



“Letter to an Accommodating Church,” Part 2 ● Revelation 2:12–17

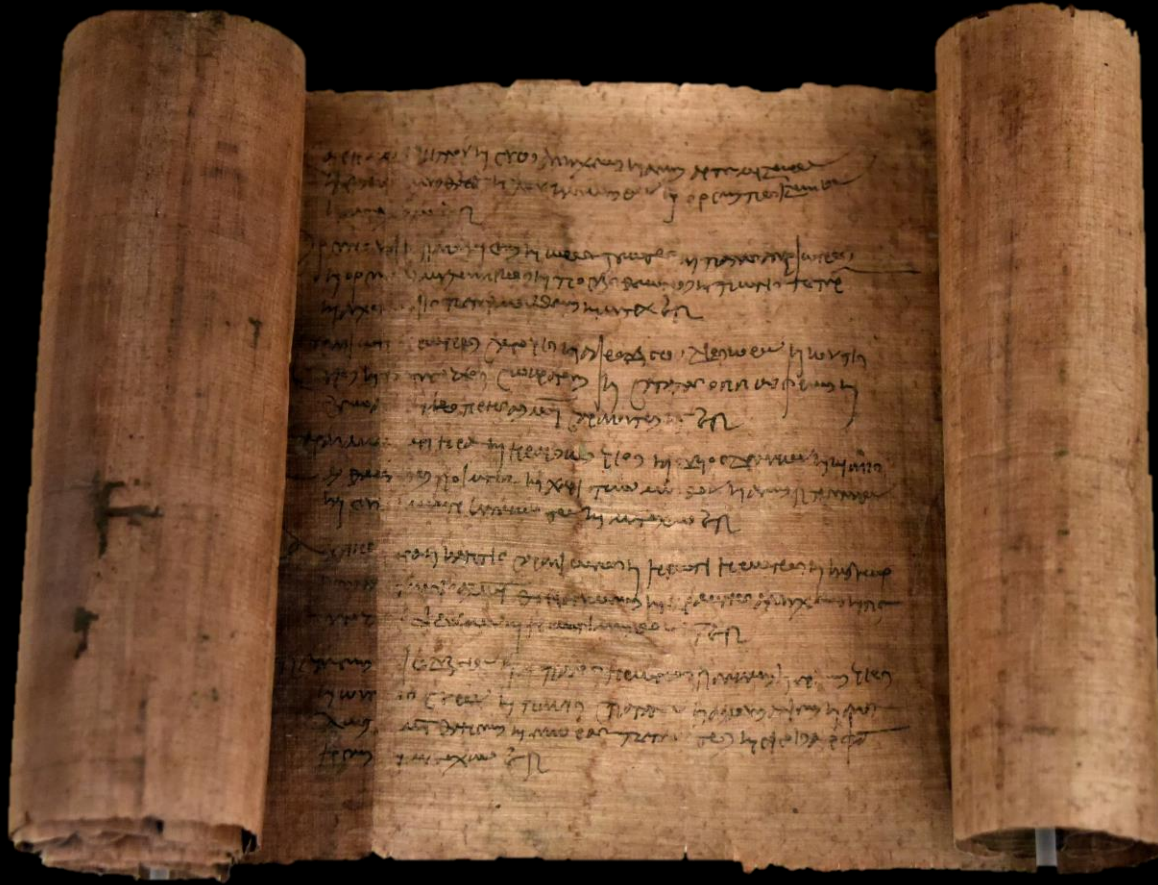


Text

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. . . .

“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 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.”

Outline



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I. The Address (2:12a)

