

The Compromising Church **Revelation 2:12-17**

There is a little village now on the ancient site of Pergamos known as Bergma. Pergamos was located about 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea and it was the capital of Northwest Asia known as Mysia.

Pergamos was a center of learning. They had a magnificent library containing over 200,000 volumes. Next to the renowned library in Alexandria, it was the largest library in the world.

In fact, the king of Alexandria became so jealous of the library in Pergamos that he refused to sell them anymore papyrus, the material from which paper was made. Out of necessity the inhabitants of Pergamos developed parchment, made of treated animal skins, for use as writing material. Today, when you graduate from college your diploma is called a "sheep skin," referring to the material on which in days past the diploma was written on.

Pergamos was also a center of medical activity as well. Located in the city was a magnificent temple to the god of medicine, Aesculapius. People believed they could come there and be healed of their diseases. It's interesting that the symbol for this mythological god of medicine was the snake. To this day the symbol of the medical profession is the coiled snake.

Pergamos was also a center of idolatry. It was an important center of worship for four of the main gods of the Greco-Roman world. Within the city of Pergamos was a temple to Zeus, a temple to Dionysius, a temple to Athena, and as I mentioned a moment ago, a temple to Aesculapius. In addition to this, there were not one, but three different temples that were dedicated to the worship of the emperor, Caesar.

The word, Pergamos, means married. When we look at the church in Pergamos we see a church that has compromised its convictions and married itself to the world.

1. The Commendation

They were commended for their dedication to the service of Christ. Jesus said, *"I know your works and where you dwell."* They faithfully served the Lord in a very difficult place, *"where Satan's throne is."*

Did you know that the devil has a throne? He does, and it's not in hell. The Bible says his throne is on this earth. The Bible says that the devil is the prince of this world, the god of this world. Evidently, the devil had a stronghold in the city of Pergamos.

Why did Jesus refer to Pergamos as the place of *"Satan's throne?"* Maybe it was because of the numerous pagan temples there or the fact that Pergamos was such a hotbed for Caesar worship. Some have suggested that it was because of the imposing altar of Zeus that stood so prominently there. Perhaps the Lord referred to Pergamos as the place "where Satan's throne because of the great persecution of God's people that was occurring there.

Here's the point. The believers in Pergamos were living in a very, very difficult place to be a Christian, right in the middle of hell's headquarters. And yet, they remained dedicated servants

of the Savior.

Imagine how hard it must have been trying to be faithful follower of Christ in a place like that? We may feel it would be much easier to be a Christian in some other place or in some other circumstance but our duty as a Christian is to be a faithful witness and a fruitful servant for the Lord wherever He puts us.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well, that's easy for you to say pastor. All you have to do is read the Bible, pray, go to church, talk to people about Jesus, and hang around sweet Christians like me all of the time. You don't have to work with the people I have to work with. You don't know what those folks at the factory are like. You don't know what the kids in my school are like. You don't what it's like to live with man/woman I live with. Pastor, you just don't know how hard it is to faithfully follow Christ in the world I live in." I have just two things to say to that. First, I don't care who you are, or where you live, or what you do, there are no easy places to live for the Lord. Second, the truth is I really don't know where you live and how difficult it may be for you - but Jesus does.

Jesus knows where you dwell. Jesus knows where you live and work and go to school. The Lord has you right where He wants you, in the very place He can use you to be a witness for Him. Jesus said that we are to be the light of the world. Where is the most useful place for a lamp? In a room filled with windows and flooded with sun light or in the darkest corner of the house? Where is the most effective location for a lighthouse? In the middle of a city with a multitude of lights, or on some rough, rocky, storm-beaten sea coast where ships lost in the dark can see the light?

Dear Christian, remember this; the Lord places His brightest lights in the dark places. Our place of greatest service may be under the most difficult of circumstances.

