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**Crossroads Ministries**  
301 S. 8th Street  
Opelika, Alabama 36801

**Website:** [www.fbcopelika.com](http://www.fbcopelika.com)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers)

Alright, we're running a little late tonight but the good news is I don't have a basketball game to go to at 7:30 so we're good there. But I do want to give you like a 20 second warning so if you need to pick up an outline or a prayer sheet, feel free to go do so or take care of other business. 20-30 seconds, we'll get started. Make it happen.

Alright, ladies and gentlemen, let's start and I want to go ahead and begin by apologizing for my voice but it's all that little yellow dust that's in the air. I think about 4-5 ounces of it has landed in my esophagus today so I apologize in advance. I hope you have one of the green sheets. This is our circle of concerns, otherwise known as our prayer sheet. Please, just as a reminder, I know I go through this every week, but if there is a concern, an issue, a situation that we need to be praying about as a church family, please let us know in the church office and we will make a point to get it on here as soon as possible. Also, please don't throw this away. Make this a part of your daily prayer life as you pray for those connected to First Baptist, those that may be a part of our church, related to people in our church, or even friends oftentimes that are even overseas. Speaking of overseas, two groups of people I always like to allude to on the back of your sheet, those serving in the military and those that are serving on the mission field. Please make it an extra point to pray for those individuals who are being at least in our vernacular, very very sacrificial in the endeavors that they're partaking of.

Let's begin by prayer tonight and we'll get started.

*Lord, as we gather tonight, thank you for the privilege, thank you for the opportunity, Lord, of all the places that we could be in the world, that we're right here, the privilege of studying your word, the privilege of gathering together as believers in Jesus Christ and, Lord, we know that right now at this moment there are many people connected to our church that are serving overseas in various capacities who don't have the privilege of tonight. Many are on the mission field in areas where very few believers are, if any. Many are serving in the military and there are all types of emotions as they're absent from family and friends. And so, Lord, we pray for those individuals specifically tonight, that you would be the peace that passes all understanding, that your arms would wrap around them, and that whatever they need emotionally and mentally and, yes, even physically tonight, that you would provide it. For those that we know of that are sick and hurting and struggling in physical and emotional and all types of capacities, Lord, we come tonight with these names on the list and the names on our heart and we just ask*

*that you would move in a mighty way. Lord, my prayer for those that are sick is however you move in their life, that it might be mesmerizing to the doctors and the nurses as they go for check-ups and appointments and as they go through tests, that they might look at them and just say, "Wow, we didn't expect this result. We don't know how this happened." Lord, may that be the testimony because you moved and worked in their lives. And Lord, tonight as we study your word, may it be your word and your word alone that is elevated in our lives. Lord, may it not be our opinions, our ideas, our philosophies, Lord, may it be what you've said that guide us in all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Alright, I do want to welcome you tonight to Ask Jeff Spring Break edition. You say, "Well, what is Spring Break edition?" None of you have to worry about going and picking up your kids when you're done so we can just kick back and enjoy and relax, but also Spring Break edition means that we've got a lot of folks that are not able to be with us. In fact, if you are not aware, we have over 350 of our college students and adults that are down a ways south of here on a mission trip so please continue to pray for them as they wrap up the amplify mission trip.

But tonight as we begin, those of you that may be first timers with us or new, this is a Bible study that is guided and directed by you. Every question that we deal with tonight is because you have submitted it. Most of you take advantage of our website [fbcopelika.com/askjeff](http://fbcopelika.com/askjeff). When you submit a question, it goes into a database. In just a moment, I'm going to go to the database, I'm going to pick a question. It is completely at random. I cannot control it. You can't control it. None of us can control it. It just comes out random. In other words, you can ask a question a day ago and it comes up tonight, or a year ago and it won't come up for five more years. I can't control it. I apologize.

One thing I do want to allude to because we have somebody who screens the questions for multiple reasons, one of which is just to make sure it's a legitimate question. 2. It has been brought to my attention that some of you in an act of possible desperation are submitting your question like 5, 6, 7, 10 times. The question will get kicked out. It does not have, it's not one of those that, you know, the more times it's in there, the greater chance it is of being answered. So I just want to give you a warning, I don't know who some of you are but some of you are just hitting like return, return, return, return, thinking that if half the questions are your own question, surely it will get picked. I'm sorry but those do get removed. The original question does stay.

So that being said, without further ado we will go to the database. Oh, this is going to be interesting. I'm just going to read it as written and then we'll unpack the question, or as most of you do, there's like 3-4 questions within one. It says how much damage has the Roman Catholic Church done to Christianity? I know they played a big part of the Crusades but other things have been brought on the purge of the Jewish people, for example, World War I & II. What role did the leaders play in World War I & II to help the Catholic Church to eradicate the Jewish people?

Woo, if that's not a loaded question, I don't know what is but it is a relevant question because I want to draw a clear distinction tonight between an organization and the body

of Christ. You see, the question could have been asked how much damage have Baptists done to the body of Christ? How much damage have Methodists done? Have Pentecostals done? We could allow any of the organizations of which find themselves in a Christian umbrella be utilized but tonight for the sake of the questions that were asked, it's utilizing one known as what we know as the Roman Catholic Church. So I want to begin by saying no organization, no denomination, no group is perfect but per this question is what about the Roman Catholic Church.

