

FBC POWELL, 8-18-19 AM  
"The Compromising Church"  
Revelation 2:12-17  
# 3 in Series, "Letters from Jesus"

I. The Speaker (v. 12)

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

II. The Strengths (v. 13)

**Matthew 25:41 (NASB)** "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Satan will be the chief inmate in Hell because it was prepared primarily for him and the angels that followed him in his rebellion.

When we use the words "*world system*" we are not talking about a place; we are not talking about God's creation. When "*world*" or "*the world system*" is used in the negative, it is an organized system of ideas and values that is energized by Satan and leaves out God and His Word.

**John 12:31 (NASB)** "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."

**2 Corinthians 4:4a (NASB)** "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving..."

**1 John 5:19 (NASB)** "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one."

*Antipas* – "against all"

III. The Sin (vv. 14-15)

A. Compromise in the Area of Morality and Idolatry (v. 14)

**James 4:4 (NASB)** "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

B. Compromise in the Area of Theology (v. 15)

"Worldliness, compromise, and tolerance had rushed into this church like a flood and she was on the verge of drowning."  
—Danny Aiken

#### IV. The Solution (v. 16)

**Revelation 19:15a (NASB)** “From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations...”

#### V. The Success (v. 17)

A. The Hidden Manna (v. 17a)

B. The White Stone (v. 17b)

C. A New Name (v. 17c)

### **Sermon 3: The Compromising Church**

#### **Revelation 2:12-17**

Is “compromise” a bad word? It depends on what is being compromised. Preferences should be compromised. When it comes to what the thermostat is set on or whether a couple watches the football game or the Hallmark channel, love compromises when we are dealing with our preferences. That kind of compromise is not wrong; in fact, that kind of compromise is essential to relationships in the church, in marriage, and in the workplace.

Under what circumstances would compromise be a bad thing? Compromise is wrong when it comes to commands or principles grounded in Scripture. This kind of compromise displeases God and robs a church of His blessings and power.

Today we are focusing on a letter from Jesus written to a church that was compromising in areas where the compromise involved disobedience to God. It is amazing how this compromising in a church at a place called Pergamum in the late first century is similar to many churches today. I am convinced that this ungodly kind of compromise is what has robbed most churches and individual Christians today of seeing God supernaturally at work in their life and their church.

Let’s focus on the compromising church, the church at Pergamum. We will begin by examining some of the background of the church at Pergamum. The city of Pergamum (known today in Turkey as Bergama) was a center of pagan worship. At least four pagan temples were found in Pergamum – Athena, the goddess of Wisdom; Dionysius (Bacchus) – the god of wine; Zeus – chief of the Greek gods; Aesculapius – the god of medicine and healing. All four of these temples were located on a large hill that stood about 1,000 feet above the surrounding plain. Attached to the temple of Aesculapius was a medical school. People would come into the temple courts to be healed. Non-poisonous snakes roamed unrestrained throughout the temple. The worshippers were encouraged to lay on the floor and allow the snakes to crawl on them. They believed that there was healing power in the snakes. The symbol of the god of healing, Aesculapius, was a serpent twisted on a pole. In some areas, that is still the symbol of the medical profession. Also,

as it was in Smyrna, emperor worship (worshipping the current emperor) was prominent in Pergamum.

There was a church in Pergamum. We are not sure how this church was started, but likely it was started by Paul or some of the disciples he taught during his three years at Ephesus and the surrounding areas. The Christians at Pergamum were certainly in the minority since most of the residents of Pergamum worshipped several or all these gods we just mentioned. When the Christians proclaimed that there is only one true God, the persecution started. The church at Pergamum was under great pressure to compromise the truth of Christianity with the prevailing culture of that city. Many refused to compromise, but some gave in to the pressure. Our temptation to compromise does not involve going to the pagan temple and allowing snakes to crawl all over us. Our temptation to compromise, however, is just as real and just as devastating in robbing us of our walk with Christ.

What kind of compromises are many churches struggling with? They are struggling with trying to obey Scripture and yet please and appeal to the culture of our day. But in the crazy culture we live in, there is a stark contrast between the culture and true Christianity. So many churches want to reach the lost, but they seek to do it through making the church “sinner-friendly”. But the fact is that a church that compromises to be sinner-friendly is no more “God-friendly”. John MacArthur said it best:

...as the world grows increasingly hostile to the gospel, the sinner-friendly church must compromise more and more to maintain its attractiveness. Refusing to be an offense to anyone, they emphasize physical emotion, not spiritual worship; affirmation, not conviction; sentimentality, not theology; entertainment, not edification; and frivolity, not solemnity.

[John MacArthur, *Christ's Call to Reform the Church*, page 90]

Let's dive into this text and see the danger of a compromising church.

## **I. The Speaker (v. 12)**

As with all the letters to the seven churches, Jesus began with a description of Himself that was intended to communicate an important truth that the addressed church needed to hear. The sharp two-edged sword in verse 12 is referring to the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12a: “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any *two-edged sword*...” In New Testament times, the sword pictured absolute authority. The sword was also a symbol of capital punishment (Romans 13:4). It is interesting that Pergamum, because of its loyalty to Rome was given the rare authority to exercise capital punishment on its own. Jesus is saying that the city of Pergamum may wield the sword on earth, but the Lord Jesus Christ wields a mightier sword from Heaven. His sword is more to be feared than that of human government and capital punishment.

