

Pergamum: Corruption Through Compromise

Revelation 2:12-17

Will you take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to the book of Revelation chapter two. We come to a very fascinating text of Scripture with enormous implications with respect to Christian living as well as preserving the purity of the Church.

Thus far you will recall in our study of Revelation we have examined the essential characteristics of two kinds of churches, first we examined the Church at Ephesus that the Lord condemned because of their loveless orthodoxy and then last time we were together we looked at the Church at Smyrna where the Lord praised them because of their purity that was forged on the anvil of persecution.

And today we will look at the Church at Pergamum and we will see this was a church that was corrupted through compromise. And, as with all of these letters, may I remind you that the Lord's words are very timely. They were not written just for those churches in the first century, but for all churches from that day forward. Remember that Christ alone is the Head of the Church, not any man whether he be pope or pastor or king. Christ alone is the Head and the Head speaks to us through his Word of which I am merely a mouthpiece.

And so, first, let's read the text here in Revelation chapter two beginning at verse 12.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make 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 him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."¹

In order to prepare your hearts this morning for what we are about to examine more closely, I would like to remind you of some very important theological truths that will make this text even more practical to us. As believers we have three deadly enemies that we must fight and defeat in our life if we are to experience God's blessings. And unless you are aware of these you will be defeated as a believer and, unfortunately, many people in our modern neo-evangelical world seem to be utterly oblivious to these enemies. And, certainly, I don't want that to be the case with you dear people here in this church family.

¹ Revelation 2:12-17.

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The first enemy that we have is the enemy of the *flesh*. These are impulses and desires that remain within us in our unredeemed humanness. It is what is left of the old man. The old man no longer reigns within us, but he still remains. In Galatians five verse 17 we read, “The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit [the Holy Spirit], and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”²

He goes on in verse 19 and says:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.³

Now this is contrasted to the fruits of the Spirit in verses 22 through 23 which are, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control.”⁴

So because of indwelling sin in conflict with the indwelling Spirit of God, there is a constant battle that rages inside of every believer. One that is seducing us to do evil and the other motivating us to holiness; one will lead to misery, the other will lead to joy and contentment and blessing and life.

Well, if the flesh isn't bad enough we have yet another enemy. This enemy is not on the inside, but on the outside. And that enemy is Satan as well as his well organized demonic horde. He is called our *adversary the devil, the slanderer, the father of lies, the ruler of the darkness of this world, the god of this age, the ruler of the demons* and so forth. We know that Satan commands one third of all of the angels that God created. These are called demons. And it is a well organized army of diabolically wicked fiends that do his bidding in an effort to thwart the purposes of God.

In Ephesians six and verse 12 we read. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”⁵ In other words, our real enemies are not other human beings, but Satan and the demonic horde that influence them and in many cases control them.

Hence, we know, biblically, that Satan and his minions utterly hate God. He hates all that belong to Him and Scripture is filled with warnings to “stand firm against the schemes of the devil,” Ephesians 6:11. And in verse 13, “Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”⁶

² Galatians 5:17.

³ Galatians 5:19-21.

⁴ Galatians 5:22-23.

⁵ Ephesians 6:12.

⁶ Ephesians 6:13.

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Repeatedly as we study the Word of God we see that we are to resist and we are to stand firm and we do that through various ways, certainly by wearing the spiritual armor that he has given us, by walking by the Spirit and so forth.

Dear friends, you must never forget that Satan is absolutely committed to your destruction. He is committed to that. For non believers he is committed to making sure that you remain blind to your sin and to the Savior and to the gospel so that you will never repent, you will never see the truth and you will never be saved. To believers he is committed to destroying your faith, to destroying your finances, your doctrinal discernment, your testimony, your marriage, your family, your children, your church, your life. That is what they exist to do. That is the passion of their being.

I might add a very important note. There is nowhere in Scripture that we find Satan or demons indwelling Christians, only in non believers. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the question is: *How do Satan and his demons destroy us?* Well, this brings us to the third enemy and that is the enemy of the *world*, also on the outside. The world is the kosmos (kos'-mos) in the original language. kosmos (kos'-mos) is the opposite of *chaos*. It has the idea of an orderly system. In fact the word "cosmetic" comes from kosmos (kos'-mos) and it means to make order out of chaos. Ladies, you may want to keep that in mind.

And so the world that Satan ultimately controls, at least under the umbrella of divine sovereignty, is an orderly system and it is designed and administered by Satan to thwart the purposes of God primarily through damning lies and temptations. It is called in Scripture "the kingdom of darkness."

And this system, again, is currently ruled and empowered by Satan and his demonic hordes as they work through human agencies. Unsaved people are literally the pawns of the devil. They are called "children of disobedience." We know biblically that they are deceived. They are ruled by their flesh. And as we study the Word of God we see that Satan functions in the world by influencing and even controlling human institutions and agencies, the orderly system, things like government and schools and universities, the news media, things like the ACLU, Hollywood, on and on it goes.

