

Pergamos: The Compromising Church

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[0 : 00] But if we could, this evening with the Lord's help, we could turn to the book of Revelation in chapter 2.

Revelation chapter 2, continuing our study of the seven churches in Revelation. Revelation chapter 2, we're reading at verse 12.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 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.

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.

[1 : 18] And practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon, and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

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.

What would Jesus say about your church? Now that's the question we're being asked as we study these letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation.

What would Jesus say about your church? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church? And as we said before, it's a searching question. What would Jesus say about the spiritual health and the spiritual condition of Barba's free church?

Would Jesus commend us? Would he condemn us? Would he comfort us? Or would he have concerns about us? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church?

[2 : 38] And as we said before, these letters to the seven churches in Revelation were to view them as the results of a spiritual health check. Jesus, the great physician of souls, he's giving to the churches in Asia the results of their spiritual condition.

And some of the things that Jesus has discovered, they're not pleasant. And they need to be corrected immediately. Because they could have damaging effects upon the spiritual well-being of the church.

And the reason Jesus is giving the results of this spiritual health check, as we said before, it's because he has a care. And he has a concern for the spiritual well-being of his church.

Jesus loves the church. Jesus gave himself for the church. Jesus washed and freed the church from their sins by his own blood.

And now, as the risen and exalted and glorified Savior, Jesus is the king and head of his church. And Jesus wants his church to be faithful. And he wants his church to be obedient in a world that is hostile to the gospel.

[3 : 48] And as we said before, the book of Revelation, it's all about revealing Jesus Christ. It's all about revealing Jesus as the risen and exalted Savior. So that the church will live faithful and obedient lives in the face of opposition and persecution.

And so the reason there are seven churches, as we said before, it's symbolic. They represent the whole of the church of Christ. Therefore, the letters to the seven churches, they apply to every church in every generation.

They apply to us. And they're an important message to us sent by Jesus Christ. Which means that Jesus, he has a care and a concern for the spiritual well-being of our church.

And we have to take heed to the results of these spiritual health checks. So that we will apply these prescribed remedies in our own congregation.

And that we'll seek to be faithful and obedient to Jesus Christ. Now, as you can see, there are phrases which are repeated in each letter. We're now on the third letter.

[5 : 00] And we've seen phrases that are repeated. And even the structure of every letter, it's very similar. Because as we saw last week, the church in Smyrna and also the church in Philadelphia, they didn't receive a word of condemnation from Jesus.

They only received a word of commendation and a word of consolation. But what we see here this evening is that the church in Pergamum, they received a word of condemnation.

They received the threefold structure. And this evening, as we consider the church in Pergamum or Pergamos, the church in Pergamos is described as the compromising church.

The compromising church. And for them, Jesus has a word of commendation, a word of condemnation, and a word of consolation.

So these are the three things. First of all, a word of commendation. A word of commendation. Jesus says in verse 12, And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

[6 : 15] 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.

So the letter in the church, to the church in Pergamos, it begins in the same way as all the other letters. It begins with the phrase, to the angel of the church.

And as we said before, the angel of the church, it isn't a guardian angel, it isn't the spirit within the church. The angel of the church is the pastor of the church, because the word angel can also be translated as messenger.

And that's what the pastor of a church is. He is God's messenger to God's people. And the pastor's responsibility is to bring the word of God before the people of God.

And the spiritual health and the spiritual condition of a congregation is the responsibility of the pastor. Because it's the pastor's responsibility to ensure that his people are being fed, that they're being taught, that they're being challenged by the word of God, as they ought to be.

[7 : 19] And so Jesus, he addresses this letter to the angel of the church. But notice how he describes himself. He describes himself as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword.

And what you often find with these self-descriptions of Jesus is that we can work out what Jesus means by this, by our knowledge of the Bible.

Because the sharp two-edged sword, as you know, it's mentioned in Hebrews chapter 4, where we're told that the word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow.

And it's a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And so Jesus, he reveals himself as the word of God. And that his word, he says, is a sharp two-edged sword.

And you know, this description, it was relevant to the believers in Pergamos because there was this constant pressure upon them to undermine the Bible and its teaching and to deny their faith and their obedience to Jesus Christ.

[8 : 33] They were constantly under pressure to compromise and to contradict the message of the gospel. But Jesus reminds the church in Pergamos that he and his word is a two-edged sword and that it should never be watered down or compromised.

And you know, it's a warning to us as a congregation that the word of God, it's the power of God unto salvation. And faith, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

The word of God, it's the sword of the spirit. But if we make this sharp two-edged sword, if we make it blunt by compromising or watering down the gospel, then the saviour will not be honoured, the saint will not stand firm, and the sinner will not be saved.

