

PERGAMUM: A COMPROMISED CHURCH

Text: Revelation 2.12–17

Theme: Jesus Christ calls us to clear discipleship with no compromise

Introduction — The Big Apple

- The Big Easy, The Big Pineapple, The Big Raggedy, The Biggest Little City in the U.S.
- Mill City, Icebox of the U.S., Spamtown, USA, Med City

These are all city nicknames: you can guess what they are or where they are by nickname

- how about one more: **Satan's throne**
- no, it's not Las Vegas, although that's called Sin City
- and it's not a moniker the city fathers would choose for their hometown
- but it is the one given by Jesus Himself to ancient Pergamum

This is the third letter to the third church, Revelation 2.12–17

- Pergamum, now modern Bergama, Turkey, some 50-60 miles north of Smyrna
- just a few miles in from the coast, on high elevation of over 1,000 feet
- this gave it a gorgeous view of the sea and surrounding area
- also quite large, perhaps 200,000
- and like previous two cities, a great many temples scattered throughout
- two stood out among all others: temple to Emperor & to Asclepius
- Asclepius was the god of healing; his key symbol?
- a serpent entwined around a staff: still used today
- one of the temples held the Altar of Zeus: 40' tall, bigger than this building
- add to this that Pergamum was THE city of emperor worship and you now understand the name Jesus gave it
- it housed Satan's throne and it seemed to indeed be Satan's dwelling place
- so dark must the atmosphere seemed, no surprise Christians oppressed and persecuted harshly

Jesus writes to this group of believers

- “The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword”
- Jesus uses imagery for each city which the believers would clearly understand
- this one would have been crystal clear for them

- the proconsul, or governor, had been given the power of “*ius gladii*” – **the just sword**
- this gave him power to carry out capital punishment
- Jesus, by using this image, is telling the Christians: Don’t be afraid
- the proconsul thinks he has ultimate power over life
- but I will come as the Great Warrior and My words will cause him to melt and tremble

Note where this sword originates, however: from His mouth!

- this seems an odd thing, but it’s always there: Rev. 2:16

Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

(Revelation 2:16 ESV)

- then later in Revelation 19:15, 21

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

(Revelation 19:15, 21 ESV)

- this is the sword He wields against His enemies
- and it is the sword of His word
- according to Hebrews 4:12, it cuts and divides

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 ESV)

- it removes impurities and leaves only the pure
- it is His very words
- some might think: how can words be used against enemies to defeat them?
- if this One could speak and all things came into existence...
- if this Son of God can sustain all things even now with His words...
- and if, at the ceasing of that word, all things would simply vanish and cease to be...
- why do you wonder that He can decimate His enemies with just a word?

So, Jesus come to the church at Pergamum and calls them to purity or He will cut away that which compromises

He begins and they are...

I. COMMENDED FOR COURAGE

- as in other letters, Jesus begins by saying, “I know...”
- He reminds them He is with them, aware of their circumstances: He knows exactly where they live
- then He commends them for two things

1. They hold fast His name

- in spite of overwhelming opposition, these Christians are holding on tightly to Jesus Christ
- they are remaining faithful, still bearing witness to the gospel
- praise God! They are *“not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”*

2. It gets worse, however; yet they are still commended

- Antipas, one of their members, gave his life for Jesus’ sake
- don’t know who he is, but it doesn’t matter: Jesus did quite well
- this martyr shares Jesus’ own title: the faithful witness
- how much more like Christ can one get than to give his life for the Name?
- he was a faithful witness: the word for “witness” is where we get our word for martyr
- it was a courtroom term; for Christians, it became used since they would witness to Christ when arrested
- then, when put to death, it became the standard word for them: martyrs

But not all is good news for this church, because now we hear of...

II. CAUGHT IN COMPROMISE

- Jesus has commended them well & they were worthy of that
- however, hear those words in v. 14 again: But I have a few things against you!
- what a paradox in Pergamum: martyrs amidst accommodators
- what could possibly have brought this about?

1. Compromise of conscience

- this church stood for Jesus but went soft on false teaching
- the heart of this false teaching is akin to that of Balaam from the O.T.

1) Balaam, found in Numbers 22

- Israelites moving thru Moab & Midian on way to promised land
- King Balak of Midian wanted his prophet, Balaam, to curse them
- tried three times, but God always turned his curses to blessings
- so, Balaam knew he had to try another tactic since he coveted the king's reward

2) **compromise consisted of food offered to idols & sexual sins**

- your homework this week is to read Numbers 22–24 & see how this happened
- then you'll know how simple it was for believers in Pergamum to compromise purity
- most of these believers had been converted pagans
- they wanted to make clear cut from past, so avoid all things to do with idols
- now, more mature of these Christians, knew meat for sale in market had been offered
- but also knew it was just meat, so not a big problem
- however, thru their businesses, they belonged to guilds, like unions
- guilds would throw many feasts and all things idolatrous took place there
- Xns torn: don't attend, thrown out, lose business & livelihood
- attend, but try not to participate too much to be accepted
- now you can see the tension

3) **Balaam-like teachers: no big deal**

- it's just food, what can it hurt?
- and you also need your job or business to support your family & church
- so go ahead: a small sacrifice can't be that harmful, right?
- but Jesus condemns this accommodation to the world's standards
- He knows you cannot serve two masters: God and the world

