comes from abiding with Jesus. We need to be feeding and depending on Jesus the Living Word. He is the only source of eternal joy, love and strength.

Manna is a great picture of the Word of God

Firstly, without it you can't survive, you would starve in the wilderness. In the same way, our spirits starve and become weak if we don't read the bible with a humble heart each day. Also, you had to collect some each morning, just like we need to read our bibles to feed our spirits each morning. But always remember that the purpose of the written word of God is to point us to the Living Word, Jesus Himself.

v 17 **And I will give him a white stone:** In the ancient world, the use of a **white stone** had many associations. A **white stone** could be a ticket to a banquet, a sign of friendship, evidence of having been counted, or as a sign of acquittal in a court of law. Jesus may have any one of these meanings in mind, but at the very least we know that it has the assurance of blessing.

v 17 **And on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it:** What is the meaning of this **new**, secret **name** promised to **him who overcomes**? Is it God's name, or is it the believer's name? This is probably the believer's new name. Here are two possible applications or blessings.

"One idea behind this new, secret name is that it shows what an intimate relationship we have with God. When a couple is close, they often have "pet names" for each other. This is probably the same idea.

Another idea associated with the new name is simply the assurance it gives of our heavenly destination. Your name is there, waiting for you. It is as if your "reservation" in heaven is made" (David Guzik).

Application for the church today based on the church of Pergamos

Roman culture reminds me of today's western culture. Remember that in Roman culture, to keep from **sexual immorality**, you really had to swim against the current. Today's church faces the same test — idolatry and sexual immorality. Let's read those verses.

Numbers 25:1-3 NLT

While the Israelites were camped at Acacia Grove, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local Moabite women. ² **These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods**, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of Moab. ³ **In this way, Israel joined in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the Lord's anger to blaze against his people.**

Nothing has changed. The women and men of the world are still inviting us to join them in their sexual immorality and idolatry. Unfortunately, many Christians today accept. Remember, what Satan couldn't do through violence, he did through deceit - causing us to compromise.

Again, just like Satan used the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men by inviting them to attend sacrifices to their false god's, which included sexual rituals, so the world invites, calls, and uses every means possible to seduce or lure the church and individuals into sin. The most common baits are money, power, pleasure and sex.

Just as Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, causing the Lord's anger to blaze against Israel, so the church can be joined to the world, causing the Lord's anger to blaze against it. In that day, 24,000 people died as God's plague went through the camp. It's foolish to think that God won't carry through with His promise to discipline the church if we are joined to the world. Consider:

1 Peter 4:17 NKJV

For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

What does this look like today? Homosexual pastors and other compromises, acceptance of unmarried people living together, churches greedy for money, churches drawing people in using the promise of a better life (the prosperity gospel), or churches that appeal to people's pride in their own goodness (legalism). Again, it's idolatry and sexual immorality. Nothing changes. As Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. Satan's schemes are so predictable. If we know what they are, we shouldn't be fooled by him.

How do we avoid the judgement that will begin at the house of God? How do we enjoy the presence of God in our lives? By being a faithful witness, dying everyday, denying ourselves, saying, "not my will but Yours be done," and taking up our cross and following Jesus. Say no to the world's invitation, and yes to God's. Feed on Jesus, the bread from heaven, and not the poison that the world offers.

2 Corinthians 6:17 - 7:1 NLT

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers,
and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord.

Don't touch their filthy things,
and I will welcome you.

¹⁸And I will be your Father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

7:1 Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.