My friend, if we compromise on the word of God, then we will remove our solid foundation. And as Jesus reminds us, a house that is built upon the sand is the house of a fool.

It's the house of a fool. But in these verses, Jesus gives a word of commendation. And he says, I know where you dwell. And as we said before, these words, they would have been a great encouragement to the church.

[9 : 59] For Jesus, the king and head of his church, to say to this struggling church here, I know. I know what's going on. I understand what you're going through.

I know where you dwell. And the church in Pergamos had lived in one of the toughest places to live as a Christian. Because Jesus says, you live where Satan's throne is.

You live where Satan's throne is. And Jesus described Pergamos in this way because Pergamos was a city overrun by idolatry.

So just to set the scene, just to bring you into Pergamos. The city of Pergamos, which it's now modern day Bergama, that's what it's called.

It's located 60 miles north of the city of Smyrna. But Pergamos, it wasn't a seaport city like Ephesus and Smyrna. They were right on the coast of Turkey.

[10:59] But Pergamos, it was built inland, about 15 miles inland. And it was built on this high hill, a thousand feet above the surrounding hillside. Pergamos, you could say, it was like a fortress.

It was perched on this hill in the hillside of Turkey. And Pergamos, it was said to be a sophisticated city. It was a center of Greek culture and education.

It boasted of a library with over 200,000 books. The people in Pergamos, they were educated. But that didn't mean they were wise.

Because they wasted large sums of money building altars and temples to all their gods. In fact, there were five gods that were worshipped in the city of Pergamos.

And every one of them, they all had to be given their place of honor and praise. Of course, there was emperor worship, which everyone, including the Christians, they were made to confess Caesar as Lord.

[12:01] But then there was another temple, the temple to the Greek god, Dionysus. He was the god of wine. He was very helpful if he wanted to grow wine or get drunk.

Then there was Asclepius, who was considered to be the god of healing. And people, they came from all over the world to be healed from this god, by this god.

In fact, Pergamos, it built the world's oldest hospital because of this god, Asclepius. And you can all look it up online.

It's really fascinating. Then you have the goddess Athena. She was said to be the goddess of war. And strangely, Athena, she was said to be the half-sister of the god, Hercules.

You've all heard of him. And she was also the daughter of Zeus. Zeus was the Greek god of sky and thunder. He was the king of all the gods. And his altar was situated in Pergamos.

[13:02] And the altar to Zeus, it was the greatest and grandest structure in Pergamos. It measured 36 metres high and 113 metres long.

It was a massive structure. And it was so expensive that the people of Pergamos, they had to stop working on the temple of Dionysus in order to complete the altar of Zeus.

And it was said to have taken three generations to build this altar. But now, in the 21st century, what's left of Zeus' altar, it has been taken to Germany to a museum called the Pergamos Museum. And you can find it in Berlin. And you know, when you look at the pictures of this altar, the altar of Zeus, although it was an altar to a god that was dead, doesn't exist, you know, the altar, it was an impressive structure.

And it only shows the dedication of the people to their gods and their desire to worship these idols. And yet, it was because of all these temples and all these altars and all these dead gods that Jesus describes Pergamos as the throne of Satan.

[14:18] And you can imagine that it wouldn't have been easy to be a Christian in Pergamos because there was such a great pressure around them. Every day, they were being pressurized to compromise their faith or even abandon their faith completely.

But Jesus doesn't tell the Christians in Pergamos. He doesn't say to them, move away to another city, find an easy life. He doesn't say, escape all this idolatry and all this worldliness.

No, Jesus, He commends them for refusing to renounce their faith. He commends them for standing firm. But by being constantly surrounded by idolatry and worldliness, there was always the danger of becoming immune to it.

And that danger of becoming immune to sin and worldliness and idolatry. It's always there. Because evil, it's always trying to creep into our lives.

There's always a danger for us to become immune to sin and worldliness that surrounds us and just to accept it. Because, you know, well, what may have been abhorrent to us at first, it can easily become the new normal.

[15 : 32] And, you know, sometimes we have to ask ourselves, are there things that I tolerate in my life today that I would never have tolerated a few years ago? Do I settle for things more easily than I used to?

Do I allow things in my home that I would never have allowed in the past? And if our answer, if my answer is yes, then we need to think, why?

Why? Why has this happened? Why have I allowed this to happen? Have I compromised the word of God? Have I become too worldly? Have I become too dependent upon all the things around me and less dependent upon the Lord?