2. **Compromise of purity**

- those, like Balaamites and Nicolaitans, infiltrated Pergamean church
- causing all sorts of trouble

1) **teaching that the physical doesn't really matter**

- your body is made of matter, which, pardon play on words, doesn't matter
- it's not good, and will die and rot anyway
- you need to focus on your spiritual life, but let physical do what it wants

- if this means, you're walking past temple of fertility goddess and spy a temple prostitute, then it's no big deal what you do with him or her
- if you participate in fertility rituals, as long as you don't enter in spiritually, it's okay

2) Jesus calls them out: no compromise

- again, you cannot serve two masters: God and your sinful desires
- Jesus taught that our bodies DO matter: 1 Corinthians 6.13, 15a, 17, 19

"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

(1 Corinthians 6:13, 15, 17, 19 ESV)

3. Is it really that big a deal?

- after all, we're to love one another & love covers over a multitude of sins
- yes, we are to do those things, but look what Jesus says: I have these things AGAINST you
- Jesus won't tolerate these sinful behaviors, so He points them out
- remember the sword He uses: His word
- **Hebrews 4.12–13**

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. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

(Hebrews 4:12–13 ESV)

- if the Word of God is to do that, why do we think we know better...
- ...better than God's Word and better than Jesus Himself
- we must cut out sin and seek to bring the believer to repentance

This is what Jesus does, as we hear His...

III. CALL TO CONSIDER

- Jesus refuses to leave us in our sin
- He died to save us and He works to make us holy

1. Repent

- Jesus calls these wayward Christians to return to Him
- it's not enough to just leave sin behind
- a vacuum never stays that way: it fills up with something
- **Romans 12.2** – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”*
- renew your mind by fixing it on Jesus Christ

2. Warning or Comfort?

- Jesus says, *“I will come to you soon...”*
- this might seem a comfort; we all look for His Second Coming
- but this is not the Lord's return; this is Jesus coming quickly in judgment
- He takes holiness & purity seriously and will cut it out or cut it off, either way
- if you repent of your sins, turn to Him, His sharp sword is like a surgeon's scalpel
- it cuts, but will heal quickly after the cancer is cut away
- however, if you refuse to give up your sin, His sword will cut & not pleasantly
- so, consider His call and take it seriously: let Him purify your life

As in the previous two letters, Jesus holds out the...

IV. CHALLENGE FOR CONQUERORS

- He who has an ear...
- if you trust Him, look to Him, He holds a two-fold promise out to you

1. Eat the hidden manna

- what is this? Scripture always helps us out
- we know what manna is, right?
- it was God's provision for His people following the exodus as they wandered
- He instructed Moses to take some, put it in gold jar & place in ark of covenant
- now, this ark was kept in the Holy of Holies; only high priest went in once a year
- yet now, our High Priest Jesus has opened the way so all may come
- and we commune with Him & the Father thru a feast
- now we call it communion & it seems sparse, but someday, that hidden manna will be all ours

- what a tremendous blessing: promised sweet fellowship forever and ever

2. **White stone with a new name written upon it**

- what is this promise about?
- Jesus seems to tie His words with something familiar in each city
- like the two-edged sword, He does it here
- Pergamum's many temples built with brown marble
- but over entry points, plaque of white stone with name of god or goddess worshipped
- Jesus uses this imagery to let Pergamean believers know He knows their name
- even as they hold fast His name, He holds their stone in His hand
- add to this that white/black stones used in courtroom to declare guilt or innocence
- black stone = guilty; white stone = not guilty
- you have been declared righteous by God's grace through Christ Jesus: not guilty!
- this will be your entry point into God's eternal heaven

CONCLUSION — Commended for courage, cautioned against compromise

- this is the key to understanding this church and its letter from the Lord Jesus
- living in this world will never be easy or "safe" for Christians
- if you bear the name of Christ, do not look to anyone, no matter their authority, who promises that they can keep you safe from evil, harm, or danger
- like the believers in Pergamum, we certainly cannot look to our government to do this
- more and more they represent the anti-Christ mind set that would harm us, not keep us safe
- there is only one authority that is to reign and rule our lives: the Lord Jesus Christ
- we are called, like the believers here, to boldness and courage, even in face of threats
- God is to be first in our affections and actions
- nothing must displace Jesus in our lives, whether it be family, health, wealth, comfort, work, or success
- instead of trying to have needs met anywhere else, let the Lord give you His manna
- trying to get our needs met anywhere else is nothing less than idolatry: avoid it at all costs
- rather than seeking intimacy outside of God's divine plan revealed in Scripture, look to Him
- no one knows you better than Jesus does; cling to Him and avoid the immorality seeking to suck the life out of you
- in God's great mercy, the lion of the tribe of Judah is indeed protector & champion of church
- do not flirt with the teaching of the Nicolaitans

- sin makes promises it does not keep
- the words of Jesus are meant to remove the false beauty of sin, so that we see sin as it is
- it is ugly, vile, disgusting
- it promises nourishment and intimacy, but what it delivers is only a cheap imitation of real blessings
- it never satisfies

Do you have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches?

- fight the good fight. Overcome.
- feed your soul on the manna Jesus gives
- enjoy the intimacy he promises
- He knows you as you are, and He loves you. There is no love better than His.