Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion-it is a daily process whereby we grow to be more and more like Christ.
Billy Graham

REVELATION CHAPTER TWO - Verses 12-17
THE SEVEN CHURCHES - Part Three
A Look at the Church of Pergamum:
The Church Married to the World
Handout Five
Prayer Study 404
First Love Ministries of Perry, Georgia USA

PERGAMUM

12 Then to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Pergamum write: These are the words of Him Who has and wields the sharp two-edged sword:

This is another one of the seven names derived from Jesus' words and description in Chapter One of Revelation (Revelation 1:16). The sharp two-edged sword is the anointed Word, some suggest that its two-edges alludes to both the Old and New Testament. Barclay tells us that Roman governors were divided into two classes: those who had the right to carry swords and those who did not. Those who could carry swords thus had the power of death or life over all their subjects and could have anyone put to death on the spot at any time without a trial. Christ has the sharp two-edged sword. As Barclay puts it, "The power of Rome might be satanically powerful, but he power of the risen Lord is even greater."

13 I know where you live—a place where Satan sits enthroned. [Yet] you are clinging to and holding fast My name, and you did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed (martyred) in your midst—where Satan dwells.

The phrase where Satan sits is a very strong assertion since we know that Satan is not omnipresence. Scholars are not sure what this means. Barclay suggested that Pergamum was the center of Caesar-worship. Here people were required on pain of death to call Caesar and no other *Lord*. To a Christian there could be nothing more satanic than that.

We know almost nothing about Antipas except tradition tells us that he was shut up, because of his faith in Christ, inside a bronze bull which was then heated up. He spent the last minutes of his life as he burned to death singing songs of praise to Jesus.

All true Christians know that Satan is real. The word tells us that he is a murderer (John 8:44), a deceiver (Revelation 12:9 & 2nd Corinthians 11:3), a liar (John 8:44), a sinner (1st John 3:8), the adversary (1st Timothy 5:14 & 1st Peter 5:8); and the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). His domain is the vast demonic kingdom, whose hierarchy is described in Ephesians 6 and shown in Revelation 12:7-9, and the world system (1st John 5:19). But again, we must remember that he is in one place at one time and not omnipresent.

An interesting point to remember from history is that the occult and Satanic rituals and worship was started by Nimrod in Babylon. The Babylonian priests took it to Pergamum and from Pergamum to Rome.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: you have some people there who are clinging to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to set a trap and a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, [to entice them] to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols and to practice lewdness [giving themselves up to sexual vice].

Balaam was a Gentile prophet from Iraq or what we would call a soothsayer. King Balak was the king of the Moabites. The Moabites lived in Jordan along the banks of the Dead Sea and often were in conflict with the Israelites. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh to whom they made human sacrifices when times got tough. They also practiced sexual immorality. Balak wanted Balaam to come and curse the Israelites so that Balak could beat them in war. God twice tells Balaam not to go, and his donkey refuses to carry him and finally speaks to him and Balaam's eyes are open and sees that he would have been killed if he had gone forth (Numbers 22). Because of Balaam's insistence, God finally lets Balaam go to Balak, but refuses to let Balaam, in a series of meetings with Balak, curse Israel (Numbers 22-24). However, this 14th verse of Revelation 2 shows us that what Balaam in the end did was show Balak how to defeat Israel. He told Balak to send good looking Moabite girls to hang around the camp of the Israelites, enticing the men to fornicate and to marry the Moabite women who persuaded the Israelite men to walk in disobedience and corruption and thus remove the protective covering of the Lord over Israel.

The error of Balaam is to sacrifice eternal riches for temporal gain (Jude 11: *Woe to them!* [False Teachers] *For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*) (2nd Peter 2:15: *They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.)*

15 You also have some who in a similar way are clinging to the teaching of the Nicolaitans [those corrupters of the people] which thing I hate.