When we begin to discuss particularly with people that are unbelievers, people that are skeptics, agnostics, atheists, or just plain what we call now non's, just have no religious affiliation whatsoever, there are several what we call excuses that they love to use when trying to dismiss Christianity. One of those excuses that's usually in the top three or at least the top five is the "atrocities" that the Church has done throughout the years. For example, a little over 1,000 years ago, what we know as the Roman Catholic Church had this not so brilliant idea that those that did not adhere to their specific belief system, if they did not convert, they should be eliminated from the face of the earth and violence was ensued to take their lives because they did not convert. It's absolutely true, the Crusades are a horrible mark on the history of "the Church." Now notice I didn't say the history of Christianity because I have a hard time believing that someone who's come to an understanding that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior and they've read the gospels and they've read the letters of Paul, I have a real difficult grasp of thinking that those individuals would think that it would be biblical to eradicate mass groups of humanity "in the name of a church."

Now if we'll hold on just a few moments when we study in the book of Revelation tonight, the church of what we know as Pergamos, which means "much marriage," we're going to look at it from a historical standpoint and we're going to realize for a long period of time including what we know as the Crusades, what we know as the church as an organization – listen – was more worldly than it was biblical. Per the questions about World War I and World War II, I'm just going to share facts. Those that had high ranking positions in what we call Nazi Germany, almost every single one of them was an active standing member of what we know as the Roman Catholic Church. That being said, none of them were excommunicated.

Now if you're not familiar with what excommunication means, in Catholic tradition that means they're removed from the Church which in Catholic theology means they're sent to hell. And so none of those who were in charge of the horrific events known particularly as the Holocaust were ever eradicated from the Church that we know as the Roman Catholic Church. You say, "Why is that so significant?" Because there are people today from Jewish backgrounds and Jewish families that believe that the Bible teaches that we're supposed to kill Jews because of the Holocaust. Why? Because the Roman Catholic Church as an organization is perceived as a panel of Christianity and the activities that took place under their watch. Now during what we know as World War II, Vatican City did to a small gesture of benevolence. They allowed 500 Jewish people to escape concentration camps and they kept them in the catacombs to endure the atrocities of

World War II. But if you ask me, that's a small piece compared to what they allowed to happen under their very nose.

Now again, an organization, an entity is very different than the body of Christ of true believers, and I want to make this very clear. We could answer this question in regards to Baptists, Methodists and everybody else as well but the questions are true, there's a lot of atrocities particularly during the Crusades, World War I and World War II of which what we know as the Roman Catholic Church either promoted or did not stop horrific events from happening right under their very nose. How much damage? Only heaven and hell know how much damage was done.

Any other thoughts on that lovely question? Concerns? Issues? What abouts? Everybody's like, "I'm not touching that one." Okay, good, we're moving on. Thank you.

Before children reach the age of accountability they belong to Jesus. Is it wrong for them to participate in the Lord's Supper? They trust him as only little ones can.

That's a really good question. Now the concept is the age of accountability. Now that's a term that typically Baptists are known for and so I want to take you all the way back to the book of Deuteronomy and I want you to see where we get this idea of the age of accountability because in some faith traditions, they say, well, that's age 12, and a lot of those traditions have times of confirmation or they'll have classes that they go through, some faith traditions say that baptism cannot happen until a certain age, but Deuteronomy 1 is the story of the Israelites that are going into what we know as the Promised Land. They have wandered through the wilderness for 40 years. Now I want you to notice what the Bible says about the eventual going into the Promised Land. This is actually a statement on the front end. This is what God is telling them because of the generation that rebelled. In verse 39 of Deuteronomy 1, it says, "Moreover, your little ones which you said should be for prey and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in, and unto them I will give it and they shall possess it. But as for you who had taken your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea." In other words, when the Israelites who, by the way, only had about an 11 day journey, when they decided that they would rather be in Egypt because at least in Egypt they had three meals a day, at least that's what they claimed, they began to grumble and mumble and gripe and whine and complain, and the Lord said, "Okay, fine, if that's the case, take a lap and you're going to take a lap for 40 years." But what does he say? But those little ones who did not yet know or could not discern the difference between good and evil, here's what I think is critical, God is not holding them accountable for the rebellion. In other words, they are not going to be punished by the wandering of 40 years. They are going to have the grace of God over them because they were not yet of the ability to discern between good and evil.

Good and evil is different than right and wrong. For example, when my children were 9 months old, or a year old, they knew that if they grabbed something we told them not to grab and they got punished, they knew they had done something they should not do but that doesn't understand the difference between good and evil. I think the best way to

explain that is when you can understand what sin is and the natural and the supernatural ramifications for your sin, then you understand the difference between good and evil. We cannot be found until we understand we're first, what? Lost. We can't be saved until we understand that we are lost and these young ones who are with their parents and grandparents wandering for these 11 days, they did not understand what was taking place. They could not comprehend their "rebellion" or as we would say, lostness so the Lord says, "Okay, you're covered, you're shielded."

