GROUP GUIDE

Frisco First Baptist Church

7 Letters to the Church

Letter to Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

5/18/2025

MAIN POINT

The Word of God, the ways of Jesus, and the works of Jesus provide a stable, unshakable foundation for our faith.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What does it feel like to be lied to and know that you are being lied to, even as the lie is spoken? What does it feel like to discover that something you believed to be true is actually false?

What are some subtle lies we have believed that impact our daily life?

What are some of the most dangerous lies we might believe about the Christian faith? About our lifestyle choices?

Lies and deceit are prevalent in a fallen world. All of us have either been contributors or victims. Perhaps we have even devoutly believed some things about God or His Word that are simply not true. It’s also possible that we have believed some things true about ourselves that are actually false. Through Jesus’ letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation, we are reminded that false prophets and teachers are always around spreading dangerous lies, which is why our faith must be rooted firmly in the Word of God and in the person of Jesus.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Revelation 2:12-17.

How were the Christians in Pergamum being tested?

Why might Jesus’ letter have been comforting to the church at Pergamum?

What did Jesus commend about the church’s behavior? What did He call out as wrong in their behavior?

Jesus commended the congregation for maintaining their commitment to Him. Twice Christ noted the presence of Satan in the city where these believers lived. The devil had used his stronghold in the city to make life miserable for the Christians. While believers in other places might have buckled in the face of such pressure, Christ complimented the believers who did not renounce their faith. Yet, the church in Pergamum apparently had the opposite problem of the Ephesian church (Rev. 2:1-7). Rather than testing and rejecting false teachers, they had accepted people who held to the teaching of a false god. They were guilty of tolerating people whose teachings opposed those of Christ.

Given their testing, why do you think this church tolerated false teaching?

What are some of the ways in our culture that we might be tempted to tolerate false teaching in the church?

Why is the title with which Christ revealed Himself so appropriate to these Christians?

Christ responded vehemently. They must repent, recognizing and forsaking their sins. The penalty will be severe for those who do not. The church members had become Christ’s enemies. He threatened to unleash among them the awesome power of judgment He intended to use against His enemies, represented by the double-edged sword coming out of His mouth (v. 16).

Why does God take false teachings so seriously? Why should we?

What do we communicate to God when we allow something other than His Word to guide our lives? What about when we know His Word, but our lives don’t reflect it?

The church at Pergamum was guilty of religious tolerance, and Jesus was aware of it. How might our church be pressured to participate in the kind of tolerance that Jesus corrected here?

We live in a day and time that champions tolerance. Unfortunately, tolerance comes at the cost of compromising the truth. We must find the balance between loving those far from Jesus and tolerating sinful teaching. We must, in other words, love each other and others enough to tell them truth, just as Jesus did to this church. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul warned Timothy, a young spiritual leader, against false teachers. Paul took this opportunity to teach Timothy—and us—how we might grow in our relationship with Christ by keeping the gospel of salvation by grace through faith central to our thinking and actions.

Have a volunteer READ 1 John 4:1-6.

Are false prophets and teachers always easy to recognize? Why or why not?

Why is the nature of Jesus “ground zero” for determining whether a teaching is truth or a lie? What does this indicate about the importance and centrality of the person of Jesus Christ?

Why is recognizing the humanity and divinity of Jesus at the same time the foundation for determining all truth?

Read John 14:6. Why is it significant that Jesus called Himself “the truth”? How does that make Jesus distinct from any other religious figure in history?

A vast majority of people in the world would readily agree that there is a god of some kind in the universe, but the real litmus test of truth is what a person believes about Jesus. For John, what a person believes and teaches about the nature of Jesus is the dividing point between authenticity and lies. Time and time again, we must return to the basic truth we know about Jesus as presented in Scripture. As we do, we will be able to hold firm to truth if it falls in line with Jesus. If it does not, we must be on guard against it. Because Jesus is so completely central not only to Christianity but to everything we know as true, John rightly puts teaching to the test by holding it up to the ruler of the Son of God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do we, as a church, stand to lose if we choose to tolerate false teaching? Why is it important that we “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) as we seek to correct false teaching?

How might we, as a group, help one another recognize and be on guard against the influences of false teaching? How might we help one another hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

PRAYER

Close your group by thanking God that He is trustworthy. Thank Him that He is greater than anyone and anything in the world. Pray that you and your group would be able to spiritually discern the difference between truths and lies.

COMMENTARY

Revelation 2:12-17

2:12-13. In the first century A.D., the city of Pergamum, 50 miles north of Smyrna, was the leading religious center of Asia Minor. Like Smyrna, Pergamum was a center of emperor worship, and Christians were persecuted harshly for their refusal to engage in such worship. This refusal was deemed disloyal and unpa- triotic by non-Christians. This is why Jesus called Pergamum the place where Satan’s throne is. The situation for Christians in Pergamum was even worse than at Smyrna. A faithful man named Antipas had already been killed. The sharp double-edged sword that came from Jesus’ mouth symbolizes the power of the Word of God to judge (Heb. 4:12).

2:14-15. A viewpoint resembling the teaching of Balaam in the Old Testament (Num. 22-25), which is probably linked to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, had a strong foothold in the church.

2:16. The sword of My mouth is the sword of verse 12. The clear-cut duty of the church at Pergamum was to combat the false viewpoints in their midst (vv. 14-15) or else they would be judged by the Lord Jesus.

2:17. The reference to the victor receiving hidden manna is intended to remind readers that Israel’s sin in eating food sacri- ficed to idols in Numbers 25 was that much worse because God was still giving them manna, even as He was still caring for His church in Pergamum. The white stone and new name may be related to (1) victory in the ancient Greek athletic games, which allowed an athlete to retire permanently, or (2) entrance to a community feast.

1 john 4:1-6

As John began chapter 4, he urged Christians to show discernment because every voice they hear cannot be trusted. The test for the validity of a teacher or the spirit behind a teacher is their treatment of Jesus. Apparently, false prophets in the church at Ephesus were denying that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. This test was specifically set up for this situation: Does the teacher accept Jesus’ full humanity and full deity. If not, his entire teaching is to be rejected.

This is not the only test a teacher must pass. An eloquent teacher of God’s Word might agree to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, but have other things so out of bounds in his theology that he still might qualify as a false prophet. Jesus himself said that not everyone who called him “Lord” would enter the kingdom.

In this context, the person who acknowledges or confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God. Those who don’t are the spirit of the Antichrist, which John had already warned his readers about (2:18-27; see 2 John 7). Every teacher belongs in one of the two categories: true prophet of the Word or Antichrist.

Warnings might make us question if we have listened to false teachers and become Antichrist. No! You have overcome the antichrists, for you have successfully resisted the lure of the false prophets. The one who is in you (the Holy Spirit; Rom. 8:9) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan; 1 John 5:19), who is called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31).

The antichrists and false prophets are cut out of the same piece of cloth as the world. As a result, they speak to the same values as the world, so the world listens to them. They are from the world, but we are from God. So when the apostles (and possibly other true witnesses) speak from God, those who are born of God listen to them. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8), calls to righteousness (John 16:8), and illumines the mind to the truth of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

The world does not listen to the things of God. The person without the Spirit “does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The ministry of the Holy Spirit lets us discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Therefore, prayer, meditation, and spiritual sensitivity are the primary factors that protect us from being deceived by false doctrine—not raw intelligence or academic learning.