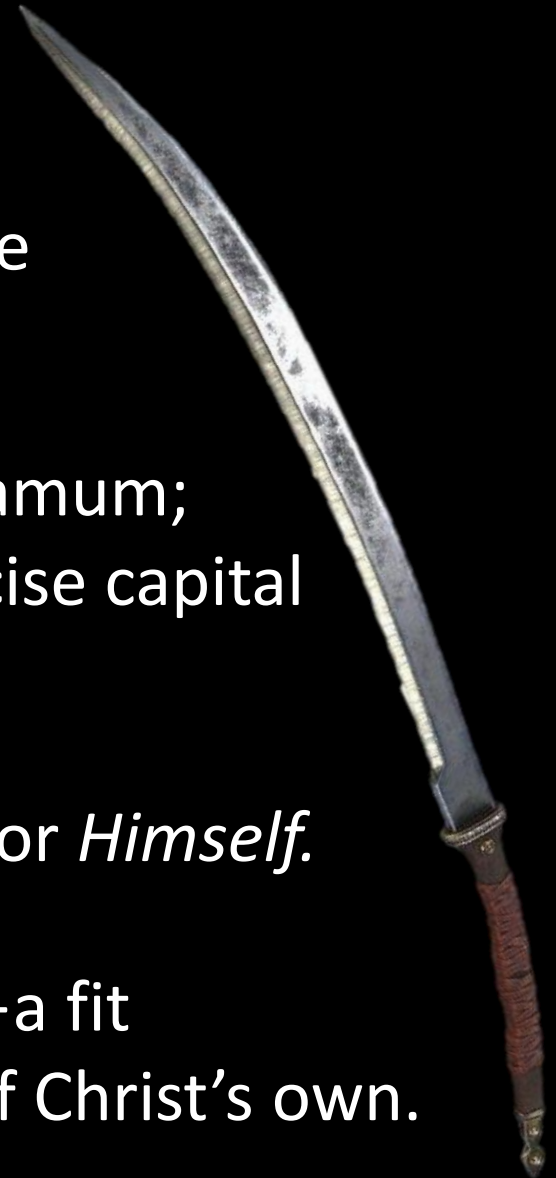
“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:”

- Pergamum was located about 70 miles north of Smyrna.
- Pergamum was the imperial city of the province of Asia, with a thriving imperial cult.

II. The Assessor (2:12b)

“The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”

- The exalted Christ identifies Himself by a characteristic He revealed to John back in chapter 1:16.
- The provincial governor resided in and judged from Pergamum; he possessed “the right of the sword”—the right to exercise capital punishment at will.
- But the sovereign Christ claims this authority ultimately for *Himself*.
- He is the One who comes as the Judge and Executioner—a fit description in response to a city that had executed one of Christ’s own.



III. The Approval (2:13)

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

- Christ possesses intimate knowledge of the state of the believers in Pergamum, specifically:
 - 1) Their religious context: **“Where you live, where Satan’s throne is”—**
i.e., the seat of the imperial cult.
 - 2) Their faithful confession: **“You hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith.”**

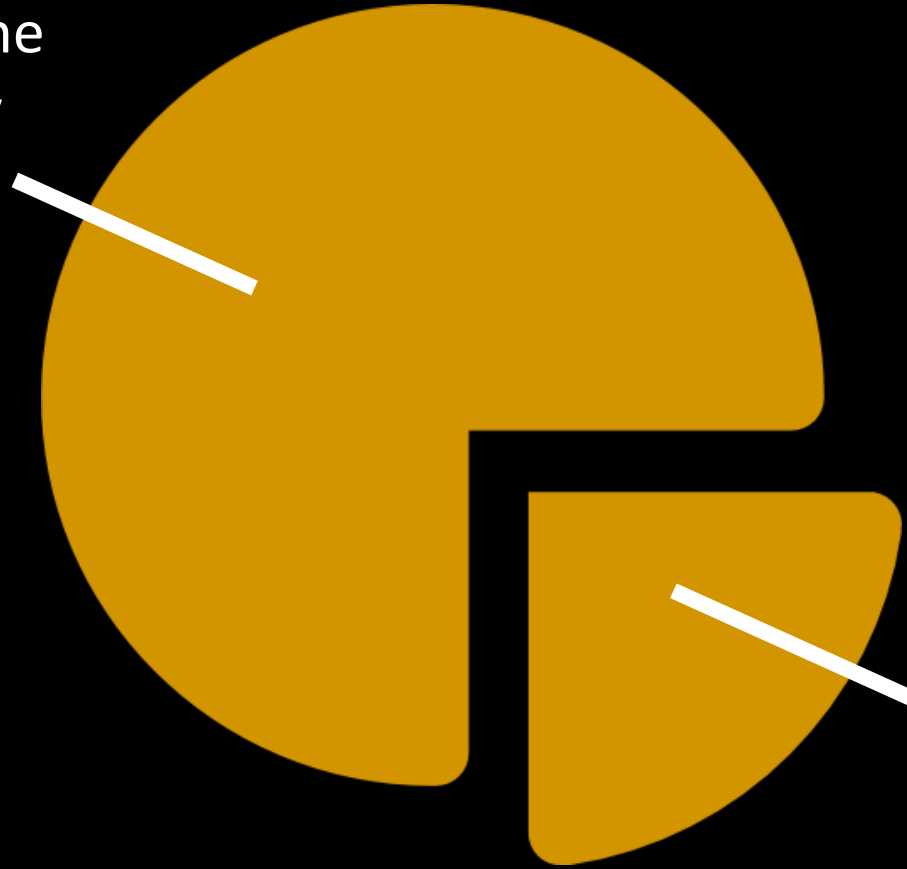
IV. The Accusation (2:14–15)

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality” (v. 14).