And, you know, my friend, evil has a way of creeping into our lives and creeping up upon us. And Satan, as you all know, he's like an angel of light. He's very cunning and very subtle in all that he does.

But, you know, Jesus, he commends the Christians in Pergamos for refusing to renounce their faith even when the worshippers of Satan martyred one of their own church members.

[16 : 46] Jesus says in verse 13, he says, you didn't deny my faith even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

Antipas, who's mentioned here, and whom Jesus commends as his faithful witness, he was summoned before the Roman governor, and he was commanded to sprinkle incense to the altar of the emperor.

And he was commanded to say, Curios Caesar, Caesar is Lord. But, as you know, Antipas, he refused. And because he refused to confess Caesar to be Lord, he received the death penalty.

The death penalty in Pergamos was death by the brazen bull. And the brazen bull, it's frightening when you look it up, it was a large hollow bull that was made entirely out of bronze.

And it had a door on the side of it. And it was designed in such a way that those who were sentenced to death, they were locked inside it. And then a fire was set under it, heating the bronze metal until the person inside was roasted to death.

[18 : 03] It's an awful way to die. And only, you know, only at Satan's throne, Satan had, he had blinded the minds of those in Pergamos.

And yet Jesus, he's commending these Christians for not renouncing their faith, for standing firm. Even when they saw Antipas dying the way he did, they stood firm.

He commends them for not renouncing their faith. But what we see secondly is that Jesus does condemn them because they compromised their faith.

They didn't renounce it, but they compromised it. That's what we see secondly, a word of condemnation. So a word of commendation and a word of condemnation.

Look at verse 14. Jesus says, but I have a few things against you. You've come, you, sorry, 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.

[19 : 19] unfortunately, Christians suffering, the Christians suffering in Pergamos, they didn't produce the faithfulness and the obedience of the Christians in Smyrna.

And because of this, Jesus says, he says, I have a few things against you. In fact, there were two things against them, two things that Jesus condemned the church in Pergamos for.

They were compromise and contradiction. When Jesus spoke to the church in Pergamos about their compromise, he used the solemn illustration of the prophet Balaam.

We read earlier in Numbers chapter 22 that Balaam, he was the Lord's prophet. Balaam was a chosen servant of the Lord who was called to proclaim the Lord's covenant faithfulness to his people and remind the Israelites to be obedient to the Lord.

But as we read, when the Israelites conquered the Amorites, the Moabites, they were afraid of Israel's army. And so Balak, the king of Moab, he wanted to protect his people, wanted to stay safe, so he sent for Balaam.

[20 : 29] And King Balak, he asked the prophet Balaam, he asked him to pronounce a curse upon the Israelites. And at first, we saw that Balaam refused. He claimed that he was the Lord's prophet and the Lord had said to him that he would do no such thing.

At first, he listened to the word of the Lord. He listened, Balaam listened to the sharp two-edged sword, and he stood firm upon God's word.

But then King Balak came back a second time. He came to the prophet offering him money to curse the Israelites. And Balaam again, he refused.

saved. But what was different that time was that Balaam wanted to do it. He wanted the money from Balak, but he knew it was wrong.

And you know, what we read next, it's so surprising because we're told in Numbers 22, verse 20, it says, God came to Balaam at night and said to him, if the men have come to call you, rise, go with them, but only do what I tell you.

[21 : 37] Now, this verse might seem like the Lord was contradicting himself because the Lord had told Balaam not to curse the Israelites and to stay away from Balak. But now the Lord was saying, go with them.

But you know, it was really fascinating studying it. All the way through the narrative of Numbers 22, when the Lord spoke to Balaam, we're told that it's the Lord who spoke.

But in this seemingly contradictory verse, we're told that it's God who spoke. And this is so important because the point that's being made is that when God spoke to Balaam, not the Lord, but when God spoke, it wasn't a different person that spoke, but when God spoke, Balaam heard what he wanted to hear.

Balaam heard what he wanted to hear so that it would give to him a license to do what his heart designed. because Balaam wanted the money.

Balaam wanted to do what Balak was asking him to do. And the Lord knew that. The Lord knew his heart, which is why the Lord was testing him. That's what the whole scene about the donkey is about.

[22 : 48] The Lord was testing him. And the Lord knew what was going on. And you know, it's so dangerous for us to read the Bible and interpret the Bible and even twist the Bible in a way that will match the desires of our heart.

