



An 8-Week Mini-Series on the 7 Churches in Revelation
Wednesday, August 13th, 2025

Sermon #4: 'The Controversy of Compromise!'

Revelation 2:12-17

Last in our study through Revelation 2-3:

- Last Wednesday we looked at the Church at Smyrna, a Church that was persecuted, yet hung on to the truth of the Gospel.
 - Last Wednesday I preached a sermon entitled 'The Persecuted Church' and I asked this question: *What kind of persecution did the Church in Smyrna go through?*
 - Truth #1: *The Sustainer. (v. 8)*
 - Truth #2: *The Slander. (v. 9a)*
 - Truth #3: *Synagogue of Satan. (v. 9b-10)*
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- In the first week, we looked at the Church at Ephesus and how they resisted false teaching, but they did leave their first love, Christ Himself.
 - Tonight we arrive at the Church at Pergamum or Pergamos, as it is sometimes called.

'The Controversy of Compromise!'

Revelation 2:12-17

Sermon in a Sentence:

The Church at Pergamos was faithful to Christ when it came to the junction of persecution, but the controversy came when they compromised Biblical Doctrine.

Intro:

- The word 'Compromise' is something that we here a lot and some of us engage in 'Compromise' more than others.
 - *By definition, a compromise is when two sides are having a difficult time agreeing on something, and one or both of the sides choose to give up something or give something in order to please the other side and get the deal done.*
- In business, marriage, friendship, and many other avenues of life, compromise is often necessary in order to be able to move forward with something.

- *But, compromise is not something that should ever be a part of the doctrinal stance of a Church.*
- Where we arrive in Revelation 2 tonight is we find a Church that did well when under persecution, but failed miserably in the avenue of Compromise.
- I'm talking about the Church at *Pergamos*. Let's look more into the context of the location of this Church before diving into what Christ, through John, had to say to them.
 - *Pergamum was officially the capital of Asia Minor, the Roman Province.*
 - While Ephesus and Smyrna also claimed to be the capital, Pergamum was the official one.
 - *Pergamum was an inland city that was 65 miles north of Smyrna and was placed along a fertile valley of the Caicus River.*
 - One of the many things that Pergamos was known for, was their 200,000 volume library.
 - *Second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt.*
- *Pergamos was deeply entrenched with pagan worship.*
 - They had temples dedicated to greek gods such as Dionysus, Athena, and Asclepius.
 - They even had a hospital that was ahead of it's time, due to Asclepius being the god of healing in the Greek world.

- On the temple that was dedicated to Aesculapius was a symbol, logo, was the entwined serpent on the staff.
 - You can even see today that this particular symbol is used in the medical realm.
 - As you know, satan is also symbolized as a serpent/snake according to 2nd Corinthians 11:3, Revelation 12:9.
- *In addition to the pagan worship of the greek gods just mentioned, they had an alter that was dedicated to and for Zeus.*
 - That great alter became one of the wonders of the ancient world.
- To say this city was steeped in pagan religion would be an understatement.
 - *In the midst of such a pagan infested land, was the Church of Pergamos, a Christian Church, not far (65 miles) from Smyrna.*
 - Like Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamos too, had a large population. Believed to be pushing 200,000 at the time John wrote the letter.
- *Pagan religion was not all Pergamum had going on.*

- Due to being the capital, it was a city that was tight with Rome.
- Pergamum was actually the official center for worship of the emperor.
- *At one time Pergamum had 3 different temples that were dedicated to the emperor.*
 - In 29 B.C., it became the first city in Asia to receive permission from Rome to build a temple that would be dedicated to the worship of a living emperor.
 - Usually these temples couldn't be built until after the emperor (of Rome) had died.
- *While it was a pagan city, and there was 1 Christian Church there, Josephus also recorded that there were Jewish pockets in the city. They were not persecuted like the Christians, because they were of no real threat to Rome or Emperor worship.*

Question to Ask:

What was the Church at Pergamum commended for and what was the controversy of compromise that they were guilty of?

Truth #1: *The Judgement of Christ. (v. 12)*

- “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.’

