

I have an observation to make and I would like to see if you agree with me. Is this a true statement...? “***People do not drift toward holiness.***”

I believe that it is a definite fact... that apart from grace-driven effort... people do not gravitate toward godliness... prayer... obedience to Scripture... faith... and delight in the Lord. ... Instead... we slouch toward prayerlessness... and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism. ... We slide toward godlessness... and convince ourselves we have been liberated. ... We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance.

And this is the subject of our passage today – Compromise through tolerance. The letter that Jesus instructed the Apostle John to write from Patmos... to the Church at Pergamum... showed how they had conceded so much of their faith through acceptance of worldliness... and their lenience toward it... that it is depicted as the church that married the world.

We have been studying the Book of Revelation here on Sunday morning... and today we continue with a third letter that John was instructed... by Jesus... to write.

John was (in fact)... given a three-fold outline of the book of Revelation that he was told to write... Revelation 1:19 says... “*write therefore the things that you have seen*” (and he had seen the image of Christ standing before him)... “*the things that are*” (in other words the existing church and it’s entirety through the ages)... But the church will not continue to exist on earth forever... so John was also told to write)... “*and those that are to take*

place..." (the events that will occur after the church age... which are the very events of the tribulation... which we will get to in chapter 4 onward...)

The church age in its entirety is represented by seven letters to seven churches. This is the first series of 7 that we come to in Revelation. The number seven represents completeness... and these seven churches represent the complete history of the church from Pentecost... until the church's end... when we are raptured off this earth.

We have been going through these letters... (one a week)... and seeing a dual fulfillment – that John was addressing specific contemporary situations in each church... current to John's own day... when he penned them... but also (as Old Testament prophecy often did)... they clearly they relate to future events... (and in this case)... seven definite periods of church history... all the way to the final church period (Laodicea.)

We have already studied the letter to the church at Ephesus. This letter parallels the literal church in Ephesus during John's day AND the church period from Pentecost to around 100 A.D. (when the next church age began.) ... Both had patiently endured hardship... defended God's truth against false teachers... worked sacrificially... but eventually only did ministry out of a sense of duty. They had lost their first love for Jesus... and were warned that if they did not repent... Jesus would remove the lampstand (their witness to the world) from among them. ... Today... when we look to the entire region where this church had once thrived... their testimony has been extinguished. It is a Muslim land today.

Last week we studied the letter to the church at Smyrna... which amazingly paralleled the period of church history from 100 A.D. to 312 A.D. ... The

Church of Smyrna is the church under persecution. The letter said there would be ten periods of testing... and when the time came from 100 A.D. through 312 A.D. the church had never known (previously... or since then...) such severe persecution. During that time period... 10 separate Roman Emperors tried to extinguish the church. But it eventually ended.

This morning... we come to the letter to the church at Pergamum. This represents the church period from 312... to approximately A.D. 590... Beginning in 312... Emperor Constantine not only made Christianity legal... but forced his armies and induced much of Roman society to convert to Christianity. ... He was allowed to take over and to preside over the church as it's leader... and so in this period of church history... we see the Church marry the world... (We see tremendous compromise through tolerance.)

There has always been a great effort on the part of Satan to try to destroy and hinder the work and the influence of the Church. Satan has always used persecution as one of his main methods in hindering the work of God and destroying churches.

However... what we saw at Smyrna... it didn't work for him. ... Real and dedicated Christianity has always flourished and spread under persecution. Someone has well said that *the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church*. It was true then... and has been during every period of Church history. Persecution strengthens the determination and causes men to affirm their allegiance to Christ as nothing else seems to do.

But having failed with persecution... Satan changed his method of attack - from persecution to infiltration. ... As we pick up now with the letter to the church at Pergamum... notice the phrase, "*I know where you dwell*...

where Satan's throne is..." (when we get to verse 13) ... He dwelt among them. ... Satan couldn't stomp them out... so he would move right into their midst... join the Church of Pergamos, and destroy them from within.

Revelation 2:12-17

Early in the fourth century... after the death of Emperor Diocletian (who persecuted Christians the most severe)... two men contended for the throne. ... Constantine in the West... and Maxentius in the East... They were both determined to succeed Diocletian.