It's so dangerous for us to read the Bible in order to hear what we want to hear and not what the Lord is actually saying. And you know, when we do that, when we read the Bible in order to hear what we want to hear, when we ignore God's word or put something in front of God's word, you know what we're actually doing?

We're taking away the sharpness of this sword. And that's when compromise comes in. You know, compromise, it doesn't begin with outward actions that are obvious.

Compromise often begins in the heart, just like it was for Balaam, just like it was for the Lord's prophet. My friend, compromise doesn't happen immediately.

It happens gradually. Compromise doesn't happen immediately. It happens gradually. Worldliness doesn't happen immediately. It happens gradually. And the effects of worldliness and compromise can be devastating.

[24 : 05] And that's what happened with Balaam because over time, his heart moved further and further away from the Lord. He moved further and further away from his word and he compromised his faith and his position.

He compromised that as the Lord's prophet. Because, you know, as Jesus says here, he says Balaam taught Balak. Balaam told the enemy of the Lord how to put a stumbling block before the Lord's people so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

What's so sad about this, what's so solemn about it is that Balaam, he not only compromised, he was a traitor. He turned his back upon the Lord and he turned his back upon the Lord's people all so that he could fulfill the desires of his heart.

And Balaam's compromise, it was so extensive that he even taught the Lord's people to compromise. He taught the Lord's people to ignore God's word and just do as they please.

And it all ended by leading the Israelites to eat unclean foods and practice sexual immorality. If you want to put this into a 21st century context, Balaam's backslidden state caused his Christian witness to be compromised.

[25 : 32] And because Balaam was backslidden and compromising on God's word, he led other Christians astray. And with this you see, my Christian friend, how important your Christian witness is, that it's not compromised.

And you know, the only way to ensure that your Christian witness is not compromised is to stay close to God's word. The only way to remain uncompromised is to know this sword.

So make sure you know this sword. Make sure this sword is sharp in your life. And make sure it's the word that is shaping you.

And not the world. God. And you know, what's so sad about Balaam is that he was remembered by all of the Lord's people. He was remembered throughout history as one who compromised his faith. He was remembered as a traitor and a heretic. You know, Joshua mentions him, Nehemiah mentions him, Micah mentions him, Peter mentions him. They all mention Balaam as the one who compromised his Christianity and led the Lord's people astray.

[26 : 53] And that's how Jesus described the church in Pergamos. Because the leaders in the church, they were compromising their Christianity. And the result was that they were leading people astray.

And the worst place you could lead Christians astray is at the throne of Satan. The worst place. And you know, the leaders of the church today, we have such a responsibility.

Because we have a responsibility not to compromise our Christianity or water down the gospel just to please people. Just to be liked.

Just to be in with the crowd. Just to be accepted. Because you know where compromise leads the church? If the leaders of the church compromise. Do you know where it leads them? To the throne of Satan.

It leads them to the throne of Satan. But you know, Jesus not only condemned the church in Pergamos for their compromise, he also condemned them for their contradiction.

[27 : 57] Jesus says in verse 15, he says, so also, you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore, repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

We first heard of the Nicolaitans with the church in Ephesus. At the church in Ephesus, Jesus said that they hated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. But sadly, the church in Pergamos, they loved the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

As we said before, the Nicolaitans, they contradicted their Christianity because they claimed that they could still live an idolatrous and immoral lifestyle and be a Christian.

In other words, the Nicolaitans taught that you can love God and do as you please. We mentioned this on Tuesday evening at the Bible study. We mentioned the dangers of easy believism.

Well, the Nicolaitans, they taught easy believism. They taught that being a Christian isn't about following rules and regulations. It's about being free.

[29 : 08] But in the mind of the Nicolaitans, being free means that you don't need to be dedicated in your Christianity. You don't need to read the Bible all the time. You don't need to pray often.

You can come to church whenever you like. You don't need to go every week. You don't need to go both ends. You don't even need to go to the prayer meeting. As long as you love God, that's the main thing.

As long as you love God, you don't need to be committed to your church. You don't need to be committed to your congregation. You don't need to be even committed to Jesus Christ. You can still live like the world Monday to Saturday and come and sit on the Lord's table on Sunday.

Because it's okay to worship Jesus and worship other gods and worship the emperor. It's okay to follow Christ and flirt with the world. It's okay to sing the songs of Jesus and sit at the throne of Satan.

You know, my friend, if anyone, if there's anyone who tells you that Christianity doesn't involve wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ, then they don't know this sword.

[30 : 14] They've never read it. They've never read this sword and they don't know the sharpness of this sword. Because this sword says to the church of Jesus Christ, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? What fellowship has light with darkness? What unity is there between Christ and Satan?

