

The Sharp Double-Edged Sword (*Pergamum*)
Revelation 2:12-17 on July 31, 2022
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Please read Revelation 2:12-17 before reading further in this transcript.

In Revelation 2:13 Jesus writes to the church in Pergamum, “I know where you live...” My wife Debbie and I had the opportunity to visit Ancient Pergamum during my sabbatical. I’d have to say it was probably one of my favorite places to visit. You see many of the ruins of Ancient Pergamum are located on the top of a 1,000-foot-high hill, or acropolis. Here’s a picture from the top of Ancient Pergamum, overlooking modern Bergama¹ 1,000 feet below. We actually rode a cable car all the way up to the top of Pergamum.²



This next picture on the left highlight’s the Pergamum Theater, the steepest theater in the ancient world. To the right, is a picture of my dear wife, hanging on for dear life!



¹ “BEAR gah ma”

² The locals call it a teleferic, “tel-uh-FER-ik.” Hear it pronounced here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Hc2DLs63yc>

Ancient Pergamum had rivers on 2 sides³, but it was located ~15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, and it was way north of prominent cities like Ephesus and Smyrna. So the city is located on our map by that little black dot on the bottom right corner of the word “Pergamum.”



Despite its seemingly remote, inland location, it was actually quite an important city politically, religiously, intellectually, and medically. It had a population of 100,000 people, with close ties to Rome, and all kinds of pagan temples. It had a library that boasted 200,000 volumes, which was impressive in the days before the modern printing press.⁴ It became a significant medical center due to the temple of Asklepios, the serpent god of healing.⁵ It also had an impressive temple to Zeus, although there's not much left of it in this picture on the right. However, in its prime, it was “the largest altar in antiquity... [measuring over 100 feet on each side and 40 feet high]... Smoke rising from sacrifices to Zeus... would have lofted regularly over the city.”⁶



³ Selinus River on the west; Cetius River on the east. Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3rd ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 281.

⁴ “a magnificent city of 100,000... an important intellectual city with a library holding 200,000 volumes; it was Asia’s religious center, the foremost city for emperor worship, and home to a 40-foot-high altar to Zeus (king of the gods).” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2591 footnote on Revelation 2:12.

⁵ “The shrine of Asklepios, the god of healing (also known as “the Pergamene god”), attracted people from all over the world. Galen, one of the most famous physicians of the ancient world, was a native of Pergamum and studied there.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 78.

⁶ Ege Yayinlari & Mark Wilson, *Biblical Turkey, Corrected 3rd ed.*, Zero Produksiyon, Istanbul, 2014, p. 287.

In addition to Zeus's temple, and Asklepios, Pergamum had all kinds of temples to various pagan cults including Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, and so on.⁷ In other words, Pergamum had a god for whatever ailed you, or for whatever interested you.⁸ More important than any of these temples though, was the fact that Pergamum "was the official center in Asia for the imperial cult. [In fact], It was the first city of Asia to receive permission to build a temple dedicated to the worship of a living ruler. In 29 B.C. ...a temple [was built for] 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma.'"⁹ This is most likely what Revelation 2:13 is referring to, "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne...."¹⁰ "Where Satan has his throne" was a way of saying that Satan was "ruling" from Pergamum, because "it was the official center of emperor worship."¹¹ New Testament scholar G.K. Beale explains it this way: Pergamum was "a center of Roman government and pagan religion in the Asia Minor region...the capital of the whole area for the cult of the emperor. ...Life in such a politico-religious center put all the more pressure on the church to pay public homage to Caesar as a deity, refusal of which meant high treason to the state."¹² Much like the church in Smyrna, Pergamum Christians "refused to show...religious loyalty to Rome through emperor worship, [which resulted in them being] marginalized and persecuted."^{13 14}

New Testament scholar Grant Osborne notes that "Emperor worship was linked to civic loyalty and patriotism. Thus, refusal to participate was

⁷ "For example, the cult of Asclepius, the serpent god of healing, was prominent in Pergamum; the serpent symbol of Asclepius also became one of the emblems of the city and may have facilitated John's reference to "the throne of Satan" (cf. 12:9; 20:2!). Zeus, Athene, Demeter, and Dionysus were also gods receiving significant cultic attention. The reference to "Satan's throne" may also have been brought to mind because of the conical hill behind Pergamum which was the site of many temples, prominent among which was the throne-like altar of Zeus, which itself would have been sufficient to arouse the thought of the devil's throne." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 246.

⁸ Joe Stowell, President of Cornerstone University, alluded to this idea while hosting the DVD on "The 7 Churches of Revelation."

⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 78–79.

¹⁰ "where Satan has his throne" "May refer to the altar of Zeus or the pagan shrine to Asklepios, the god of medicine; [However,] most likely designates the prominent practice of emperor worship in Pergamum." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2591-2592 footnote on Revelation 2:13.

¹¹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 2152-2153 footnote on Revelation 2:13.

¹² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 246.

¹³ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2591-2592 footnote on Revelation 2:13.

¹⁴ As we might imagine, worship of the various pagan deities played off of each other. So, for example, there might be one god that you were expected to worship because they were popular in your particular city, another you should worship because of the line of work you were in, and still another because of your own family background or traditions. On top of all this pressure, if someone noticed that you weren't giving proper homage to a particular god that was important to them, they might be inclined to put extra pressure on you, by alerting the Roman authorities that were unwilling to sacrifice to the emperor. "Often when Christians were coerced to sacrifice to the emperor it was because they had already refused to recognize the locally venerated gods and were consequently called to account by the Roman authorities." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 247.

[considered] subversive... Christianity [was]...all the more hated for its exclusivism and intolerance of the gods.”^{15 16}

Revelation 2:13, mentions Antipas¹⁷, “I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.” Last week we talked about Polycarp’s martyrdom in Smyrna, but Antipas was martyred much earlier in church history. In fact, Antipas was the very first martyr in Asia minor. “According to tradition he was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle during the reign of [Emperor] Domitian (81–96).”^{18 19 20} In Revelation 2:13, Jesus refers to Antipas as “my faithful witness,” which mirrors the description of Jesus Christ Himself, back in Revelation 1:5, “Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness.” What an incredible testimony for Antipas to be like Christ in this way! What an incredible testimony for the believers living in Pergamum to witness, and for every believer all throughout Asia Minor to hear of his faithful Christian witness, even unto death. Rather than responding with fear or renouncing their faith in Jesus, the believers in Pergamum receive a commendation from Jesus in Revelation 2:13, “...Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, NOT EVEN in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in YOUR city-where Satan lives.” The believers in Pergamum lived in such a difficult city, the city where Satan lived. But here’s the thing we need to recognize, the fact is, Satan and his demons are at work in every city. The same Satan who was at work in Pergamum, continues to be the enemy of the church. So, we should remain keenly and prayerfully aware of his evil work within our own city.

So let’s learn from the godly example of the believers in Pergamum. What did Jesus commend them for? For remaining true to Jesus’ name, and for not renouncing their faith in Jesus. To remain true to Jesus’ name means to hold fast to our integrity as Christ-followers, and to live lives that match up with all that Jesus’ name represents. Victory in the Christian life is all about

¹⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 139.

¹⁶ “light and darkness cannot dwell together in peaceful coexistence. Therefore, a witnessing church will be a persecuted church.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 247.

¹⁷ “AN tih puhs” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 25.

¹⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 2152-2153 footnote on Revelation 2:13.

¹⁹ However, Osborne notes “there is no evidence to substantiate this tradition.” *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 142.

²⁰ If we think about the timeline of all this, it means that Polycarp would have read about Antipas when he read the book of Revelation. You see, the letters to Smyrna and Pergamum are right next to each other in Revelation 2. So Polycarp was still a young believer when he read about the testimony of Antipas who was “faithful even unto death” (2:10). Undoubtedly Polycarp would have heard the local reports about Antipas’ faithful witness; in fact, he would have known it better than we do today.

faithfulness to Jesus through thick and thin. Antipas was a faithful witness to the point of death. His fellow believers in Pergamum were faithful witnesses in life. They remained true to Jesus' name, by not renouncing Him or denying Him. But Satan wasn't making this easy for them, because his goal is to deceive us. And that's exactly what was starting to happen among some of the believers in Pergamum...

In Revelation 2:14 Jesus says, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality." Some "AMONG YOU" is referring to people immediately within the Pergamum church who were holding to false teachings. This was an *internal* problem, opposed to the *external* problem of persecution.²¹ This isn't referring to everyone in the church, but only to some of them. So certain people within the church were leading other people within the church astray, through false teaching and by encouraging sexually immoral behavior.