This picture that Jesus gives of Himself to this congregation is not a comforting one! In their compromising, this church at Pergamum had treated lightly the absolute authority of the Lord Jesus Christ over His church. The Lord Jesus pictures Himself as having the sharp two-edged sword, the very Word of God which divides between truth and error. The Word of God, like a two-edged sword, divides between the wisdom and ways of the world and the wisdom and ways of God. God's wisdom and God's ways are not to be compromised!

Jesus was saying to this compromising church, “I have the two-edged sword coming out of my mouth. Stop giving in to the enemy’s enticement.” We must realize that as the culture moves further and further away from the truth of God’s Word, we will seem to be more and more out of step with the times and we will be tempted to compromise, to soften some of the hard things in God’s word. We must not budge from the clear instructions of the One who stands in authority pictured by His wielding of the two-edged sword.

## II. The Strengths (v. 13)

There were some good things about this church at Pergamum. Jesus begins verse 13 with a comforting two-word reminder, “I know”. Whatever we go through, Jesus is not standing aloof as one who has no idea of what it is like to be enticed by the evil one. Remember that He faced the devil’s enticements in the wilderness in a way that goes way beyond anything we will ever face. *He knows* the struggles and temptations that you are facing. Many of the members of the church at Pergamum had remained faithful in the face of pressure to compromise and conform to the world around them.

What is “Satan’s throne”? Some would say that Satan’s throne is Hell. That is not true. In spite of legends, books and even cartoons, Satan is not the lord of Hell. Hell was prepared for the Devil and His demons. Matthew 25:41: “Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels,’” Satan will be the chief inmate in Hell because it was prepared primarily for him and the angels that followed him in his rebellion.

We cannot be certain what Satan’s throne refers to. Let me give you a few possibilities and then tell you which one I lean toward. First, it may simply refer to Pergamum being the center of pagan worship and thus a place where it seemed that Satan ruled. Second, it could be a reference to the altar of Zeus on the great hill at Pergamum that looked like a throne to the traveler approaching Pergamum from Smyrna. Third, it could be a reference to the city of Pergamum being a center of Emperor worship in Asia Minor.

While any of those (and a few more I left out) could be what Jesus was referring to, I believe that Satan’s throne was not something unique to Pergamum. There is a sense that all of Jesus’ disciples live where Satan’s throne is. I think it is simply a reference to the world system we live in. When we use the words “world system” we are not talking about a place; we are not talking about God’s creation. When “world” or “the world system” is used in the negative, it is an organized system of ideas and values that is energized by Satan and leaves out God and His Word.

Satan, as we have said numerous times, is the ruler of this fallen world system. John 12:31: says, “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” Satan is even called “the god of this world” in 2 Corinthians 4:4a: “in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving...” We are told in 1 John 5:19: “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one.” Living in this world means that we dwell in the devil’s neighborhood. He is the one who sets the values and agenda of this fallen world. This world system is where Satan has set up his headquarters and true Christians are not welcome.

Jesus says to the church at Pergamum and to this church at Powell, “I know the temptation to compromise and not look like a fanatic. I know that some of you have refused to bend or bow or give in to the pressure of the world.” He commends those in the church at Pergamum who held

fast to His name and did not deny *The Faith*. In other words, they did not deviate from their surrender to the deity and lordship of Christ over every area of their lives, and they refused to compromise the truths of the Christian faith no matter how unpopular and out of step they may be in the culture in which they lived. Can the Lord Jesus commend you for the same things?

Jesus gives an example of one of their brothers who had paid the ultimate price for not denying Jesus' name and not compromising the truths of the faith. His name was Antipas. We know nothing for certain about this man other than the fact that he died rather than deny Christ and the truths of the faith. The name "Antipas" means "against all". There is a tradition (many scholars believe is accurate) that Antipas was brought before a statue of Caesar and was commanded to bow down and confess, "Caesar is lord". Antipas answered, "Jesus Christ is Lord!" The officials reportedly said, "Antipas, don't you know that the whole world is against you?" Antipas answered, "Then it is Antipas against the world!" At that point he was reportedly placed inside a large brass bull and a fire was lit under it and he was burned to death. Jesus calls Antipas "My witness" or as some translations say, "My martyr" – same word in Greek. How I long for that to be said of me by the Lord Jesus.

Jesus commends those in Pergamum who were faithful to His name and to the doctrines of the faith.

### **III. The Sin (vv. 14-15)**

There was a cancer in this church at Pergamum that if it was not cut out, it threatened to destroy the church. As we have already seen, it was the cancer of compromise with the world. Satan seldom destroys a church through persecution. He often destroys churches through compromise. There was a group at Pergamum who said, "Let's go along to get along with the world and not look like backward behind the times yokels." Many in this church compromised in two areas. While the specifics of compromise may differ today, all compromise in the church takes place in two areas.

