

A poster for a church event. The background is a vibrant purple and red color with a faint, stylized illustration of a human brain. The text is white and blue.

Sooke Baptist Church
Sunday, October 25, 2020, 9am and 11am
7110 West Coast Road
also on Facebook Live Stream and YouTube

MIND
THE BATTLE FOR YOUR
Revelation 2:12-17

A poster for a church event. The background is a photograph of a street scene with a brick sidewalk and a road. The text is white.

Sooke Baptist Church
Sunday, October 25, 2020, 9am and 11am
7110 West Coast Road

Coffee/question:
In what aspect(s) of your life are you tempted to cut corners?

Why are we enticed? Why is it attractive to us to cut corners?

A magnifying glass is held over a white surface. The text 'REVELATION 2:12-17' is visible through the lens.

REVELATION
2:12-17

2:12 – These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

Who is Jesus revealing himself to be? A warrior.
But he is unlike any other warrior we have ever heard of.

We understand from Psalm 110:2 that upon his return to heave Jesus was told by the Father, **“to rule in the midst of his enemies.”**

This quantifies for the followers of Jesus that our Savior is a Warrior King.

But there is something else Jesus wanted to communicate to his church, by identifying himself as he did – as the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

When the Revelation was written, Pergamum, was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. The governor in that city had what was known as "the right of the sword." He had Rome's authority to decide which prisoners or accused persons would live or die (including Christians who refused to honor the "divine" Caesar). <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/where-satan-lives-article>

Do you see what Jesus was doing?

He reminded his church that ultimately, it was he, and not the governor who has power over life and death....even though the governor had put Antipas to death.

As it had been the will of the Father that Jesus die... so it can be the will of Jesus that some of his followers die for him and for his glory!

2:13 – I know where you live...

This repeated phrase in each message – I know - made me think of Psalm 139.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

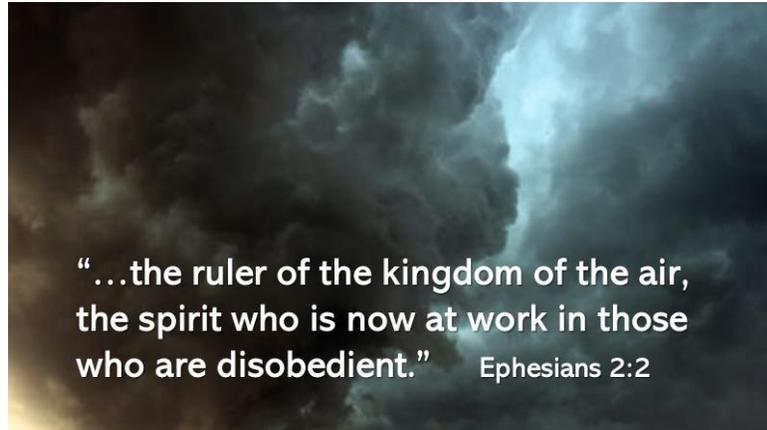
Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? **Psalm 139:2-7**

Like God the Father, Jesus' knowledge of all things is comprehensive and thorough... and includes all things concerning his followers. This reality leaves the people of God in awe – to think that God knows us... in detail...even to how many hairs are on our heads.

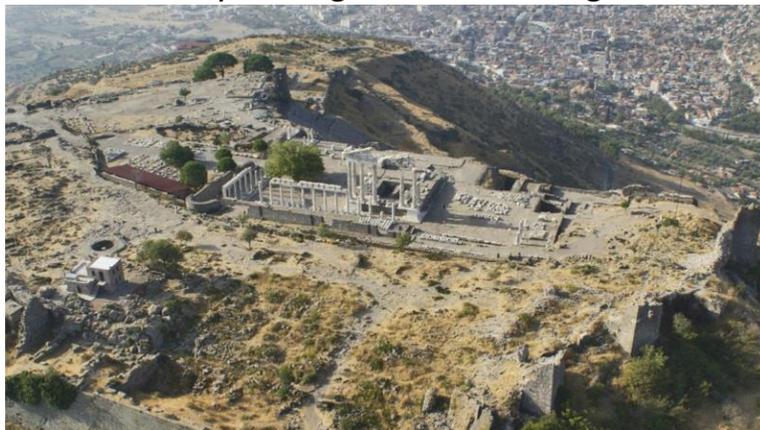
I know where you live - where Satan has his throne.

Ephesians 2:2 identified Satan as...