- ‘And to the angel’
 - Last week we were able to make a strong case that Polycarp was the Pastor at Smyrna due to our digging into Church History and Church Fathers.
 - *When it comes to Pergamos, we don't know who the Pastor was.*
 - It is unlikely that it was a Church Father, and none of the Church Fathers mentioned a particular angel at pergamos. Perhaps, his identity was concealed due to the persecution, and maybe the embarrassment of the Church fathers at his (the Church's doctrinal compromise).
- *As John has done in the first two letters to the first two Churches we looked at, he does it again here, in drawing a Christological statement from Revelation 1.*
 - Here, he pulls from Revelation 1:16.
 - ‘In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.’
- *The ‘Sword’ that is mentioned here is the Word of God.*
 - The Word of God is true, trustworthy, inerrant and infallible. And here, it is

coming from Christ Himself that it is a sharp, two-edged sword!

- *The idea of verse 12 in this Christological statement, is that Christ is the Judge. And He Judges based on His Word.*
 - This Christological statement will set up in the minds of the hearers (v. 17) at Pergamos that the Judgement of Christ is sharp, and it's better to stay the course with the Sword (the Word) than to compromise and have friends in the capital of Asia.
 - *And for us, there can be times we compromise with our kids, family members or friends!*
 - By saying things like 'Did God really say that?'
 - 'Did God really mean that?'
 - 'That was just a figure of speech by God'.
- *But see when we, or the folks at the Church at Pergamos start to think that way, we go directly against the validity and inerrancy of Scripture.*
 - Remember what the writer of Hebrews said?
 - 'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of

joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.' Hebrews 4:12

- *The use of the sword terminology in pulling it from Revelation 1 was done on purpose by Christ, through John!*
 - In Pergamum, there was an altar for Zeus, and he carried a large sword and there undoubtedly would've been many statues of Zeus and his sword.
 - *But the sword of Christ is greater. It conveys absolute authority, decisive discernment, and it is far greater than that of Zeus.*
- *Church at Pergamos, Christ is the Judge, He is greater than Zeus, you must remember that.*

Truth #2: *The Junction of Persecution. (v. 13)*

- "'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith[d] even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.'
- *A Junction is a place or point, where two paths join, and one has to make a decision about which path to go down during the junction.*
- The Church at Pergamos was at the Junction of persecution.

- *They could either stop holding fast to the name of Christ and proclaiming Him, or they could continue in serving the Lord and making His name known.*
- **Look at the beginning of verse 13, ‘I know where you dwell’**
 - God knows where you and I live. Why? Because He has planted us where we currently live in order to share His Word.
 - Whether that’s where the throne of satan is at pergamos, across the world in a country where Christianity is illegal, or whether that’s right here in Gaston where we can freely worship.
 - *God has planted you where He wants you for a time such as this.*
 - *The phrase ‘where satan’s throne is’ has caused a lot of questions and theological debate.*
 - Without explaining each viewpoint, I believe that this was Jesus referencing the imperial cult.
 - Which by definition was the worship of the state embodied in the person of the emperor.
 - *Like their brothers and sisters only 65 miles away, they suffered persecution and according*

to the text, one of their own was killed for the Gospel.

○ **Antipas.**

- Smyrna is known as a ‘Martyr’s Church’ due to what is said about them concerning the crown of life.
- Pergamum could be called that as well. (Which shows even ‘good’ Churches can be susceptible to compromise as we will see).
- ***In the Greek, Jesus uses the present tense to tell them that they are holding on to His name in dark days.***
- Jesus goes on to say...
 - ‘even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.’
 - *Amidst the persecution, this church maintained its faithful witness to Christ Jesus.*

○ **Who was antipas?**

- We know nothing about Antipas. Some will speculate that he could have been their Pastor.
- Church tradition does speak to the execution style of Antipas, and that he was roasted alive in a Brass bull. (Explain this as a torturing mechanism

used by the Romans made for Christians.)

○ **Look though at how Antipas is described?**

- 'My faithful witness'
- *How would Christ describe you?*
- *How would Christ describe FBCG?*
- Christ was God's faithful witness to the end when He died on the Cross for all humanity. And Antipas?
 - Jesus says He was His faithful witness.
- Did you know that out of all deaths on the basis of religion that occur, 90% are Christians?
 - *100,000 to 150,000 Christians are martyred each year?*
 - *And what were you worried about again?*
- 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.' Psalms 116:115
 - Wherever we are in the world, we must not stop clinging to the Name of Jesus.
 - *Jesus compliments them and tugs at their memory of their martyr, Antipas, now, He accuses them of a problem.*

Truth #3: *The Joke of Doctrinal Compromise. (vv. 14-15)*

- 'But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and

practice sexual immorality. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.'

