

We come to Rev. 2:12-17: one writes the following:

Food for Thought

One day I was trying to feed my 2-month-old daughter, Crystal. She cried loudly and frantically, pausing just to breathe. If she would only be still, I thought, then I could feed her. Looking down at her in my arms, I wondered how often I cry out to God, hungry for spiritual food--but am too frantic to allow Him to satisfy my needs.

Julie Collins, North Platte, NE. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."

I recently saw an article which stated that bad doctrine is what led to the apartheid in West Africa. This made me think it is wrong beliefs that have always plagued the church and caused much of our problems. We used Scripture, though wrongly, to justify slavery. On the other hand, many don't even care about Scriptures; therefore, we have our own problems for lack of study. Most of the Bible is fairly easy to understand, if we read it and read it and read it more. When we make the Bible part of us, the Holy Spirit will really guide our lives by His Own Words. Then there is the problem that happened with slavery, this happens when we read the Scriptures trying to make them say what we want them to say. That is called *Eisegesis*. We can make the Bible say the wrong things instead of letting the Bible speak.

But generally, the problems come because we don't know any better. We don't know any better than the wrong beliefs, the wrong doctrine that is taught.

As we look at the church in Pergamum we see that they held true to the faith, even in persecution, but they tolerated false teaching. They tolerated false doctrine.

Let's look at the good and the bad of Pergamum and apply this to our lives.

Theme: Pergamum stuck with Christ, but they tolerated false teaching.

Application: Stick with Christ and watch out for false teaching, know correct teaching.

Please turn to Revelation 2:12-17 and we will look at the verses as we talk about them:

- I. Learn: Let's learn about this church and then we will be encouraged and apply.
 - a. The church at Pergamum was an important city: The Life Application Study Bible says it very well:
 - b. The city of Pergamum was built on a hill 1,000 feet above the surrounding countryside, creating a natural fortress. It was a sophisticated city, a center of Greek culture and education, with a 200,000-volume library. But it was also the center of four cults, and it rivaled Ephesus in its worship of idols. The city's chief god was Asclepius, whose symbol

was a serpent and who was considered the god of healing. People came to Pergamum from all over the world to seek healing from this god.¹

- c. We get our word parchment from Pergamum.
- d. Just as a note, back then libraries were not for lending. You went to the library and you would read the scroll there and actually books, called, “Codex,” were not yet invented. The book form, codex, were likely invented by Christians. That is another way Christians might have changed the world.
- e. In verse 12, we, once again, see the idea of the two edged sword. It reads: *These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.*
- f. Then we come to verse 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.*
- g. Notice that Jesus knows, we’ll come back to that.
- h. The church in Pergamum is kissed before they are hit, isn’t that nice? In other words, they are encouraged before they are rebuked. They are commended because despite the area where they live, they have not renounced their faith. They stayed true to Jesus’ name. May we stay true to Jesus’ name.
- i. Pergamum was called the city where Satan had his throne.
- j. They were in heavy persecution, but still did not renounce the faith. We don’t know much about Antipas, but there are thoughts about him: "Antipas is said to have been a dentist and a physician, but the Aesculapiades suspected that he was propagating Christianity secretly and they accused him of disloyalty to Caesar. He was condemned to death and was shut up in a brazen (or copper) bull, which was then heated until it was red-hot."
- k. This idea of satan’s throne, it is thought that there was all this pagan worship, but there was also imperial worship and in Revelation satan’s throne, or the ways of satan’s are the ways of the Roman culture. So, to give into Satan’s ways means to surrender to the dominant ways of the culture. James 4:4 says that Friendship with the world is enmity against God.
- l. Verses 14-15 show that there are a few things against them: *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. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*
- m. This is where we come to teaching. Teaching matters. Doctrine matters. I don’t know if this is a literal teaching of Balaam or not. You can read about Balaam and Balak in Numbers chapters 22-25 and and 31. Balaam was told to curse Isarel by the local king Balak, but God would not let him and he only blessed them. However, in Numbers 25

¹ Tyndale House Publishers (2011-08-01). Life Application Study Bible NLT (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 161746-161749). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

we see that the Israelites intermarried with the Moabite women which was forbidden and we see that Balaam realized if you get them to intermarry then you can take down Israel internally (Deut. 7:3; Joshua 23:12; 2 Cor. 6:14). We receive some of this information from the Jewish Historian Josephus. This could be a metaphor for what is going on here. In this case some Christians are participating in worldly practices. The passage says that they are eating food sacrificed to idols and participating in sexual immorality. Paul dealt with this in Romans 14 and 1 Cor. chapters 8-10, but the problem is not the food. The problem is what goes on with the food. When the food was sacrificed there was pornographic sexual activities, temple prostitution and pagan, idol worship. It was not just the eating, it was the festival.

