

Revelation 2:12-17
Pergamum: Faith Without Compromise

I. SLIDE # 1: Blank

II. Good morning church!

- A. This is officially the first week of summer break!
- B. Which is unusual this year for our families since our kids have been home with us for the last 3.5 months:
- C. now they are still home, but with no assigned work from school, which means parents now have the added job of helping our kids use their time constructively. . . this is exhausting!
 - 1. Pray for those parents in our community!
- D. During the summer. . . Hopefully, many of you will be taking some time to unplug. . . literally. . . this year unplug has a deeper conotation!
 - 1. unplug from the internet and screens. . . from zoom, skype, whatsapp, facebook, etc. . . unplug and spend time together without screens!

III. Well, today in our series we come to the third letter from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia-minor, which is present day Turkey.

- A. The letter this morning is to Pergamum. . . Pergamum was the Roman empirical city of Asia-minor, which means this was so to speak the Roman capital of this region. . . it was the centre of Roman power in this region.
 - 1. It was the home base of the Roman governors and envoys from Rome with the main military barracks. . .it was located strategically in the middle of the region.

IV. Let's check out what Jesus has to say to this church:

V. Let's read this passage together, Revelation 2: 12-17.

VI. SLIDE # 2

VII.12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 13 " '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.

VIII.SLIDE # 3

IX. 14 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. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

X. SLIDE #4

XI. 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war 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 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

XII.SLIDE # 5: Blank

XIII.Pray

A. Satan has more than one tactic to use against Christians.

1. Satan works in many different ways in different contexts.

a) Satan may work one way in Asia, but in Europe he will work in an entirely different way.

(1) For example, in India where you have a large % of the population in poverty, Satan uses the idolatry of Hinduism to lure the people towards false worship.

(2) ANd in China, Satan uses the State to suppress the Church through persecution.

(3) And here in Europe, Satan uses our wealth and comfort to make us accommodate Biblical truth to cultural norms.

b) Satan is not a one-trick pony. . . he has many different tactics to lure people away from trusting exclusively in the Lord.

XIV.The Church in Pergamum, like the church in Smyrna, which we studied last week. . . was a target of Roman persecution.

A. Being the Roman capital city, obviously, the gaze of the local authorities fell on this suspicious new religion spreading throughout the empire.

B. Now, what made Pergamum different than Smyrna, is that although they stood firm in the face of persecution, they had began to accommodate to their culture in two ways:

1. Beliefs and in their Ethic. . .

a) In 1 Timothy 4:16: Paul instructs timothy:

XV.SLIDE # 6

(1) 16 Watch your **life** and **doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. - 1 Timothy 4:16

XVI.SLIDE # 7: Blank

(1) Watch your life and doctrine . . . your behaviour, your ethic and your faith, your beliefs.

(a) Here is the main message this morning. . . this is the message to the church in PErgamum:

i) Main Point:

XVII.SLIDE # 8

(1) If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.

XVIII.SLIDE # 9: Blank

(a) The Christians in Pergamum had withstood persecution. . . they did not abandon the faith, even having some who died for the faith.

(b) they withstood persecution. . . but this was in the past.

(c) They had withstood this first tactic of Satan. . . but today they had succumbed to Satan's new tactic.

(d) They gave in to a compromised faith by accommodating their beliefs and their ethics. . . to the cultural norms around them.

(e) And Jesus comes to them and warns them "repent or they will face judgement for compromising their life and doctrine.

(f) *16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

XIX.So, let's turn now to see what Jesus has to say to the church in Pergamum:

XX.SLIDE # 10

A. 12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. — Revelation 2:12

XXI.SLIDE # 11: Blank

1. So, we know at this point that the way Jesus introduces himself in these letters, is connected to the message he has for them.

a) So, here Jesus is the one "who has the sharp two-edged sword."

(1) We know that in the NT, the "two-edged" sword is a symbol for the Word of God.

- (a) Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
 - (b) Ephesians 6:17: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
 - (c) Revelation 1:16: In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword;
2. In the Roman empire the sword was an important imagery. . . it was the state that wielded the sword. . . the sword is equivalent with the authority of justice.
- a) It answers the question of who has ultimate authority over life and death. . . who is the ultimate judge.

