

LEADERS LEAD

“Players: Verbal leadership doesn’t always have to be rah-rah. If you can talk, then you can be a verbal leader. Any athlete can ENCOURAGE, INFORM, or REMIND their teammates of the standards, expectations, and goals they have.” This quote from a coach sticks out as we’ve walked through the different letters in *Revelation*.

In the first two letters, Christ addressed strengths including doctrinal vigilance, hard work, and faithfulness through suffering. He also pointed out the Ephesian church’s weakness—they lost their first love. The Lord never mentioned any weaknesses among believers in Smyrna. The next stop on this ancient mail route is Pergamum or “Pergamos.”

In this letter, the Lord commended their strengths even under very dire circumstances. The Lord also confronted their weaknesses. As we’re learning, the Lord calls believers to live at a high standard. Sometimes after hearing what the Lord says, we need to encourage, inform, and remind one another to live up to the standards, expectations, and goals shared by all those on God’s Team.

REVELATION 2:12–17

¹² “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

¹³ “‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Pergamum was home to between 120,000 and 200,000 inhabitants. It was a large royal city exercising the authority of Rome to rule with legal and military might.

Additionally, Pergamum was well known for entertainment, literature, academics, and medicine. It housed one of the ancient world's greatest libraries as well as temples dedicated to Greek gods and Roman ceasars. Geographically, its immense rock acropolis rose up symbolizing the strength and power of this mighty city.

DISCUSSION

On a scale of 1-10 how well do you think you handle constructive criticism? Can you give an example?

ICEBREAKER

1. Describe the one who wrote the letter. (12b)

2. What victory did Christ commend? (13)

3. What weaknesses did Christ mention? (14-15)

4. What rewards does Christ promise for obedience? (17b)

OBSERVATION

5. In your opinion, summarize their biggest problem(s) versus what Christ values. (14-15)

INTERPRETATION

6. Are there any areas of compromise in your life?

APPLICATION

7. Who might be able to help you overcome and conquer?

Being a Christian isn't about sinless perfection, it's about faithful obedience. Sin breaks our fellowship with God. If you have been struggling in your walk, talk to your coach today.

STUDY NOTES

NO COMPROMISE

Legendary college football coach, “Bear” Bryant, said, “It’s not the will to win that matters—everyone has that. It’s the will to *prepare* to win that matters.” Preparation will not guarantee a victory, but a lack of preparation often leads to limited success. There are no shortcuts to a winning program. The decision to win when the game gets tough, when a championship is on the line, isn’t decided in the moment. It’s decided in every uncut corner, in every ounce of preparation, and in every determination that “I will not compromise.”

As we open our letter for today, John recorded Christ’s words to a compromising church. Like most schools, they had an impressive trophy case of past victories. However, a program that consistently wins in the present can’t merely celebrate what they accomplished in the past. Christ issued a strong warning for those that *compromised*, but an amazing promise for those that *conquered*.

CHRIST’S GLORY IS REVEALED BY OUR DOCTRINE

John recorded Christ’s words delivered *to the angel* who would deliver the message to *the church in Pergamum*.

Christ identified himself as the author, “*The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.*” Christ’s reference to a “sword” carried multiple meanings. *Physically*, it refers to the sharp-pointed, double-edged, cut-and-thrust sword of a Roman soldier. However, *symbolically*, it refers to the power of Rome behind the one possessing what they called *ius gladii*, the “right of the sword.” As the seat of Roman power in the province of Asia, Pergamum’s chief Roman administrator possessed *ius gladii*. His judgments brought life or death. By identifying himself in this way, Christ reminded them that *his* word held *ultimate* power and that he alone had authority in heaven and on earth.

Again, we see that nothing escapes Christ’s knowledge, “*I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*” I know what you’re thinking, “I thought my neighborhood was bad.” Satan didn’t have a literal throne in Pergamum, but he does have power on earth (see Ephesians 2:2) under God’s limitations. Satan isn’t just a *symbol* for evil, he is an actual *living* Adversary to God’s Kingdom and God’s people. Even with Satan’s influential stronghold

in Pergamum, the Lord honored the church for holding fast even in the face of martyrdom.

However, Christ said, “*But I have a few things against you.*” In the Old Testament, *Balaam* was hired to curse Israel, but failed. Instead, he lured the *sons of Israel* into *sexual immorality* and idolatry. Additionally, some people followed the *teaching of the Nicolaitans*, which allowed for indulging in temple prostitution. Both groups attempted to fold the temporal “benefits” of cultural paganism into their Christian practice.

OUR DOCTRINE MAY REQUIRE OCCASIONAL CHALLENGE

Christ warned them, “*Repent. If not, I will come to you soon [suddenly] and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*” “Soon” doesn’t refer to a time-frame, it refers to the unexpectedness of Christ’s arrival. In other words, don’t wait to turn away from your sin. Authority far greater than Rome’s will arrive with the power of eternal life and death.

Just like the previous letters, all *churches* should heed this warning. That means we all need to hear this. For *the one who conquers*, Christ promises great reward—*hidden manna* (provision personified in Christ), *a white stone* (legal pardon), and *a new name* (entrance into a new life).

We often think of idols as little figurines to which people pray. Instead, we need to think of idolatry as the things we love more than God. These are the things for which we would compromise our faithful obedience. Your sexual immorality, for instance, may not be inspired by Balaam or the Nicolaitans. However, we see believers frequently excusing their own sin in this area as if we can have a fellowship with Christ *and* sinful gratification.

Like the church at Pergamum, many people live however they want and try to bring Christ along. They sing *Jesus Take the Wheel* when they get in trouble or forget to study for an exam. Instead, we must face the reality that what we believe is wrong.

Doctrine is another word for “teaching.” Essentially, it refers to the things people believe or teach about Christ and Christianity. Weak doctrine leads to a compromised faith that allows people to justify anything. Ultimately, God’s Word is our source for right teaching. Where it speaks, it takes ultimate authority.

Believers must study doctrine like preparation for a game. When confrontation comes or when the storms of life blow, what you believe about who God is and who you are in him matters. Doctrine matters. We must prepare now, so that we might not compromise then.