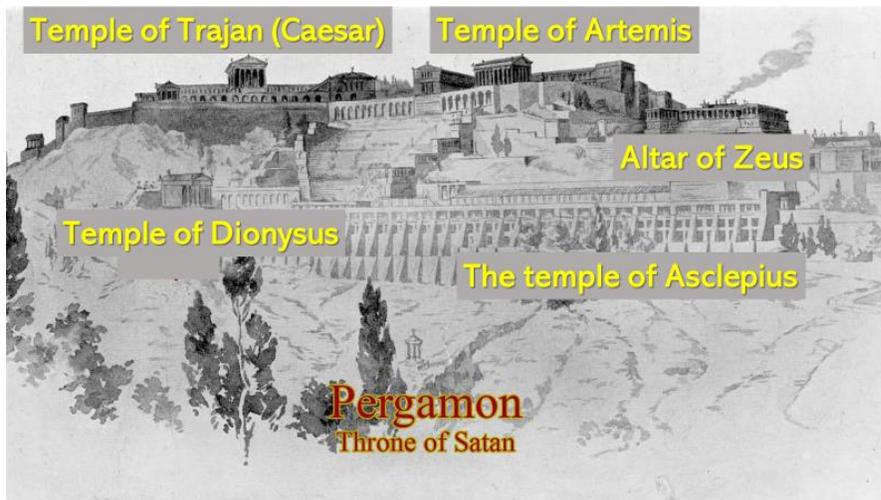


What was it about Pergamum and its people that so welcomed Satan, that he chose to place his throne of operations there; that it became a stronghold of his?

Behind the city of Pergamum was a huge conical hill.



On top of this hill stood a number of temples and altars.



- Pergamum was a major center of Caesar worship – the temple of Trajan
- It had a temple to Artemis (remember Ephesus?) and Dionysus.
- The city boasted an imposing temple to Zeus the Savior, with an immense altar that could be seen by all in the city below. Krodel, p.113.
- Another temple was dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, who was symbolized by a serpent. Claims of miraculous healing drew pilgrims from all over the empire. Krodel, p.114.

Darryl Johnson says...

“The one Jesus called ‘the deceiver’ had the mind of a whole city; from politics to medicine to religion.”

Darryl Johnson



p.78.

This is why Satan chose Pergamum to be his capital city. Its environment nurtured a people who were aligned with him and easily susceptible to his manipulation.

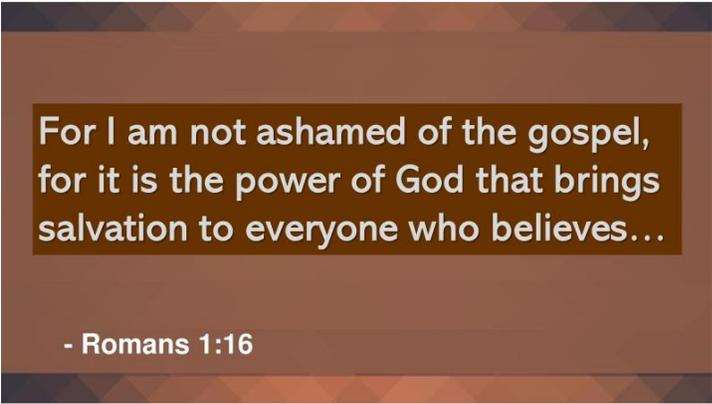
This is why the culture of Pergamum was so hostile to the gospel of Jesus.

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.

It was not the intent of Jesus to frighten his church; to leave his followers in a terrified awe that Satan lived in their city.

Jesus the Warrior King and Savior was with them; he walked among them. He held the keys of death and Hades. He had died and was now alive forevermore.

The church in Pergamum was a testimony...



For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God that brings
salvation to everyone who believes...

- Romans 1:16

... to the power of the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. There were no exception clauses with that declaration. Pergamum was a testimony of this.

What does it mean... to remain true to Jesus' name?

I believe the statement made by the apostles when they were arrested a second time for preaching Jesus helps us understand.

When asked why they had ignored the order of the Sanhedrin to not speak of Jesus, they said...

