

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Revelation 2:12-17**
“**Handling Heresy**”

If you were traveling through first-century Pergamos, I believe you would notice the spiritually dark landscape and feel the chill of evil; as we will see, this city was Satan's headquarters at the time. The church was like a flickering candle on a very dark night, and they were under intense persecution. But as you visited the church and sat through a service, I believe you would see that, overall, the members had a basic faithfulness to Jesus Christ; but you would also notice, sadly, that the surrounding darkness had crept into the church in the forms of loose living, poor standards, and perhaps moral relativism. You would also hear some evil doctrine being preached, which God hated.

How can we handle heresy in a godly way, keeping it out of the church so that we can be pure? God has given us an effective weapon—the Word of God—and I believe this passage shows us several aspects of this “sword,” which if we learn, will help us to effectively fight false teaching.

1: The sharpness of the Word (v12-13). Jesus, and He alone, has this **sharp sword**. I'm sure you've personally felt the power of the convicting Word of God. We can also see it in the reactions of others, both good and bad (cf. Acts 2:37; 7:54). It cuts against sin so strongly that all who come into contact with it must either submit or fight against it. Is your sword old and rusty, so to speak—sitting on the shelf, never used anymore? Or are you constantly using it? On the other hand, maybe it's polished, kept in a prominent place, and studied thoroughly; yet it doesn't have any “wear and tear” from actual daily use in your practical life as it should. This sword has **two edges**, prospering wherever it turns; it can fall downward and prosper, as when Jesus Christ died on the cross and defeated sin; then it can prosper when it comes back up, as when Jesus Christ rose from the dead; both directions have a sharp edge.

(v13) Jesus knows our works, and where we dwell. He knows the immorality of your city. He knows the vulgarity or profanity of your roommate or family members. He knows the difficulty you may have with your neighbor. And though Jesus may bring to your attention the parts of your life that need work, He is not ignoring the difficult situation into which you have been placed. This poor church dwelt **where Satan's seat is**. If you lived near a police station, you would see patrol cars constantly coming in and out, up and down the streets, and you would feel safer. Here, however, demons were surely frequenting this city, constantly going in and coming out, as it was Satan's headquarters. The spiritual darkness must have been oppressive.

Yet amazingly, this church **held fast Jesus' name**; we can let money and family and friends go, but never, ever the name of Jesus. And they didn't **deny Jesus' faith** (cf. Matthew 10:32-33). And who is **Antipas**? It seems that we are not entirely sure, though some people have guesses. Even if *we* forget martyrs and godly saints, the sweet thing is that *Jesus* never forgets; He has written down every sacrifice you have made for Him, and He will reward you (Matthew 10:42).

2: The holiness of the Word (v14). Notice the wording of the problem: “**thou hast there them**” which were heretics. In other words, Jesus isn't addressing the heretics; He's addressing the leader for simply *permitting* them to remain. Jesus is, at this point, silent to the false teachers (I Samuel 15:35). We are held accountable for the actions of others when we are complicit, so we need to be more careful than ever. I believe **Balaam** introduced the doctrine of loose standards and sinful living, placing a **stumblingblock** of fornication before the Israelites. Satan hides stumblingblocks of sin in, for example, bottles of beer colorfully disguised to look like fruit drinks; he places stumblingblocks in TV commercials for otherwise wholesome movies or shows. Scoffing at holiness and denying that these stumblingblocks exist simply increase your chances of falling for them.

Balaam introduces his doctrine in two stages; first, he urges people to **eat things sacrificed to idols**. In other words, he says, “Get out of

your comfort zone! There's no verse against this, right?" The strategy is to first lead people into the "gray zone." Once they're in there, the next step is to lead them **to commit fornication**, into unquestionably wrong things. The danger with the gray zone is that when you're in it, the zone of obvious sin now seems like the gray zone, and what you *used* to believe now seems like legalism; the boundaries are ever shifting. Instead of trying to justify something by asking, "What's *wrong* with this?", perhaps the better question to ask is, "What's *right* with this?"

The specific sin mentioned here is fornication, something especially pushed by Hollywood. Have you let your guard down by accepting the false modern idea that "you can't tell me what's wrong for me to watch"? Satan is an expert trickster; and sadly, the church has been largely duped and weakened in this area, and it's time to "clean house," so to speak. Are you married and flirtatious? Do you dress immodestly, effeminately, or worldly? Are you being a Balaam, leading others astray with your social media "likes" and shows that you endorse?

3: The truth of the Word (v15-16). It may be unpopular, but **doctrine** is actually important (Matthew 16:12). Stick with what the Bible plainly and simply teaches. God actually **hates** certain doctrine, as should we (Romans 12:9). Are you letting evil doctrine from persuasive false teachers affect your attitudes and lifestyle? It's easy to think that doctrine is only intellectual and not very important. However, technically, so are geometry and navigation and the study of the stars; yet to a ship lost at sea, having the correct "doctrine" or beliefs about these studies can mean the difference between life and death. Similarly, those who accept false doctrine are affected by it, whether they realize it or not.

(v16) Repentance is something we must consistently do, even after salvation; churches need it as a whole, and we continue needing it individually as well. And if we have been tolerant or accepting of false teachers and immorality, we should repent as church members, even if we were not pushing those things. If we don't repent, how embarrassing for **Jesus to come** and take care of it with the **sword of His mouth**, having to do Himself what He asked us to do. And if you're the one promoting false

doctrine, Jesus gives you fair warning to be prepared to **fight** Him; and no matter how smart you think you are, Jesus' arguments will expose the underlying sinful heart behind the false doctrine as well as the deceit covering it up, and it will be made very plain to everyone how wrong the doctrine really is.

4: The study of the Word (v17a). If we **have an ear**, then we should absorb what God has written to us; or if we have an eye, we should read it. Having immorality and heresy in the church blinds our eyes to God's hidden manna; we must **overcome** through God's strength. God has **hidden** pearls that He reveals only to His Christians, and yet more treasures, I believe, that He reveals only to the extent we walk with Him. Reading the Bible should be as daily as the eating of **manna** by the Israelites; it showed up in the morning, before the day grew hot, and it bred worms when they tried gather a bunch at one time and hoard it. We cannot get into God's Word just once a week and expect that to be sufficient; we must do it daily (Matthew 6:11). If you are physically able, read and meditate on it; and I believe that, as with the manna, the morning is the best time (Exodus 16:21).

5: The specialness of the Word (v17b). The **white stone** may represent purity and durability; and our new names will be written **in the stone**, perhaps engraved, or maybe even inside a translucent stone, like one of those glass blocks that has text etched inside it. When we get a new home in Heaven, we will also get a **new name** which will be one-of-a-kind and unique, just as our relationship with Jesus Christ is personal.

How about you—do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Be careful; some false doctrines are heavily intellectual, and I've known people who know the Bible really well yet do not have much of a genuine personal relationship with Jesus Christ, if any.

To avoid heresy, remember how sharp and powerful God's Word is. Live a life of holiness, and don't get swept away into the immoral doctrines of this age. Don't compromise on the absolute truth of the Bible. Study it. And above all, maintain a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Doing so will help you to learn from Pergamos and to correctly handle heresy.