We have already discussed the teachings of Nicholas, the only Gentile deacon appointed by the twelve to serve tables and look after the widows. Basically, the Nicolaitans taught believers to live licentiously and do what they wanted since they were already saved. It sounds a lot like *hyper grace* to me. Notice that this is the second time the Lord has said He hates the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

16 Repent [then]! Or else I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The Lord, unlike some of His followers, always allows people a time to repent, but He only gives a certain amount of time before He comes with a sword. This sword and His mouth, of course, is the Word of God, which brings conviction and godly sorrow to true believers who are in error and a desire to turn from sin and come back to the love and peace of God.

17 He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). To him who overcomes (conquers), I will give to eat of the manna that is hidden, and I will give him a white stone with a new name engraved on the stone, which no one knows or understands except he who receives it.

This is one of the most puzzling scriptures of the whole Bible. The Lord is promising something to overcomers, but we are not sure what. Manna was collected six days each week (Exodus 16) and is called *food of heaven* and *bread of the mighty* (Psalm 78:24) and *bread of heaven* (Psalm 105:40). Jesus tells us in John 6 that He is the bread, which came down from heaven. Thus, the hidden manna is Jesus Christ Himself, and when we eat the hidden manna, we will have a deeper revelation of or be more intimately acquainted with Jesus. That's what I believe the first part of this verse means, although it could also mean that if we overcome the things of this world, we will feast in heaven on heavenly food or, in other words, enjoy the blessings of heaven.

It is the second part of this verse that is much more puzzling. Barclay suggests several possibilities:

1. There was a Jewish tradition that said that precious stones fell from heaven along with the manna. Perhaps the white stone means that God will give precious gifts to His people.
2. In that time colored stones were given as counters for doing calculations, sort of like our use of an abacus. This would mean that God counted Christians in the number of the faithful.

3. In ancient law courts, white and black stones were used for registering the verdicts of juries-black for guilty and white for not guilty. This could mean that Christians were found not guilty and acquitted in the sight of God because of the work of Jesus.
4. In the ancient world objects called *tesserae* were used. These were tablets made of wood or metal or stone and the possession of them granted certain privileges:

a. For the workers of a household the stones were given so that the workers could cash them in for free gifts. Christians have the right to the free gift of eternal life because of Jesus gave His life for us.
b. Victors in the public games were given these stones so that they could get in free at the games. Christians are victorious in the game of life and thus are given the right to share in the glory of the Lord.
c. If a gladiator survived a long career without being killed, he was allowed to retire in honor. These men were given these stones with the letters SP on it. SP stood for a man whose valor had been proven beyond any doubt. Christians are the gladiators or mighty warriors of Christ and are allowed to enter the rest, which Christ gives to them with honor.

5. In the ancient world a particularly happy day was called a white day, and a sad day was called a black day. Some of the ancient people kept large urns in which each day they tossed in a white or black stone according to what kind of day they had had. When these people died, these stones were counted to see if the person had lived a happy or sad life. Christians, through Jesus, can have a white stone each day because of the joy there is in knowing Him.
6. Many ancient people carried a stone with the name of a god on it. This was the god they called on in the time of trouble. Such an object was thought to be doubly effective if the bearer was the only one who knew what name was on his stone. Perhaps is saying that those Christians in Pergamum had previously participated in carrying these good luck charms, but now the Lord was going to give them a new stone with the name of the only true God on it.
7. The white stone may be Jesus' way of telling us that He is giving us a new self, cleansed of all earthly stains and glistening with the purity of heaven. The word used for *white* in this scripture is a white that glistens like snow and is used for white garments (3:5), white linen (19:8), and the great white throne (20:11). The word for *new* is *kainos,* which is new in the sense that nothing like it has ever been made before. In Revelation there is the New Jerusalem (3:12), the new song

(5:9), and the new heavens and the new earth (21:1). Also, God makes all things *kainos* or new. And as to a new name, this is a feature of the Old Testament saints, such as Abram who became Abraham and Jacob who became Israel. Barclay says of this interpretation, "It suggests that the white stone means that Jesus Christ gives to those who are true to Him a new self and that the new name means the new status of glory into which those who have been true to Christ will enter when this life ends and when the next begins."

These are just some of the possibilities. There is no clear- cut interpretation or even an interpretation that seems to have the most scholarly evidence to back it up.