(1) PHOTO SLIDE 12

- (2) Go down to the Romer here in frankfurt and at the middle of the big market square you find a statue of lady justice. . . what does she hold?

XXII.SLIDE # 13: Blank

- (a) The scales of justice and a sword, signifying the authority she wields.
2. So Jesus' words: his teaching, his commands, what we find here in scripture. . . this is the authority to which we must bow.
- a) The roman empire, the german state, your employer, even your own little opinion and feelings. . . must bow before the authority of the Word of God.
- (1) The Word of God is our authority. . . the Word of God is what determines our life and doctrine.
- (a) The content of our faith AND the standard of our ethic. . .as Christians we are called to a different standard and different set of values. . .
 - i) determined not by culture, not by our feelings, not by our own wisdom. . . but rather by the revealed word of God!
- (1) 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'

XXIII. Then Jesus moves on to commend, the Pergamum Christians for their past. . . for their former faithfulness in the face of persecution.

XXIV.SLIDE # 14

- A. "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. — Revelation 2:13

XXV.SLIDE # 15: Blank

1. To the Ephesians Jesus says: I know your works.
2. To Smyrna Jesus says: I know your afflictions.
3. To Pergamum Jesus says: I know where you dwell.
 - a) I know your context. . . you live in a hostile environment.
 - (1) Satan's throne is there. . . we know in Revelation. . . ROME is the Agent of Satan. Rome and Satan are synonymous.
 - (a) So, Pergamum was the capital city of Rome for Asian-Minor. . . so this is the seat of Roman authority and power. . . or in spiritual terms the throne of satan.
 - (2) I know where you dwell. . . . I know your context. . . it is hostile to all we hold dear.
 - (3) I know your past, where good old Antipas, was martyred. . .
 - (4) I know you hold fast to my name. . you will not abandon my name.
- B. So, here is a church that withstood a former wave of persecution. . . they were found faithful when the fiery trial came.
 1. And Jesus commends them for this.
 2. But remember what we said earlier. . .
 - a) If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.
 3. This was the problem in Pergamum. . . they were faithful. . . they did resist persecution. . . but we can't rest on our past accomplishments.
 - a) We cannot rest on yesterdays' accomplishments for the temptations we face today. . .
 - b) If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.

XXVI. So, let's see how Jesus addresses the sin in the church at Pergamum:

XXVII.SLIDE # 16

- A. 14 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. 15 So

also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. — Revelation 2:14-15

XXVIII.SLIDE # 17: Blank

- A. So, against Ephesus, Jesus had 1 thing against them. . . they lost their first love.
 - 1. They had right doctrine, they had right living. . . but the one thing they were missing was the first love.

- B. Pergamum on the other hand, had that first love, they stood firm in the face of persecution, but SOME among them were compromising on right beliefs and right doctrine.
 - 1. If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.
 - a) And this is what was happening here Pergamum. . . and I believe for the Western church for the affluent church, where persecution is not overt and violent. . . this is our temptation as well.
 - b) Satan uses our wealth and our comfort to lure us away from right doctrine and right living.

 - 2. Jesus mentions here two specific false teachers, Balaam and the Nicolaitans.
 - a) To understand Balaam you have to go way back to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert before they entered the promised land.
 - (1) The Moabite King- Balaam paid the prophet Balaam to curse God's people.
 - (a) When he tried to go and do it, God's Spirit fell upon Balaam and every time he tried to curse God's people, he ended up blessing them.
 - i) So, Balaam's plan didn't work. . . but then Balaam taught the Moabite king. . .if you want to defeat the Israelites, just get them to compromise on their beliefs and behaviour. . .
 - ii) So, we read in Numbers 25:
 - (1) While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor.