**“We must obey God
rather than
human beings.”**

Acts 5:29

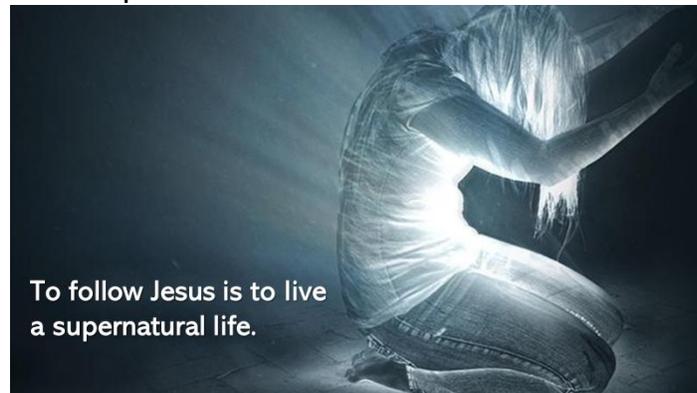
Their response impresses upon us that it is in the spiritual DNA of the follower of Jesus who has been born of the Spirit... to obey God.

It is natural for the follower of Jesus to obey God and unnatural to disobey.

This is why there is such conflict within when a follower says yes to sin.

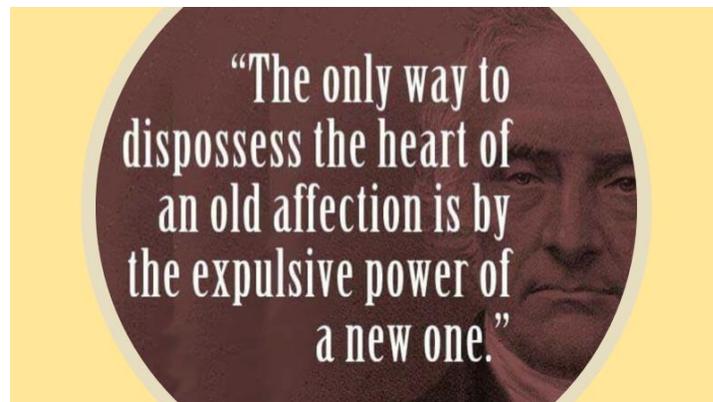
But Jesus' followers are not just born of the Spirit.

God's Spirit comes to make his home in us...in order to empower us to obey.



What does it mean... to not renounce our faith?

Thomas Chalmers wrote ...



God loved us when we were spiritually dead.

God loved us ...“while we were yet sinners...”

God loved us even though we were his enemies.

God loved us even though we did not love him... but loved worthless things that made us worthless.

2 Kings 17:14-15

But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God. ¹⁵ They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. **They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless.**

The church in Pergamum did not renounce their faith... because of love. They had been gripped by the love of God; God had awakened them, they had heard the gospel and believed it and we were saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

This was why, instead of renouncing Jesus, they willingly gave everything else up... to not lose Jesus.

Remember the response of the disciples in John 6 when Jesus asked, “Do you too want to leave?”

Peter answered: To whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life!

2:14-15 - 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.

Ephesians 4:15 tells the believer to...



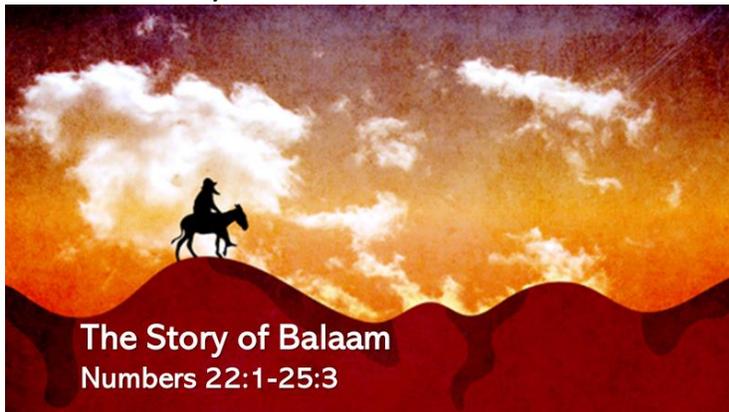
Why do we do this? Because... this is what Jesus did...this is what Jesus does... with his church.

The one who has the sharp, double-edged sword speaks the truth to his people.

Let's be clear on what the issue was in Pergamum.

"There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam."

Balaam's story is told in Numbers 22:1-25:3.



Balak the king, sent the elders of Moab to Balaam, who was a prophet. The elders asked Balaam to come with them and to curse the nation of Israel, who was migrating through their land.

There is so much more in the story to consider.

But the short of it is this – seven different times, instead of cursing, Balaam blessed the nation of Israel and foretold disaster that would come upon Moab and the nations that surrounded them.