And since man is inherently a worshipper, Satan offers a smorgasbord of false religions that he can choose from. Satan doesn't care what you believe as long as it is a lie. And so we see all of these false religions and the primary thread of commonality with all of them is that they are some form of works righteousness where you do something to earn or to merit your salvation. There, again, profoundly underestimating the seriousness and the consequences of sin and doing away with the need of a Savior. For those who want nothing to do with religion, he offers them a banquet of temptations that appeal to their lusts and make them love darkness rather than light. Indeed, there is a poison for every palate.

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And God has allowed Satan to be the temporary ruler of this world. 2 Corinthians four and verse four we read that he is “the god of this world,” small g who, “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”⁷ In 1 John we read that the whole world lies in the lap of the evil one.⁸ In Ephesians two we read that he is the prince and power of the air of the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience.⁹ In 2 Corinthians 10 we read how that we are at war as believers with “fortresses,” they are called, and “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God,”¹⁰ a reference to all of the ridiculous ideologies and phony philosophies and false religions that imprison people behind the bars of deception and damning lies. In fact, we read that these are called doctrines of demons.¹¹ This is what is behind all falsehood and false religion.

By the way, folks, I hope you rejoice as I go through this knowing that by God’s grace we have been delivered out from the kingdom of darkness. Jude reminds us that we have been snatched out of the fire.¹²

But the battle is not over. And we must remember this. Our ancient foe is formidable. We read how he is clever. He stalks like a roaring lion. He is always scheming to figure out how to ensnare us through well-concealed and appealing temptations. For this reason Paul warned in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that we should be careful that, “no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”¹³

And, beloved, sometimes, unfortunately, we are ignorant of his schemes, but we don’t have to be. In Ephesians 4:27 Paul says, “[Don’t] give the devil an opportunity.”¹⁴ Don’t give him an opportunity in your life. Let me give you just a brief overview of the things he tells us just out of Ephesians. He tells us how not to give the devil an opportunity.

He says:

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.¹⁵

He tells us to listen to your teaching shepherds because they will equip you and help you mature and give you discernment.¹⁶

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

⁸ See 1 John 5:19.

⁹ See Ephesians 2:2.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:5.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 4:1.

¹² See Jude 23.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 2:11.

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:27.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:1-3.

¹⁶ See Ephesians 4:11-13.

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He says, “Don’t walk like the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”¹⁷

He tells us to lay aside the old self, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, to put on the new self of righteousness and holiness.¹⁸

He tells us to lay aside falsehood.¹⁹ In other words don’t be a liar. Never be selfish in your anger.²⁰ Don’t steal. Work with your hands. Earn a living.²¹ “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.”²² Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit.²³ “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice,”²⁴ which is evil, the root of all vices.

He says to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”²⁵

He tells us to walk in love.²⁶

He says, “Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you.”²⁷ “There must be no filthiness,”²⁸ which refers to dirty talk. There must be no silly talk, no course jesting which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.²⁹

He says, “Don’t offer assurance of salvation to those who live in sin.”³⁰ “Walk as children of light.”³¹ Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.³² “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.”³³

He says, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time.”³⁴ He says to be filled with the Holy Spirit.³⁵ He says, “Give thanks in all things.”³⁶ “Be subject to one another.”³⁷

¹⁷ See Ephesians 4:17-19.

¹⁸ See Ephesians 4:23-24.

¹⁹ See Ephesians 4:25.

²⁰ See Ephesians 4:26.

²¹ See Ephesians 4:28.

²² Ephesians 4:29.

²³ See Ephesians 4:30.

²⁴ Ephesians 4:31.

²⁵ Ephesians 4:32.

²⁶ See Ephesians 5:1.

²⁷ Ephesians 5:3.

²⁸ Ephesians 5:4.

²⁹ See Ephesians 5:4.

³⁰ See Ephesians 5:5.

³¹ Ephesians 5:8.

³² See Ephesians 5:10.

³³ Ephesians 5:11.

³⁴ Ephesians 5:15-16.

³⁵ Ephesians 5:18.

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And he tells wives how to be subject to their husbands. He tells husbands how to be subject to Christ.³⁸ He tells slaves how to be subject to their masters and masters even to their slaves.³⁹

He says, “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”⁴⁰

He tells us to pray constantly, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.⁴¹

Now, folks that is just a smattering of what is in Ephesians. This is what we must do to avoid allowing Satan to have an opportunity. And, beloved, if we are not vigilant in being obedient in these areas in our life we will give the devil opportunity in our life. And, unfortunately, this is precisely what happened to the saints at Pergamum, a church that became corrupted because of moral and doctrinal compromise.