Now I want to address this question then we'll go to the issue about the Lord's supper. What is that age, then? I don't know and neither do you. I believe it's different for every single human being. I have met 5 and 6 year olds who knew what sin was and could grasp the ramifications and knew the impact of Jesus for their lives because of it, and I've known 12, 13 and 14 year olds who didn't yet quite get it. In fact, typically and not always but typically the more biblical information, knowledge and exposure a child has in their life, usually the earlier that age is in their life because they understand and they've been told the concepts and it's been reiterated to them. Oftentimes you take a young person at camp, youth camp so to speak, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 13, 14 years old, never been to church in their life, never seen a Bible, you think.... Well, that's not always the case but sometimes you have those situations and they don't grasp this. They know what's the difference between right and wrong and this is punishment and this is a blessing, but what is sin and the understanding thereof?

So the ages vary across the spectrum because it's about one's personal exposure. Any age of accountability questions before we get to the Lord's Supper issue? Obviously we should have fed you tonight because you need energy because you're not raising your hand. Yes, ma'am.

[unintelligible]

20 and under, yes.

[unintelligible]

Yes, that is in the same context of this story that it talks about those, by the way, in the army, when they go into the Promised Land, there's two aspects. 1. I believe this is in the book of Numbers but correct me if I'm wrong, when they go into the Promised Land, that the Lord made a quick or a very strong division between those that were over 20 and those that were under 20. Basically under 20 was still considered a child, over 20 was considered an adult. That made all the difference in the world, particularly when it came to fighting in the battles against all the ites, you know, the Hittites and the Pezzizites and all those folks that they would find in the Promised Land. That being said, I'm glad you brought that up because a lot of folks have said, "Well, maybe Deuteronomy 1:39 is addressing that, you know, roughly it was 20 and under." I don't have a problem with that because here's the difference in a Jewish culture and our culture. In the Jewish culture, you're not often allowed to have your opinion for a long time. Your opinion is your parents' opinion.

In fact, I'm going to shift gears just a little bit. I had the privilege a couple of years ago, is that I was asked to officiate an official Nigerian wedding. Now you have not lived until you've been to a Nigerian wedding. Nigerian weddings always start late because that's just the culture, and they go for hours. Now most of you would struggle because it involves at least 2-3 hours of dancing at every Nigerian wedding. I preached an entire 30 minute sermon as a part of the service. That's what they wanted. But when we got to the reception, as a part of Nigerian tradition, this is perfect to your question, ma'am, all of those that were not married, okay, so singles. Now generally speaking it was young people but there were some there that I would classify as older teenagers, even young adults. In the Nigerian tradition, they would sit at the tables for the reception. Those children had to sit on the floor and the parents had to feed them. I know some of you are going, "Oh, how horrible." By the way, this wasn't in Nigeria, it was in Atlanta, okay?

Now why is that significant? Because in their tradition, in their culture, that child was not of ability to make decisions of their own until they were married, and so they were just enjoying their culture and their tradition. The reason I bring that up, in the Jewish tradition oftentimes you do not have an opinion until you're at a latter stage of life which would mean this whole idea of the age of accountability maybe they weren't allowed the opportunity to make a decision of whether or not to rebel. Does that make any sense? In other words, when they got together and said, "Hey, we're going back to Egypt," they may have told 18 year olds, "This has nothing to do with you. You're out of here." But in our context today in dealing with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I wouldn't want to dare say, "Well, if you're 19 years old, you don't know any better anyway. Not important that you make a decision," because I've met 9 year olds who do understand what sin is.

But you're right, the Lord makes this line with the age of 20 which is interesting because the average age of death back then was about 40 so it was mid-life at that point. Because think about it, they were in the wilderness 40 years, right? And everybody died out. Have you ever wondered, "Well, why didn't some people outlive the wilderness?" Because they didn't live that long in those days, and by the way, it says their shoes or their clothes did not wear out. You know the women were unhappy. No excuse to get some new shoes. And the beauty that they could eat all the manna they wanted and you get the idea that they didn't get fat. Oh, man, what a great opportunity.

But I'm glad you brought that up about the age of 20 because was it 18 and 19 year olds? If it was, I would say it was because they were not allowed to personally express their rebellion or not. But in today's world when it comes to our relationship with the Lord, 9 year olds have an opportunity to reject or accept Jesus.

Did you find it?

[unintelligible]

I got the right book, thank you. Numbers 14, what?

[unintelligible]

Numbers 14:29 deals with the 20 year old line in the sand, so to speak. Any other age of accountability issues? I apologize, yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

At age 12, yes.

[unintelligible]

Okay, the question he's alluding to or the statement he's making is when Jesus was in the temple and the Bible says he was confounding the doctors and the rabbis and the religious people of his day, that he was 12 years of age. What's interesting is and, again, we're dealing with culture and background and history here, even though Numbers 14:29 talks about being age 20, that in the Jewish culture there was this thing called bar mitzvah. You know. Bar mitzvah isn't just an excuse to have a party and get gifts, it's when a young man would become a man. And at a bar mitzvah, several things occur. 1. Whatever your occupation is going to be, that is the point at which it's announced who you will apprentice under. For example, when Jesus came to Peter and James and John and these guys and said, "Come follow me," have you ever wondered why did they just take off and leave everything? Because every young man wanted to be a rabbi. I mean, that was the ultimate job in their days. And at a bar mitzvah when a rabbi such as Gamaliel would come by, he would be at the bar mitzvah and he would say, "Come follow me," meaning your job is now to be under my tutelage, so to speak. So whether they were woodworkers, whatever it would be, carpenters or such, that's when that was announced.