#### **A. Compromise in the Area of Morality and Idolatry (v. 14)**

You can read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-25, as well as in Numbers 31:16. Balaam was a "prophet for profit". Balaam *claimed* that he could influence the gods to give favors to those he asked favor for. He had a wholesale business of selling divine favors. The king of Moab (Balak) went to Balaam to purchase favor in getting rid of the Israelites. This favor involved Balaam cursing the Israelites. Every time Balaam tried to curse the Israelites, God took control of his tongue and made him bless them. Balaam's normal way of doing business was interrupted, but he did not give up. He told King Balak that he could not curse the Israelites, but Balaam shared a plan with this enemy king that would result in the Israelites cursing themselves. Here was the plan. They would get women from Moab and Midian to seduce the Israelite men and entice them to worship their idols. The plan worked and God killed 24,000 Israelite men as a judgment for their idolatry and immorality.

Let me tell you what the doctrine of Balaam looks like today. It is when we buy into the world's values concerning immorality and the idolatry of such things as being consumed with sports and hobbies. Sports and hobbies can become an idol just as real as the idols of the Moabites that the Israelites worshipped. My heart grieves as I see so many parents who are allowing and even encouraging their children to bow down to the sport god as it consumes their time and keeps them from church and consumes their minds. Certainly not all participation in sports and hobbies is idolatry, but it can easily turn into idolatry. An idol is anything that you love more

than you love God. An idol is anything that takes higher priority in your life than God. When sport, whether it involves kicking, catching, running, jumping, flipping or throwing can become an idol when it begins to consume our thoughts, our time, and our passion.

The immorality that has worked its way into the church of this century is manifested in such things as the acceptance of pornography, accepting homosexuality as a legitimate alternative lifestyle and the sad practice of determining a person's gender by feelings instead of biology. We could add to these examples the acceptance of couples living together without the commitment of a covenant marriage and the refusal of the church to exercise loving church discipline with the goal of repentance in such cases. This is really serious! James 4:4 (NIV): "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

### **B. Compromise in the Area of Theology (v. 15)**

We dealt with the Nicolaitans when we looked at the church at Ephesus. Whereas the church at Ephesus was commended for rejecting the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the church at Pergamum was rebuked because some in the church embraced this doctrine. We aren't certain, but many scholars tie them to the false teaching that Christians are under grace, so our behavior is not really important. Any standards in a person's life even though drawn from Scripture are labeled as legalism. Holiness is not legalism! To the modern day Nicolaitans, doctrine and behavior are unimportant. Since God is a God of love and grace, we can do whatever we choose to do and it's okay because we are "under grace".

These two doctrines – Balaam and the Nicolaitans were the same poison – just in different bottles.

### **IV. The Solution (v. 16)**

The sword Jesus is speaking of in this verse represents His words. They penetrate deep. Revelation 19:15a: "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations..."

Because compromise with the world is such a dangerous thing, there is only one way to deal with it. There must be radical repentance. Repentance in the Scriptures is indeed radical. Repentance involves mourning over our sin, confessing our sin (changing our mind from condoning it to agreeing with God about it), and changing our conduct by looking to God for His enabling grace to empower obedience to God.

After exhorting them to repent, Jesus reminds them of the power of God's Word to bring His discipline. The coming of Jesus refers to is not His second coming; it is His coming in chastisement to His church. Make no mistake, Jesus will discipline His church.

### **V. The Success (v. 17)**

Jesus says to those who hear Him (those who are His) that if they will listen and look to Christ for strength to obey Him, He will give them three things. This is really good!

#### **A. The Hidden Manna (v. 17a)**

In John 6:51 Jesus tells us that the manna in the wilderness that sustained the Israelites as they left their slavery in Egypt was a type or picture of Himself. Just as the manna sustained the

Israelites physically, Jesus Himself will sustain, enable, and empower His people with His presence and supply. This supernatural supply will be hidden from nonbelievers, but those who look to Christ will be sustained by Christ Himself. He is sufficient to take us through every trial, every heartache, and every obstacle

### **B. The White Stone (v. 17b)**

Scholars aren't sure what this symbolic white stone is referring to. There are numerous possibilities. I believe it is the white stone used in a jury trial that indicated a vote for acquittal. All true Christians are free from condemnation because Jesus has paid for our sin. He gives us the white stone of acquittal (not guilty) because Christ's righteousness has been put on our account.

### **C. A New Name (v. 17c)**

What is the new name written on the stone of acquittal? It says no one knows but the one who receives it. It is likely a name of personal affection the Lord Jesus has just for us. The name Jesus referred to which no one else knows is a picture of our intimate relationship with Him that is different and better than all other relationships.

### **Conclusion**

This battle against compromise with the world is an ongoing one. It is personal and it is corporate. For the individual and for the church, when we refuse to compromise truth, there will be a heavy cost here, but there will a reward – the hidden manna, the white stone, and a new name/intimacy with the one we love and desire to hear His “well done”.

**NASB** (New American Standard Bible)

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