

Revelation 2:12-17

"Overcoming Compromise"

They were churches literally; they model the church age historically, yet there's application for us personally. They're the 7 churches of Revelation Ch.'s 2-3. Through the letter to Ephesus we're reminded to return to our 1st love. *That just being busy for God doesn't mean that we're necessarily pleasing to God. It's not about faithful works at the expense of love, but it's about faith working through love.*

The exhortation we receive from the letter to the church of Smyrna...be faithful unto death & we will receive the crown of life. Nowhere in the scriptures is there the promise of a "primrose", problem free life should we choose to respond to God's call to follow Christ. In fact the bible teaches just the opposite. *That it's easy to follow the ways of the world, to go w/the flow, but the pathway of Christianity is riddled w/problems, w/pressures, w/persecutions; we must "through many tribulations" (the bible says) enter the kingdom of God.*

There will be those whom God will call upon to lay down their life for His sake; be faithful. Don't fear those who can kill the body (Jesus said) but cannot kill the soul. Don't fear those whose power ends in the ability to take your life. But fear Him who can destroy both the soul & the body in hell. *Here's what we need to understand, being faithful unto death begins w/being faithful in life. If you can't live for Jesus now, don't think you'll be able to die for Jesus then. Being faithful unto death is the byproduct (the fruit [if you will]) of living a faithful life... "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the 2nd death".*

Outside of the rapture we will all be subject to the 1st death; that is we will die physically. However there's no need for anyone to be subject to, that is, hurt by the 2nd death; which is to be cast into the lake of fire in condemnation & separation from God forever.

Next we come to Pergamos. Up the coast about 50 miles & inland a bit, Pergamos was the Roman capital city of Asia Minor. As you might imagine it was incredibly pagan as well as the others housing temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, & Asclepius. In connection w/the temple of Asclepius was a medical school. Asclepius was the Greek god of healing; & his emblem was a serpent wrapped around a pole (which you may see as a physician's emblem even today). Where the serpent comes in is that people would come from literally all over the place being afflicted w/various maladies to the temple of Asclepius (it was the mayo clinic of it's day).

They would lie on the cold marble floor at night & the priests would release snakes into the temple (non venomous). But as you lay there if you had the fortune of having one or more of these snakes brush up against you or slithering over you it was said to be the touch of Asclepius releasing healing into your body.

Asclepius had a title as well. We call Jesus, Jesus “Christ” Jesus is His name, Christ is His title. They called Asclepius, “Asclepius Soter” which means “Asclepius savior”. As you can imagine Christians had a real problem w/calling a “god” represented by a serpent “savior”.

Being the Roman capital of the region it’s no surprise that it also was the capital of Caesar worship housing 3 temples 3 different Roman Emperors to be worshiped as gods. Couple more quick facts about Pergamos; it house a library containing some 200,000 volumes which was taken by Mark Antony & shipped to Egypt to be given as a gift to Cleopatra... (I guess she liked to read ☺). It’s also where skins were 1st used to write on as opposed to parchment.

So it was a happening place in the ancient world, it’s where the rock stars would’ve hung out, “Planet Pergamos” would’ve been there. Hard Rock Café “Pergamos” certainly apart of the scene; you get the idea. “Have your cake & eat it to” could’ve been the motto.

Vs 12

The problem w/Pergamos (as we will discover) was that of compromise. Historically it represents the church period from about 313 A.D. to 606 A.D. when Constantine caused Christianity to become the state religion. You were either baptized into Christianity or you were put to death; needless to say there were lots of converts. The problem is that many claimed Christianity outwardly (of necessity) & were baptized accordingly, but inwardly they remained pagan. So the church was infused w/all sorts of compromise, pagans were put in positions of power & rather than the church purifying the world, the world polluted the church.

That’s the typical pattern btw. Many people think that they can w/stand certain worldly environments or keep the company consistently of unregenerate friends and eventually win them over. However, as a general rule rather than us being a purifying agent in *their* lives, they wind up being a polluting agent in *our* lives.

Over & over again the word of God warns us regarding the company we keep lest we enter into compromise. It’s not self-righteous legalism, it’s simple wisdom to heed lest we drift away. If you guys have heard me say it once, I’ve probably said it 100 times...

We gravitate naturally toward the flesh; sin is what our flesh *wants* to do. It's like a boat in open water; as long as the motor is running you can navigate against the current; but once it runs out of fuel it begins to drift w/the current. Our lives (outside of the power of the Holy Spirit propelling us) will naturally drift w/the current of the world.