Old tradition has it... that the night before the battle at Milvian Bridge... Constantine saw a vision in the sky in the shape of a cross... bearing the inscription in Latin... *in hoc signo vinces*... ("by this sign conquer"). ... Constantine promised to declare himself a Christian if he won the battle... but he faced overwhelming odds... against him.

On October 28, 312 A.D., Maxentius built a trap... somehow using a bridge of boats that crossed the Tiber River. ... However... while standing there with a garrison of his troops... the bridge gave way... sending Maxentius and his elite guard to their deaths in the river.

Constantine could now ascend to the throne as Emperor. Within months of this victory... the *Edict of Toleration* was implemented in 312 A.D. and the persecution of Christians stopped. ... Christianity was elevated and became the state religion. ... The persecuted Christians went from the catacombs to comfort. ... The emperor promised anyone who would convert to Christianity a white robe and twenty pieces of gold. ... In one

year twelve thousand were baptized in Rome alone... most of them being unsaved.

The church became married to the world and people claimed to be Christians who had never been saved at all. - There was no change – what-so-ever - in their life.

Later on... when almost four hundred bishops met... Constantine was carried on a golden throne and he presided over the international church council as the recognized head of the church. ... But with all of the profession and pomp... there is no evidence that Constantine was born again.

Pagan practices were introduced into the church under the guise of Christianity... because many of these “*converted*” heathens complained that they missed their pagan rites and festivals. The Roman church decided to implement them in "so called" Christian worship in order to please the complaining masses. Several pagan holidays were “Christianized.” Also...

- Prayers were made for the dead.
- The worship of saints and angels commenced.
- Mass (where Christ is believed to be re-crucified every time it is celebrated)... was instituted.
- Mary was worshiped and eventually prayers were directed to her.
- Purgatory was introduced. The church became more Roman and less Christian.

These teachings are not found in the Bible anywhere.

Let's return now to our text...

Revelation 2:12

Before reading this verse... I had been discussing the period of Church history... which the church at Pergamum represents. Now... it is necessary for me to discuss the literal church at Pergamum during John's day... and why it is such a fitting representation for the 3rd distinct period of church history.

Pergamum was a famous and prosperous city, and its rulers had been the first to invite the Romans into the affairs of Asia Minor. It was the center of the imperial cult for its province. The worship of the emperor as a god was strongly emphasized, even required, in the province of Asia, and it was a major problem for Christians at the time.

Augustus came to this beautiful area when the climate got cold in Rome. There was a healing spa there.

Pergamum hosted temples dedicated to "the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma" and to Asklepios (As-klep-ios - **the god of healing**... symbolized by serpents entwined on a staff... the very symbol for medicine today)... and a large altar dedicated to Zeus. ... All of these centers of godlessness qualified Pergamum to be called the site of **Satan's throne**... by John in his letter to them.

Not only did Pergamum boast great temples... and a healing spa... it also had the greatest library of the pagan world. It was a library of over two

hundred thousand volumes. In fact, the city got its name from the parchment (pergamena) which was used. This great library was the one which Marc Antony gave to his girl friend, Cleopatra. She lugged it off to Alexandria in Egypt, and that library was considered the greatest library the world has ever seen -- and it originally came from Pergamum.

It just seems natural that Satan would want control of a city such as Pergamum... in which to operate his system of evil. The combination of idolatry... higher education... and the medical arts... allowed Satan the opportunity to affect the total man. Satan could control the mind of man through learning... the body of man through healing... and the soul of man through pagan religion.

Now that we have looked at a few descriptions of the Pergamum that was contemporary to John's day... Notice... please the description of Christ in this letter (in verse 12)... ... It says... He has a sharp two-edged sword! This speaks of the Word of God. The Word can bless... and it can also judge. Here it is used in a way of judgment. The enemy which is so prominent in Pergamos will be judged by the Word of God.

Nothing but His truth can defeat error and Satanic opposition. It was more important that the church fear the sword of the Lord than the sword of Roman authority. ... The Word of God has the power to penetrate the very depths of the soul and expose the hidden secrets of the heart of man. Here the two-edged speaks of sure and swift judgment.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

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.

