

EFC

March 10, 2024

Revelation 2:12-17

“Faithful Through and Through”

Good morning, EFC. My name is Jeremy, and I’m one of the Pastors here. This morning, we will look at the third letter Jesus sends to the seven churches in Asia Minor, at the beginning of the book of Revelation. In the letter to Ephesus, we were called to be a church that is committed to the truth and committed to loving God and one another. In the letter to Smyrna, we were encouraged to remain faithful to our faithful God. This morning, we will consider Jesus’ letter to the church in Pergamum.

Pray.

Compromise – to meet in the middle of competing desires or demands.

Is compromise a good thing? That depends on what is being compromised.

Compromise can be a good option to solve disagreements when both options and the agreed upon middle ground are good and acceptable, in and of themselves. Marriage (or any friendship, for that matter) can often be helped by appropriate compromise. Going on a date – one of you wants to go to the orchestra at Casa de la Musica; the other wants to go for dessert.

Compromise can help: “This week we’ll see the orchestra, next week we’ll go get ice-cream.” Compromise is a helpful tool in many situations.

But what about at the bank? If are certain you have \$100, but the teller says you have \$10, do you want to compromise and settle for \$55?

Worse yet, how about at the doctor’s office. What if the doctor tells you that you are allergic to almonds and you will die if you ever eat another one again. And what if you absolutely love almonds. So, you argue with the doctor that he can’t possibly mean you can’t eat ANY almonds at all. Do you want him to change his warning to you, and say, “Alright; since you love almonds so much, you can eat one a day.” That compromise will kill you!

Jesus confronts the church in Pergamum because they were compromising in this second sense: they were willing to put up with unbiblical, unfaithful teachings that were threatening to destroy them.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum 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 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.” (Revelation 2:12-17)

#### Pergamum

- Another major city in Asia Minor
- Satan’s throne – lot of false religions (including a 40 foot high altar to Zues); also, the primary center for Imperial Worship in Asia Minor
- The church had already passed through tribulation, even including the martyrdom of Antipas (Christ’s faithful witness)
- Clearly this was a difficult place to be a Christian, but the Church had not denied their faith in Christ and had not run away from the difficulties (dwell)

Jesus commends this church for remaining faithful to Him in their public witness, not hiding or denying that they were Christians, even when they knew it could cost them their lives.

But they had a problem: they were willing to compromise on things that should never have been compromised on. This was not a question of going to the orchestra or going out for dessert; this was compromise of the most serious kind. What we see is that this church, while faithful publicly, was not faithful privately, for they put up with (or tolerated) false teachers and false teachings within the church itself.

They put up with those who held to the teaching of Balaam, which resulted in idolatry and sexual immorality.

The story of Balaam can be found in Numbers 22-25 and 31. Balaam was a prophet who a Midianite king tried to pay so that he would curse Israel. However, God did not let Balaam curse Israel, and instead he blessed. However, when Balaam was not allowed by God to curse Israel, he advised the king of Midian to have the Midianite women seduce the Israelites so that they would fall into idolatry and immorality.

The church in Pergamum compromised their commitment to Christ and sole dedication to Him and His teaching, by tolerating teaching in their midst that said idol worship and sexual immorality was acceptable for Christians. Pergamum held many feasts to false gods throughout the year, and these would often include eating meat sacrificed to idols, as well as sexually immoral activities.

They also put up with the Nicolaitans. In the letter to Ephesus we already learned that God hated their works.

So, this church was a compromising church – compromising on things they should never have compromised on, for they were tolerating things that were against Christ and against His teaching and against the lifestyle God calls all Christians to.

From Charles Swindoll: Four things to remember about worldly compromise.

- I. Compromise never occurs quickly.
  - a. Illustration: a ship drifting off course
- II. Compromise always lowers the original standard.

- a. Since God's ways are perfect, no man-made compromise is ever better than (or as good as!) God's ways.
      - i. Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.
- III. Compromise is seldom offensive.
  - a. If our greatest drive is to not offend others, we will never stand on the truth and never stand for Christ. But maybe this helps: you will either offend people who don't know Christ, or you will offend Christ!
  - b. We must be willing to be offensive – humbly, graciously, lovingly, but offensive none the less – to avoid compromising and offending God.
- IV. Compromise is often the first step toward total disobedience.
  - a. Illustration: Like cancer that, if “tolerated,” spreads to the rest of the body and eventually kills

We also need to consider the dangers of compromising in our commitment to Christ and His Word.

- I. Great danger and damage to one's faith and life, including up to apostasy
- I. Others will fall (and you might, too) – tolerated false teaching is contagious; think about your loved ones and your brothers and sisters around
- II. Christ will war with the word of His mouth

The church in Pergamum, with all their temptation to compromise in ungodly ways, is not too different from the church today. We, too, are constantly bombarded with temptation to tolerate false teachings in our midst. For example, here are some issues Jesus' church is in danger of compromising on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- I. God's design for marriage and sexuality
- II. Reliability and authority of the Scriptures
- III. Holding back from the clear teaching and demands of God's Word (What Jesus Demands of the World – which is His right, and the natural outflow of the fact that He is God!), and instead teaching a “soft gospel”

Jesus' church today is faced with the danger of compromising in our commitment to Him and His teaching by putting up with false teachings and false teachers, all in the name of “tolerance” and “kindness.”

Obviously, Christ is still calling us to love – even those who teach falsehood. But love does not require approval, when approval would mean agreeing with or putting up with or tolerating deadly lies and deadly behavior. Love requires that we do NOT put up with or turn a blind eye to false teaching about Christ and His teachings and the Christian life.

Christ is the truth, He has given us the truth in His Word, and He has given us the Spirit of Truth, who leads us into all truth. And He commands us to not compromise with lies and false teaching.

So, we must ask ourselves two questions: How do we recognize when we are compromising and putting up with false teachings? And what do we do if God shows us we are indeed compromising, and in danger of Him coming to wage war in judgment upon us?

We recognize by humbly asking Him to show us, and then open our Bibles and take seriously what Christ tells us there. Jesus is pictured as coming to this church with a sharp two-edged

sword. This is a picture of judgment – of dividing the truth and the lies based on the truth He speaks.

The Bible itself is God's sword, which reveals truth in the hands of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 6:17 we are told that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit, and in Hebrews 4:12 we read, "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." If you want to discern if you are compromising on things you should not compromise on, read that Bible, and let the Holy Spirit show you the truth.

And if we find as you humbly and honestly reflect on God's Word that we are indeed compromising, how should we respond? In the same way Jesus told the church in Pergamum to respond: repent.

To repent means to change our thinking, which leads to a change in our actions. If God shows you in His word that you are compromising inappropriately, He doesn't just show you that so you have more information; He shows you that so you would believe what He says, and change what you are believing. Then, as a result of agreeing with God, He is calling you to put your words (and new beliefs/though patterns/perspective) into action, stop living sinfully, and stop tolerating false teaching.

This may mean that you have to stop listening to certain preachers; it means you need to stop acting in sinful ways; it may mean you need to humbly talk to a brother or sister in Christ who is starting to believe and share falsehoods; it may mean you need to raise concerns to the Elders of the church. Whatever is in the way of wholehearted love and devotion and obedience to Jesus needs to go; that is what repentance means.

There is great reward for those who repent by no longer tolerating false teaching, no longer compromising with the world. Secret manna, white stone with a new name – in the end, we get Christ!