They were commended for their loyalty to the name of Christ. Jesus said, "*And you hold fast to My name.*" Here was a fellowship of believers that, in spite of all the problems and persecution they faced, were still faithful to the name of Jesus. They refused to deny his wonderful name. They simply would not keep quiet about their Lord and Savior. By the way, that's a pretty good test if you are looking for a church. When you go into a church pay careful attention to how often they mention the name of Jesus. If the people in the church don't talk about Jesus; if the congregation doesn't sing about Jesus; if the preacher doesn't preach about Jesus, then you had better shake the dust off your feet and find another church.

They were commended for their fidelity to the faith of Christ. Jesus said, "*And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith.*" The believers in the church at Pergamos were committed to the fundamentals of the faith. Now, what do I mean by the fundamentals of the faith? There are certain basics of biblical Christianity that we call fundamentals. That means you can't deny any of them and still be true to the faith. What are those fundamentals? The fundamental of the Christian faith include the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the physical resurrection of Christ, the return of Christ, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You take any one of those away and you don't have Christianity anymore, you have a false faith. You have what Paul called "*another gospel,*" which is not another gospel at all. It's a counterfeit Christianity; a false faith.

The Bible says we are “*to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 1:3). But beloved, contending for the faith can be very costly.

Not only did Jesus commend the saints of God at Pergamos for being fundamental in their faith, He also praised them for being faithful to their Savior. Look again at verse 13. Jesus said, “*you have not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr who was slain among you where Satan dwells.*” The Christians in Pergamos refused to deny the name of Christ or denounce their faith in Christ, even if it meant dying for Christ. The Lord Jesus specifically commended one member of the church for his faithfulness, a man by the name of Antipas. Antipas is only mentioned here in the bible. Most bible scholars believe that Antipas was probably one of the leaders of the church in Pergamos. Perhaps it was because he was a leader in the church that he was chosen to become a martyr for Christ. According to tradition, he was roasted to death inside a brass bull during the persecution instigated by Emperor Domitian. Antipas would not bow down to Caesar; he worshipped Christ and Christ alone. He paid the ultimate price for his refusal to compromise his faith in Christ.

I have often wondered if armed men were to suddenly burst through the doors of this church, line us up around the walls of the sanctuary, and demand that we deny Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior or die, what would we do? I wonder how faithful we would be. I pray that, like Antipas and many other believers in the church at Pergamos, we would never deny the name of Jesus no matter the cost, that we would be faithful to our blessed Savior even until death.

The Lord Jesus had many good things to say about the church at Pergamos. Nevertheless, He had a few things against them. Let’s consider then...

2. The Condemnation

They were condemned for compromising the truth. Look at verse 14. Jesus said, “*You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*”

While the majority of the believers in the church at Pergamos were loyal to the truth and faithful to Christ, there was a certain group who had infiltrated the church and led some in the fellowship to compromise the truth and embrace bad doctrine. Jesus called these infiltrators the “*Nicolaitans,*” in verse 15. Jesus said, “*Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*” The name Nicolaitan means “to rule the people.” What they taught was called “*the doctrine of Balaam.*” What is the doctrine of Balaam?

The book of Numbers tells us about a prophet by the name of Balaam who prostituted his God given gifts for financial gain. Do you remember Mr. Ed, the talking horse? Well Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who was famous because he had a talking donkey. The bible tells us that Balak, the king of Moab, wanted Balaam the prophet to curse the Israelites. Balaam did his best to comply with wishes of Balak but to no avail. In fact, he tried four times to curse the children of God but the Lord wouldn't let him. Every time he tried to curse them, he wound up blessing them.

God prevented Balaam from cursing Israel, but Balak still got his money's worth. He couldn't curse them so Balak decided to follow Balaam’s advice and corrupt them instead. He said to

himself, "If the prophet can't bring a curse upon the chosen people of God then I will entice them into idolatry and immorality and they will bring a curse upon themselves."

Listen, all the demons of hell cannot bring a curse upon God's children, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom 8:31b). But if a child of God compromises with the world he will bring a curse upon himself.