The second thing that was done is the couple that had entered a "contract" with your parents for your bride, that that would be initiated at that time, that this couple, that their daughter or the daughter that had already been born would be, that's why we call it being betrothed, they would be betrothed to them and when she was of age, typically 13 or 14 years of age physically, and he was usually 25 to 30 years of age, they would be married. So a bar mitzvah, you received your job and your wife all in one time. In our world, sixth grade. Can you imagine? I can't. I'm just here to tell you. I could not imagine right now having two of my children out in the workforce. Go for it, guys. Make it happen.

So with cultures changing, the bar mitzvah of the Jewish tradition doesn't have that much significance today as far as job and bride, but at the same time it is a recognition of manhood, adulthood. Though they couldn't fight in the army of Numbers 14, they still had the ability to make their own decisions. Now here's the key to all this. I don't think any of us could put a stamp on it and say that's the age, so that when a person begins to deal with the things of God, take advantage of the opportunity. Don't say, "Oh, well, in a couple of years they'll be 12, we'll deal with it then." If they're 8 years old, 9 years old, deal with it at that time.

Now the question is what about the Lord's Supper? Now the question was asked and I think it's a great question, will these young children, they're under the grace of God, they're at the age of accountability, what would hurt if they practiced? Because let me reread the question. I don't want to misquote anybody. They trust him as only little ones can, yes, but the Lord's Supper is for those who have already believed in the shed blood of Jesus, have already realized that they were a sinner, and they are confessing and remembering what he did on their behalf. Though these young children, 4 years of age, 5 years of age, may have an innocent faith, a simple acknowledgment of who the Lord is in their life, I don't believe that they can actually remember the Lord's death because they never have been saved by the Lord's death. How can you remember something you've never experienced?

Now this may be difficult for some of you parents and grandparents to grasp but I think one of the greatest lessons in all three of my children's lives are when the Lord's Supper was taken and they were told they could not participate. Why? Because what do kids say when they can't do something? Why not? And within that day or the next couple of days, questions, well, why did you do this and I did not, and you're able to begin to share the gospel with them at a very young age because it was not appropriate for them. Simple faith, yes. Simple trust, absolutely. But the Lord's Supper is one of only two ordinances the Lord gives us. He gives us the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. So would we allow them to be baptized just because they think it would be enjoyable? No. And you know, the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, it says because some people have taken it in error, they are sick and some of them are dead. Now I don't wish that on anybody, much less my own children. And I know some of you may say, "Well, it's innocence. It's not with mal-intent. Oh, I understand it's not with mal-intent, but at the same time, I think we need to take the Lord's Supper that seriously that it's only for those who have repented, confessed, and believed.

Any Lord's Supper, age of accountability? Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

I can give you the exact numbers. Alright, so the question that's been brought up is those that are over age 40, the opportunity or, I hate to use the term, but the chances that they will ever get saved. How about this word, how about the probability? Alright, so we're going to do a little test tonight. We're going to have some fun. If you got saved at age 18 or under, 18 or under, raise your hand. Look around. Keep your hand up. I'm going to just venture to say that's a majority, okay? You can put them down. Age 19 or over? Keep them high. You folks need to go home and drop on your knees and thank God because the moment, at least in our culture, okay, I can't speak to the Eastern world, I can't speak to other but at least here in North America, the best statistics we've got is that once a person turns 19, okay, the statistical probability of them ever coming to faith in Jesus Christ the rest of their life is only 6%. Only 6%.

That is why evangelism among young people is so critical because here's the difference. When you're 12, let's use that age tonight, when you're 12 years of age, what's the worst problem you've got? Little Susie may not have reciprocated your liking her and you might not be playing the starting position on the ball team you want to be on. But when you're 42 and you're drowning in debt and your kids aren't where you want them to be, and your marriage isn't where you want it to be, and you're struggling at work, you've got a lot more to work through, if that makes sense. There's a much simpler, less crowded spiritual scenario when you're 12 versus 40+ years of age.

But I'm glad you brought that up because the older, and by the way, and I don't have all the specific statistics tonight so I don't want to allude to them, but what we used to call was kind of the golden window, okay, was between ages 11 and 14. That was the time, that was where the greatest percentage of people got saved. Now those are a little bit dated statistics. And the reason was because after 14 you're in high school and all of a sudden you're interested in everything but the things of God, right, okay? Under age 11, obviously we understand. But now they're saying that number is dropping because the pressures and the stresses of life that used to be reserved for high school students is now going down into Middle School. And so we're seeing now young people who are 11, 12, 13, who are so caught up with the things of the world they don't care about the things of the Lord and so that golden window is actually shrinking and getting lower, if that makes sense.