XXIX.SLIDE # 18

- (1) “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people. — Numbers 31:16

XXX.SLIDE # 19: Blank

1. The second false teaching was from the Nicolaitians, who we met already in Ephesus. . . Jesus commends the ephesian church because they hate the works/behaviour/the ethic of the nicolaitians.
 - a) The nicolaitians, those were Christians that took the liberty of God’s grace saw this has permission to sin. . . we are saved by grace, so we can ignore God’s commands.
 - (1) Saying they were christian, yet living like the pagan neighbours.
2. So, what was happening here in Pergamum was that the false teaching of ballaam like teacher combined with the moral permissiveness of the nicolaitians to led SOME among the Pergamum church astray.
 - a) So, the new threat to PErgmum was not violent persecution, but a luring away like the Israelites gave into the moabite women and customs long ago.
 - (1) If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.

XXXI.Now, let’s sit on this for a moment, since I believe this is the same unique temptation facing our own church in our own unique context.

XXXII.The pressures the Christians faced in Pergamum, mirror the pressures many of you face in your own context:

- A. Christians in the first century had unique behaviours that made them different than those around them.
- B. We know from roman historical records some of the unusual behaviours that made people suspicious of the Christians.
 1. Some of our earliest Christian records are from around the same time Revelation was composed. . . so it’s fascinating to combine the historical context with what was written here in Revelation.
- C. Church Historian, Micheal Kruger outlines just a few of these unique behaviours of Christians that set them apart form their culture in his book “Christianity at the Crossroads”. . . and he goes back to their beliefs and their ethics. . . as Paul told timothy watch your life and you’re doctrine closely

XXXIII.SLIDE # 20

- (1) A fundamental aspect of early Christian worship was its exclusivity.

- (a) Only Jesus was to be worshiped.
- (b) To be a good citizen in the Roman mentality, your duty was to pay homage to the Roman gods who kept the empire prosperous and flourishing. To refuse to worship the gods risked invoking the gods' displeasure.
- (c) So, Tacitus writes, that the Christians were haters of humanity because they didn't worship the Roman gods. . .
- (2) They also didn't participate in the local trade guilds' annual pagan festivals. . . which included:
 - (a) sacrifices to idols
 - (b) grand banquets with meat sacrificed to idols . .
 - (c) Sexual immorality (for the early church this meant any form of sex outside of covenant of marriage between 1 man and 1 woman)
 - (d) And because they didn't participate in these things they were financially impacted and outcasts from the trade guilds.

XXXIV.SLIDE # 22

- a) **Strange beliefs: trinity, incarnation, suffering saviour.**
 - (1) Christian doctrine was regarded as ridiculous, silly, and not worthy of the intellectual Roman elites.
 - (2) Paradox of faith
 - (a) For Romans, the idea of worshiping a crucified person was the height of insanity. Crucifixion was a symbol of shame and rejection—why would you follow someone who suffered such indignity?
 - (3) The early church spent great effort at defending the intellectual value of their beliefs. . . so intellectual persecution is not a new thing for Christians.

XXXV.SLIDE # 23

- a) **Ethics:**
 - (1) What was probably the most distinctive aspect of early Christianity was their ethic. . . here is a list by 2nd century father of the church Irenaeus:
 - (a) **Sexual purity:** sex was reserved only for marriage. . .which included no sex before marriage. . . no sex outside of marriage.

- i) But also homosexuality. . . distinctive gender roles, etc.
- (b) **Abortion:** the Romans would routinely practice infanticide: leaving girls and handicapped babies to die of exposure.
- (c) **Divorce:** the early church had dramatically lower rates of divorce
- (d) **Alcohol and food excesses:** not giving into gluttony and drunkenness
 - i) these are just a few.
 - (1) What is significant about all three of these “unusual” characteristics . . . is that it was exactly the early Christians’ fidelity to these beliefs and behaviours that eventually enabled Christians to thrive in contrast to their pagan neighbours
 - (2) . . . so that within a mere 300 years after Jesus’ death, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire.