That's why the bible says, *"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away."*¹ Or another way to understand that? We've got to take the warnings of the word of God seriously. You know, warnings like, *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God."*² & Again, *"Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty."*³ Here's one more, *"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray."*⁴

But so many think that they're an exception to the rule; they're an exception to the warnings of God's word. What's worse is that many in the church today are *just fine* w/compromise, as a matter of fact they *prefer* it that way.

Of course the problem is like the story of the man who couldn't decide which side he wanted to fight for during the Civil War. So he put on the coat of the North & the trousers of the South; guess what? He got shot at from both sides! That's what happens to the compromiser; the person who tries to live in 2 worlds.

Yet we've all met this person. They want to go to church- when they get around to it... They certainly want to go to heaven, but they still want to lead lives of sin. They want to party, they want to lead lives of sexual immorality, lie when they feel they need to, cheat if they have to, get revenge on the one that crosses them...

Again it's the idea of sinning till you've had your fill & seeking to convince yourself that God will understand in your case. Surely there won't be repercussions because you're not really trying to hurt anyone & after all it's tough to be a Christian! Hey, you think it's tough being a Christian where you live, wait till you see where they believers at Pergamos lived...

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Heb 2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (2 Co 6:14-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (2 Co 6:17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Pr 12:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But let me just make this clear, there are no exceptions to the rule. If you think you can sin over & over again & somehow escape the ramifications/repercussions of that; you're deceiving yourself.

"Are you suggesting that Christians don't sin?" No, that's not what I'm suggesting. The bible is clear *"If we say we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* 1 John 1:8 Listen, there's a huge difference in the person who sins, grieves over it; repents of it & wants to quit doing it; compared to the person who continually, willfully, habitually sins again & again carrying about the attitude of, "It's ok, God will forgive me."

We're to be salt & light in a dark & dying world. Not holier-than-thou hypocritical jerks. But our lives should be lived in such a way that the unbeliever could look at us & say, "There's something different about this guy, this gal." They may scorn us outwardly, but perhaps even respect us inwardly. But the compromising person doesn't reach or appeal to anyone. Jesus wants to keep us from compromise; perhaps you've entered into compromise; He has a word for you.

He says, "These things says He who has the sharp 2-edged sword:" again this is that huge "strap across your back" kind of sword that's being spoken of here.

As we know when the reference is made to the sharp sword that comes from the mouth (1:16) of our Lord, it's pointing to the razor sharp sword of the Word of God.

It reminds us of the passage found in Heb 4, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*⁵

Jesus is about to use the sword of His word to make some division among the believers at Pergamos, that is to separate those who are consecrated from those who are in compromise.

The 2 edged Sword of the word of God has the power to convict, to convert & when necessary to condemn.

Vs 13

As is typical Jesus begins w/a word of commendation before He issues the word of exhortation.

He says, "I know your works & where you dwell." Translation, "I know what you do, & I know where you live." Jesus knows every detail of your life, what you do, why you do it, even where you live, where you hang out, the places you frequent.

⁵ The New King James Version. 1982 (Heb 4:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The kudos (credit) that He gives them is that they hold fast to His name, & didn't deny His faith (that is they've not *denied*, but they've *held to* the Word of God).

Now that's a significant word of encouragement for anyone, but it's compounded when you stop to realize where it is that these guys lived & what it was that happened there. I mentioned a moment ago that sometimes we think God will understand because it's not easy to survive in the context of where we may be. Last I checked you were living where Satan himself had set up his headquarters...

Btw this should tell you that Satan's throne isn't in hell, he's not been there yet. He just does his very best to send everyone else there. He's very much alive and well on planet earth & evidently he establishes a territorial HQ & at this time they were in it! No wonder Asclepius Soter (who's symbol was the serpent) was the god of Pergamos.

But they didn't deny the word even in the face of losing their lives as did Antipas; the Lord's faithful martyr. What an honor for Antipas to be called *by* the Lord w/the same description as the *Lord*...it's found in Vs 5 of Ch 1; "Grace to you & peace from J.C., the faithful witness". That word witness is the same word here "martyr". What is a martyr? A witness; someone who knows the truth and stays true to it; the dynamic that the Christians added to the word was a willingness to die for it as well.

Antipas was a man who followed Jesus, who was like Jesus in that he knew the truth & he laid down his life for it.

Vs 14-15

So much for the good news, now for the bad; concerning the church of Ephesus Jesus had 1 thing against them...Pergamos has a few things against them.