Now that being said, that means that every single one of you is going to volunteer for VBS this year, right? Oh, I heard a no. Well, there is your reason to do so because that is one of the great times in a young person's life where we have the opportunity to share the gospel with them. But I'm glad you brought that up. And by the way, though, I will say this. I had a great uncle of mine who my great grandmother prayed for, every time I ever heard her pray, she prayed for his salvation. He got saved at 84 years of age. So just because you're 84 doesn't mean you won't but he was cutting it close, real close. In fact, I'll go ahead and share his story. I had three relatives of mine who all played what we would call minor league baseball. Okay, they never made it to the show but they played some AA and some AAA ball. This one particular great uncle of mine was one of those individuals. His grandson was an outstanding collegiate baseball player and had some strides in the game. He was inducted into his state's sports like college hall of fame or whatever, this 84 year old man. He had played in some of the days of the greats. Now he only played minor, he never played major league baseball but he had had the opportunity through the farm system to play with the Mickey Mantle's of the world, to play with some of the Joe Dimaggio types, and so when he gave his speech about being at the sports banquet, they asked him who was the most influential baseball player in your life and he said the most influential baseball person in my life, and he named his grandson, my cousin. And they all looked around and said why? And he goes, because he's the baseball player who introduced me to Jesus and he shared his testimony. What were they going to say, he's 84? I mean, pass the filter age. You can do and say anything you want at that point. But what I think's important is and this is why it's critical, he didn't talk a whole lot about the superstars and the hall of famers because he had understood at that point the most important person in his life was Jesus, not some ball player that he played with.

Any others in this area or issue before we get to Revelation? And we're going to do Revelation tonight because we didn't last week. Hopefully you have your outline. I want to make a clarification or I've entitled tonight's "Who is your mother?" I realize that we're in the deep South and it should have been named "Who's your momma?" but that being said, we're going to stick with "Who is your mother" tonight because we're going to deal with a subject matter in the book of Revelation 2, the church of Pergamos. The church of Pergamos and the church of Thyatira back to back here have some of the most horrific track records in Scripture that you'll find of any church. I want to give us just a reminder. We're looking at these churches not just as seven historical places of worship of which they were, but the Bible says in regards to the book of Revelation, it says that you should not, this is at the very end of Revelation 22, you should not add or subtract from this book of prophecy. Now when we get to the last chapter of Revelation in five or six years, we'll talk about that verse, does it mean the entire Bible or does it just mean the book of Revelation. Well, we know it at least means just the book of Revelation.

That being said, this book of prophecy, what we understand is even though this was a local congregation, even though they had specific issues, as we've been discussing with the church at Ephesus and Smyrna, they also give us a very good prophetic picture of the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ throughout time from the ascension of Jesus till the soon return of Jesus. So that being said, in a moment when we talk about Pergamos specifically, we're also going to allude to a time period of which what we know as the church acted very similarly to Pergamos.

Beginning in verse 12, it says,

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Now when you look at this one specific church, there are two main accusations. At the very end, it just kind of throws in, "Oh, by the way, this whole thing about the Nicolaitans, y'all bought into that problem too and I don't like that either." That was the only problem that the church of Ephesus had at the beginning of chapter 2, but they have

the doctrine of Balaam. Now we're going to discuss in just a moment the difference between the doctrine of Balaam and the error of Balaam and the way of Balaam. Here is a story found all the way back in the book of Numbers 21-30 that comes into play in the last book of your Bible.

But the church, Pergamos, just the word Pergamos means "much marriage." And I realize that Matthew 19, Jesus discusses marriage about between one man and one wife, I understand that but the term "marriage" by strict definition means when two separate entities join in oneness. Now that's what we see happening in this church, we see the believers in the world becoming one. Much marriage. And so in the name Pergamos means "much marriage."

Now as far as a definition, they were a compromised church. Now we use the term "compromised" a lot and allow me to give you what I believe is the best definition for compromise that I've ever run across. It says "exchanging an eternal truth or principle for a temporary benefit." So when we talk about the church at Pergamos being a compromised church, in just a moment when we take kind of that 30,000 foot view and we look at the history of what we know as the church, what we're going to be discussing is not just this local congregation but there has been a time period in specific where we, the church, compromised ourselves with the world. We married the world and we traded our eternal truths for temporary blessings or benefits. In other words, we wouldn't discuss the truth of Jesus or the reality of sin so as to gain power, position, authority or financial gain. We compromised. Pergamos compromised.

Now it's interesting that compromise has what I like to call a center. Notice its seat. "I know where your seat is," it says, "you have Satan's seat." Now what I think is unique is compared to the church at Ephesus where it talked about the Jews in the synagogue who were lying about being Jews, there's a difference here. This isn't a religious seat, this is a political secular seat, and what we see happening at the church of Pergamos is they have decided to have a seat, they have decided to plant themselves both feet in all the way, they are completely engrossed in the secular system of their day. You cannot, at Pergamos you can't tell the difference between the church and the world. They appear the same.

"I know where you sit in Satan's seat." You say, "Well, why would it be called Satan's seat?" In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Satan is called the god of this world and Pergamos, as we're going to see in just a moment, this church did not distinguish themselves and they did not allow themselves to be different from the world, but thought it was best to be merged or married to the world. Also we find their arrangement. It's not evident and what I mean by that is real simple because in 2 Corinthians 11:14 it says marvel you not that Satan himself disguises himself or transforms himself into an angel of light. In other words, when an individual, when a local congregation or as we're going to see in just a moment, when the church as a total entity allows itself to become completely secularized, it always looks good on the outside even though it is corrupt on the inside. It's as if Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and then there in Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 12 through 19 it says do not marvel, we do not fight against flesh and blood but against

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness. Therefore the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, etc.