XXXVI. So, these main arenas of cultural tension remain for us today as we engage and interact with our culture, which also thinks our beliefs and our ethics are odd. . . but still, we are called to be obedient to a different set of standards. . . the teaching of Jesus Christ as it is laid out for us in scripture:

XXXVII. So, we join our brothers and sisters over the last 2000 years in defending and living out:

A. Exclusivity of Jesus Christ.

B. Unique Doctrines

C. Unique Ethic

XXXVIII.SLIDE # 24: Blank

1. For 2000 years Christians have remained faithful to these unique beliefs and behaviours.
 - a) And these unique beliefs and our unique ethic is where Satan likes to attack.
 - (1) It was true then and it is true today. . .
 - b) So, we don’t only have the witness of scripture which teaches and affirms these things, but we also have the unique 2000 year witness of those who have gone before us.
 - c) Orthodoxy. . . right doctrine/beliefs . . . orthopraxy. . . right behaviour/ethics are what Christians’ have believed at all times, in all places. . . throughout 2000 years over church history spanning multiple contexts, languages, and generations.

(1) We have scripture, we have the global witness and we have the historical witness of those who have come before as a guide for us today.

(a) Pre-marital sex in Europe. . . ????

XXXIX. Now, although the historical context has changed. . . these very same hot-topics we find here in the 1st century are the very same arenas facing the church today:

A. We might not have Balaam tempting us, like the Israelites in the wilderness.

B. We might not have the nicolaitians tempting us toward abusing God's free grace.

1. But Jesus here is pointing out the spirit of compromise behind these false teachings. . . and this same Spirit of compromise has slipped into the wealthy, comfortable church across the globe. . .

C. Its not a coincidence that if you translate Balaam from the Hebrew and Nicolaitian from the greek, you find that these two words mean the very same thing:

1. Conquerer of people. . . .

a) The spirit of compromise and accomodation is what Satan will send upon God's people if He cannot force them to abandon the faith.

(1) If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.

(2) The Spirit of Balaam and the Nicolaitians rises up within a church in times of ease and comfort. . . beware of this Spirit of compromise and accomodation in your life.

2. I can't tell you what that might be for your unique situation:

a) It may be conducting yourself at your workplace in one way and then at home and church in another way.

b) It may be that secret sin, you've kept private for too long and don't want to turn from.

c) It may be that a Spirit of bitterness has grown up in your heart against someone.

(1) Satan has a million different ways to make us compromise and accommodate our faith to our situation.

3. But the call of Jesus here is clear. . . we can't let our situations lead us to compromise on those core beliefs and behaviours that distinguish us from the world around us.

a) Jesus calls us to faith without Compromise.

(1) So, we all need to take stock and ask ourselves in our own life and our doctrine, where do I need repent from the Balaam's lure of accommodation and compromise. . .

(2) What authority in our life dictates our behaviour?

(a) The double-edged sword of the word of God?

(b) Or the double-edged sword of our cultural context?

(1) By which authority do you live?

XL. Jesus comes to us in our comfortable, cozy walk. . . and says this to us as we close our study this morning:

XLI.SLIDE # 25

XLII. 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 2:16-17

XLIII.SLIDE # 26: Blank

A. Jesus gives us the choice. . . the same choice laying ahead of the Israelites in the wilderness. . .

1. Blessing and curse. . . judgement or forgiveness. . . this path stands before each one of us this very morning.

2. The Israelites that compromised and accommodated the faith by following Balaam's teaching were struck down by plague. . .

a) And Jesus warns each of us. . . that if we follow the way of the world. . . we will also face the consequences of our sin. . .

3. But if we humble ourselves and bow to Jesus' authority and not our wisdom, not our culture's preferences, . . . if we stay faithful in our life and our doctrine. . . then we will be given that hidden manna and a white stone with a new name.

a) In Roman courts, when a judge, handed down a verdict. . . the defendant, would be given a stone.

(1) A black stone, meant guilty as charged. . . and a sentence was handed down.

(2) A White stone, meant innocent the charges are dismissed and the defendant may live as a free man.

XLIV.If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.

XLV.He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Pray

Application Slide:

“If Satan cannot force you to abandon your faith through persecution, then he will make your faith futile/worthless through accommodation and compromise.”

1. What area of my life (ethic) and my doctrine (beliefs) am I tempted to accommodate and compromise to the cultural norms around me?
2. Where do I need accountability? Do you have a network of relationships where you can confess and turn from sin and fight for holy living?
3. What do I need to bring to the altar this morning/week?