He says, "You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam". What's the doctrine of Balaam? Write it down, look at it later Numbers 22-25:1-9. What you'll find is that the king of Moab (Balak) sent for the prophet Balaam (Gentile) to curse the children of Israel & God told him he better not go there. Well...he went there, but try as he might he couldn't curse Israel, God would always turn it to blessing. So what he did (as we discover in Num 31) is teach Balak to play the "if you can't beat em', join em'" card. He said, "Hey send your women into their camp; intermingle & intermarry; invite them to immorality & idolatry & they will bring a curse on themselves."

That's what Balak did & that's exactly what happened. The doctrine of Balaam w/in the church of Pergamos tells us that there were those who were given over to idolatry & sexual immorality; now it wasn't the churches stance, but they allowed it; they were compromising.

They were allowing those who called themselves Christians to exercise a liberty that the bible forbids. They were desensitized (it would seem) to unrepentant sin (much like Corinth when Paul wrote to them [1 Cor 5]).

Perhaps believers were marrying nonbelievers & therefore the believing spouse would partake in activities that were pagan, idolatrous &/or immoral. "Hey I went to your church, you come to mine" kind of a thing. I don't know, but the little leaven was leavening the whole lump.

Not only did they have those there who held the doctrine of Balaam, but also those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Jesus said, "which thing I hate." Interesting that Ephesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, Pergamos had them & some among them *held* to them.

We're not certain what exactly the doctrine of the Nicolaitans amounted to. If you break down the meaning of the name, "Nikao-laos" it means "to conquer the people." The idea is the establishing of a hierarchy of the priesthood over the people, the very thing that Jesus died to abolish. When Jesus died the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom sending the signal that because of the work of Christ there no longer need be a separation between God & man but that all were welcome into the presence of God through faith in Christ.

When the hierarchy of the priesthood was put in place it's effectively saying that what Jesus did wasn't enough, you need to go through "me" to get to God. Well it's no wonder then that Jesus would *hate* that.

In Ephesus the deeds were noted, in Pergamos it's doctrine; it's established & in order. Jesus says, "I hate it".

But don't forget, as much as Jesus is rebuking those who are apart of those things, He's also rebuking those who are desensitized & allowing those unrepentant actions in their midst... What's the word of the Lord to the one's in the midst of compromise?

Vs 16

Whether you're the one caught up in compromise or the one turning a blind eye to compromise Jesus says, "Repent." Change your mind; change your direction; no longer will there be compromise but you're going to consecrate your life, fully & wholly to J.C.

Forgiveness is available through repentance; if not there's a fight coming & try as you might, you won't win.

It's a simple word, but it carries a significant impact "Repent". It's a command that Jesus issues to 5 of the 7 churches. We like to think of repentance as something necessary for the unbeliever (& it is) but the believer's life should be earmarked w/continual confession of sin and repentance (or a turning *from* sin).

Antipas may've felt the sword of Rome, but Pergamos would feel the sword of Christ if they didn't repent...

Vs 17

This "White stone" business drives commentators crazy. Because there's so much ambiguity attached to it. In ancient times if you were being judged, a black stone would be mean guilty, a white stone was acquittal. Jesus may be saying, "To him who overcomes you'll be acquitted, exonerated & vindicated." A white stone was also many times used as a merit of entrance into a banquet; Jesus may be inviting them to feast w/Him. Either way, I want in on it.

I would love to partake of the "hidden manna". The bread from heaven; Jesus says here that should they overcome; rather than eating things sacrificed to idols (Vs 14); they would feast on the bread from heaven, the word of God; J.C.

Jesus says, "You'll find fulfillment; you'll be fed to the full when you repent;" perhaps pointing to Himself as the "hidden manna" the true bread that came from heaven. He's our unseen source of nourishment & strength. Oh taste & see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way (any compromise) in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*⁶

Prayer Points:

Lord deliver us from compromise. Be it compromise in us personally, in our midst collectively, or perhaps we're desensitized & need to see clearly. Do the work. We don't want to be found fighting against You, but rather drawing near (in repentance) to You. We want to be effective in our stand for You; purify us, have Your way in us; be glorified in us.

⁶ The New King James Version. 1982 (Ps 139:23-24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Repent”; it’s really the clarion call to all who will have ears to hear. The word of God calls us to turn from our sin and trust in J.C. for forgiveness of sin and being made right in the sight of God. If you don’t know the Lord (that is you’ve never consciously given your heart to the Lord); then it’s not that you’ve compromised, you’ve never been washed clean to begin with. If you’re here today & you need to be forgiven of your sin, washed clean in the sight of God then turn from your sin, trust in Jesus who shed His blood, died upon the cross & 3 days later rose from the dead paying the penalty of our sin so that through faith in Him we might have everlasting life.

So if God is speaking to you, dealing with you, respond to Him today, surrender your heart & your life to Him & you’ll never be the same...