

Hold Fast to the Truth

Revelation 2:12-17

Rev. Brian Bill

February 14-15, 2026

Have you ever wondered where Satan lives? We all know Wisconsin is God's Country, but where does Satan have his headquarters?

That question became very real to me many years ago when our daughter Lydia and I were visiting our oldest daughter Emily while she was serving as a missionary. As we walked through a neighborhood one afternoon, I suddenly felt an overwhelming, almost suffocating sense of evil. Nothing outward looked unusual, but the spiritual heaviness was oppressive and unmistakable.

When we rounded the corner, I turned to Emily and asked, *"Have you ever felt that before?"* Without hesitation, she said, *"Yes, because a witch doctor lives in that house."*

That moment reminded me that spiritual warfare is real, that evil is pervasive, and that there are places where deep darkness seems especially concentrated.

In Revelation 2, Jesus writes a letter to the church in Pergamum and makes a startling statement in verse 13: ***"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is..."*** Imagine being told that your hometown is the location of Satan's command center!

What does it mean to live where Satan dwells? How do believers remain faithful in a culture saturated with compromise, pressure, and spiritual opposition? And what does this ancient message say to us today, living in a world that dismisses Satan while being increasingly hostile to biblical truth? The good news is that Jesus knows exactly where we dwell, and He calls us to stand firm, just like He did for the believers in Pergamum.

How are you doing on your assignment to read the Book of Revelation three times before Easter?

Let's open our Bibles to Revelation 2:12-17 and discover how Christ calls His people to hold fast to the truth, even when we live in the shadow of Satan's throne. Here's our main idea: *The secret to overcoming seduction in this world is to be satisfied by the Savior.*

1. Christ's character revealed. As we've seen in the introduction to each letter, Jesus reveals a different aspect of His character that is especially pertinent to each congregation. Each of these attributes takes us back to the awe-producing vision of Jesus in chapter one. This letter is directed to the messenger, which is either an angel assigned to the church or the pastor of the church: ***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write..."***

At that time, Pergamum was one of the largest cities in the world, located about 100 miles north of Ephesus, with Smyrna about halfway in between. Known as the capital of Asia Minor, this "most distinguished city," housed a library containing 200,000 hand-written volumes (second only to Alexandria) which helped make it a center of culture and learning. Its name was derived from the production of parchment.

It was also a city steeped in pagan religions, with temples dedicated to Dionysius (the god of wine), Athena (the goddess of wisdom), Demeter (the god of crops), and Asclepius (the god of healing). Like an ancient Mayo Clinic, people came from all over the Roman Empire in search of healing. Sufferers would spend the night in the darkness of the temple of Asclepius while snakes slithered over their bodies, which supposedly brought health and healing. Interestingly, the symbol associated with Asclepius (a staff with a single serpent wrapped around it), remains a medical emblem today and is used by the American Medical Association.

Pergamum was also home to a massive altar to Zeus, towering some 800 feet above the city, dominating the skyline as a visible reminder of pagan power. In addition, the city was the official center of emperor worship. One pastor summarizes it well: *"Pergamum combined a toxic mix of political power, pagan ritual, and Greek philosophy mixed with Caesar worship. Once a year, every citizen was expected to offer incense and declare, 'Caesar is Lord.'"*

To a church in danger of capitulation and compromise, Jesus described Himself with a metaphor of judgment: ***"The words of Him who has the sharp two-edged sword."*** The word ***"sharp"*** means, *"nimble and swift, with a piercing point."* This three-foot long sword was like a razor on both sides and was used in war. Since the symbol of Rome's sovereignty was the sword, Jesus is saying that He is infinitely stronger than Ceasar. In 1:16, this sword comes ***"from His mouth,"*** meaning the power of Jesus comes from His words as we see in Hebrews 1:3: ***"...He upholds the universe by the word of his power."***

2. Commended for courage. After revealing His character, in verse 13 Jesus commends these Christians for their courageous faith: ***“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.”***

- **Jesus knows their situation.** The word ***“dwell”*** means, ***“to take up permanent residence.”*** They weren’t running away from Satan’s stronghold because they had made their home there. They weren’t about playing it safe because they knew they were called to be salt in a decaying and decadent society. Jesus knew all about this church, where it was, what it was doing, and what it was facing.

Don’t you love that Jesus knows everything about you and loves you anyway? Last week we learned that He intimately knows our trials and tribulations. He knows and He cares. In fact, in each of these seven letters, Jesus says, ***“I know.”*** He knows these followers are residing in a hostile and seductive society.