As you might imagine, King Balak angrily ordered Balaam to go home. But Balaam wanted the money.

He couldn't curse Israel.

But he advised Balak of something that could be done that would achieve a similar result.

Look at Numbers 31:16.



A honey trap...an enticement was set for the men of Israel.

Some of the Moabite women invited them to attend a worship service... to their god...that involved a feast of meat sacrificed to Baal, followed by ritual sex.

The men who participated broke their marriage vows.

But their actions brought about something even more devastating.



Because of them and through their actions the nation of Israel committed... spiritual adultery.... with Baal, the god of Moab.

In the spiritual realm, they attached themselves to Baal.

Listen to what Paul told the church at Corinth in his second letter....

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?

Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?

Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

For we are the temple of the living God.

As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

¹⁷ Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

¹⁸ And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

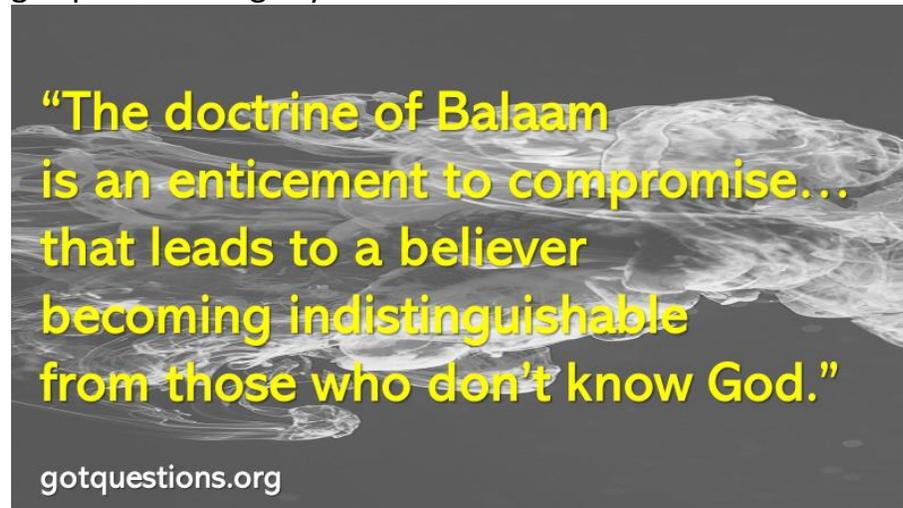
⁷ Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

...do not be yoked

...be separate

...purify yourselves

gotquestions.org says...



<https://www.gotquestions.org/doctrine-of-Balaam.html>

This was what happened with some... in the church at Pergamum.



Like a chameleon they were losing their distinctiveness as followers of Jesus. In the words of 2 Corinthians 7:1 their body and soul were being contaminated.

2:15 - Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

We don't know much of the Nicolaitans.

But the usage of the word 'likewise,' suggests that their teachings were similar to that of Balaam's.

We need to ask how did this teaching of Balaam and Nicolaus get into the church; and take root in the lives of some believers?

Darryl Johnson says...

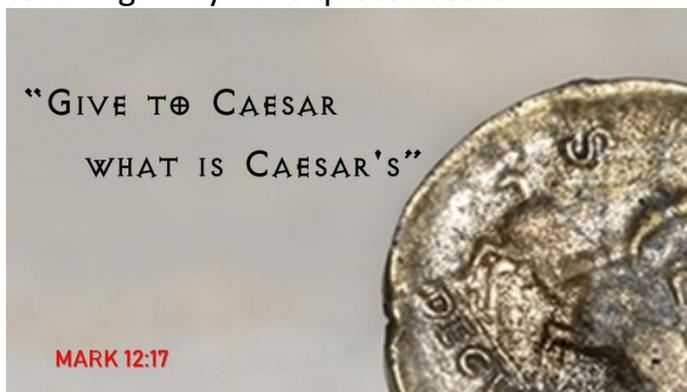
**“It was wrapped in the language
of the gospel.”**

Darryl Johnson

p.85.

It sounded reasonable.

Regarding the worship of the emperor, those who held to these teachings may have quoted Jesus...



or referenced Peter...

1 Peter 2:13-15

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

But the paying of taxes and the giving of respect are different than worship.

Regarding the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, they may have cited Paul...

Romans 14:2-6

² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? ... Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

"It's only meat!"