It says we wrestle against the wiles of the devil. The reason I believe this is important is because the church at Pergamos still had all the outward appearances of being a church but they had abdicated all of their distinctive beliefs so as to gain favor from the world around them. In other words, if you won't participate and/or advocate this, we will allow you to receive this. Oh, compromise is a subtle subtle slow fade in our lives, even "a church's life."

Then we have their actions. They appeared godly. Church still took place. Ministers still went where they were supposed to go and people still made statements they were supposed to make, and participated in celebrations they were supposed to celebrate. The holidays, the feasts, the opportunities for "expression of faith" were there, the problem was that the root or the reason or the faith behind it was not.

Now in your outline, I put Genesis 3:5. To me that's a very critical verse. In fact, you go back previous to Genesis 3:5 and you have Adam and Eve in what we are aware of, the birth of their first two sons. We know them as Cain and Abel. We know that Cain killed Abel and so by the time you get to chapter 5, verse 3, I put 3:5, forgive me that I had a little biblical dyslexia there. Forgive me for that, it should be Genesis 5:3. I apologize. By the time you get to chapter 5 of Genesis, Adam and Eve are going to have another male child. What's interesting is we have Cain, Abel has been killed, he's deceased. When Seth is born I want you to notice what it says there in Genesis 5:3. Adam makes the statement, "He is after my likeness." Now here's what's interesting, is Adam and Eve according to Genesis 1 and 2, were born in the image and the likeness of God. One generation later everything has changed.

Now I want you to think about the seriousness. Adam and Eve born in the image and likeness of God, their children were born in the image and the likeness of them, and who were they when they were born? They were sinful depraved creatures. All it took – listen – was one generation to go from godly to ungodly. All it took was one generation to go after the likeness of God to the likeness of men, and it only takes a small amount of time for that which advocates the things of God to compromise and advocate the things of the world. But here's what I want you to see. Just like the church at Pergamos, the seat that is secular, it looks good on the outside, the decorations haven't changed, the verbiage hasn't changed, but it was the spirit that has changed.

Compromise always starts with what I call convictions. Here's the problem of Balaam. Now I'm not going to go through all these verses tonight for the sake of your time and mine, but the person of Balaam, the prophet of Balaam, a fascinating character. In fact, if you so have a desire, go back to the book of Numbers at some time, read chapters 21 through 30 and you have an individual who was a prophet of God, and the Lord came to him very specifically and just said, "Hey, listen to my voice. Don't listen to everybody else's and you'll be okay." There's a man by the name of Balac who comes to him and wants him to curse the Israelites and he tells him, "I cannot curse that which God has

blessed. I can't do it. You're asking me to do something that is actually impossible to do." And what we see in the life of Balaam is that he committed three very distinct rebellious actions against God and his people. They are called his doctrine. They are called his way. And they are called his error. His actions were so significant that he's mentioned in the book of Jude, he's mentioned in Peter's writings, and he shows up in the book of Revelation. I mean, it's almost as if the Bible is saying, "Hello, don't you understand what this guy did?" And here in Revelation it says that the church at Pergamos, the compromised church, bought into the doctrine of Balaam. Why is that important? Doctrine, that's a theological term. That means one's belief about the things of God. So it was their spiritual beliefs that got them compromised with the world.

Now his error. The book of Jude talks about the error of Balaam. You say, "Well, what was his error?" And I'm not going to go back to Jude and read back in the book of Numbers but just allude to, that he thought that he could determine the actions of God, that he knew better than God did. In other words, he said, "Well, I think if God would allow me to, this is what God would want so I'm going to make the decision on his behalf." I don't know if you're aware of what Balaam actually taught Balac to do, he said, "I cannot curse the Israelites but if we can convince them to marry the women they're not supposed to marry, then it will tear up the whole group. Is that not a lesson for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? If we can mess up marriage, we can mess up the whole group of people.

Can I just take a step back and say I think the enemy's done the same thing to the church today? If we can get them to not take marriage as seriously as they should with the right folks and the right procedures and the right this and the right that, and what has happened? The same thing and the Israelites started marrying people they had no business marrying, outside their tribes, outside of the Israelites. They turned to marrying the Philistines. What happened when they married the Philistines? They brought their false gods in. They started polytheism. They started worshiping false gods and everything messed up. You see, he knew he couldn't curse them and so he got them on the backside. Isn't that what the devil did to us in the garden? He got us around the long way.

So that is his error. His way in 2 Peter 2:15 was to make gain with God's gift. Basically what we see Balaam do is that he made a mighty small fortune for offering this advice. He was willing – listen – to be bought. Hm, sounds a little like Judas, does it not? There was a price he was willing to accept or to pay.

One of my favorite historical examples of this and I go back to kind of the video we showed on Sunday with the life of Martin Luther because it was 500 years ago this year that all of that began, what we know as the Reformation. There was a man by the name of Prince Frederick. Prince Frederick basically housed and protected Martin Luther when those who did not like his teachings began to try to eliminate his life. Prince Frederick was the one who kidnapped him after he made his famous statement that, "I cannot and I will not recant," and those that were opposed to him were going to try to kill him. He actually kidnapped him in advance of those that were opposed to him so they could get him to safety. Prince Frederick housed him. Prince Frederick funded the translation of the Bible into the German language that Luther did and allowed him to eat and to have

housing while he did so. Prince Frederick was a pretty critical character in the life of Martin Luther.

