

Revelation 2-12-17 (Pergamum) Forsaking compromise!

Sermon introduction:

Towards the end of the 2nd century thousands of Christians in the the Roman empire were martyred by the state.

In 312 emperor Galerius died. He was the emperor of the Eastern half of the empire.

When he died several men fought over his throne. One of them was a pagan named Constantine. Constantine quickly marched his army across the Alps to attack his rival headquartered in Rome.

They met at the Milvian Bridge just outside of Rome. Constantine was badly outnumbered. In desperation Constantine, the pagan, cried out to the Christian God for help.

A little later, he had a dream. In his dream he saw a large cross in the sky and the words "by this you will conquer."

The next day he had his soldiers place a Chi and Rho on their shields. The first two letters in Christ's name. They attacked and won a brilliant victory. Constantine, saw this as proof that the God of Christianity was the one true God.

After he gained control of the entire roman empire he used his platform to promote Christianity. He made Sunday a state holiday, he built church buildings, and he gave Christian pastors tax exemptions. Was his conversion real? Probably not...

But here is the point... in just a few years Christianity went from being a despised and persecuted minority to being the most prominent religion of the emperor.

Prior to 312 Christians had been outlawed and persecuted. After 312 it was favored and pampered. By 380 penalties for Christians had given way to penalties for non-Christians.

Constantine's "conversion" changed everything.

But it was not all good.

Eventually the church was compromised. She started to look more and more like the world. Now that it was cool to be a Christian, cool people joined the church, and the cool people brought their worldliness with them.

Satan tries to destroy the church in one of two ways; persecution or compromise. If persecution does not work he turns to compromise.

This brings us to the 3rd letter written by the risen Christ to the seven churches in Asia.

Satan tried to destroy the church in Pergamum with persecution when this failed he turned to compromise.

This is often what happens. When our enemies can't beat us, they join us.

Fortunately, the church in America does not face much persecution but it does struggle with compromise. We have compromised our doctrine and our ethics.

The main point of the letter to Pergamum is simply this, the church must flee compromise.

The first letter dealt with love.
The second letter dealt with suffering.
This letter deals with compromise.

To understand this letter, we will look at four things-

Fueling compromise
Forsaking compromise
Fostering compromise
Fleeing compromise

First, fueling compromise.

What fueled compromise in Pergamum? Satan.

Revelation 2:12-13 (ESV) — 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. **13** " 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is...

This letter was written to the church in Pergamum (modern day Turkey). Show map from week one.

It was one of the largest cities in the ancient world (190,000 according to Sam Storms). It was also the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. In other words, it was the Washington DC of Asia Minor. But it also had elements of Las Vegas.

Pergamum was well known for her massive amounts of temples, more than most ancient cities.

There was a temple to Zeus, 1000 feet above the city on a steep hill.

There was the temple to Athena.

There was the temple of Dionysus.

Furthermore, there was the temple of Asclepius (the god of healing). He was symbolized by a serpent wrapped around a staff, which is currently the symbol of the department of health and human services.

More prominent than all of these cults was the imperial cult devoted to worshipping the emperor Augustus. The citizens of Pergamum, like the citizens of Smyrna, were passionate about worshipping the emperor.

Standing behind all of these religions was Satan himself.

Revelation 2:13 (ESV) — 13 " 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

Chicago is the windy city
Seattle is the emerald city
Paris is the city of lights
New York is described as the city that never sleeps.
Las Vegas is called sin city
Spokane is the lilac city...

Pergamum is Satan's city. According to our text, it was the place where Satan's throne dwelled. Satan did not have a literal throne in Pergamum, although some think "Satan's throne" was

an allusion to the statue of Zeus or the temple to Asclepius. A thrown is a symbol of power. Satan exercised tremendous power in Pergamum.

Application:

H exercised his power fueling compromise through the vast collection of shrines, temples, alters, and pagan ceremonies in Pergamum.

He seduced the people of Pergamum with political power, clout, illicit sex, pleasure, and wealth. The city offered all five of these things in abundance.

Satan loves to deceive... he lies about the good life. He tactics have not changed. If he is not persecuting the church he is seducing the church, with the same things.

He will seduce you with the same things. He wants you to compromise.

He will lie to you, telling you that the good life is found in the things of the world. More stuff, more sex, more power, more entertainment, etc...

These are our false Gods. We don't worship stone statues in the West be we still worship idols. This is what fuels our compromise.

We are often blind to the idols of our age. We need to be careful. (Israel was blind to her idols, what idols are we blind too).

Fortunately, Satan did not fuel compromise in everyone.

This brings us to the next point.

First, fueling compromise.

Second, forsaking compromise.

Did everyone compromise? No... Antipas forsook compromise!

Revelation 2:13 (ESV) — 13 " I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Some in the church refused to compromise with the world.