That's exactly what happened to the Israelites. Many of them were taken in by Balak's offer. They ate meat offered as sacrifice to idols. They committed fornication while participating in pagan ceremonies. As a result, 24,000 people died. That was the cost of Israel's compromise (Num 25:1-9).

There are occasions when compromise is commendable, but beloved compromise is never a good thing when it comes to truth and morality. There is always a price to pay!

3. The Command

Jesus said in verse 16, *"Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."*

They were commanded to repent. What does it mean to repent? It means to see your sin as God sees it, as the ugly, damning, deadly thing that it is. To repent means to see your own sinfulness as God sees it. The bible tells us that *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10), *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). To repent means to have a genuine, godly sorrow for the sin in your life. The bible says in 2 Cor. 7:10, *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation."* But that's not all. True repentance means a godly sorrow for sin that leads to a change; a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of direction. Repentance is like making a spiritual U-turn. It's turning from sin - to the Savior.

Who needs to repent? Certainly the lost need to repent. The bible says that salvation comes from *"repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21). Jesus said, *"Unless you repent you will perish"* (Luke 13:3). Without repentance there can be no redemption. If you want to be saved today you must repent of your sin, ask God's forgiveness and place your faith in Jesus Christ.

It's not just the lost who need to repent, it's also the saved. The sad truth is, even the saved sin now and again, and when we sin we must repent. Without repentance and confession of our sins there is no forgiveness. The Word of God says in 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Without repentance there is no fellowship with God. What fellowship has light with darkness or holiness with sin? Without repentance we lose the joy of God's salvation. Exhibit A of this spiritual truth is King David. His failure to repent of his sin with Bathsheba drained all the joy out of his soul. I'm convinced that King David was the most miserable man in all Israel. That's why when he was finally confronted with his sin David cried out to God *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation"* (Ps 51:12). Without repentance we face the judgment of God .

4. The Comfort

They were comforted with a promise of a priceless provision. Look at verse 17. *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat."*

God fed the Israelites with manna from heaven when they were wandering in the wilderness. The Lord now offers a different kind of manna, the *"true bread from heaven,"* Jesus Christ. Listen to what the Jesus said in John chapter 6, verses 32 through 35. *"Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" (Jn 6:32-35).*

This is God's promise. If we are faithful to Christ, He will give himself. He will be the bread of life. He will be life itself.

They were comforted with a promise of a divine declaration. Look again at verse 17. Jesus said, *"And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."*

In biblical times they would sometimes use stones to cast a verdict in a court of law. If the verdict was "guilty" the judge would place a black stone in a jar or urn. If the verdict was "not guilty" the judge would place a white stone in the urn. The white stone was used by a judge to vote "not guilty." Dear folks the fact is all of us are guilty. We are as guilty as sin because all of us have sinned.

This is God's promise. If you will repent of your sin and place your faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, you will be declared "not guilty." All of your sins will be washed away.

They were comforted with a promise of a personal possession. In days of old a white stone was sometimes given to close friends with their name or a symbol engraved on it. It was a very personal possession of the one who received it. The Lord offers salvation to everyone, *"He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* and be saved (2 Pet 3:9). God has a gift just for you. It has your name on it. It's called eternal life. The bible says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"* (Eph 2:8).

This is God's promise. If you will give your heart, your life to Jesus, He will give you His gift of eternal life.

They were comforted with a promise of an intimate invitation. There was a third way the white stone was sometimes used in the past. Not only was it used to grant acquittal in a court of law and given as a gift to close friends, a white stone was also used like a ticket to gain admission to a great feast.

This is God's promise. The Christian who faithfully serves Christ, who refuses to deny the name the name of Christ, who never compromises the faith of Christ, will not enjoy sweet fellowship

with Christ today, he will also feast with Him in heaven some day at the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9).

Now god's food and God's forgiveness, and God's fellowship, and God's feast are reserved for those who are a member of God's family. Are you a part of that family?