To better understand the situation in Pergamum, we need to do a quick Old Testament refresher on Balaam.^{22 23} Balaam is the guy who King Balak summoned to come and curse the Israelites because they were getting too close to his territory.²⁴ If that doesn't trigger your memory, maybe this will: Balaam is the guy who talked to a donkey!²⁵ But more importantly, the story goes on to reveal that Balaam wasn't able to curse Israel on Balak's behalf, no matter how much money Balak offered him. Instead, the LORD kept making Balaam bless God's people. Now, if we were to stop reading at the end of Numbers 24, we might think that Balaam was a pretty good guy. After all, he blessed Israel 7 times in a row, and didn't get paid for his time and effort. However, the story goes on in Numbers 25 and then later in chapter 31. When Israel was camped by the Jordan River, right across from the city of Jericho, Numbers 25:1-2 says, "...the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods." These are the same two sins mentioned in Revelation 2:14, eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. Numbers 31:16 then tells us a key detail, "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor²⁶ incident, so that a plague struck the LORD's people."²⁷

²¹ "Their problem was not external, but internal," right in the midst of their very own local church body. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 143.

²² Rich Mullins sings Balaam in his song, "Who God is Gonna Use."

²³ Balaam = BAY luhm and Balak = BAY lak

²⁴ Read Numbers chapters 22-25, and 31 for the full story.

²⁵ In fact, the donkey saved his life because the angel of the LORD was about to strike Balaam dead.

²⁶ "PEE awr" (W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 129.

In other words, after failing to help Balak by cursing the Israelites, Balaam then came up with a plan to entice God's people into sin.²⁸ Now, you'll have to go back and read the story for yourself, if you want to learn more about the plague, and how the plague was stopped. (But I'll give you a hint, Israel's blatant act of unfaithfulness was matched by an equally blatant act of zeal for the LORD's honor.²⁹)

The main point for today's text, is that Balaam was behind the whole thing; that's what Revelation 2:14 is getting at, "...There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality."³⁰ **"Balaam...taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin."** In other words, Balaam becomes an object lesson that illustrates how some people, entice other people, to sin.³¹ And in the church at Pergamum, they had multiple "Balaams" in their midst!^{32 33} We aren't given any specifics about how the people in the Pergamum Church were being enticed to sin, but we have some pretty good clues, based on what we know about the surrounding culture. The church in Pergamum was surrounded by pagan temples and emperor worship. It's not difficult to imagine the many temptations that the Christians would walk by every day. Sexual promiscuity and shrine prostitutes were on every corner. Invitations to pagan celebrations and ritual feasts with all kinds of amazing foods were happening almost every weekend. There was just so much immorality and idolatry all around them; it made it easy to fall into syncretism, and to mix pagan worship practices into their Christian faith and practice.³⁴ Some of

²⁷ It's interesting to trace how Balaam was eventually held accountable. "It is especially intriguing that Balaam was threatened with being "killed by the sword" of "the angel of the LORD" if he continued to oppose Israel (Numbers 22:23). And when he did not heed the warning, he was "killed by the sword (Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22)." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 250. Ironically, Balaam also mentions wishing he had a sword of his own in Numbers 22:29.

²⁸ And probably became quite wealthy doing it. Jude 11 references rushing for profit into Balaam's error. 2 Peter 2:15 mentions leaving the straight way and wandering off to follow the way of Balaam "who loved the wages of wickedness." In other words, who sold out their faith and became unfaithful.

²⁹ See Numbers 25:6-13.

³⁰ Romans 14:22 warns us, "Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves."

³¹ "Balaam became proverbial for the false teacher who, for money, influences believers to enter into relationships of compromising unfaithfulness, is warned by God to stop, and is finally punished for continuing to disobey." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.

³² "Thus Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies. At Pergamum, where Satan sat enthroned, some within the church had decided that accommodation was the wisest policy. They taught the way of compromise." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 81.

³³ In other words, Balaam is "a fitting prototype of corrupt teachers who deceive believers into compromise with worldliness." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2153 footnote on Revelation 2:14.

³⁴ The reference to food sacrificed to idols "probably refers to meat that was eaten at pagan feasts rather than that sold in the open market after having been offered to idols. "Sexual immorality" should also be understood literally as part of the pagan festivities. Some writers take both expressions metaphorically as referring to idolatrous practice in general and religious infidelity." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 81.

the people within the Pergamum church had apparently gone from co-existing alongside of a pluralistic religious culture, to actually diving in and participating in its practices.

Now, maybe they had somehow justified this sin. G.K. Beale suggests that their behavior may have been “rationalized by thinking that it was only an empty gesture that fulfilled patriotic or social obligations, and was legitimate, as long as Christians did not really believe in the deities being worshiped.”³⁵ He also suggests that “while possible, it is unlikely that they were *intentionally* trying to deceive the church.”³⁶ In other words, these believers may very well have been lying to themselves, as much as to anyone else. They didn’t grasp the enormity of the spiritual danger that they were in. They didn’t realize that not only was their own faith in jeopardy, but they were putting the faith of others in jeopardy as well.^{37 38} Some of these Christians may have grown tired of fighting against the cultural tides; compromise was just SO much easier. So even though they may not have been acting with malicious motives like Balaam, the net result was just the same.