Have you ever thought about where Satan’s headquarters is right now? Contrary to popular opinion, he is not in Hell, but that’s where he’s headed in the future according to Revelation 20:10: ***“And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*** As 1 Peter 5:8 says, ***“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*** 2 Corinthians 4:4 says He is the ***“god of this world.”*** Because Satan is not omnipresent, he can only be in one place at one time, though he deploys his evil forces all over the globe to do his evil work.

I don’t know where Satan’s throne is today. We know it was in Pergamum at one time, but it seems that evil concentrates itself in different places at different points in history, when darkness seems to take up residence in particular cities, movements, and regimes. I watched a documentary this week describing how the Nazis intentionally drew architectural inspiration from the ancient altar of Zeus in Pergamum when designing the grandstand at the Zeppelin Field in Nuremberg, which became the stage for chilling propaganda spectacles under Adolf Hitler. From that very platform came demonic rhetoric that fueled hatred and ultimately contributed to the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust.

- **Jesus knows their steadfastness.** Amid all this satanic influence, God’s people held strong: *“Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith.”* To *“hold fast”* means, *“to grasp,”* and is in the present tense meaning, *“you are holding.”* Jesus said something similar to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:25: *“Only hold fast what you have until I come.”* Notice Jesus says, *“my name”* and *“my faith,”* reminding us that it’s all about Him. We’re not commended for just having faith but having the name and faith that belong to Jesus alone.

Our son-in-law, Lucas Leibforth, gave a very powerful message at Second Winders this week in which he talked about how we go through different seasons of life. One of the points he made was this: *“Scripture reminds us that being with Jesus comes before doing for Jesus. Mary chose the better portion. The next gen needs people who know how to sit with Jesus.”* There are printed copies available at the Welcome Center if you’d like one.

- **Jesus knows their sacrifices.** They stayed strong even when *“Antipas”* was martyred. They didn’t hide or stay silent. They didn’t bail or cave on their faith. This is the only church where Jesus mentions the name of a martyr. Don’t miss that Jesus knows his name and that he describes him as, *“my faithful witness.”* This is the same description used of Jesus in 1:5: *“Jesus Christ the faithful witness.”* As we learned in 2:10, we’re called to be *“faithful unto death,”* just like Antipas was. Legend tells us Antipas was put inside a bronze bull and was roasted to death on the altar to Zeus.

The secret to overcoming seduction in this world is to be satisfied by the Savior.

3. Confronted for compromise. After commending the church for their courage, Jesus also confronted them for their compromise in verses 14-15: *“But I have a few things against you...”* In Ephesus, Jesus had *“one thing”* against that church, in Smyrna, He had *“nothing”* against the believers, and in Pergamum, he had a *“few things against them.”* The word *“against”* means, *“down upon.”*

- **The teaching of Balaam.** Verse 14 continues: *“...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.”* Balaam was a complicated character who serves as a prototype of all corrupt teachers. While he seemed to function as a prophet, he was also motivated by greed and was guilty of

leading God's people into immorality and idolatry. The phrase "***stumbling block***" refers to the trigger of a trap, where bait was placed.

Here's a quick backstory to one of the most unusual stories in the Bible. Balak, the king of Moab, became nervous when two million Israelites were traveling near his border, so he hired Balaam to curse God's people. Each time Balaam tried to do so, God turned the curse into a blessing. When that didn't work, Balaam suggested to Balak that since they couldn't curse Israel, they should focus on corrupting them from the inside by luring them into immorality and idolatry. We see this in Numbers 25:1-3: "***...the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.***" As a result of their immorality and idolatry, 24,000 Israelites lost their lives.

When frontal assaults fail, Satan always takes a back-door approach by launching a sneak attack, using greed, immorality, gossip, quarrels, backbiting and divisiveness to accomplish his evil plans.

Balaam is mentioned in eight books in the Bible and each time it's negative. To sum up, the teaching of Balaam promotes falsehood for financial reasons (2 Peter 2:15), it accommodates pagan beliefs (Jude 11), and it perverts the grace of God into a license for immorality (Jude 4). The teaching of Balaam is the view that Christians can compromise their convictions for the sake of popularity, pleasure, sexual gratification, or personal gain. It's the idea that sin is 'no big deal.' There was a group in the church that saw nothing wrong with putting incense on the altar to Caesar and being involved in immoral relationships outside of marriage.

Sadly, according to a recent Barna Research study, while Christians often hold different beliefs than non-Christians, their actual behaviors regarding issues like pornography use, drunkenness, lying to get out of a difficult situation, and gossip are remarkably *similar* to those of non-Christians. Studies show little difference in lifestyle choices, although Christians tend to give more to charity and cuss less. That's not how it should be!

