

Revelation 2: 12-17

¹² *“And to the ¹²angel of the church in Pergamos write,*

‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because 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. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, ¹⁵ which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight 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 him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. 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.” ’*

Today’s message brings us to our third of the seven churches. Thus far we have looked at the church in Ephesus. Remember Ephesus was a church that held fast to the teaching and doctrines of the Scriptures and they were very zealous in defending them. They knew the truth and they practiced the truth. The problem with the Church in Ephesus was that they had left their first love. 1 Corinthians 13, the famous love chapter begins with these words: **13** *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am*

nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

There are many praiseworthy things it seems in Ephesus, but the fact that they had left behind love means they were nothing. Yes, I know there is a way back, and that is to repent and remember from where they have fallen, but without that, they were in real danger of having their candlestick removed.

The second church was the Church at Smyrna. Smyrna, and as we will see Philadelphia, are the only two churches that receive no words of condemnation from the Lord. Outwardly, the Church in Smyrna, which is taken from the word Myrrh, seemed to be in a very dark place, but they were praised for their faithfulness, and they were encouraged to persevere even unto death. But today brings us to the Church at Pergamos.

Pergamos in many ways reminds me of the modern American Church. And if there is one word that I could use to describe the church in Pergamos it would be the word compromise. But before we get into that I want us to make sure that we see who it is that gives the Word to this church. The one giving the message to Pergamos is described as the one who has the sharp two edged sword.

Perhaps the most well-known metaphor of the Word of the Lord in the Bible is the sharp two edged sword. Now, I want to be clear, just because something is well known, does not mean that it is well used. In Ephesians 6 believers are reminded that, *“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,*

against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

It is interesting, and I know I have pointed this out before, the only part of the armor that is offensive in design is the sword. We have the belt of truth around our waist to protect us from lies. We have the breastplate of righteousness which guards our heart, and our boots which carry the gospel of peace, and we have the important shield of faith and helmet of salvation, and I do not intend to minimize any of these, but the only piece of that armor that truly strikes at the enemy is the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of the Lord. Jesus addresses this church as the One with the sharp two edged sword, because it seems they are well armored, and yet they have compromised in that the Word of the Lord is not central to them.

It may help us to remember that Imperial Rome had claimed for herself the position of the one who created all things and defined all things. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission we read:¹⁸ *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen.

Rome claimed all authority and all power, and Jesus has all authority and power. Of course Christians that refuse to acknowledge this will compromise with a state that claims all power. Let's look at the events of the last 50 years in our own nation. As we all know, Roe V. Wade was overturned on Friday. Praise the Lord, this is great news. But the fact that a nation that many claim to be a Christian nation allowed this monstrosity of a decision to exist for almost 50 years tells us much of what we need to know about the Church in America. Much of the Church remained silent, and many in the Church believed in the lie that courts, congresses, Presidents are not bound by the holy Word of God. But, as we will see the world does not recognize the authority of God's Word in large part because the Church has itself often compromised on the Word of God. But before we get there, Pergamos did have a few things going well for them.

¹³ "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

We mentioned last week that there was great idolatry practiced in Smyrna, well in Pergamum there were also many false religions. There were temples to Zeus, Dionysus, and Asklepios. Most of us have probably heard of Zeus and Dionysus. Asklepios was a serpent God whose official designation was "savior." Zeus was known as the King of the God's and he was the god of the heavens and of thunder. Dionysus was the God of the grape harvest and was a celebrated fertility deity. The festival of Dionysus was known as the Bacchanalia. His wine, music, and ecstatic dance freed his followers from self-conscious fear and care, and subvert the oppressive restraints of the powerful. Anyone who attempted to limit one's freedom was seen as an enemy of the people.

David Chilton has pointed out that Rome had become the center of Satan's activities in the West, but Pergamum had become his throne in the East.

Now something that needs to be seen in this passage. Satan's throne indicates that many in this area had become involved in the emperor cult. Last week we saw that those who were persecuting the church were called "a synagogue of Satan." Here we see Satan's throne. The synagogue of Satan were those unbelieving members of the Jewish community who were continually having true believers in Christ brought before the Roman authorities. What is seen here is that unholy alliance between Satan or the emperor cult and apostate Israel. Those who claim to be Jews, but by their action we know they are not.

Perhaps we can see this more clearly if we remember Daniel 7. Here Daniel has a vision of four beasts. In that vision there is a lion, which represents Babylon, there is a Bear, which represents the Medes and Persians, and there is a leopard with four heads that represents Greece, and the last beast, which is a terrible beast that is not described as a particular creature but it has 10 horns on its head. This beast represents Rome. Combined each of these beasts represented kingdoms who ultimately opposed Christ and yet they were often used by God to protect His faithful from those who would attempt to destroy her.