While there is certainly some wisdom in coexisting within a pluralistic society, it’s something entirely different to promote pluralism within the local church. Revelation 2:15 goes on, “Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”³⁹ Now, we aren’t given much detail about the Nicolaitans or their teachings. What we do know is that they are equated with the teaching of Balaam in verse 14, and they may even be one and the same group.^{40 41} My *NIV Study Bible* suggests that the Nicolaitans were “A heretical sect within the church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. Its adherents apparently taught that spiritual liberty gave them sufficient leeway to practice idolatry and immorality.”^{42 43} Be that as it may, in Revelation 2:16 Jesus commands

³⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.

³⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.

³⁷ Consider Matthew 18:6-7.

³⁸ We could also note that it must have gotten increasingly difficult, day after day, to have people picking on them for not taking part in the festivities, and for not honoring the pagan gods who were thought to bring blessing on the whole community. 1 Peter 4:3-4 says, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.”

³⁹ “NIK oh LAY uh tuhns” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 123.

⁴⁰ “The Nicolaitan movement is difficult to define, for the only information we have is found in Revelation 2:6, 15, and probably in the discussions of the cults of Balaam (2:14) and Jezebel (2:20-23) (I argue later that these all describe the same movement).” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 120.

⁴¹ “there is too little in the texts to be at all certain about gnostic tendencies.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 120.

⁴² *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2151 footnote on Revelation 2:6.

⁴³ Whoever the Nicolaitans were, they were also active in the city of Ephesus. Back in Revelation 2:6 Jesus commended the Ephesian church for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans. Now, in stark contrast, Revelation

them, “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to YOU and will fight against THEM with the sword of my mouth.”⁴⁴ To be clear, only *some* of them held to these false teachings, and yet, *all* of them were responsible for what was being sanctioned in their midst.⁴⁵

This is a call for discipline within the church, to better monitor its own teachings. They’ve not only allowed false teaching to creep into their midst, but they are also harboring a group of doctrinal compromisers right within their own church walls.⁴⁶ So Jesus is saying, “confront the Balaam’s among you or I will come over and do it Myself!”⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ You see, Jesus doesn’t leave them the option of just keeping quiet about it or looking the other way. In other words, it’s not just those who are holding to these false teachings who needed to repent, every believer in the Pergamum Church needed to repent - for tolerating false doctrine and allowing openly sinful behavior by their brothers and sisters in Christ. The lesson here for E-Free Bemidji is that, as a church body, we are corporately responsible for the doctrine that gets taught here and the behaviors that get promoted here. Galatians 5:9 reminds us that, “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”⁴⁹
⁵⁰ ⁵¹ ⁵² Verse 16 warns that the consequence for not dealing with this themselves, was that Jesus would come fight *against* them, with the sword of His mouth. This sword “symbolizes Jesus’ ultimate authority to exercise

2:15 calls the Pergamum Christians to repent for holding to their teachings. “The contention of some that this is the same group as the “false apostles” is possible but not obvious. The Nicolaitans taught that some degree of participation in the idolatrous culture of Ephesus was permissible. The temptations and even pressures to become so involved were great since the city’s life was dominated by the pagan temples. Ephesus was known as the “temple warden” (νεωκόρος) of the goddess Artemis, ... The city had also been declared a “temple warden” of two temples dedicated to the imperial cult, which meant that this cult also played an essential part in the city’s life. Therefore, the church’s resistance to internal pressures to accommodate to aspects of this idolatrous society was very commendable.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 233–234.

⁴⁴ Giving people time to repent and to change their ways demonstrates once again the gracious character of our God. So Jesus warns His beloved church in Pergamum, that they need to repent of these false teachings within their church.

⁴⁵ “only a portion of the church has fallen prey to the pernicious doctrine of the Balaamites, but all are guilty of not taking action against their presence.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 82.

⁴⁶ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 248.

⁴⁷ Allow we must always be careful not to sanction a “witch hunt,” we must be equally careful not to remain silent when a valid concern arises.

⁴⁸ Jesus “rebukes them for allowing in their midst false teachers who had encouraged them to accommodate themselves to the prevailing culture.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 77–78.

⁴⁹ See 1 Corinthians 5:6-13.