- n. The problem was that many times the trade guilds or business unions would have their own idol and to have a job meant participating in these trade guilds, but for the Christian participation in these guilds meant idolatry and sexual immorality.
- o. This means that part of the persecution meant that Christians could not work.
- p. This may be a definition of the Nicolaitans in verse 15.
- q. Verse 16: *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*
- r. We once again see the idea of the Word of God. The Word of God is Truth and it exposes and takes down the falsehood of the imperial and satanic systems.
- s. Verse 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.*
- t. We are not dumb, fake idols. We have ears, listen. The Holy Spirit is speaking.
- u. This idea of hidden manna likely is the idea of the golden pot of manna which was “laid up before God in the ark” (Ex. 16:23). It was believed that Jeremiah hid the ark, before the destruction of Jerusalem, where it would not be discovered till Israel was restored (**2 Macc. 2:5ff.**). Christ is the true bread from heaven (John 6:31–33, 48–51) and that may be the idea here.
- v. In Roman times they would vote with stones. A white stone was a positive ballot and black was negative. So, a white stone means that we overcome and we have entrance into Heaven.

II. Be encouraged

- a. As I look at this passage, I am greatly encouraged that Jesus knows.
- b. I see that Jesus knows that though they are in a city of satan they are holding fast to their faith (verse 13).
- c. Jesus knows about their persecution and the death of Antipas (verse 13).
- d. Jesus knows what we go through as well. Jesus knows if we are persecuted. He knows if we are making stands for our faith and how difficult it is to stand strong. He knows.
- e. I am also encouraged that Jesus gives opportunity to repent. Jesus gives second chances in this life.
- f. This opportunity to repent is for us as well. This instruction is for us. Be encouraged that Jesus has given us this instruction. (verse 16)

- g. Overcoming means eternal life (verse 17).
- III. Apply: Let's make some final applications.
- a. Stay true to Jesus' name (verse 13). I see hear that they are commended for holding fast to the faith. This is an application for us.
 - b. If you are with your family, your friends, or your co-workers, stay true to Jesus.
 - c. Staying true to Jesus means that you don't actually deny the faith.
 - d. Staying true to Jesus means that you don't fail to say anything about the faith. Sometimes we deny the faith by omitting to share when we need to.
 - e. Sometimes we deny the faith by not living as a Christian. In their case they would have denied the faith by going into the idols temple and participating. Are we participating in things like that? What about pornography? What about the sexually explicit and crude conversations? What about how we are entertained? I used to like the *Big Bang theory* as well, but that is likely the type of thing I shouldn't be entertained by. That type of conversation, that type of crudeness is what sent Jesus to the cross. Turn it off. Ask God to *Create in you a clean heart...* (Psalm 51:10) Don't deny Christ in commission or omission.
 - f. Teaching matters, doctrine matters (verses 14-15). Learn the Gospel, the true Gospel. Learn doctrine, read the Bible. They are essentially rebuked because of false doctrine. We can know false doctrine by learning true doctrine. Just read the Bible.
 - g. Twice have a reference to the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. This is in verse 12 and 16 (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).
 - h. Repent: if we are involved in these false beliefs or lacking the faith repent. Jesus has given us a second chance right here.

Conclusion:

I stand by my belief that false Doctrine, which means incorrect and improper beliefs, are what hurts the church and hurts people. When we have wrong beliefs we harm many in the name of a supposed religion, we harm ourselves. So, don't be afraid to get into the Bible and know the Truth.

It is a true and major part of Christianity that Jesus lived, died and rose again. That is doctrine, that is the correct teaching of the Bible about Jesus. But people have tried to thwart it. (1 John 4:2) This is why we must stand on the strong foundation of the Word of God. We must stand for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 1:2, 9)

Stand strong in your beliefs and in not denying Christ.

Prayer