- **The teaching of the Nicolaitans.** In verse 15, Jesus identified another group of evil influencers in the church: "***So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***" We don't know a lot about them, except

that they celebrated idolatry and immorality. It makes me think of Jude 4:
“For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

What Balaam was to the children of Israel in the Old Testament the Nicolaitans were to the church in the New. Interestingly, according to 2:6, the Ephesians *hated “the works of the Nicolaitans,”* while the church at Pergamum *held* to their teaching. The deeds of the Nicolaitans in Ephesus had become doctrine in Pergamum. Since Satan couldn’t destroy the church from the outside, he became a member and did his work on the inside.

I read a sobering post this week called, “Satan Doesn’t Use Rubber Bullets” by Ben Hicks. Here’s an excerpt:

Christians often act as if Satan is using rubber bullets. They wouldn’t say it, but the way they behave treats sin as something light or non-serious. Yeah, their sin might hurt, but it’s not like it’s going to kill them. They don’t realize the incredible danger they are in...we know that God will ultimately be victorious. Yet while Satan is guaranteed to lose the war, he can and does win battles and inflict much damage. Sadly, he has been highly effective despite his inevitable failure. If you look around carefully, you’ll see the carnage everywhere.

Listen. The problem was not that the church was in Pergamum, the problem was there was too much Pergamum in the church. Brothers and sisters, God always plants His church in the darkest places so we can shine His light.

4. Called to change. Just as Jesus called out the church at Pergamum for immorality and idolatry, He calls His church today to holiness and purity. If you’re involved in sinful behavior or spurious beliefs, it’s time to turn around according to verse 16: ***“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”*** This is an allusion to the drawn sword of the angel of the Lord who would not let Balaam’s donkey pass. This account is a bit strange because the donkey speaks and acts like a person. Someone has said we don’t think much of it when a person acts like a donkey, because it happens all the time!

Repentance can be defined as turning from sin to the Savior, resulting in a change of attitude, affection, and action. This is an urgent appeal from Jesus which

literally means, “*to change instantly before it’s too late!*” The word “**soon**” means “*suddenly, with haste, promptly and swiftly.*” For example, if you’re dating a non-Christian, and you’re getting serious, break it off now so you don’t become unequally yoked in marriage.

A couple weeks ago, someone who doesn’t go to Edgewood (yet) listened to one of our sermons and remarked how thankful he was that we don’t shy away from preaching about repentance because too many churches have stopped doing so. I told him we’re simply being faithful to what the Bible teaches. The word “**repent**” appears eight times in Revelation 2-3. In fact, it’s the most repeated command Jesus gives to the churches, more than *believe, love, serve, endure, or overcome*. That alone shows how central repentance is to spiritual vitality and revival.

The word “**repent**” appears a total of twelve times in the book of Revelation. Most of these calls to repentance are directed not to the unbelieving world, but to the church. This reveals a sobering truth: revival does not begin in the culture, but in the church. Before God changes the world, He calls His people to humble themselves, to turn from sin, and return to their first love. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, “***If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.***”

After all, the very first sermon John the Baptist preached was about repentance in Matthew 3:2: “***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.***” In the first sermon of Jesus in Matthew 4:17, He also issued a call to repent: “***From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’***”

I’ve been reading reports this week about how student-led worship has prompted Southeastern University in Florida to cancel classes because continuous prayer and repentance have been going on in the chapel for 30 hours (and counting). Here’s part of one account: “*The gathering began during a conference after the speaker invited about 2,300 students to publicly confess their sins. For 15 minutes, students openly named struggles like fear, anger, pornography, and insecurity. Campus pastor Jonathan Rivera said the moment brought ‘freedom,’ not shame, adding, ‘Something broke in the room immediately.’*”

Revival often begins not with hype, but with humility and confession. When people bring hidden sin into the light, shame loses its grip and grace rushes in. As 1 John 1:9 reminds us, “***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive***

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Is there anything you need to bring into the light?

Notice if repentance is put off, Jesus says He will come to **“you”** soon, and war against **“them.”** Jesus knows those who are convictional Christians and He knows those who are compromising Christians. We’re to turn from the direction we’ve been going and go in another one because we don’t want Jesus going to war against us with the sword of His mouth. One commentator writes, *“Christ fighting His church: I can think of no sadder image in the whole Bible as it relates to the Christian community.”*

The secret to overcoming seduction in this world is to be satisfied by the Savior.

5. Comforted with blessings. Once again, Jesus urges us to listen to what He is saying, only this time this repeated refrain comes before, rather than after the exhortation and promise in verse 17: ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...”*** We’re challenged to live as conquerors, which is a reference to all believers in 1 John 5:4: ***“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”*** When we live like this, we can be assured of two blessings.

While we might not fully understand these mysterious metaphors, my guess is the believers in Pergamum did. Whatever they mean, the main point is blessings come to conquering Christians.