⁵⁰ The Pergamum Church “had a responsibility to cease tolerating this movement, to repent and to discipline its adherents... If action were not taken quickly, the whole church could be captivated by these teachers.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 251.

⁵¹ This is a comparison between the Nicolaitans and the Old Testament teachings of Balaam. In other words, “In the same way that Balaam subverted the Israelites, these false teachers are trying to subvert you.” See discussion by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 145.

⁵² “When Israel did finally discipline itself, the plague was lifted (see Numbers 25:4–9).” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 249.

judgement...warning the church to turn from idolatrous compromise.”⁵³
Jesus is more than ready to judge false doctrine, especially false doctrine that threatens the spiritual welfare of His bride, the Church.⁵⁴

Revelation 2:17 concludes, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.” This reference to “Hidden manna” harkens back to the Old Testament book of Exodus “where the Lord commands Moses to preserve [some of the] manna for future generations.”⁵⁵ In verse 17, Jesus is promising better food than that which was being offered at the pagan feasts throughout Pergamum.^{56 57 58} My *NIV Study Bible* has a helpful note about this “white stone.” Back in the 1st century, “White stones were associated with...admission to special feasts for athletic victors... here they may suggest entrance to the Messianic feast.”^{59 60} I wonder if this may have been something that made the believers in Pergamum feel left out. They were consistently not getting invited to various religious feasts and pagan festivals. While many of the people around them were excited and celebrating, and showing off the white stones that they’d been given, the Christians stood their empty-handed. They may have thought to themselves: “Boy, just one time, I’d sure like one of those white rocks. But that’s never going to happen because I’m a follower of Jesus.” Jesus reassures them in verse 17, “I’m giving everyone a white stone, everyone who’s victorious gets a white stone, with a new name written on it.” Later on, in Revelation 19:9, John is told to write down these words: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” The pagan feasts in Pergamum will be nothing compared to the wedding supper of the Lamb!

Living as a Christ-follower in Bemidji today, has some close parallels with the church in Pergamum. There are similar pressures all around us to

⁵³ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2591 footnote on Revelation 2:12.

⁵⁴ John writes about this sword “In the context of life in a provincial capital where the proconsul was granted the “right of the sword,” the power to execute at will, the sovereign Christ with the two-edged sword would remind the threatened congregation that ultimate power over life and death belongs to God.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 79.

⁵⁵ See Exodus 16:31-35. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2592 footnote on Revelation 2:17.

⁵⁶ Consider John 6:51; 19:9

⁵⁷ In John 6:51, Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Pastor Eric preached on Jesus as the Bread of Life back on April 3, 2022. <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/jesus-is-the-bread-of-life/>

⁵⁸ “The heavenly food available to the believer who overcomes, in contrast to the unclean food of the Balaamites.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2153 footnote on Revelation 2:17.

⁵⁹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2592 footnote on Revelation 2:17.

⁶⁰ “Certain kinds of stones were used as tokens for various purposes. In the context of a Messianic banquet the white stone was probably for the purpose of admission.” *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2153 footnote on Revelation 2:17.

conform and syncretize. To stop being so insistent about Jesus as the only way to God. To stop being so insistent about the reliability and authority of God's written Word. Let me ask a challenging question: have you ever had someone from E-Free Bemidji entice you to sin? Or maybe someone from another church in Bemidji? It shows up in our everyday lives. It shows up on a Facebook post that urges us to celebrate the wedding engagement of a same-sex couple. You scroll through who liked the post, and you see the names of some of your Christian friends. You think to yourself, "I can't celebrate that. I'm pretty sure that's sexual immorality." It shows up in the hallway of a local church, when we overhear a conversation by some people within the church talking about the great party that they were at last night. How there was free alcohol, and everyone got so drunk and had such a good time. How there were really cute guys there and beautiful women. Then you hear them say something like this, "you should totally come next weekend! We can let lose together and just go crazy!"⁶¹ Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to remain true to the name of Jesus, not only by being willing to die for Him, but also by being willing to live for Him. We need to hold fast to the sharp, double-edged teaching of God's Word. We need to let God's Word judge the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.⁶² As we continue becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together, we're all responsible to make sure that the teaching of our church is in line with what God would have it be. And, that the behavior of our church is in line with what God would have it be.

⁶¹ When he wrote his Revelation commentary 20 years ago, New Testament scholar Grant Osborne made a sobering comment about the popularity of evangelicalism in contrast to their waning impact on society. He states, "on the whole it is hard to tell the Christians from the non-Christians by their lifestyle and attitudes... all too many Christians are turned off to theology and want a "feel-good" religion." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 150.

⁶² See Hebrews 4:12.