Revelation 12, there is a great sign in the heavens. There is a woman clothed with the sun with the moon at her feet, she is laboring to bring forth a man child. And there is a great red dragon, who we are told in verse 9 is Satan or the devil who is waiting to devour the child. The dragon is described as having 7 heads and 10 horns. Do me a favor and count the heads and the horns of the four beasts in Daniel 7. We have the lion...that is one head. We have the Bear, which brings us to 2 heads, and then we have this four-headed leopard, which brings us to 6 heads, and lastly

we have great and terrible beast that has 10 horns on his head, which gives us in these 4 beasts 7 heads and 10 horns. Revelation 12 closes with these words: *17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

The woman represents faithful Israel who is bringing forth Christ, and as we see the passage closes with the dragon waging war with all those who are His. And we know they are His because they keep the commandments of God and they have the testimony or witness of Christ. Christ carries the sharp two edged sword and those who are His do the same. One of the things I have often mentioned is that the Church in American has many problems, but one of those problems is not that we know our Bible's too well. The modern church has often found themselves compromising with the world and it usually happens because we have neglected the Word of God in favor of a fad or of a tradition. We seek to be accommodating, we seek acceptance with a system that opposes us at our very core, and then when we see problems rather than repent and turn to the Word we find another area to compromise to cover up our previous failings.

Well the Lord knows where they live and the vast majority of the people in this church have compromised but there are some who have been faithful. *And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.* Antipas was thought to be the Bishop of the Church at Pergamos. There is very little known about him other than that he was martyred for his faith because of his consistent faithful witnessing in the face of all the satanic evil that was present around him. The name Antipas means literally "against all." There is a story of Antipas who

was told: "Antipas, the whole world is against you!" His reply was telling: "Then I am against the whole world!" According to tradition he had been made Bishop of the Christian church of Pergamum by the Apostle John during the reign of Nero. His witness to the Lord Jesus Christ by word and deed and miracles of healing began turning the people of Pergamum from offering sacrificial worship to idols that can neither see, nor hear, nor move, nor breathe. The pagan priests complained vehemently that he was misleading the people by causing them to commit apostasy from their faith in their ancestral gods by his personal example of moral and spiritual virtue, the firmness of his faith in his God, and his constant preaching about Jesus the Anointed One. When they demanded that he stop, he refused. He would not submit to their demand to stop preaching Christ and offer sacrifice to the idols. They became enraged and dragged him to the temple of Artemis, and there they threw him into a glowing, red-hot copper or brazen metal bull where they normally put their sacrifices to the idols to cast demons out of their own people. He loudly prayed God to receive his soul and strengthen the faith of the Christians, and begged God to forgive those who were inflicting on him this torment. He then departed as peacefully as if he fell asleep.

His faithful witnessing and eventual martyrdom for his unshakable faith in Christ Jesus are what earned Antipas mention in the pages of Holy Scripture, and a place in God's "Hall-Of-Fame Of Faith." Yet certainly not all in Pergamos were faithful, in fact they are mentioned as having some who hold to the teaching of Balaam.

Balaam was a false prophet, and in the Book of Numbers we read the account of the destruction that Balaam brought against the people of God. Balak was the king of the Moabites

who was the enemy of the people of God. Balaam, who spoke for God... Yes He was a false prophet, but he claimed to speak for God and he taught Balakm the King of God's enemies how to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel so that they would continue to eat things sacrificed to idols and continue in fornication.

Balaam was a wicked false prophet in that he said all the right words, he said thus says the Lord, and yet he was speaking to the itching ears of the people and they quickly jumped on his teachings. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that the Nicolaitans and the those who practiced the teachings of Balaam were likely the same group of people. So these people were standing for truth, even to the point of persecution, and yet they were falling to moral compromise in their own practices. I know this could set me up for an accusation of going after the low hanging fruit, but those in Pergamos were the type of people who could rightly explain to you how one could become a Christian, but if someone were to ask them, "How should we then live?" They would have no answer. Like many modern American Christians they had no answer because they had so internalized the faith and by that I mean conversion, that it had nothing to do with they way in which they lived their life.

There is a well known Pastor in America today who has said that Christians, and I quote, "need to unhitch themselves from the Old Testament." The idea is that we are New Testament Christians, so why do we need the Old Testament? Remember it was in Luke 24 on the Emmaus Road where Jesus, beginning with the law and the prophets showed the two disciples all that the Scriptures said about Himself. You know the walk was about 6 miles long and while they walked Jesus showed them Himself in The Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament is all about Jesus, but answer me this, how many of you could talk for 2 to 4 hours and talk about

Jesus only from the Old Testament? There is a reason that the address to this church that is plagued by compromise with the world is delivered by Christ described as having that sharp two-edged sword. We must know the Word of God and we must know how to apply it.