You say, "Well, why is that important?" Prince Frederick was a collector of religious icons. The best way to describe this is watch the Discovery Channel. You know, this was a piece of fabric or this was the piece of wood that was connected to Jesus or John the Baptist or the apostles. These items, this was a rose that was blessed by somebody. And so he had this marvelous collection. He was a wealthy influential man. Well, as things were getting heated up with Martin Luther and his enemies wanted him completely eradicated, they knew Prince Frederick was a fan of his. They knew he was a protector of his and so in his collection, they sent him one of the most prized icons of the day of great value, and in that movie that I showed you a short clip of on Sunday morning, there's a scene where it gets delivered to his palace and he just begins to weep and just to cry, and he's an older man by this time and he begins to shake, and the young helper that's assisting him says, "Sir, what is wrong? Do you not like it?" And as he puts his shaking hand to his face, he begins to weep and he says, "They thought I could be bought. They thought I could be bought." What a lesson for us because he said, "Do you know what? There's not a price for truth." And what we see in Pergamos, what we see in the life of Balaam is he could be bought.

Now what is his doctrine? Revelation 2:14, I believe that doctrine is he defiled his separation. Now in Romans 1:1 Paul says he was separated unto the gospel from his mother's womb, and what we see is that we are to be in but not of the world. Jesus said we're to be the light of the world and to be the salt of the world, but we are not to become the dirt or the darkness of the world. We're supposed to be distinct. Pergamos was supposed to be distinct. The church was supposed to be distinct but oftentimes we're not.

So what was the practice of Balaam? Well, according to Revelation 2, he taught them not only to marry the wrong women, we'll discuss that in a moment, but to eat unto idols. Now 1 Corinthians 8, there's a valuable group of verses there that basically teaches us that food offered to idols, those aren't even real gods anyway and though it may be critical to your witness and to your testimony to others, we know that in the big picture they're not that significant, but he taught the Israelites to do this and so they were opened up to the possibility of other gods which eventually by marrying the wrong women they received and believed into. It will gradually sink you into the world, ultimately it will destroy your testimony, and then committing fornication. 1 Corinthians 6 says every sin is outside of the body except this, and it says you shall not join yourself with a harlot for you're not to join yourself and become one with her. What we see in the doctrine of Balaam is that he taught the people of God that it was okay to compromise with the world, it was okay to eat food you shouldn't eat, it was okay to marry women you shouldn't marry, it won't be that big a deal. Listen, it's that big a deal because once you take a step, the devil will take a mile. What we see at the church of Pergamos is they fell into this trap.

Now I want to take a step away from the outline for a moment, not just the book of Numbers, not just the local church at Pergamos, let's talk about how we've been

discussing that these churches are a picture for us of a time and, shall I say, periods of time between the ascension of Christ and the soon return of Christ. The church of Ephesus, remember we discussed that it gave us a good picture of that early church, faithful in doctrine, faithful in teachings, didn't bow down, but they had lost their first love. The church of Smyrna that we discussed last time, that one of the only two churches that nothing bad is said about, high persecution, many people losing their lives for the sake of the gospel. A very similar picture up through about the early 300s, early 4<sup>th</sup> century of Christianity where 10 major waves of Roman-fueled persecution took place. Interesting that if we take the 30,000 foot view and we look at the church of Jesus Christ as an entity from when Jesus ascended until he returns, the next step after Smyrna, the next step after waves of persecution, the next step would be what we know as this compromised Pergamos church.

I don't know if you remember when we studied the church at Smyrna, I made this statement, it was a rhetorical question: if you can't beat them, what do you do? You join them. The world could not squash the church and so what did it do? It decided to join the church and in 313 the Edict of Milan took place, a man by the name of Constantine, a ruthless Roman General and leader, had a dream one night and in his dream he saw in the clouds the Greek letter Chi and the Greek letter Rho, an X and a P in English. It happens to be the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek so what did he decide? That he had had a vision that Christianity was supposed to become the official religion of the Roman Empire. That's how we get the name Roman Catholic, which means universal, Church because the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, this group of people who were being killed and literally slaughtered for their faith all of a sudden the most powerful entity in the world said, "You're now the official religion. You are now what everybody must believe in."

Now what's interesting about Constantine is he then made everybody in his army get baptized whether they believed or not. That's what we call a good luck charm, not a religious expression. When Constantine was baptized, he was baptized his entire body except his right arm because he wanted the liberty to still kill people with his sword hand. Now the reason I bring that up is I don't think Constantine had an experience with Jesus. I don't think his army had a revival. What you see is a completely secular institution coming to a sacred institution and saying, "Okay, we'll quit killing you if you'll join us."

Now can we just be honest? I bet you that the church in 313 AD was kind of getting tired of this stuff. You know, every now and then you'd like a reprieve, wouldn't you? You're tired of worrying if you're going to get killed or if you're going to lose your life or lose something else. Did you know that we did really good for about 50 years? We did great, in fact, shortly thereafter in 325 we have what is called the Council of Nicea. You say, "Well, why is that important?" Because that's when we finally declared that Jesus was completely God. It took us 300 years to figure that one out, by the way. If they would have had Google, it would have taken three seconds, but we didn't have Google back then. It took 300 years for the church to come together.