- **“But . . .”** – a strong contrasting conjunction introduces Christ’s strong accusation against the church.
- **“A few things against you”** – two in particular: the church’s accommodation of *the Balaamites* (v. 14) and *the Nicolaitans* (v. 15).
- **“Because you have there”** – introduces the chief problem: the believers’ *accommodation* of certain people in their midst.

Pergamum: The Accommodating Church

“You hold fast My name
and did not deny My
faith” (v. 13).



“There are some who hold
to the teaching of Balaam ...
also to the teaching of the
Nicolaitans” (vv. 14–15).

“You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.”

—Galatians 5:7–9

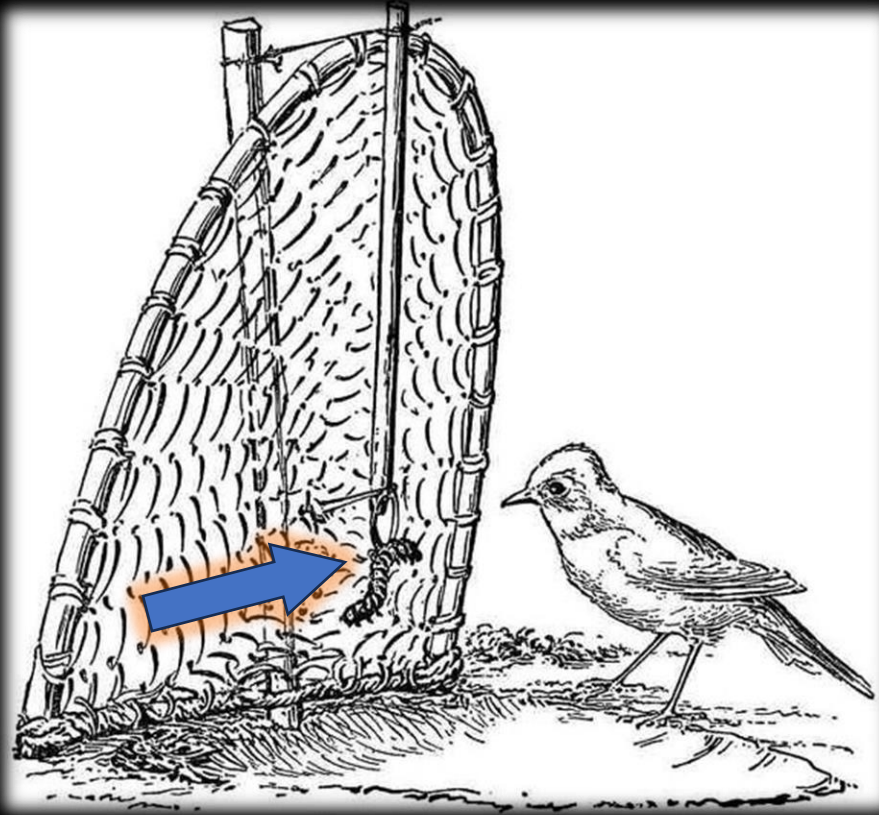


“... because you have there **some who hold the teaching of Balaam**, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. . . .”

1) “**Some who hold to the teaching of Balaam**” – not the entire church, but a segment of it.

- “**Hold to**” – this group had the same tenacity as the larger group described in v. 13, who “**held fast**” the name of Jesus (see also v. 15).
- “**Balaam**” – “swallower of the people” – the false prophet hired by Balak, king of Moab, to *curse* Israel on her way to the Promised Land, but whom God rendered powerless except to pronounce *blessing* (Numbers 22–24).

“... because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put **a stumbling block** before the sons of Israel, to eat **things sacrificed to idols** and to commit **acts of immorality**...”



- **“A stumbling block”** – *literally*, “a device for catching something”; *figuratively*, “an action or circumstance that leads one to act contrary to a proper course of action.”
- **“things sacrificed to idols”** – foods associated with pagan worship.
- **“acts of immorality”** – sexual activity associated with pagan worship.

“ “While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.”