If we desire to stand against the world we have lots of armor. They are not unimportant, they are in fact critical, but if we are to take the offensive, we require the Sword of the Spirit. One of the Scriptures that I often think of in this context is found in Matthew 16. This is a well known passage, but we often miss the obvious:

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not [[&]]prevail against it.

Peter confesses who Jesus is and is told that the gates of Hades or of Hell can never prevail against the church. We often forget that gates are defensive in nature. They are meant to keep out hostiles. We read this and often think that we are the ones on the defensive. It's like Satan can throw whatever he wants at us, and we know he cannot prevail. O.K. that is fine, but that is not what the text is about. It is hell's gates that are on the defensive. We are not on the defensive. By the Word and the Spirit of God we are to break down the gates of the enemy.

Now the warning to this church is perhaps one of the most terrifying than to any of the seven churches. *¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*

You know it is one thing to unhitch our selves from the Scripture. It is one thing to compromise with the world, these are of course awful, but the result when this is done is that unless one repents, it is the Lord who will declare war against them with the sword of His mouth. To express His displeasure with this Church He will fight them with the Sword of His Mouth.

False teaching in the church, and false practice in the church come about when churches abandon God's Word for some other standard. This usually comes about through small compromises. Over the last couple of weeks, the Southern Baptists had their convention, and the PCA had theirs as well. There has been much discussion and controversy about these conventions as to what issues they would be discussing. One of the issues, specifically in the Southern Baptist Convention is the topic of ordination of women to the pastoral ministry. The Scripture is of course abundantly clear on this issue, but once other standards are introduced, everything falls apart.

In the PCA there is controversy on whether or not homosexual ministers can be ordained. Again the Scripture is clear. But as soon as there are other standards introduced, and I am referring back to Daniel, the writing is on the wall. When churches abandon the clear standard of the Word of God for anything else they have declared war against their Lord and this Scripture tells us that the Lord will fight against them with the Sword of His mouth.

In Numbers when Balaam desired to speak his own word to Israel, because he would profit, rather than speak the Word of the Lord. It was the Lord, who in turn brought the Word of the Lord against Balaam.

This account is from Numbers 22:22-34:

22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. 24 Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. 25 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. 26 Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have ^[e]abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?"

And he said, "No."

31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. 32 And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I

have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse^[h] before Me. ³³ The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live.”

³⁴ And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, “I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back.”

The idea that Balaam did not know what he was doing displeased the Lord is frankly laughable. The Lord has spoken His Word to Him, but Balaam wanted His own desire more than he wanted what the Lord wanted. But then again the reason this is an example here in Revelation is because we have people who are compromising with God’s Word and saying stupid things like, “if this displeases You, I will turn back.”

The Angel of the Lord and a donkey speak to Balaam and we get the distinct impression that God is now taking the fight to Balaam. Compromise and heresy are real threats in the Church of Christ and must always be opposed. To not do so for the purposes of pleasing men, or for whatever the reason is to declare war against the one has the sharp two-edged sword.

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. 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.” ’

We are finally encouraged to truly hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. And then there is a promise made to the overcomers. First, they are told that they will be given some of the hidden manna to eat. The hidden manna is of course a reference to the manna that is placed in the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 16. The hidden manna is Christ who sustains and nourishes

His people. Second, the Christian is promised a white stone. The reference to a white stone is something that many of the commentaries disagree about the significance. Some see it as a token or a ticket to a feast. This is said to have been a common practice in the first century. David Chilton reminds us that in the Bible there is a white stone connected with manna. This stone is called bdellium. In Genesis 2:12 in a description of Eden we read: ¹²*And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there.* The pointing back to Eden is meant to point to the idea of Salvation as New Creation, and the restoration of God's people to Paradise. The last thing that is promised to the overcomer is that they will be given a new name that will be written on this stone. Remember a person's name is His character and identity. In Christ we are given a new name.

God the Lord is the Definer, who has called us into being and wholly interpreted us in terms of his predetermined plan. This new name is a fulfillment of Isaiah 62:2

²*The Gentiles shall see your righteousness,*

And all kings your glory.

You shall be called by a new name,

Which the mouth of the LORD will name.

Christ says that no one will know the new name except for the one who receives it. The meaning of this expression is "known" by the receiver in the sense of owning it. Another way of saying this is not that the name is secret but that it is exclusive.

In Christ Jesus, we are given a new name. We are named as belonging to Him. How can we who have been called by Christ be called by another. Let us receive the Word, and truly hear the Word and may we obey it.