- **Provision:** ***“...to the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna.”*** Just as God fed Israel with manna from Heaven in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4), so Christ, who came from Heaven as the Bread of Life, will provide hidden manna to the one who conquers. In contrast to the pagans who offered hidden mysteries, Jesus offers something much greater to those who follow Him as stated in John 6:48-50: ***“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.”*** Jesus is saying, *“I am greater than all the allurements of the world. Those who eat the Living Bread will never hunger and will live forever.”* BTW, two of our Go Team Partners, the Stevenson’s and the Hudgins, work with a ministry called Manna Worldwide.

According to Exodus 16:32-34, some of this manna was gathered and hidden, or placed, in a golden pot in the Ark of Covenant as a memorial to

future generations. Ancient Jewish tradition teaches that when Israel was captured and taken into captivity by the Babylonians, the prophet Jeremiah hid this jar of manna underground at Mt. Nebo. When the Messiah comes, He will take this hidden manna and feed God's people again. In the context of this letter to the church at Pergamum, Jesus, the Bread of Heaven, will provide all the sustenance needed in contrast to the Balaamites who urged them to eat food sacrificed to idols.

- **Promise:** “...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.” The word “white” means, “bright and shining” and symbolized purity, victory and acceptance. In the ancient world, a white ceremonial stone carried powerful meaning, and each can be applied to those who overcome. Get ready to be blessed by these six cultural connections.
 - **To signify citizenship.** A white stone was often given to people who had proved their allegiance to the king. Think of it this way: *“In a city like Pergamum, where allegiance to Caesar was demanded, Jesus promises something better; not Roman citizenship, but heavenly citizenship.”*
 - **To declare someone not guilty in a courtroom.** In some courts, jurors would cast a stone to indicate their verdict; black for guilty, white for innocent. Though the world may condemn you, though culture may “blackball” you, Jesus rolls out the white stone and declares you innocent of all charges.
 - **As a symbol of victory.** White stones were given to those who were victorious in the athletic games. Believers in Pergamum were often excluded from public games because of their faith. But Jesus says, in essence: *You may not receive applause in the arena, but you will receive honor in Heaven.*
 - **As access to banquets.** In a culture filled with pagan feasts, Christians were often left out. But Jesus promises admission to a far greater banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - **A reward for proven courage.** In some traditions, a courageous gladiator would receive a white stone engraved with the initials S.P. for *spectatus*, meaning his valor had been proven beyond doubt. Heaven's white stone says, *“Your faithfulness was seen. Your endurance was known. Your loyalty was proven.”*
 - **A symbol of friendship.** Often two friends would take a white stone, break it in half and write the other friend's name on their half. When

they met again, even after many years, they could place the halves of their stones together, signifying their deep “covenant of friendship.”

And then there is the most personal part found at the end of verse 17: “...*with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*” While we don’t know for sure what this new name is, basis of Revelation 3:12 says that it’s the name of the Father and the name of Jesus: “*The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*” Revelation 19:12 says, “*His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.*”

It could also refer to a believer’s new name as we see in Isaiah 62:2: “...*and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.*” Isaiah 65:15 adds, “...*But his servants he will call by another name.*” If so, this points to the intimate and intensely personal relationship that Jesus has with each one of us. He knows Antipas’ name and He knows your name.

It was customary in that day for guests at a dinner to have a white stone placed at their seat. After being seated, they would turn the stone over and read a private message from the host. It was a way for the host to share a personal thought with each person he was sharing the meal with. I’m reminded of the coming banquet for believers described in Revelation 19.

Not just acquitted.
Not just victorious.
Not just admitted.
But personally known.

In a city where believers were pressured to declare “Caesar is Lord,” Jesus promises an intimate, eternal affirmation from the true King.

- Citizenship.
- Acquittal.
- Victory.
- Admission.
- Courage.

- Friendship.

All in one white stone.

When you leave today, you'll receive a white stone as a tangible reminder of this promise: *The secret to overcoming seduction in this world is to be satisfied by the Savior.* Put this stone somewhere to remind you to be a conqueror for Christ, no matter how dark and demonic things are where you live. Keep it in your pocket, put it in your car, on your desk, next to your Bible, or on your nightstand.

- When the enemy whispers accusation, remember the verdict is white because you've been declared not guilty, fully forgiven, and forever accepted. On top of all that, you've been declared righteous.
- When you feel excluded, remember you have a banquet invitation.
- When you feel unnoticed, remember your courage has been proven.
- When you feel alone, remember you have a forever Friend who knows your name.

And one day, when we stand before Him, the symbol will give way to the substance, and the One who promised the stone will place into our hands the eternal reality it represents.

Until then...hold on. Be an overcomer. The hidden manna and the white stone are coming.