

3 – PERGAMUM: “The Compromising Church”

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. 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. 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. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ 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."

-- Revelation 2:12-17 (ESV)



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In our previous two letters to the churches in Revelation, Ephesus and Smyrna, we have learned something about God's will for us and the church. **In the letter to the church at Ephesus** ... Christ commended the church for its doctrinal purity, for recognizing and confronting the false teachers, and for not tolerating evil within, but rebuked it **because it had lost its first love**. God wants us to be pure in doctrine, He wants us to study his word, discuss it with each other, be able to recognize false teaching and to deal with it, but He also wants us to feel the same love for Him that He feels for us, a complete eternally deep love that puts no-one else first, a love that is pure and strong just because of who God is, a love that is within our hearts and minds.

The Letter to the Church at Smyrna shows an example of those united with Christ and His saving word, **knowing that they may suffer for their faith**, enduring trials and temptations ... but reminds them that the eternal future outweighs any temporary trials or worldly price that we pay because of our faith.

This time we are looking at the next letter, written to **the church at Pergamum (also called Pergamos or Pergamon)**. This church was ... **“the compromising church – the worldly church - the tolerant church”**. Although they refused to deny Christ, they allowed sin like idols, immorality, cults and heresies to remain among them.

The problem in Pergamum (“mixed marriage”) was leniency toward those in the church who were compromising their faith with the idol worship and sexual immorality of pagan worship. Compromise can be good and is often needed ... but the church must never compromise God's Word and the basic tenets of the Christian faith.

The literal translation of Pergamum can be seen as “**married to the high tower**” suggesting some of the character of the church ... and if we think about what the high tower might be, we see from the letter that the high tower wasn't Christ ... but rather the world around, **making a compromise with the world rather than allowing themselves to be persecuted by it.** But uniting with the world while it made life easier for them ... they allowed themselves to become married to the system and leaders of the time.

James 4:4 cautions us ... “*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?*”

Because they had gone the way of the world, Christ introduces Himself as **the one who has a sharp two-edged sword. They had lost the ability to discern from right and wrong, good and evil, and can no longer keep the two apart.** The sword is the living word of Christ, able to separate the light from darkness, piercing men's hearts or striking down the false. Christ wields the same sword today through scripture, allowing us to use it as a weapon against the false teachings of the world! (Hebrews 4:12)

- **It was not easy to be a Christian in Pergamum. Believers experienced great pressure to compromise or leave the faith.**

As in other regions, the Christians at Pergamum were tempted to compromise in their faith in order to enjoy the benefits of Roman citizenship. The Roman government tolerated any religious practice that also recognized and worshipped the emperor as deity. The choice facing the church was remaining faithful and suffering the cultural and economic consequences ... or compromising his or her faith in order to work and prosper!

We must recognize that the problems there are still problems that exist in modern churches today, and so the message is still very relevant to us! There have been many throughout history who have compromised their faith to gain some worldly benefit, perhaps some gain of political power, or wealth ... but there have also been those who have remained faithful to Christ and made no concessions when it came to the name of Christ.

We serve a God who knows everything ... He knows our physical condition, He knows our spiritual condition. In the letter to Ephesus Christ tells them ... He knows their works, labor and patience. To Smyrna He tells them ... He knows of their works, tribulation and poverty, and here He begins by telling them ... He knows where they dwell. **Christ knows where we dwell physically and spiritually,** and while we dwell with Christ spiritually ... then all is well, even if we physically dwell where Satan's throne is!

A true follower of Christ places their trust in Him, and this is where Pergamum left the path ... for they thought if they associated with the governing powers, compromised what they thought was a little, in order to obtain more, it would be a worthwhile deal! However Christ condemns their actions, and points to one **Antipas** (which means "against all") who remained faithful even unto death. ***While the church as a whole tolerated false doctrines, there were still those who would not deny their faith!***

1Corinthians 15:33 says ... ***"Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."*** It seems that many churches today have forgotten this universal law ... and Pergamum didn't keep this at the forefront of their minds ... and gave themselves over to ideas that they had no business getting involved with.

- **Note:** ***Although man can easily contract disease from another man, the same cannot be said about good health. Man is more susceptible to evil than he is to good ... and has a greater power to spread evil than to spread good.***

There were a few things (v.14) to be said against the church at Pergamum, of its mixing with the world, but what made it worse ... is that it was done under the formality of another doctrine, namely the teaching of Balaam. ***This was no longer a sin committed out of weakness or ignorance, but rather something that was calculated and based upon the philosophy of others, but was in conflict with the teaching of God and it was the basis of that doctrine which had displeased God.***

The church at Pergamum is thought of as the "compromising church". The members expressed their faith for Christ on one hand ... but on the other, they accommodated the world around them, compromising where it was convenient to do so!

There are so many churches today that follow the same pattern ... where large parts strive for cultural harmony, or political correctness and ignore some fundamental Bible teachings. Through his teaching, Balaam laid a trap for the children of Israel, separating them and dividing them from the truth of God, as well as from each other. He advised the Moabites to tempt the children of Israel with their women. (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16)

The enemy's plan is never revealed until it's too late. When Balaam advised Balak to bring out the women of Moab, he knew it would go further than just that. He was teaching Balak how to separate the people of Israel from God and set them on the path to ruin. ***Once one compromise has been made, a greater compromise will often follow!***

There are still churches today that hold the doctrine of Balaam, teaching people to commit harlotry with the world ... *promoting half measures* so they can walk with God and the world at the same time. The numbers in the churches who advocate this deceitfulness ... have pushed the true believers to the side, who may even be despised by the majority for their failure to compromise, and labelled as old fashioned and not with the times. Cultures change, but the doctrines of God never have!



The Nicolaitans were a sect that had arisen in the early days of Christianity ... which believed that since Christians are saved by grace and free from the law, nothing they do could be called evil. As a result ... the Nicolaitans *“lead lives of unrestrained indulgence”* as a right of Christian liberty. Those following the doctrine of the Nicolaitans “felt free” to participate in worship of the emperor and other pagan deities as was the cultural practices ... and lived according to cultural standards of greed, social position and power, rather than by godly standards.

Although these destructive forces can be found within the body of believers, we can also apply it individually too. We should always begin looking at our own problems first ... before considering the problems of others.

- *“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”* Revelation 2:16

Christ gives the command to repent in relation to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. It was a serious warning, for if they didn't repent then there would be consequence for Christ would come quickly and fight them with the sword of his mouth. *The good that was in the church couldn't cover or atone for any of the sin that had crept in.* Evil cannot be atoned by doing good, but rather repenting of the evil.

Whatever justification there was in trying to accommodate themselves into the world ... they had strayed from the path and must repent. By standing firm in the Word of God, and allowing it to dwell in our hearts we can overcome evil. The reward for the one who overcomes the evil will be to receive some of the hidden manna. (v.17)

God has called us out of the world by name ... and once having heeded His call He calls us by a new name. If we remain faithful ... if we endure ... if we strive and pursue righteousness, it is this new name that we will hear when we stand before Him!

“You've Got Mail ...”