

Revelation 2:16-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-2/revelation-216-17/>

Jesus calls the church in Pergamum to repentance and urges them to hear the truth so that they might receive the blessing of intimacy with Him.

Jesus has commended the church at Pergamum for holding fast His name and not denying their faith in the face of persecution. But He has also chastised them for accommodating false teachers/leaders. The basic message of the exhortation to Pergamum seems to be that if the church in Pergamum doesn't get rid of the false teachers themselves, that God will do it Himself.

Verses 14-15 of Revelation 2 detail the false teachers that the church in Pergamum has allowed to continue in their community. God calls them to repentance. Repentance requires an acknowledgement that you have been wrong and a decision to turn back and follow the truth.

The way that God says He will deal with the false teachers if the church in Pergamum doesn't *repent* is with *the sword of My mouth*. The way that God introduced Himself at the beginning of this letter in Revelation 2:12 was *the One who has the sharp two-edged sword*. In scripture, the *sword* typically represents the word of God, such as in Hebrews 4:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

And again, in Ephesians 6, which comes at the end of the passage about the armor of God:

“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.”
(Ephesians 6:17)

The word of God is truth (John 17:17). Therefore, if God is to *make war against them with the sword of My mouth*, it likely means that he is *making war against them* with the word of God, which is to say, the truth. The way to be a faithful witness in this case, to be *him who overcomes*, is to speak the truth to power/authority. This would infer that being a faithful witness (Greek “martyreo”) includes a willingness to incur the negative consequences of speaking truth to an authority. This would seem to fit with the picture that begins this letter, of Pergamum being a seat of Roman authority (it being the capital of the Roman province of Asia) as well as the seat of Satan's throne, thus a place of spiritual authority (Revelation 2:13).

Thus, this letter from Jesus to the church in Pergamum provides one specific means to gain the great blessing promised in the introduction to Revelation to those who read, hear/understand, and heed/obey the words therein (Revelation 1:3):

When facing down authorities who are teaching falsely, do so courageously, and in truth.

Jesus does not say how He will strike down the false teachers with the truth of His word if the church at Pergamum has no faithful witnesses willing to speak truthfully. Perhaps God would orchestrate circumstances such that they would be exposed. But it is insightful to note that the threat here from Jesus is, “If you don’t do the job of a faithful witness in facing down false authorities, then I will do it myself.” The implication is that missing an opportunity to be a faithful witness who speaks truth to correct an erring authority is a great loss. That would connect with the promise in Revelation 1:3; to miss such a moment is to lose a promised blessing.

We might imagine the trepidation we could encounter in speaking truth to an authority who is speaking falsely. The circumstance would infer that the authority has many followers. These followers are likely following the person rather than the message. Therefore the authority would have a platform and followers, while an individual person might not. The false authority would be able to turn their gaze upon you and cause their followers to scorn you. To speak up would likely mean a prolonged, uncomfortable battle. You would be tempted to defend yourself, and get distracted from advocating for the truth. You could experience substantial rejection and loss.

The primary temporal “upside” would be that everyone else benefits, including those who do not particularly care to hear the truth. The natural calculation would be “Why would I go through all this trouble to contend for those who will revile me, and will not appreciate what I have done for them?” In correcting individual believers, Jesus tells us not to waste holy words of correction on those who will not listen ([see commentary on Matthew 7:1-5](#)). But in the case of false teachers, Jesus exhorts us to engage and resist them with the truth, even as He did (Matthew 23).

There would be few observable earthly benefits to put oneself at risk to oppose an authority speaking falsely. But this thought experiment seems to fit perfectly with this passage, since Jesus is saying, “Don’t miss this opportunity to gain a great reward from ME.” The admonition of Revelation is to have enough faith in the word and promise of Jesus to take actions that will bring earthly loss and discomfort upon ourselves in order to have an immense eternal blessing (Revelation 22:12).

Just as in the other six letters, *he who has an ear* is admonished to *hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. Hearing is the first step, but, as was established in Revelation 1:3, the full formula is to read, hear, and heed (or do) the words of this prophecy.

James 2:14, 17 says:

“What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?...Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

In other words, it is not enough to simply *hear what the Spirit says*, because to *hear* only is to not have fully understood what was said. One of the things *the Spirit says* is to *repent*. To *repent* is a command to alter our perspective. To change our minds that have a false mental model and replace it with one that is true (Romans 12:1-2). If we are to truly *hear what the Spirit says*, we will also understand and then do the things that are commanded.