—Numbers 25:1–3

“And Moses said to them, ‘Have you spared all the women? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD.’”

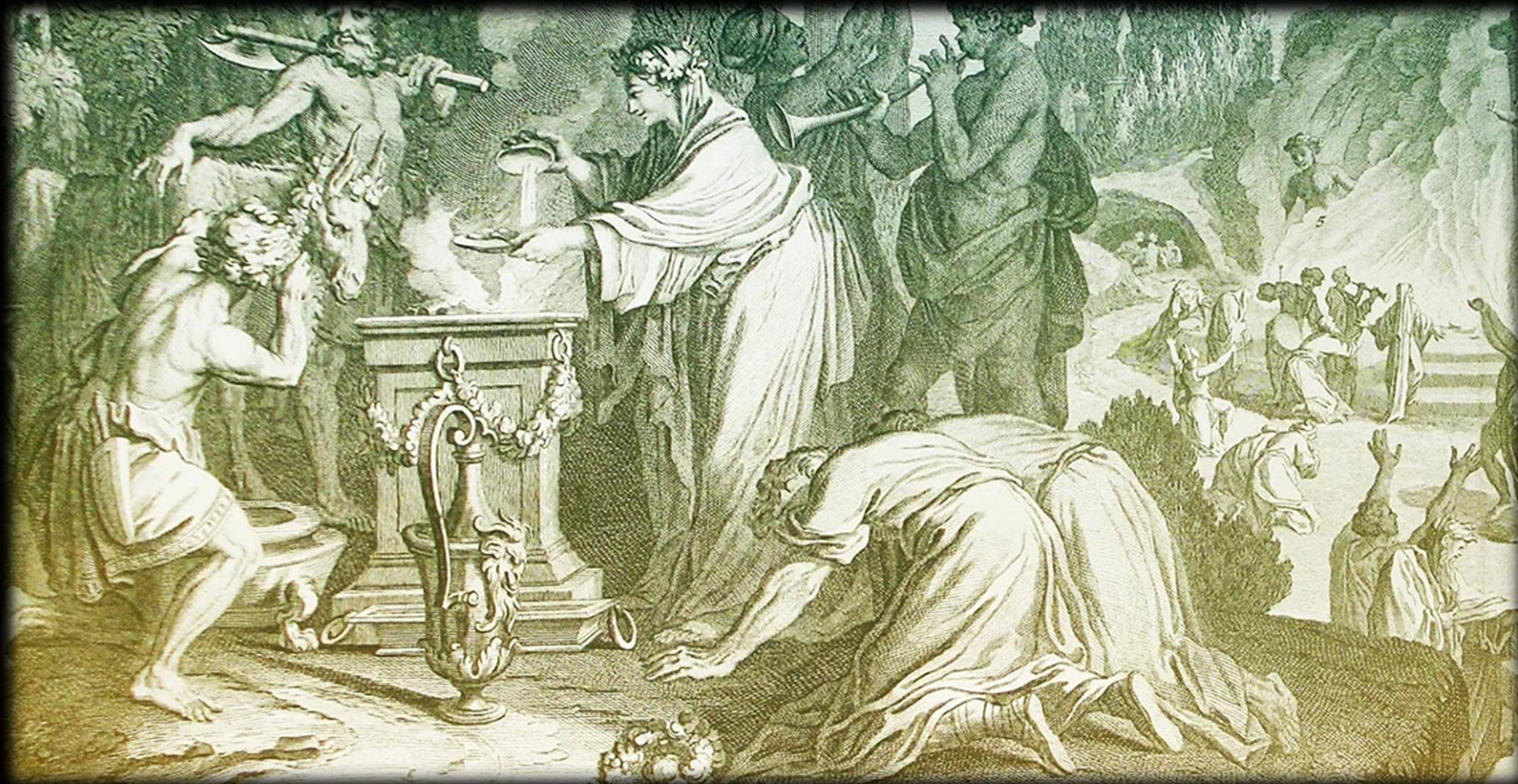
—Numbers 31:15–16

“... because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. . . .”

- “Satan, then, as *the* Tempter is the great placer of ‘scandals,’ ‘stumbling-blocks,’ or ‘offences,’ in the path of men” (Trench, *Seven Churches*, 160).
- How did he snare Israel? By exciting the desire for *freedom*.
- “Pagan food and pagan women were [Balaam’s] powerful tools against the rigidity of the Mosaic Law” (E. M. Blaiklock, *Seven Churches*, 39).
- These “some” in Pergamum had taken the same bait.

