

REVELATION – SERMON 11

THE COMPROMISED CHURCH

Revelation 2:14-17

INTRODUCTION

- The term “fifth column” has come to mean a hostile or enemy group working within their enemy’s ranks, often secretly, to undermine and destroy them from within.
- Satan, has not just one “device”, but many “devices” at his disposal, and one of his most effective is that of subtle infiltration amongst God’s people to bring about their downfall.
- The devil’s attacks through persecution had failed to injure the church at Pergamos, so he sought to harm them via another stratagem.
- Where he fails as roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), he often succeeds as a beguiling serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3).
- We might ask, “How could it be that such a steadfast church could have people in it that hold such serious errors and engage in such ungodly behaviour? Such great zeal for the name of Christ, yet such error and compromise also?”
- It is a reminder to us that we must be constantly beware, and be on guard against any encroachment of false doctrine or practice in our church or lives.
- More and more churches in our day have gone down this same path of compromise with the world, becoming more like the world in an attempt to please the world, but in doing so, coming under the judgment of Christ.

- His warning to the Pergamos church is a warning that is needed today.

I. THE SINFUL COMPROMISE IN THE FLOCK'S COMPANY (14-15)

A. Doctrinal error crept into the church

1. The doctrine of Balaam (v.14), and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (v.15)
2. The standard for permitting false doctrine in a church is *zero-tolerance* (1 Timothy 1:3)
3. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. (Galatians 5:9)

B. Blame must shared when doctrinal error is in a church

1. The pastor has responsibility to protect the flock from error (Titus 3:9-11)
2. The church as a whole ought to confront those who bring in false teaching (Revelation 2:2,6)
3. The erring parties themselves who are guilty of departing from sound doctrine

C. The doctrine of Balaam

1. The account of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25
2. Balaam was unable to curse Israel himself, so he devised a wicked plan to bring the Israelites under *God's* curse (Numbers 25:1;31:16)
3. Balaam mentioned three times in NT:

- a. Peter describes the *way* of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15-16)
 - b. Jude describes the *error* of Balaam (Jude 11)
 - c. Revelation describes the *doctrine* of Balaam (Revelation 2:14)
4. He cast a “stumblingblock”
 5. He enticed others to commit idolatry and fornication
 - a. These two sins are frequent companions
 - b. Where there is a corruption of worship (idolatry), there will be corruption of morality

D. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans

1. The conjunction “So” in v.15 can be understood to be linking and comparing these two doctrines which were effectively the same
2. Revelation 2:6 mentions the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans; here their *doctrine*
3. Doctrine and practice are closely linked and Christ is concerned with both, as should we be
4. “The Nicolaitanes taught the community of wives, that adultery and fornication were things indifferent, that eating meats offered to idols was quite lawful; and mixed several pagan rites with the Christian ceremonies.” (Adam Clarke)

E. This is the doctrine of antinomianism – that the Christian is at liberty to commit sin

1. This doctrine was corrupting many churches in the first century, as it is today (Romans 6:1; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; Galatians 5:13; 1 Timothy 6:3; Jude 4)
2. Today, the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans is seen in churches and Christian organisations compromising with the world by adopting the world's moral standards
3. Yet the grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:11-12)
4. We are to “come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)
5. Christ “hates” such antinomian doctrine – so ought to every Christian (Psalm 119:104; Hebrews 1:9)

II. THE SAVIOUR'S CHARGE TO FORSAKE CORRUPTION (16)

A. Repent

1. The command to repent is given to five of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3
2. This church had tolerated error and sin when they should have exercised discipline
3. The command to repent is given to the entire church, not only those who were in error
4. Each church member has responsibility to maintain the spiritual health of the church

5. Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17)
6. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:31)

B. Christ's impeding judgment

1. "Quickly" indicates the imminence of His judgment
2. As Balaam was slain by the sword (Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22), so his spiritual followers would be judged by the sword of Christ's mouth
3. The standard of judgment is the word of God which condemns such error and sin (John 12:48)
4. The Balaamites had taken sides with the enemy, therefore instead of Christ fighting *for* them, He would fight *against* them

III. THE SWEET CONSOLATION TO THE FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN (17)

A. The call to hear

1. Christ demonstrates His mercy in not immediately judging, but giving opportunity to repent
2. Each believer has a duty to hear God's commands and obey

B. The overcomer will eat of the hidden manna

1. The Balaamites lusted for and ate meat sacrificed to idols that satisfies the flesh temporarily

2. Christ offers heavenly food that satisfies the spirit eternally
3. God miraculously fed the Israelites with manna for forty years in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35; Psalm 78:23-25)
4. Christ identified Himself as the fulfilment and antitype of this manna – the bread of life (John 6:31-35-51)
5. Those who eat of this bread (believe on Christ) shall live for ever (John 6:57-58)
6. The *hidden* nature of this manna points to the golden pot of manna laid up in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 16:32-34; Hebrews 9:4)
7. The pagans of Pergamos had their secrets and mysteries as part of their idolatry
8. The believer is made partaker through faith of the grace of God which is a mystery to the world (cf. John 14:17)
9. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant (Psalm 25:14)

C. The overcomer will receive a white stone

1. There are numerous interpretations of the white stone
 - a. White stones signified acquittal of guilt in judgment
 - b. White stones signified citizenship
 - c. White stones signified victory and privilege
 - d. White stones signified initiation

- e. White stones signified friendship
 - f. White stones signified access
2. The most likely interpretation is that it alludes to Israel in the Old Testament (as with the hidden manna) and may be the white stone of the Urim on the high priest's vestment (Exodus 28:30)
 - a. Urim means "light"
 - b. Only the high priest knew the name written on this stone
 - c. The Urim and Thummim were consulted for divine guidance
 - d. The believer is promised the full experience and knowledge of God's will
 3. Another interpretation is that it refers to the stone tablets of the law
 - a. These were placed in the ark with the pot of manna
 - b. The overcomer is the one who is justified from the law through Christ's obedience, and whose life is directed by the rule of the moral law
 4. The new name may refer the believer receiving a new name
 5. It may refer to the name of God which is given to His people (Revelation 3:12)

6. This new name known only to the recipient indicates the close relationship the believer has with Christ, as an adopted child of God

CONCLUSION

1. The church at Pergamos shows us that even the most steadfast and persevering churches are vulnerable to Satan's attacks
2. Those who think they stand are in danger of falling (1 Corinthians 10:12)
3. The whole armour of God is required if we are to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11)
4. While we are to follow peace with all men, there are some areas that Christians are not to compromise in
5. If we carefully examine ourselves we can elements of Balaam's doctrine in each of our hearts
6. Spiritual idolatry and adultery is must be acknowledged and repented of (James 4:4)
7. While thousands of the Israelites fell to Balaam's enticements, Phinehas vehemently stood against the wickedness, and was zealous for the LORD's sake (Numbers 25:6-13)
8. We must resist unto blood, striving against sin (Hebrews 12:4)