Whose judgment do you fear? The Christians in John's audience could avoid the sword of Rome by doing things that would put them in danger of the sword of Jesus. We will all face situations where what the world judges to be right conflicts with what Jesus judges to be right. Whose sword do you respect in that moment? The sword of the world and the judgment the world might inflict, or the sharp two-edged sword in the mouth of the Son of man?

Revelation 2:13

Christ was acquainted of their service. Those who are in your life may not be aware of your service... of your faithfulness and fidelity in service... but Christ knows. ... You may be unrewarded by the world... but Christ knows which means in due time you will be duly recognized and rewarded for your good service... regardless of how obscure and unimportant your service has been to the world.

Jesus was aware and He commended them for three things. **First**, they were steadfast in devotion. *"You hold fast my name"*.

The *"name"* represented everything involved in Jesus Christ. This commendation says they were devoted to Jesus Christ. They would not deny Him.

Second, they were steadfast in doctrine. *"you did not deny my faith"*. ... There was doctrinal fidelity in the church. Obviously... as we learn shortly, all were not faithful... but the Lord commends those that were.

Third, they were steadfast in danger. *"Even in the days of Antipas... who was... killed"*. When persecution began to kill the righteous, there were those in Pergamos who refused to be cowardly about their faith in the face of great life-or-death danger. They would be faithful to death.

Despite their courageous stand against persecution, the believers in Pergamos were not faultless before the Lord. Satan had not been able to destroy them by coming as the roaring lion, but he was making inroads as the deceiving serpent. A group of compromising people had infiltrated the church fellowship, and Jesus Christ hated their doctrines and their practices.

Revelation 2:14

In order for us to understand the doctrine of Balaam referred to by our Savior in this passage, it will be necessary for us to refer to the Old Testament account of Balaam.

In the book of Numbers, chapters 22-25 and 31, we find that the Children of Israel, on their way from Egypt to the Land of Canaan, had pitched in the plains of Moab. Balak, King of Moab, was afraid of the Israelites, so he called for Balaam the Prophet, and asked him to curse the King of Israel. Almost every child knows the story of how Balaam went on his way, riding upon an donkey, and how he was met by an Angel in the way, who warned him against the purpose of his journey. Nevertheless he was allowed to go on his way, but he was told to speak only those things which the Lord would direct him to say.

Every time Balak tried to get Balaam to curse the children of Israel, he ended up blessing them instead of cursing them. Not being allowed to curse Israel, Balak the King of Moab was very angry, and Balaam himself was greatly disappointed for, being a hireling prophet, he had hoped to receive a great reward for cursing the Children of Israel.

Therefore, having been hindered in his purpose of cursing the Children of Israel, Balaam conceived another plan for securing the reward which he desired. Balaam reasoned with the King of Moab that if he wanted to overcome the Children of Israel, he could do so by breaking down their standards of separation. This he did by calling the people of Israel unto the sacrifice of their gods, and by leading the Children of Israel to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. Because of this unholy alliance with the children of Moab, God sent a plague among them, and twenty-four thousand of them died of the plague before the judgment of God was stayed.

Balaam was willing to see Israel robbed of her glory, and thwarted in her purpose, all for the love of money and a reward. Balaam the hireling prophet, was willing to do anything for the sake of profit, and in the Church of Pergamos there were those who held to the doctrine of Balaam.

"The teaching of Balaam," simply stated, denotes a doctrine of compromise. ... Balaam led Israel to compromise all of their distinctives in order to be like the nations around them. ... Balaam was a greedy man who had both a faulty concept of God and a devious mind.

Why did this bit of ancient history apply to the believers at Pergamos? Because a group in that church said, "There is nothing wrong with being friendly to Rome. What harm is there in putting a pinch of incense on the altar and affirming your loyalty to Caesar?" They wanted to compromise their distinctives so they could be like all the other nations. Antipas refused to compromise and was martyred; but others took the "easy way" and cooperated with Rome.