They held fast to Christ's name, which means that they affirmed that Salvation is found only in the name of Jesus. It is found in his life, death, and resurrection.

Some even died for their faith. Antipas is mentioned. He is called a faithful witness. The word witness is the Greek word martyr. We don't know exactly what happened to Antipas, but it is easy to speculate.

Illustration:

It may have gone down like this...

Antipas is at home with his family. As they sit around the dinner table they hear a knock at the door. Antipas wonders who it could be. When he opens the door, he sees five well-armed Roman soldiers. They put him in cuffs and take him to the proconsul.

While he is walking down the road he wonders who turned him in... was it his uncle, his brother, his Jewish neighbor?

He meets the proconsul at the headquarters of the imperial cult. The proconsul was part civic leader and part religious leader. Civics and religion were one and the same in Pergamum.

The proconsul says, "Antipas, it has come to my attention that you refuse to worship the emperor? Is this true?"

Antipas responds, "I respect the emperor, and I'm a good citizen, but it is not right for me to say that Caesar is Lord when Jesus is lord."

The proconsul says, "you do realize, Antipas, that you are obligated under law to burn incense to the emperor while saying, 'Caesar is lord?' All you have to do is take a pinch of incense and throw it in the eternal sacred fire before the statue of Augustus while saying, 'Caesar is lord.' How hard or offensive could that be? If you refuse to do this I have no choice but to put you to death for treason. It is very simple, Antipas. Throw some incense in the fire and live or refuse to throw incense into the fire and die."

It that moment, Antipas probably thought...

Do I really believe that a dead guy named Jesus rose from the dead?

If I die who will take care of my family?

Wouldn't it be better to compromise so that I can save my life, care for my family? I can always ask for forgiveness later?

We don't know the details of his death, but we do know that the risen Christ gave him resolve to forsake compromise.

He is to be commended.

Application:

Certain members of the church in Pergamum were commended for forsaking compromise. This is a good thing.

May god give us the same grace and courage to take a stand for Jesus, forsaking compromise.

Just heard about some TLI students... their instructor said, "some of the students will not make it through our 3-4-year curriculum alive. Some will go back to their homes and die for Jesus."

BTW... if we are not willing to take a stand for Jesus now, when it costs us hardly anything, we will not take a stand for Jesus when our lives are on the line.

Unfortunately, not everyone was as uncompromising as Antipas. This brings us to the next point.

First, fueling compromise.

Second, forsaking compromise.

Third, fostering compromise.

Some in the church in Pergamum fostered compromise.

How did the church foster compromise? They tolerated false teaching.

Revelation 2:14 (ESV) — 14 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.

Revelation 2:15 (ESV) — 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

There were some people in the church in Pergamum who believed bad doctrine.

John writes,

Verse 14.. "you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam..."

Verse 15... "you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans..."

What was the bad doctrine? John calls it the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans are related.

The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-24. Here is the summary... Balak the king of Moab paid Balaam to curse the tribes of Israel as they crossed over the Jordan river into the promise land.

But every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, blessings, not curses, came out of his mouth.

Since Balaam was hired by Balak to destroy Israel he wanted to do what he was paid to do. So, he suggested another strategy. He told Balak to send Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel with feasting and sex. This is exactly what happened, and it worked, arousing God's righteous anger against Israel this destroying Israel.

The Moabites seduced the Israelites with idolatry and sexual immorality.

Just like the citizens of Pergamum seduced the church in Pergamum with idolatry and sexual immorality.

The teaching of the Nicolaitans was probably a version of antinomianism.

The teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans was a toxic combination.

It went like this, "go to the temples, have sex with cult prostitutes, drink and be merry, it is ok, God forgives, we are free in Christ, all of our sins are forgiven sins, let's celebrate his grace together."

Application:

The church fostered compromise by allowing this teaching to go unchecked.

What was the real issue???

Christ is upset because the church in Pergamum tolerated this compromised theology.

Clearly some of the saints in Pergamum did not believe the bad teaching, but they refused to silence the ones who did. This is why Jesus is upset.

They may have said something like, "I personally believe that it is wrong to worship in the pagan temples but I'm not going to judge those that do. I mean, I don't want to be divisive."

Doctrine matters. Tolerating bad doctrine angers the risen Christ because bad thinking leads to bad living.

Today we hear things like...

"I believe that abortion is wrong personally, but I'm not going to challenge my Christians friends who think otherwise."

"I think homosexuality is wrong, but I'm not going to challenge my Christians friends who think otherwise."

"I think Jesus is the only way to God, but I'm not going to confront my Christians friends who think otherwise."

"Or, those two women love each other, love is love, why are you condemning something so beautiful??? Isn't God a god of love?"

The church in Pergamum was not willing to draw theological lines in the sand.

But Dave, "Doctrines divide..." the risen Christ is saying that some doctrines should divide us.