God says that the promised reward to *him who overcomes*—who *hears what the Spirit says* and speaks the truth—is two-fold, and the first is that He will *give to them some of the hidden manna* as a reward.

Manna is the food God gave to the Israelites during their time wandering in the wilderness. It was given fresh at the beginning of each day, but the Israelites were commanded not to gather more *manna* than what they would eat in a day, except on the day before Sabbath when there would be no *manna*. They were told that if they gathered too much it would rot (Exodus 16:4-7).

But there was an exception—a small portion of *manna* was stored away in the tabernacle, as God had commanded:

“Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”
(Exodus 16:32)

An omerful of manna was put in a jar with the tablets containing the Ten Commandments in the tabernacle (Exodus 33-34). This is likely a picture of the *hidden manna* that God promised *him who overcomes* in Revelation 2:17.

But the importance of this *hidden manna* isn't just that it was special and hidden away, but that it was stored in the Holy of Holies inside the tabernacle (during the time of Balaam). The Holy of Holies was a section at the back of the tabernacle separated by a curtain because that is where the presence of God dwelled (see picture in the Maps and Charts section of the right sidebar). Further, to enter the Holy of Holies meant instant death for all save the High Priest, and he could enter only once a year. Perhaps this picture of the great reward of the *hidden manna* indicates that those who overcome will gain a greatly enhanced intimacy with God. This enhanced intimacy might be pictured by having the special privilege of being allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and dine with God on the manna from the ark. We might have a glimpse of this in examining the relationship God had with Moses, who God dealt with face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Since there was only a small portion of *manna* in the ark, perhaps this also indicates the great and special privilege that Jesus will grant to those who speak truth to power. This would explain the nature of the threat Jesus makes to deal with these false teachers Himself if the Pergamum church will not.

Normally, if someone says, “If you don't do this incredibly difficult task then I will do it myself,” our natural reaction would be, “That sounds great to me!” But on reflection, this is more like Jesus saying “If you don't make this sure-bet 100 to 1 investment then I will make it myself.” The great reward Jesus promises is the reason the opportunity to embrace difficulty in this world ought to be embraced. This fits with the opening promise that those who read, hear, and heed the words of Revelation will gain a great blessing (Revelation 1:3).

When we dine, we usually converse. It appears that those who honor the word of God (which is the two-edged sword of God) by speaking truth against what is false will gain the reward of

being able to converse intimately with the very Word of God, who is Jesus Christ. In the last letter to the Church at Laodicea, the means by which we can gain all the treasure we desire is pictured as inviting Jesus into our home to dine with Him (Revelation 3:18-21).

To speak the truth of God in a circumstance where we will be resisted requires us to lay aside our own desires and illusion of control. That would be to set aside the attitude of Balaam (Revelation 2:14). But if we can die to ourself and be a witness for God, He will invite us into His innermost presence. There we will have an intimate fellowship no one else can experience.

The second part of the promised blessing indicates that it will be special and unique to each of us. We will gain the greatest fulfillment of wholeness, one that will completely fill our souls.

The second part of the promise to *him who overcomes* is that *God will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.*

White stones had many uses in the Greco-Roman world, but the one that is probably being referenced here is the scenario where, if you were a special guest at an event, the host would engrave your name on a white stone to mark your place. So what God promises here is that if any of His people speak His truth and suffer the rejection of the world, He will invite them to His event, His honor banquet. Not only will you have an invitation to get into this honor banquet, but you will be a special guest at such a level that only you and God will understand how special it is. Perhaps it is like a great banquet where the places of honor have assigned seats, and name cards mark the seats of honor. Your name card will be like the *white stone*. Your *new name* might be a pet name, or a name of honor. In any event, it will be intimate, as *no one* will know this name *but he who receives it*.

We see this idea of a special honor banquet throughout the New Testament. Jesus makes a graphic allusion to this idea in Matthew 8. There He exhorts some believing Jews to have more faith, contrasting their small faith with the immense faith of a particular Roman centurion. Jesus instructs the Jews with Him that there will be “sons of the kingdom” who do not even receive an invitation to the great honor banquet of the kingdom, while Gentiles who exhibited great faith (like the Roman centurion) will sit at the head table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ([see commentary on Matthew 8:5-13](#)).

Biblical Text

Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make 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 him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’