

Intro: One of the common buzzwords in our day is the word "toleration."
quote by Tozer

What does the Lord think of a church that tolerates sin? We find out in Revelation 2, in the third of Jesus' letters to the seven churches.

Proposition: In Revelation 2:12-17, Christ called on a church that tolerated sin to reflect on three truths.

- I. Christ revealed Himself (12).
- II. Christ commended the church (13).
 1. He knew about their circumstances.
 2. He knew about their commitment.
 3. He knew about their conflict.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary observes, "The sword is a symbolic representation of the Word of God's twofold ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world for its sin. It was the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death."

Warren Wiersbe points out (574), "Satan had not been able to destroy them by coming as the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), but he was making inroads as the deceiving serpent." Remember, Satan's #1 tool is deceit. He loves to sugar-coat his deadly intent with a religious veneer. The strategy is a simple, though subtle one, that's been around for centuries. It involves compromise.

He used this scheme in Balaam's day. Who was he? We read about him in Numbers 22-25.

Balaam was the one who counseled King Balak to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship (see: Num 22-25; 31:15-16).

What does that story have to do with what was happening in Pergamum? The parallels are close. A group of church members were spouting their opinions, "Get with the times! What's wrong with cooperating with Rome? What harm can there be in burning a tiny pinch of incense to Caesar? Think of the good that will come of it. They'll applaud us instead of killing us. We can win their favor, and maybe win them to Christ. What's the problem with a little give-and-take?"

As believers in the 20th century, we face the same temptation. Every day we must decide whether we're going to yield to ungodly compromise, which leads to personal advancement, or stay unyieldingly true to Christ, and suffer the consequences.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

"Food sacrificed to idols" can refer to one of two things. First, it could be meat that was purchased in the public market, meat that had previously been sacrificed in a pagan temple and then was sold to the market (that's what Paul deals with in 1 Cor 8). More likely, it refers to feasts conducted in the temples in honor of various gods.

What would you do if, while living in 1st century Pergamum, you received the following invitation from your unsaved neighbor? "Dear Joe, I request the honor of your presence at a banquet--filet mignon will be served--to be held next Tuesday, in honor of Asclepius, the serpent-god of healing, to be held at the temple of Asclepius. RSVP." Would you "offend" your neighbor and decline, or would you go? Apparently, some members of the church at Pergamum chose to go.

There is no question that we have seen a decline in morals in our society. Even so, it's hard for us to imagine the moral condition in the Roman world. If we think that religion and morality went hand in hand in that day, we're wrong. In the ancient world, immoral behavior was not only practiced, but promoted, and that in the name of religion. For instance (see Ladd, 48), not far from Antioch where the first gentile church arose was a beautiful get-away called Daphne. It was a favorite retreat oasis for the wealthy citizens of Antioch, and even Roman governors visited the place. There was a thick grove of cypresses and bay trees, and the landscape was adorned with beautiful fountains. This was no mere Shawnee state lodge, however, for Daphne contained a temple dedicated to the Roman gods Apollo and Diana. More notably, Daphne was famous for the presence of temple prostitutes. The Romans endorsed base, immoral practices in the name of relaxation and religion. Immorality was accepted. It was "normal" to be lax. The average person on the street saw absolutely nothing wrong with indulging in sexual practices outside of marriage.

Please don't miss the thrust of v 16. The WHOLE church is called on to repent. Not just the ones who taught false doctrine. Not just the ones who practiced immoral behavior, but also the rest in the church who tolerated them. They needed to repent, too.

Notice the contrast here. The Nicolaitans ate food sacrificed to idols and were doomed to be judged by the sword of the Lord. Those who overcome the world will be entitled to eat the hidden manna, the bread of heaven.

What is a "white stone"? In the ancient world, white stones were given for a variety of reasons, two of which are significant here. First, jurors used to give a stone to a person at the end of his trial--a white stone indicating acquittal, a black one guilt. Second, white stones were used as tickets of admission to public festivals. This symbolism fits the context of Jesus' words to the church at Pergamum. To gain entrance

to the greatest of all public festivals, the Messianic feast, one must have a white stone.
The white stone belongs only to those who are overcomers.