What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? Because the church is the temple of the living God. Therefore, says Jesus, come out from among them, be separate and touch no unclean thing, and then I will receive you.

My friend, the word of Jesus Christ, it is a sharp two-edged sword. And whatever generation we're living in, the church of Jesus Christ, we cannot be guilty of compromise or contradiction.

We cannot be guilty of it. We have to be faithful and we have to be obedient to this word. Because this is the word of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 33] And it's a sharp two-edged sword. But you know, thankfully, Jesus, he doesn't leave it there. Because he concludes his letter to the church in Pergamos with a word of consolation.

We've heard a word of commendation, a word of condemnation, and lastly, a word of consolation. A word of consolation.

Look at verse 17. Jesus says, 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.

one who will give the one who conquers, the one who remains faithful and obedient to the end, Jesus says, he will give to them a white stone.

Now the white stone, it was a symbol of victory. Because when the book of Revelation, when it was written at the end of the first century, people, they often voted to, well for positions to take office, and whoever won after the vote to get this office, they were often awarded a white stone.

[33 : 13] And so the white stone, it's a symbol of victory. And so what Jesus is saying to the church is that if you remain faithful and obedient unto death, if you remain faithful and obedient without compromise, without contradiction, then he, that is Jesus, will give to us a white stone.

And you know my friend, it's only those who die in the Lord who will receive the white stone. and gain access to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

It's only those who receive the white stone who will gain access to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And you know, I'll share this with you just in conclusion.

When I lived with my parents, there was an access road to the croft, about a hundred yards away from the house. one day my mother, she was reading this passage in the morning, and then later that day, a friend of my father, she came to put something over in the croft, and the barn to the croft, well, the barn was over in the croft, and so my mother, she directed this man to the access road, the access road down to where the barn was.

But the only way that she could describe exactly where this access road was, was by pointing to a big white stone that sat at the end of the access road.

[34 : 46] And I always remember my mother saying to the man, go to the white stone and you will find your way from there. Go to the white stone and you will find your way from there.

And after the man went, I always remember my mother turning to me and saying, he needs to receive the white stone. And you know, from that day on, my mother has continued to pray that this man would find his way so that he would receive the white stone from Jesus.

I asked my mother the other day, I said to her, if I say to you white stone, what name comes to your mind? She said the man immediately. She's prayed for this man ever since that day when she said to him, go to the white stone, and you'll find your way from there.

And you know, there are many of you here tonight who are as yet uncommitted to Jesus Christ. And you know, that's my prayer for you.

That's my desire for you. That's my longing for you. That you will find your way so that you will receive the white stone from Jesus.

[36 : 05] My prayer and the prayer of I'm sure every Christian in this congregation is that you will know this Jesus as your saviour. But you know, is that your prayer?

Do you pray for yourself? Do you ask the Lord to save you? Do you want to be saved? is it your desire that when you die you will receive from Jesus the white stone and you will gain access to the marriage supper of the Lamb?

My friend, you ask him because the Bible promises that when you ask, you will receive. and I hope and pray that we will all receive the white stone from the hand of Jesus.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our gracious God, help us, we pray, to be obedient.

Help us to be faithful. Help us, Lord, not to compromise thy word or even to contradict it in our lives. Help us, Lord, to stand firm, to stay faithful, that we might be faithful even to the end, that we might fight a good fight and finish the kosh, having kept the faith, knowing that when we see Jesus, he will give to us the white stone and to enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[37 : 40] Lord, bless us together, we pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead. Whatever is before us, help us to cast everything into thy care, knowing Lord, that there were one who keeps us.

Do us good than we ask. Go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 138.

Psalm 138, page 431. Psalm 138. We're singing from verse 5 down to the end of the psalm.

Yea, in the righteous ways of God, with gladness they shall sing, for great's the glory of the Lord, who doth forever reign. And down to the end of the psalm, surely that which concerneth me, the Lord will perfect me.

Lord, still thy mercy lasts, do not thine own hands works forsake. These verses of Psalm 138, to God's praise. Amen. In the righteous grace of Lord, with gladness they shall sing,agen, O, grace the glory of their Lord, to end forever■■■■.

[39 : 24] To Yet He respects all those that glory When us the heart and glory was A flock of nowhere near Though I am meant of troubled war

I lie from Thee shall have Yet my hope's run Thus flesh Thy hand Thy right hand shall be saved

Curely that which concerneth me The Lord will perfect me Lord still Thy mercy last

Do not Thy own hands work for sale The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen Amen