“Commitment or Compromise?”
(Relation 2:12-17)
Series: Understanding The Book Of Revelation

- Open to Revelation, Chapter 2.

As we continue our series of messages verse-by-verse through the book of Revelation, we are dealing with the seven churches in Asia Minor. And this morning we’re studying the third of the seven churches. We’ve looked at the church of Ephesus and the church of Smyrna. Today, we look at the church in Pergamos, or Pergamum, as some translations have. And when I read the text in just a moment you will hear that pattern we talked about: Jesus says write, commendation, condemnation, correction.

- Stand in reverence for the reading of the Word.

12 “And to the angel 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, 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.” ’

- Pray.

Introduction:

I remember a T-shirt I used to have. Fish swimming in one direction. Christian fish swimming in opposite direction. “Go against the flow.” Reminder to me that Christians are expected to act differently than non-Christians. There’s something about us that is to be different. Not mean, ugly, arrogant, and prideful. We have a sweet spirit, but we are different. We “go against the flow.” People should look at the church and see something different; people who act different, etc. They should be attracted to the difference. When Christians go in the same direction as non-Christians they are just “going with the flow” instead of against the flow. Compromise. The question for us from what Jesus teaches about the church at Pergamum is, “Commitment or Compromise?”

Three action points:
I. **We Must Always Remain Committed** (12-13)

Sharp two-edged sword. The sword is a symbol of justice. The Roman proconsul resided in the city of Pergamum. The sword was a reminder of who was in control. The Romans were in control. Had power to execute. Jesus says, “I am the True Power.” I am the one with the double-edged sword. Seen before in 1:16. Hebrews 4:12. Jesus is the true power, the true sovereign.

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.

He knows. Knows where we dwell, where we live. Isn’t that encouraging? He knows. Christians at Pergamum dwell, “where Satan’s throne is.”

Pergamum was the official center in the province of Asia for worship of the emperor. Last time, once a year every citizen required to take a pinch of incense and confess “Caesar is Lord.”

This is why Jesus refers to Pergamum as the place “where Satan’s throne is” and where “Satan dwells.”

Church commended for standing firm in Christ. “and you hold fast to My name.” That is, you kept true to me even though you lived in a devilish place.

Church also commended for staying faithful to Christ. “and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr (better, witness), who was killed among you.”

This church was commended for staying faithful to Christ even in the midst of severe persecution.

Antipas—some speculate was one of the church’s early pastors. Christian tradition has it that Antipas was locked inside of a brass bull which was heated with flames of fire so that Antipas was literally roasted to death. Christ referred to Antipas as His “faithful witness.” Same words applied to Jesus in 1:5.

Jesus says, you stood firm and you stayed faithful. So must we. Jesus knows where we dwell. Some working in hellish places. Stand firm in Christ. Stay faithful to Christ.

II. **We Must Always Reject Compromise** (14-15)

Condemnation. Verses 14 and 15 go together.

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, which thing I hate.

It seems “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” is tied closely to the “doctrine of Balaam,” so that to “hold to” the doctrine of one is to “hold to” the doctrine of the other.

Doctrine of Balaam. Remember the story of Balak, King of Moab. Wanted to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites. Every time Balaam opened his mouth, only blessing came out. Balak
wanted Balaam to curse them, but he could only speak what God told him to speak, so only blessing came out. It seems, however, that Balaam really wanted to collect the money Balak offered him for cursing the Israelites. So apparently Balaam “taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel,” specifically, by “sacrificing to idols, and committing sexual immorality.” (Study Numbers 25 and Numbers 31)

So this is what Jesus means by referring to the doctrine of Balaam. Since Balaam couldn’t curse the Israelites he apparently told Balak that the best way to get to the Israelites was by getting the Moabite women to go after the Israelite men. Thus by intermingling with the women the Israelites would become fragmented and weak. They were drawn away to false gods—idolatry. They were drawn away to sexual immorality—by committing fornication and adultery. These two sins of idolatry and sexual immorality are apparently the chief sins of the Nicolaitans.

So Jesus condemns the church at Pergamum because there are some within the church who have been led away to follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans, namely idolatry and sexual immorality.

Point of application: Never Compromise Your Loyalty and Never Compromise Your Integrity.

“Pergamos” means “thoroughly married.” Fitting since this church has become “married to the world.” Pergamum was proud of its library, 200,000 volumes (before printing press, photocopiers, internet!). Proud of its temples dedicated to different gods, including Asclepius (the god of healing, you see the symbol of Asclepius in much of modern medicine; the symbol of a serpent entwined around a staff). And Pergamum was proud of its three temples dedicated to Roman emperors.

Apparently some within the church were teaching that it was okay to compromise their Christian beliefs in the face of emperor worship. “What harm is there in taking a little pinch of incense and saying ‘Caesar is Lord?’” Also, “Temple feasts” in honor of Caesar.

Loyalty. Idols have many faces. May be a mixing of our faith with elements of other faiths. Compromise Jesus as the only way. Compromise the Word of God, the Bible.

Adrian Rogers, Peace Committee. Video. “One man said to me in that peace committee, he said, ‘Adrian, if you don’t compromise we’ll never get together.’ I said to that dear friend, ‘We don’t have to get together. The Southern Baptist Convention doesn’t have to survive. I don’t have to be the pastor of Bellevue. I don’t have to live. But I am not going to compromise the word of God.’”

Integrity. Alcohol resolution in SBC. Passed by overwhelming majority. Some actually wanted to debate it. 45 minutes of debate. Compromise. Looking too much like the world.

Integrity. This church is condemned by our Lord for the behavior of some within; not all. There are some within who have done ungodly things. Sexual immorality. Compromising the moral commands of Scripture to be chaste and pure. They have gone the way of the doctrine of
Balaam, committing sexual immorality with others. What will happen to these folks? Next verse:

16 *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*

Who is Jesus speaking to? Church. Repent or else I will come to YOU quickly and will fight against whom? Those sinning in the church! Think of it! Some of you who are in trouble this morning; fighting with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.


III. **We Must Always Receive Correction** (16-17)

**Correction begins with Repentance**


**Correction ends with Reward**

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.*

Apparently two symbols that speak against the pagan feasts of the city of Pergamum. Feasts would be had in the name of the emperor. Jesus says don’t partake of that. Remain committed to Christ. Refuse to compromise Christ.

Hidden manna. Probably refers to the manna Moses told the people to place in a jar and placed inside the ark of the covenant. Spiritually, God feeds His people in ways the world does not know. White stone. Probably alludes to practice of giving a stone to special people such as victors of the Roman games or elite members of certain guilds. They would receive a stone that was used as a ticket to feasts held in the city of Pergamum. New name no one knows. Probably should be taken with Revelation 19:12 where it speaks of the second coming of our Lord, who will come having “a name written no one knew except Himself.” Whatever this new name means, it is to be connected with Jesus. He knows us. He possesses us. As the hymn goes, “Now I belong to Jesus. Jesus belongs to me. Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity.”

- Stand for prayer.

**Conclusion / Invitation:**

Compromise or commitment? Going against the flow?

**Vance Havner,** “What we live is what we really believe. Everything else is just religious talk.”