In Pergamum, we see:

- **Name of the Church:** Church in Pergamum or Pergamos (Pergamum means *mixed* or *inappropriate marriage* from *per* meaning *mixed* or *objectionable* and *gamos*, which means *marriage*)-The city was called both Pergamum, the neuter form, and Pergamos, the feminine form, but Pergamum was more commonly used. Pergamum was built on a tall conical high from the top of which the Mediterranean, fifteen miles away, could be seen. It was considered by far the most famous city in Asia. Its culture far surpassed both Ephesus and Smyrna, and it was the home of a very large and famous library. Parchment, writing sheets made from the skin of animals, was invent there. Ephesus was the great political center of Asia, which at that time referred to what we know to be Turkey today. Smyrna was the great commercial center. Pergamos was the great religious center and was very pagan with two prominent pagan temples, among others, being Temple to Zeus and the Temple of Aesculapious, the god of healing, and the caduceus was the official emblem of the city. Pergamum is now know as Bergama in Turkey. It is a city of 42,000. In Biblical times it was a city of 200,000. The mythological father of the gods, Zeus, is said to have been born in Pergamum, and Greek culture was well-entrenched there.
- **Title of Jesus Christ:** He who has the sharp two-edge sword (This is symbolic of the Word of God by the Spirit.)
- **Encouragement:** The Lord commends the believers at Pergamum for their works. We are not saved by works, as the Jehovah Witnesses are taught, but that does not mean that works are not important and it does not mean that we won't be judged by our works. James, the Lord's half brother, says that *faith without works is dead* (James 2:17), and Paul clearly addresses the importance of works we build with on the foundation of salvation in 1st Corinthians 3:10-15: "*According to the grace of God which was given to me,*

as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation and another builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Not if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire." 2nd Corinthians 5:10 tells us, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (See also Romans 14:10-12).

- Jesus also praises them for holding fast to His name and not denying the Christian faith, even when their leader Antipas was put to death, because he was a Christian, by being enclosed inside a bronze bull which was burning, like an oven.

I think we sometimes speak His name without considering the power and holiness that is in that Name. Mark tells us in Mark 16:17a, "*And these signs shall follow them that believe: In My Name shall they cast out devils…"*

And John speaks of His Name throughout John 14:

And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My Name I will do it.

John 14:13

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:26

Until John 14, according to Andrew Murray, "the disciples had not asked in the Name of Christ, nor had He Himself ever used the expression…Here in His parting words, He repeats the word unceasingly in connection with those promises of unlimited meaning, *Whatsoever, Anything, What you will*, to teach them and us that His Name is our only, but also our all-sufficient plea. The power and the answer depend upon the right use of the name." The disciples at Pergamum knew the power of that Name.

The Name of the Lord:

1. **Let's joy come to the believer**-*But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them; let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee.* Psalm 5:11
2. **Is our defense against enemies**-*Through Thee will we push down our enemies; through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.* Psalm 44:5
3. **Gives the Lord's inheritance to the believer**-*For Thou, O God, hast heard my vows: Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name.* Psalm 61:5
4. **Causes us to dwell in Zion**-*For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah, that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it, and they that love His name shall dwell therein.* Psalm 69:35-36
5. **Purges us from our sin-***Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name, and deliver us and purge away our sins, for Thy name's sake.* Psalm 79:9
6. **Brings deliverance**-Psalm 79:9
7. **Expedites an answer from the Lord**-*Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name, They call upon the LORD, and He answered them.* Psalm 99:6
8. **Blesses those who come in His name**-*Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD*…Psalm 118:26a
9. **Helps us keep His law**-*I have remembered Thou name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept Thy law.* Psalm 119:55
10. **Brings the Lord's mercy**-*Look Thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those who love Thy name.* Psalm 119:132
11. **Helps the believer in times of trouble**-*Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.* Psalm 124:8
12. **Cast out demons**-*And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils…*Mark 16:17

Even thinking of His Name pleases the Lord:

- *Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD and that thought upon His name.* - Malachi 3:16 KJV
- *Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another, and the Lord listened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of*

those who reverently and worshipfully feared the Lord and who thought on His name. - Malachi 3:16 AMP