We never had more Balaamites in our churches than now. We call them "worldly Christians." Billy Sunday used to say, "*You might as well talk about a heavenly devil.*" They argue from half a verse of Scripture, "*All things are lawful for me...*" and never add the rest of that statement. "All things are lawful for me *but not all things are helpful...*"; they do not help me on my way. "... all things are lawful for me, *but I will not be dominated by anything*"; some things will enslave me for even a hobby can hobble me if uncontrolled. "All things are lawful for me *but not all things edify,*" they do not build me up. These Balaamites never subject their habits to this threefold test of *expediency, enslavement and edification.*

Another point of compromise was their allowing the Nicolaitan doctrine to infiltrate the Church.

Revelation 2:15

We have seen this group before... (in the letter to the church at Ephesus.) The Church of Ephesus took a strong stand against the Nicolaitanes, but Pergamos allowed them in. Those who would corrupt the Church never rest. They continue their attack, and work to get in.

The word Nicolaitane comes from the two Greek words; nikao which means to conquer, and laos which means the people. It therefore means to rule over the people. This was accomplished by setting up certain men to rule over the ordinary people in the church. They divided the church into two divisions; the rulers and the laity. It was those in charge who ruled over and dominated the laity. The Nicolaitan movement marks the beginning of a form of the priesthood in the church.

The period of church history from 312 to 590... was the time that the professional clergy... as a class of rulers was developed.

Revelation 2:16-17

To the overcomers God promises three things:

1. "**Hidden manna,**" - bread from heaven. Manna was God's miraculous provision for Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. These little wafers of bread stood as a type or symbol of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Jesus Himself said, "I am the bread of life." Christ is our provision for life. Only He can satisfy the longing of our heart. He is the one who gives strength. The overcoming life is for those who feed upon Christ, the eternal Bread of life. The over comer is precious to Christ. He will feed them with a Heavenly sustenance. The manna in the wilderness had satisfied physical hungers for a while, but Christ, the bread of life, would satisfy their spiritual hunger forever.

2. "**A white stone**" symbolizes approval. At that time in history, in the courtroom, it represented acquittal. A black stone meant condemnation, a white stone meant acquittal. God's children are on trial everyday they live, but one day the test will be over and God will give his stamp of approval to the true believer. The world is casting white stones for evil and black stones for Christianity. But God will set the record straight for the overcomers.
3. "**A new name**" That the name of each believer is recorded individually on a white stone intimates the personal and close relationship that we have with our Lord. ... Each believer will enjoy a special intimacy with the Lord which no other person will share.

In the Bible, names that were given to an individual reflected the character or calling of that individual. Based on the way you are living right now, what name would the Lord give to you? Would it be a name that meant faithful, loving, responsible, courageous, etc., or would it be a name that would mean the opposite of these traits? Take a good look at your life!

Remember - ***People do not drift toward holiness.***"

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Some time ago a rash of flying accidents for single-engine planes occurred across North America. When a comprehensive study was conducted of the 44 most recent fatal accidents, a few lessons stood out.

First... *all but one* of the accidents listed "pilot-related causes." Second... (and most surprisingly)... *experienced pilots* were responsible for a majority of the accidents.

A few of the accidents were caused by pilots with less than 150 hours of flight time... but **over 75 percent** of the accidents were caused by pilots with over 400 hours of flight time.

Apparently, these pilots assumed that because they already had a lot of hours under their belts... they could cut corners and get sloppy. ... And by contrast... beginning pilots with fewer hours... were extremely careful... even painstaking in their preflight routines... meticulously inspecting every rivet of the airplane. ... They did it by the book.

The study concluded that pilots who get overconfident and stop pursuing ongoing safety training are four times more likely to have a fatal accident.

Now here's the point I want to make: Sometimes we as Christians are "400-flying-hour disciples." ... Accidents take place because we stop doing it by the Book. We stop studying the Word of God. We compromise on devotions We slump on allowing the standards of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to inspect every "rivet" in our hearts and lives. We go on day after day cutting corners, wondering why we lose power on the climbs, and we stall. ... Accidents may often be the consequences of thinking we know better.

People do not drift toward holiness. ... We drift toward compromise and agree with the world that it is "freedom" or "tolerance."