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# The Book of Revelation: Session 5

## Revelation 2:12-17

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**YouTube:** “Verse by Verse Teaching | Revelation 2:12-17 | Gary Hamrick”  
(taught on June 17, 2020, start at 14:40)

### Notes:

Pergamos/Pergamum: “The State Church”

- 312 AD (Christianity made the state religion) to 606 AD (beginning of the Roman Catholic Church)
- Became self-centred because of their wealth (paper), and their knowledge (huge library).
- Polytheistic (worshiped Zeus, Asclepius, the Emperor, etc.)
- “Gamos”: marriage → The church had married the world.

“The church has to be distinct in order to be able to hold out the gospel of Jesus Christ as something unique, desirable, and attainable to all who would believe and receive.”

**PERGAMOS** — THE STATE CHURCH (312-606 A.D.)

**JESUS' TITLE:** “Him who has the sharp, two-edged sword”

**COMMENDATION:** They have not renounced their faith despite the martyrdom of Antipas.

**COMPLAINT:** A “marriage” of the church and the world.  
[Doctrine of Balaam; Doctrine of Nicolaitans]

**REWARD:** Hidden manna; white stone with new name.

The Doctrine of Balaam: “The doctrine of immorality, seduction, and greed. ... Moral compromise.”

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans: (1) cheap grace or (2) “conquer the people”: “the clergy held power and dominance over the laity.”

White Stone: “You are accepted. God is saying “yes” to you.”



Altar of Zeus “the Saviour,” taken from Pergamum: Satan’s throne?

New Name: “You are going to be renamed by Jesus. And it really is a statement of His affection [for you].”

## Questions:

1. Read Revelation 2:12-13. We are not completely sure why Jesus says that Satan's "throne" is in Pergamum, why this city is "where Satan lives." Perhaps it is because Pergamum is the governing city of that region, where the proconsul ruled from. Perhaps it is because of the altar to Zeus, which looks like a throne (see picture on page 1). Perhaps it is because the snake god Asclepius was worshiped in Pergamum (Satan is described as a serpent). Perhaps it is some or all of the above. Marty Culy writes that, though we don't know for sure, "Pergamum is a place where Satan's work was particularly effective." This was not an easy place for Christians to live faithfully for God. Why do you think these Christians continued to live in Pergamum, and not move away? Why is Jesus' description of Himself in verse 12 so encouraging, in light of all this?
  
2. Read Revelation 2:14-16. Both the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans (notice "likewise" in v. 15) encouraged God's people to compromise, participating in sinful behaviour and then asking for forgiveness afterwards, if at all. Bonhoeffer, in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, calls this cheap grace: "Cheap grace is a preaching of forgiveness without required repentance... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross..." Grace is not cheap; it's expensive. It cost Jesus His life. How can we, modern-day believers, ensure that grace is always seen as precious, and never cheapened? Why is it a good reminder for us that He who has the sharp, double-edged sword will use His sword not just on the unrighteous, but also on His saints who have strayed from the truth?
  
3. Read Revelation 2:17-18:
  - a. *Hidden Manna*: In John 6:35, Jesus proclaims, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty." According to Marty Culy, in the past some Jewish rabbis referred to manna as "the bread of the Age-to-Come" (the Millennial Kingdom). ... It is likely, then, that being given manna is simply another way of saying that overcomers in Pergamum will partake of the blessings of the Age-to-Come. ... That blessing was not something they

could currently see, [thus] it was still “hidden”.” Culy concludes: “Though they (the overcomers in Pergamum) are hungry now, they will ultimately be nourished with food that fully satisfies. Indeed, it is those who abstain from the food of idols that was a regular part of life in the Roman Empire who will ultimately enjoy the sumptuous fare of the heavenly feast.” Read about this feast in [Isaiah 25:6-9](#). What stands out to you in the description of this feast?

- b. *White Stone with a New Name*: No one knows for sure what Jesus is talking about here. (1) Pastor Gary has one view. Marty Culy poses a few more theories. (2) White stones, in those days, “were used to indicate a vote of acquittal in the Greco-Roman world, ... [thus these overcomers were] *declared innocent* before God.” (3) Perhaps, “the white stone could simply be used to emphasize the *permanence* of the new name/identity/status (because it is not written on papyrus/parchment, which would degrade).” (4) One more theory: “Buildings at Pergamum tended to be made of very dark brown granite, with the numerous inscriptions being written on white marble that contrasted with the dark granite, ... [thus, and once again,] notions of both *permanence and visibility*.” (5) John MacArthur offers yet another perspective: “It seems best ... to understand the white stone in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests. A white stone, inscribed with the athlete’s name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.” Which view seems most plausible to you, and why?

4. Though we don’t for certain what the white stone represents, more certainty exists about the significance of the “new name” written on it. Marty Culy writes: “Within the very recent memory of readers at Pergamum, the centre of Roman power in Asia, was the dramatic events surrounding the founding of the Roman Empire. Octavius had almost miraculously restored order to the Roman republic. In order to honour Octavius, the Roman Senate took an old word that had primarily been used by priests and was not used of any other human being, and applied it to

Octavius. As the founder of the Roman Empire, he was given the title, “Augustus.” This “new name” served to remind all those who heard it of Octavius’ new and exalted status. For Christians in Pergamum, who were being tempted to enter into the “blessings” of the Roman Empire by simply burning a little incense to the emperor, Jesus tells them that *if they resist this temptation, they will be given a new name*, just as Octavius had been; *but their status would have been infinitely higher* than a puny Roman emperor could ever imagine, not to mention that *their new status would last forever*. So, Jesus implies with His promise, “Don’t trade your eternal inheritance for the cheap trinkets that the Roman Empire has to offer! Don’t compromise!”” In what ways are we, Jesus’ church, tempted to compromise? What must we keep in mind when faced with the opportunity to adopt the ways of this world?

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Want to dig deeper? Engage with this sermon by John MacArthur, taught in 1992:

- <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/66-8/pergamos-the-church-at-satans-throne>

**Quotes:**

Chuck Swindoll: “While Ephesus understood how to love the sinner and reject the sin, Pergamum chose to love the sinner and accept the sin! They compromised doctrine and morality for the sake of peace and unity in the church. They took Christian love and grace to an extreme.”

John MacArthur: ““Kainos” (“new”) does not mean new, in contrast to old (in time), but in in the sense of qualitatively different. The new name will serve as each believer’s admission pass into eternal glory. It will uniquely reflect God’s special love for and adoption of every true child of His.”

Marty Culy: “If Christians in Pergamum could remain faithful in the city where Satan was most active, then there is no environment in this world that would provide any excuse for a follower of Jesus to give in to the pressure to turn their back on Him. Jesus expected Christians in Pergamum to remain faithful; and He expects the same of Christians in all places at all times, whether they live where Satan’s activities are very subtle, or where they are far more obvious.”