“At Pergamum, where Satan sat enthroned, some within the church had decided that accommodation was the wisest policy. They taught the way of compromise.”

—William Mounce, *Revelation*, 81



“So you also have **some who** in the same way **hold** the teaching of the **Nicolaitans**” (v. 15).

2) “**Some who . . . hold to the teaching of Nicolaitans**” – once again, not the entire church, but a segment of it.

- “**Hold to**” – the same verb used in v. 13 (positively) and v. 14 (negatively).
- “**Nicolas**” – “conqueror of the people” – an unknown false teacher who taught that compromise for the sake of public appeasement was acceptable, who perverted Christian liberty (see 2:6).



“‘Just a little idolatry,’ they murmured. ‘Just a little immorality. We are free. We do not have to go to extremes.’ Such perverse reasoning is sometimes heard in the churches today. ‘It is no use being idealistic,’ it is said. ‘We are human, you know. Christ does not expect too much from us. His demands are not unreasonable. He knows we are dust.’ Totally different is Christ’s view of the matter.”

—John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 57

“The Church’s path, like that of Christian, lay between two deadly giants: legalism on the one hand, with its exaltation of trivialities, its Pharisaical insistence on codes of rules—and on the other hand antinomianism, which often took its origin in a reliance on the strength of a devoted spirit, directly inspired by God and therefore freed from the tyranny of legal precepts and prohibitions.”

—Martin Kiddle, *Revelation*, 33–34

Legalism

“Any teaching that diminishes or distorts the generous love of God and the full freeness of his grace. It then distorts God’s graciousness revealed in his law and fails to see law set within its proper context in redemptive history as an expression of a gracious Father” (Sinclair Ferguson)

Evangelical Christianity

Antinomianism

“Anti-law”

“A rejection of the idea that the Christian’s life need be governed by laws or rules” (MacArthur & Mayhue).

“The heart’s distaste for divine obligation or duty” (Sinclair Ferguson).

V. The Admonition (2:16)

“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”

- **“Therefore . . .”** – although most of the church was loyal to the profession that Jesus is Lord, its ambivalence to the two compromising groups demanded a divine response.
- **“Repent”** – a fundamental shift in one’s thinking; a decisive change of direction; a turn from that which is recognized as evil to that which is acknowledged as good (see 2:5).
- **“I am coming to you quickly”** – a promise of decisive, eschatological judgment; He is on His way (see 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

**“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly,
and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”**

- **“I will make war”** – Jesus is not ambivalent to compromise; it is only a matter of time (see Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22).
- **“Against them”** – certainly against the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, but the focus is on the *entire church*.
- “Being tolerant of the Nicolaitans makes the church as guilty as those who hold false doctrine. Failure to repent of this uncleanness in her midst must evoke the punishing sword of Christ upon the whole church” (Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 197).
- **“With the sword of My mouth”** – irresistible conquest (1;16; 19:15, 21).

VI. The Appeal (2:17a)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- The same appeal is repeated in each of the seven letters.
- Although the accusation and admonition of this letter were directed at the believers in Pergamum, they are universally binding upon on all.
- Christ is coming, but He has not yet arrived.
- As long as one hears these words, the invitation to repent is still in force.
- This righteous judge is still a compassionate Savior.

VII. The Assurance (2:17b)

“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.”

- **“Him who overcomes”** – the true believer, the one who finds delight in divine duty because of what Christ has done for Him (1 John 4:4; 5:4–5).
 - **“Hidden manna”** – the manna stored in the Ark of the Covenant was a reminder of God’s provision during the exodus and wilderness wanderings (see Exod 16:31–35).
 - A special, heavenly meal to be enjoyed on the day of final victory, the reward from Christ for abstaining from “food sacrificed to idols” (v. 14).



“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.”

- **“A white stone”** –probably a *token (tessera)* similar to those issued to grant admission into banquets, sporting events, etc.



- **“A new name”** – a previously unheard-of, marvelous name that symbolizes entry into a new status.
- **“No one knows”** – a personal, treasured possession, a gift known only by the giver (Christ) and the receiver (the overcomer).

Manna and White Stones: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’”

—Revelation 19:7–9

APPLICATIONS



- Are you one who has claimed liberty in order to bend to the pressures of the culture and avoid harassment?
- Are you one who has held fast the confession but shown indifference to those have not?
- Are you one who has held fast the confession and called others to remain faithful, no matter the cost?