Are there some things Christians can disagree on, of course, lots of things...

We can disagree on all sorts of things.

But we must agree on the gospel and our response to the gospel.

If someone refuses to repent of sexual immorality, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, or drunkenness they cannot be saved.

"we must preserve unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all-things."
(Rupert Meldeniuss of the 17th century)

This letter is for those who feel seduced to soften truth in the name of love...

Illustration:

the full preterist...

the person who refused to stop fornicating with her boyfriend but who wanted to get baptized...

The church in Pergamum fostered compromise with the world by tolerating false teaching...

How about you? are you fostering compromise with the world?

Are you making small compromises here and there? Looking at things, reading things, saying things, laughing at things, and buying things that you never would have considered one year ago?

Compromise has a way of creeping up on us.

The devil is very crafty. He knows how to tempt each one of us. he tries to kill us one small compromise at a time.

If you have compromised what should you do? This brings us to the last point.

First, fueling compromise.

Second, forsaking compromise.

Third, fostering compromise.

Fourth, fleeing compromise.

How do you flee compromise? You repent.

Revelation 2:16 (ESV) — 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

The church in Pergamum needs to repent. How? By doing church discipline. They must kick false teachers out of the church (Matt 18, etc...)

What does repentance look like for you?

Where have you compromised with the world? Repentance means changing one's mind, changing one's direction, and running in the opposite direction. If you are stuck in a compromising sin or situation tell someone, your spouse, your parent, or small group leader.

Repentance is more than feeling bad, or sad that we got caught. Repentance is turning and running.

Sin grows best in darkness. Don't let it grow.

How do you flee compromise? You repent!

What if you don't flee compromise? God will war against you.

Revelation 2:16 (ESV) — 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

What does this mean? Verse 12 gives us a clue.

Revelation 2:12 (ESV) — 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

The risen Christ does not have a literal sword in his mouth. This is a metaphor. Jesus Christ is the word of God (Rev. 1:16, 19:13, 15, 21 John 1:1). He is truth incarnate. He will fight against us bringing to bare all the judgments of scripture if we don't repent.

If Pergamum does not discipline the false Teachers in their midst, the risen Christ will discipline the church in Pergamum.

He disciplines those he loves. He will discipline you if you continue to compromise your doctrine or your behavior. It will hurt!

How do you flee compromise? You repent!

What if you don't flee compromise? God will war against you.

What if you do flee compromise? God will bless you.

Revelation 2:17 (ESV) — 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.'

The hidden manna is a reference to Exodus 16:32-34. The lord told Moses to preserve an omer of manna for future generations.

Just like the manna kept the Israelites alive in the wilderness, Jesus is our manna and he keeps us alive.

He nourishes our souls. He is the living bread from Heaven (John 6:31-35, 48-51).

He will satisfy us for all eternity with himself. The idols of the world will only satisfy us for a few minutes, at most.

One scholar writes,

"Jesus as the manna of eternal life, will be an infinite supply of refreshment and joy and affirmation and delight... it means that Jesus will be for us an endless, self-replenishing spring of refreshing water, an inexhaustible, infinitely abundant source of excitement and intrigue, an eternal, ever increasing data base of knowledge and insight and discovery that will never diminish in its capacity to enthrall and captivate." (Storms, 97)

Our souls will start to feast on the hidden manna at the marriage super of the lamb.

This is probably where the white stone comes in.

Revelation 2:17 (ESV) — 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.'

No one really knows what the white stone refers too. There have been many suggestions. Here is what it may mean...

White stones were often used as tickets of admission to public gatherings or festivals. (Storms, 100)

The white stone may be given to the believer by the risen Christ as a ticket of admission to the great marriage supper of the lamb describe in Revelation 19:17-19.

At this feast our souls will be satisfied. Psalm 16:11, Luke 14:10

What about the name?

The name could be a specific name given to each believer by God when he is given his or her stone.

The only person who knows this name is God, therefore, it is a very personal name highlighting the intimate relationship each Christian has with God.

In heaven we will have a personal relationship with Christ... yes, there will be billions of people present, but he will give us a personal and private name.

Application:

If you have compromised your faith or behavior you must repent.

When you repent you are forgiven!

Repentance is not a work...

The work that save us is the work of Jesus. Repentance is an indication that our faith in Jesus is authentic.

Here is the amazing thing... Not only are we forgiven but we are invited to eat the true manna, we are given a stone, and we are given a new name.

In other words, we will experience the everlasting Joys of Heaven.

Conclusion:

Compromise is easy... isn't it?

Compromise nearly destroyed the church after Constantine came to power.

In the North American church persecution is not the issue. I'm glad. With that said, compromise kills more faith than persecution.

Lets contend for the faith together.

Jude 3 (ESV) — 3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Lets pray...