Now you say, "Well, why did it take so long?" When you're running for your life, you don't have time to have these discussions and so once we no longer were being

persecuted, the church came together and said, "Aha, this is who Jesus is." 325. In 381, we had what was known as the Council of Constantinople, okay? At Constantinople we decided officially that the Holy Spirit was completely God. It took us almost 400 years to get this Trinity thing right. But we were running for our lives.

So we get the person of Jesus right, we get the person of the Holy Spirit right, you would think everything would be great, right? Nope. As soon as we hit the fifth century, it went south and it went south quick and we saw the church of Jesus Christ become completely compromised because secular leaders were determining religious positions and religious positions were making allowance for secular leaders and basically the church as an institution was completely governed by backroom meetings, secret handshakes and bartered deals. And for years and years and years, the church and the state were the same. Now do you understand how we got the Crusades? We got the Crusades because the church that was the state and the state was the church, what does the state do when they feel like they have an enemy? They go to war, right? And so the church went to war because the church was the state, and the state was the church. But here's the thing, they still kept their buildings, they still kept their procedures, they still wore the same clothes, they went through all of the same celebrations, the only difference was there was no spiritual vitality to it at all. It was a complete compromised state.

What's interesting is if you look at the history of what we know as the church from really the early 300s until and we're going to discuss next week somewhere in the middle of what we call the Dark Ages, next week we're going to talk about Jezebel, by the way, hopefully nobody named their daughter that. I hope not but next week we're going to talk about Jezebel because she shows up again. The church was compromised. It had traded its eternal beliefs for temporary relief and financial security. When you look at the history of the church during that time period, there are several things that are going to be very absent. You're not going to have the word of God circulating very much. You're not going to have the people of God speaking of the things of God very much. You know what you're going to have? You're going to have people in high position jockeying for position, claiming they deserve the position and the other person doesn't, and they're going to fight and they're going to argue. In fact, there's a time period in here where two of the "leaders" of the church excommunicated each other. It's called the Great Schism. And they got all mad and everybody got upset because it wasn't a church, it was an organization that looked like a church but had married the state.

So as you begin to look at these churches not only is Pergamos a valuable lesson in personal and corporate compromise, it also gives us a very frightening picture of what we, the church, looked like for a long period of time. By the way, if you think things couldn't get worse, come back next week because in Thyatira it actually gets worse. It doesn't turn the other way until we get to the church of Philadelphia. In fact, we're going to see that the church as an entity for about 1,200 years was completely compromised and of very little spiritual difference in the world. You say, "Well, how did we get the Dark Ages?" When the believers married the world, it turned dark. Hm, does that resonate with our own lives tonight as well?

Alright, back to the outline. So compromise has consequences. The difference between what I call tolerance and exclusion. I've given you a case study there in 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18. Matthew 18 is known as the church discipline passage. 1 Corinthians 5 is the story about a man who is having an illicit relationship within the church of which it's so graphic it's tearing the church up and the Apostle Paul comes in and says he must be physically removed until he repents of this sin. Keep the door open but not until he repents. The reason that this is important is we see the difference between tolerance and exclusion is that the church of Jesus Christ, the line that must be drawn in our personal lives, a church's life and even the entity of the church's life is, yes, nobody is perfect, yes, people make mistakes, yes, people struggle and they fall, we get all that, but the difference is with the church at Pergamos, is they willingly embraced, supported and promoted the agenda of the secular world and therein is what frightens me about the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is because we have become people who are at times are willing to embrace and even promote the secular agenda, not just tolerate it. In fact, I'm reminded of what we know as the pastoral epistles. It says pray for those that are in leadership, pray for those that are those that are in rule over you, pray that you will live a quiet and peaceable life.

Last but not least, compromise brings casualties. I'll summarize the last part of this outline. You've got two choices, you can either die to the world or you can die to Christ. You can either jump in both feet in the world or with Christ. Riding the fence is a very dangerous position. Now you're going to have to forgive me in advance but I am originally from the state of Texas and there's an old adage we say out there, the only thing riding a fence will do is make you raw. Just let that kind of picture in your mind for a moment. But I think therein is the lie that many times we believe, that we can put one foot in the world and we can put one foot in the church and there won't be any casualties. There are always casualties and what we see from the church at Pergamos and what we see in church history is that we suffered a multi-century casualty when we decided to marry the world. Yes, we're called to be salt. Yes, we're called to be light. But we were never called to become one with the world and that's where we need to draw a very distinctive line. It got Pergamos in trouble. It got in the church in trouble. And it will get you in trouble as well.

Alright, let's pray and we'll close.

*Lord, as we depart from this place tonight, what a challenge. God, I think I'll speak on behalf of all of us, we all struggle with this at some level. Lord, at some level there are parts of the world that entice us and intrigue us and we desire various capacities. Lord, I pray that in those areas of the world that we would be salt and we would be light and we would be different, we would be distinct, we'd be peculiar but, Lord, may we not marry, may we not join and be one with the world. May we be called out from the world as you have called us to be called out. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

God bless. I am not going to the sports plex tonight.