- While satan had not been able to destroy this Church by getting them to recant the faith like a roaring lion (1st Peter 5:8), he was able to make progress has the deceiving serpent.
- *What's happening here is that a group of comprising people were in the Church, and Jesus hated their doctrines and their practices.*
 - *Based on what's said in the text, I believe these people infiltrated the Church.*
 - *This part of the fabric of the Church believed 'Let's go along to get along' and oh, what a dangerous slippery slope that is.*
- ***What's happening here should be to us, what it was to Christ, a Joke. Doctrinal compromise away from the inerrancy and infallibility of the bible (as stressed with Jesus as the judge in Revelation 2:12) is a joke.***
 - What seems to be occurring here, is that some loved Antipas and followed him in not denying Christ.
 - Others held to the teaching and practices of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans.
- Let's distinguish and dive in deeper to the name Balaam and Nicolaitans.

- *The Nicolaitans, who we studied back in Revelation 2:6 at Ephesus, are teaching the doctrine of Balaam.*
 - We talked about when we studied the Church at Ephesus that the Nicolaitans were more than likely following the false doctrine created and taught by a rogue Deacon, Nicholas (See Acts 6).
 - **The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25. (Remember in that text, the false prophet, Balaam advised Moab's king to seduce them into sexual sin and idolatry. Here the Lord says what sin was started in the Church, among following this doctrine of Balaam:**
 - Pagan food and pagan women led to spiritual compromise and adultery on the people of God.
 - In Number 25:1-9, when King Balak hired Balaam to teach false doctrine, the Jewish men fell into it and ate meat from idolatrous altars and had sexual relations with non-Jewish women (and women who weren't their wives). Because of this in Numbers 25:1-9, 24,000 people would die.
 - *The stumbling block in verse 14, is in regards to immorality and idolatry.*
 - *Those in the Church who followed this teaching celebrated the idols of the*

culture and adopted their sexual ethics. The two will usually go together.

- *Compromise and accommodation seem to be the main factors here.*
 - The Church at Pergamos sought to serve God, and did so somewhat well at first.
 - *But, they allowed a doctrinal drift. They allowed cultural norms to shape both their thinking and lifestyles.*
- *The word 'pergamum' in the greek literally means 'Thoroughly married'.*
 - This was a Church that was married to the world.
 - Because satan couldn't defeat this Church from outside it's walls in the form of persecution, satan did so from within and had deadly success.
- **Because Christ said what He did about them, this Church at Pergamos became sexually affirming to immorality and were okay with idols being brought in.**
 - The Church at Pergamos is eerily similar to the Church in America today.
 - We've gotten to a place where *doctrine matters little and behavior matters even less.*
 - The line between the world and the Church is becoming more blurry by the day.
 - In other denominations and even our own (SBC), and our own Church, we will often seek

to accommodate even though that's not what we were called to do.

- *We were called to preach the Double-Edged sword. We must allow God's Word to do the convicting, changing, and challenging, while we present it.*

- Jesus now issues a call for repentance.

Truth #4: *A Just Admonition.* (vv. 16-17)

- 'Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'
- *Jesus is clear, compromise of any kind in regards to Biblical doctrine is not okay.*
- *Satan really loves compromise especially in regards to Churches, let me tell you why:*
 - #1: It never occurs quickly, so you hardly notice the change.
 - #2: It lowers the original standards you once held important.
 - #3: It is seldom offensive because it is perceived as loving.
 - #4: It eventually leads you to accept what you once rejected and even though repulsive.'

- You've heard it said *'What one generation tolerates, the next will accept; what that generation accepts, the next generation will celebrate.'*
 - Repentance and then rejection are what Christ clearly warns against.
- 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.' Revelation 2:17
- *Now, in verse 17, the Church in Pergamos is challenged with a potential reward:*
 - Christ will nourish us. To the 'victor' Christ promises 'hidden manna'.
 - *This was the food that was supernaturally provided by God to the Israelites during the exodus.*
 - Christ will receive us. The white stone is a tough phrase and I'd argue there are 12 possibilities of what it could mean.
 - No matter what it means, it points to acceptance and victory in Christ, our High Priest. Christ is our righteousness.
 - *Christ will acknowledge us.*
 - The new name written on the stone, points to the end-time supper where we will have intimate fellowship with the Risen Lord.

- When we know Christ as our Lord and Savior, our name is written in the Lamb's book of life and we will be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.