But the Scripture is clear when it warns, 1 Corinthians 10:20, that **"the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons"**....and to participate in such temple feasts was ...**"to be participants with demons."**

These feasts actually involved an intermingling on the part of the participants with fallen angels who were present though unseen.

Satan's strategy was to **yoke the souls** of participants with a demon.

Regarding the participation in sexual immorality that was a part of feasting in a god's temple, they may have appealed to the grace of God that Paul wrote of in his letter to the Roman church, 5:21:

**"Where sin increased,
grace super-abounded."**

Romans 5:21

The gospel of Jesus introduced into the world of that day new virtues of which chastity was one. DJ, p.81.

For people of that day, sex was viewed as nothing more than a physical act. But that was not what God intended... nor what he had created sex to be. Sex is a gift, so precious, and so powerful that only within the confines of marriage is it to be... and can it be... rightly enjoyed.

Listen to what Tom Wright says:

Sexual morality isn't, as it is so often portrayed, a matter of a few ancient rules clung to by some rather conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on.

It is, rather, a matter of the call of the Creator God to faithful man-plus-woman marriage, reflecting the complementarity of heaven and earth themselves.

That is the theme which finally emerges in the great scene at the end of the Revelation.

Married love between a man and a woman is a signpost to the faithfulness of the Creator to his creation.

The reason sexual immorality is so often coupled with idolatry, as in Pergamum, is because such behavior points to different gods – the gods of blood, soil, race, power and wealth.

It is a toxic mixture, and the Christian has no business getting involved with it.

Revelation, p.21-22.

It is true... that the grace of God is greater than our sin.
It is true... that the grace of God forgives us our sin and removes its guilt from us.
But it is also true.... that the grace of God transforms us, in the words of 2 Corinthians 3:18, "with ever-increasing glory."

The response of Jesus, which was unequivocally clear and blunt, leaves no doubt – Balaam's teaching was not of God.
Jesus said, Repent!

In the words of 2 Corinthians 6-7, Jesus' followers....

... are to be a distinct people.

... are called to come out from among them.

... are called to touch no unclean thing

...are to be holy as Jesus is holy.

The standard of our lifestyle is Jesus, not the culture in which we live.

The call to repentance was not just directed at those who held to Balaam and Nicolaus' teaching.

It was given to the church.

This message from Jesus reminds us that we live out our faith in community. We have a responsibility to watch out for one another; to speak the truth in love to one another; to be discerning together in faithfully holding on to the gospel.

The fact that error had taken root in the church, was not just an issue for those whose hearts and minds had been beguiled, but for the entire church.

This is why the church needed to repent.

They had either not been discerning or were too busy to deal with the error.

The church needed to remember who they belonged to... and return to a posture of vigilance in guarding one another's faith... and faithfully standing with Jesus.

And if they didn't repent? Jesus said...

2:16a – Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Because he loves his people, God will discipline his own.

As Hebrews 12:10 says, "God disciplines us for our good, in order that we share in his holiness."

Jl Packer says it is grace that punctures our pride and convinces us of our desperate need of God.

This was what Jesus lovingly did in Pergamum.

It is what he has done since then to the present.

Jesus uses...as often as is needed.... the word of God...this was the sword in his mouth... to convict us; to break our pride; to humble us; to turn us around... because he is committed to finishing in his followers what he began – he wants us to share in his holiness...he desires that we live the life that is truly life.

To experience the discipline of God is to be assured that one belongs to God.

2:17 – 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.

Many different expositors commented... that this promise made by Jesus is challenging to interpret.

Let's take it as simply as we can.

Hidden manna?

When the nation of Israel journeyed from Egypt to Canaan, through a desert, God fed his people with manna, bread that came from heaven.

Is not Jesus promising his church that as they live in a spiritual desert, a city occupied by Satan, that he, in a way not seen by those in their city... will feed their souls?

Is this not what we act out when we come to the Lord's table?

Jesus is the living bread.

His life nourishes ours...now... and in the age to come.

A white stone with a new name?

White in the Revelation is the color for purity.

New name speaks to identity.

I would put before you that as one is born of the Spirit... and gives evidence of the new life within them by cooperating with God's Spirit in his transformation of them from glory to glory... that a new identity is being forged within.

Not an identity that had been defined by sin, but an identity shaped by grace.

Who we will be is not yet seen.
But this we know we shall be like him.
And that which was of sin will be forever removed and gone.
And we will be...righteous...in our body, soul and spirit!

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.