

PERGAMUM

POPULATION | Between 120,000 and 200,000

EDUCATION | Home of the second-largest library in the world with some 200,000 volumes (second only to Alexandria, Egypt). Pioneered the use of parchment as a writing material.

ECONOMY | Because Pergamum was not a port city nor on a major trade route, it was known more as a center of culture than commerce.

RELIGION | Home of emperor worship and the first temple to a living emperor (Caesar Augustus). The emperors brought peace and stability, so people worshipped them as “lord and god” or “lord and savior”. Citizens in the Roman Empire were required by law to offer sacrifices to the emperor as a show of allegiance to Rome. Much like at Smyrna, Emperor worship was considered patriotic.

RESPONSE TO CHRIST | When people in Pergamum began to follow Jesus, their patriotism was questioned. For Christians, the titles of Lord, God and Savior were exclusively reserved for Jesus. Therefore, Christians in Pergamum were in danger every day.

KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM | Because of its impressive library, Pergamum was a center of learning. However, even in the church, this learning did not necessarily result in wisdom. Jesus commends them for remaining “true to my name” but rebukes them for allowing false doctrine to go unaddressed (Revelation 2: 13-15).

THE COMPROMISING CHURCH

(SUMMARY)

This week, we continue our series, by exploring the letter written to the church in Pergamum. This was the third letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. The Church in Pergamum remained true to Christ and his teachings even in a culture steeped in emperor worship and satanic practices. Because of its impressive library, Pergamum was a center of learning. However, even in the Church, this learning did not necessarily result in wisdom. Jesus commends them for remaining “true to my name” but rebukes them for allowing false doctrine to go unaddressed. Something was wrong. Some in the church held to false teaching that promoted immorality and idolatry - and this was permitted! **Idolatry and Immorality** are two areas the church of Pergamum had allowed to invade their belief system. **Idolatry** is giving anything more prominence, significance or importance than our devotion to Jesus. **Immorality** involves sexual activity that goes beyond what God intended for human relationships. **Immorality** says, “God is withholding.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

Revelation 2:12-17

¹² “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷ 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.

FOCUS ON CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Pergamum, Jesus is the one described as the one with the sharp two-edged sword (v 12). The imagery of a two-edged sword is also found in **Hebrews 4:12** and **Revelation 1:16**.

Q: *Why would God would describe himself this way.*

Q: *Why would it be helpful or important for the Church of Pergamum to see God as someone holding this type of sword?*

Pergamum was a dark place. A place where the throne of Satan lived, where blind patriotism competed against the gospel. Jesus has the sword in His hand that can defeat the darkness. Jesus had power over this city, and He was at war with the forces of darkness and He is to eventually overwhelm them and protect His church.

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

The church of Pergamum receives both praise and correction.

Q: *How did Jesus affirm them (v. 13)?*

Q: *What do you think it was like living as a Christian in this city?*

Q: *What kinds of things happened to Christians there?*

Q: *What needed correction in this Church?*

Q: *What were they tolerating?*

Q: *What had infiltrated their church community? Why was this wrong?*

Jesus affirmed this Church because they would not deny His name, even amid the cultural pressure all around them. Living as a Christian must have been difficult, especially because Christians were perceived as anti-patriotic and seen with great skepticism. However, they had let false teaching infiltrate their church, and because of this they started to compromise on the truth. Most likely, they wanted the church to worship not only Jesus, but Caesar. When we do this, we risk compromising our truest identity. But Jesus is the ONLY way of salvation, and compromising our faith in Christ can shipwreck our lives.

Q: *In light of the struggles at Pergamum, how important is it for us to balance these two core truths?*

Q: *How can we practice this at FBC as we are a Church that Honors our Country yet serves God?*

Q: *How can we balance Grace and Truth as we show grace by honoring our country and those who have served, yet maintain truth by not letting the honor of country overpower God?*

We want to reach out without selling out! Grace and Truth can seem like they are contradictions, but rather they are two sides of the same coin. Grace enables us to be open to others, to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, to show authentic mercy and forgiveness on those who sin against us. But we must also be ruthless in protecting the truth of who Jesus is. Jesus alone is God and deserves our worship and allegiance. Any compromise of that must be resisted. There are some doctrines that we cannot compromise on, but we can also have opinions that will not have definitive answers until we meet Jesus. It is important that we are unified on the essentials but have liberty on the non-essentials.

Identifying the fact that Satan is mentioned several times in this passage.

Q: *How is he described in regards to Pergamum?*

Q: *Have you ever thought of Satan and his presence in this way?*

Q: *When and how?*

Q: *What pressures would a church in the "city of Satan" experience?*

Satan is described as the ruler of Pergamum. John tells us that this is where his throne is and that he dwells there.

Q: *How is Satan at work in our Nation? City? State?*

If Satan dwelled in your city, He would use every dirty trick in the book to steal, kill and destroy the church. He is a liar, one of the best. It is a miracle that this church was able to hold on as well as it did.

FOCUS ON ME

Satan is known as a great deceiver.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:12-15.

¹² And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

In this passage, Paul passionately describes his approach to handling people who are disguising themselves as apostles but really are not.

Q: How does he describes and relate to Satan

Q: How does he describes and relate to Satan Do a simple word study on “Masquerade” What does this tell us about Satan’s tactics?

Idolatry and Immorality are two areas the church of Pergamum had allowed to invade their belief system. Idolatry is giving anything more prominence, significance or importance than God. Even good things, like our families, jobs and serving at church! These things can become idolatrous when we elevate them over our devotion to Jesus.

Immorality involves sexual activity that goes beyond what God intended for human relationships. Immorality is doing the immoral. Often times this is “Pleasing of the flesh!”

Q: In what ways do people build idols today?

Q: Does idolatry always seem or look bad?Explain.

Pastor and author Tim Keller says, “the human heart is an idol making factory.” In other words, we can make anything into an idol. In our culture we often make success, sex, and acquiring more things - idols. Idolatry may not look bad from the outside looking in, but it is really in the heart. When we envy the possessions of others, or give more focus on our families and jobs, even serving than on loving God and being loved by Him, we can enter into idolatry. Our behavior may look good to others and it may even be the right thing, but the motives may be very different and destructive.

To those who remain faithful, Christ promises three things: hidden manna, a white stone and a new name.

Revelation 2:17 ¹⁷ **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.**

The hidden manna is Jesus himself, the ‘bread of life’ and symbolizes all the blessings of knowing Christ

John 6:48-51 ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ 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.”

The white stone probably alludes to the stones awarded to victors in Roman athletic contests, which gave them access to the awards banquet. In the same way, Christ promises those who overcome will enter an eternal victory celebration.

The new name is perhaps the most intimate reward here - it’s something just between us and God. Throughout Scripture, God has a habit of giving people new names as a way of granting them a new start, a new identity, and a new future. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel and Saul became Paul. While we do not yet know what our new name will be, we do know it will uniquely reflect his special love for us. God knows us better than anyone ever will, and he delights in this relationship. Whatever our name will be, we are assured of God’s eternal salvation and blessing.

Q: *What does it mean to be given a “New Name” by Christ himself?*

A new name is the admission into eternal life. And that name is actually the name of Jesus the Messiah. He is who has given us a way to enter into life eternal through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Our old idols are broken and King Jesus is the true and rightful ruler of our lives.