In the Old Testament, Jesus is referred to as Jehovah, the self-existent One who reveals Himself-*I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty, says the Lord.* (Revelation 1:8)

THE JEHOVAH COMPOUND NAMES

- **JEHOVAH-ELOHIM:** The self-existent One, the eternal being –Genesis 2:4-5
- **ADONAI-JEHOVAH:** The Lord, our Sovereign Master-Genesis 15:2,8
- **JEHOVAH-JIREH:** The Lord, our Provider-Genesis 22:8-14
- **JEHOVAH-ROPHE:** The Lord, our Healer-Exodus 15:26
- **JEHOVAH-NISSI:** The Lord, our Banner or Victor-Exodus 17:15
- **JEHOVAH-M'KADDESH:** The Lord, our Sanctifier-Leviticus 20:8
- **JEHOVAH-SHALOM:** The Lord, our Peace-Judges 6:24
- **JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU:** The Lord, our Righteousness-Jeremiah 23:6
- **JEHOVAH-SABAOTH:** The Lord of Hosts-1st Samuel 1:3
- **JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH:** The Lord, ever present-Ezekiel 48:35
- **JEHOVAH-ROHI:** The Lord, my Shepherd-Psalm 23:1

Remember that, as these names were given to physical Israel in the Old Testament, New Testament believers, even Gentiles who have been grafted in the vine, are spiritual Israel) see 1st Corinthians 10, Ephesians 2:12, Galatians 6:16, etc.), and ALL THAT JEHOVAH WAS TO THEM, JESUS IS TO US. I would encourage you to call on these names to fit your particular need. For example, pray to Him as Jehovah Rapha when you need a healing or Jehovah Jireh when you need provision. My personal favorite is Jehovah Shammah, The Lord is present, because I know that when He is here, everything else will be all right. Be like those from Pergamum who held fast to His Name, even though they lived in a place where Satan was enthroned (sounds sort of like Hollywood to me!).

I have disappointed myself many times because of my sin, but I think the biggest disappointment I could have in myself and in the people I minister to is if I or they deny the Christian faith when perilous times come, when it will be very difficult to be a Christian. Lord, please give us the strength to stand strong, even if we have to give our lives for our love for Jesus.

- **<u>Correction:</u>** The Lord condemns four things in Pergamum:
    - Holding the doctrine of Balaam
    - Eating things sacrificed to idols
    - Committing fornication
    - Hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes
- **<u>Consequences for not repenting:</u>** The Lord Himself will come quickly and fight against those who do not repent with the sword of His mouth. I assume this would be His speaking the Word of God, which would cause great conviction and sorrow.
- **<u>Reward for repenting:</u>** To him who overcomes, the Lord promises that He will give him hidden manna to eat and a white stone with a new name written on it. I believe the hidden manna represents special revelation from the Word of God. The stones were known in that time as victory stones. White stones represented pardon. If a judge gave a white stone, it meant the accused was pardoned; if he gave a black stone, it meant the accused was condemned. Also, winners in the public games were given white stones with their names etched in them. These stones entitled them to be supported for the rest of their lives at public expense.

<u>Final Comments</u>

You will find, I think, that it appears, as we go along, that those churches whom the Lord indicated were not doing so good thought they were doing great, and the ones whom the Lord indicated that He was pleased with often thought they were not doing good. They seemed surprised at his report card evaluation. So often our assessment of our own ministries and churches is at variance with what the Lord sees.

So far we have studied three churches:

Ephesus, which means *desired one;* Smyrna, which means *death;* and Pergamum, which means *mixed marriage* and Pergamum was a place where the church, with its tolerance of the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, was compromising.

Ephesus was the **Apostolic Church**, but it had become too busy with the business of the King to be able to have personal time for the King. They had become so jealous for the doctrine of the Church that they neglected their personal time and relationship with Jesus. They had wrong priorities. Jesus wants devotion, not just doctrine.

Smyrna was the **Persecuted Church** and one of only two of the seven churches that Jesus did not have to correct. They were the church waging war against Satanic opposition.

Pergamum, called the city of the serpent, was the **Church of Married to the World or Church of Compromise and False Doctrine**. They held fast to their faith and to the Name of Jesus but tolerated the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.