Let me give you a little background about the Church at Pergamum. Pergamum, also at times called Pergamos, it could be pronounced either way, was about 45 miles north of Smyrna and 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. It is now a small village in Turkey called Bergama.

It was a magnificent citadel or a fortress that stood high, about 1000 feet, above the surrounding plains of the Caicus River valley. And it was considered the most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia which is now Turkey. And from the name Pergamum we get the English word “parchment” which is a dried piece of animal skin that has been treated that was used for writing purposes and that was a major industry there in Pergamum.

It was a university town and it boasted one of the largest, actually the second largest library in the world at that time, second only to the magnificent library in Alexandria, Egypt. It had 200,000 hand written volumes in the library. In fact, that library was later sent as a gift from Antony to Cleopatra.

It was known as the center of religious activities in the province, especially known for its emperor worship where people were required to worship Caesar as Lord. In fact, in 129 BC the Romans built a temple in Pergamum and later dedicated it to Augustus and Rome. And it was then that they introduced Caesar worship. And if you failed to worship Caesar, as we have discussed in the past, you could lose your job, you could be imprisoned, they would confiscate your property. You could even be killed.

³⁶ See Ephesians 5:20.

³⁷ See Ephesians 5:21.

³⁸ See Ephesians 5:22-31.

³⁹ See Ephesians 6:5-9.

⁴⁰ See Ephesians 6:13.

⁴¹ See Ephesians 6:18.

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There were other temples there, each dedicated to various pagan gods. There was a temple to Zeus soter (so-tare'). Soter (so-tare') is the Greek word for salvation. We get our word "soteriology" from that, the doctrine of salvation. And it is the idea of Zeus being savior; soter (so-tare') as the savior.

And, again, you have to remember Satan always offers counterfeits: "Jesus is Savior? Well, I have got some for you as well." So there was the temple to Zeus soter(so-tare'), to Athena, to Dionysius, to Asclepius soter (so-tare') which is also pronounced *Esculapius*. And the symbol of that God was the snake. In fact, if you look at our modern day medical emblem you will see that it was taken from this ancient cult. It is a serpent that is entwined around a staff. However, this demonic symbol, this mythology can be traced even back to ancient Egyptian and Sumerian and even Babylonian cultism where we see similar symbols.

Beloved, never forget. Satan is an ancient foe.

Worshippers would come into the temple of Asclepius and they would seek healing from that God. And the way you would find healing is you would lay upon the floor and the floor would be covered with thousands and thousands of non poisonous snakes and you wait for these snakes to crawl over you and the assumption would be that that is how you would find healing. Isn't it fascinating how Satan loves to be symbolized by a crafty serpent? Do we not see that originally even in the garden and the temptation of Eve?

In fact, the Lord later describes him in Revelation 12:9 as "the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world."⁴² Later on we can see in ancient Gnosticism they used the emblem of a serpent as the embodiment of the wisdom transmitted by Sophia and variations of these same demonic doctrines can be found in the New Age movement today and other false religions, because, again, Satan... it all comes from Satan and he has a myriad of ways of deceiving.'

So with all this Satanic influence, it is easy to understand why the Lord called this place the place "where Satan's throne is"⁴³ in verse 13.

Imagine if you were a Christian there. You would know that Caesar is not Lord, but Jesus is Lord. So that is what you would have to say if you truly believed that. You knew that the secret to understanding life and death was something that came from one source, one scroll, not 200,000 in a library, the Holy Scriptures. You would know that there was no need for numerous temples because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit in which the one true God dwells. There was no need for Asclepius, the healing God, because we know that Jesus is the great physician and on it goes.

⁴² Revelation 12:9.

⁴³ Revelation 2:13.

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Now, let's examine the Lord's letter. In verse 12 he says, "And to the angel,"⁴⁴ or the pastor, "of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this."⁴⁵

Friends, here the Lord again reaches back to His original appearance as the glorified Lord of the Church when He appeared to John in chapter one and in verse 16. And He uses one of the descriptions of His character to identify Himself now to the saints here. And that is: "[I am] the One who has the sharp two-edged sword."⁴⁶ I am the One who says this.

So the connotation here is that of a warrior king that is coming in great power to defeat his enemies and pronounce judgment upon them. And, friends, here we are reminded of the power of the Word of God, the power of the Word of God that can penetrate to the very core of every man and expose his sin and judge his thoughts. In Hebrews 4:12 we read that, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any..."⁴⁷ What? "Any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."⁴⁸

So the emphasis here is that the Lord of the Church sees all things and ultimately rules over all things including Satan and his minions and his world system. And He is the One that is the supreme warrior, that will not only one day defeat Rome, but all of His enemies. And He will do it with two edges, "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God,"⁴⁹ Ephesians 6:17. And with two edges you can cut two ways. It is an instrument of life for some and an instrument of death for others. For by it we know that the Word of God can deliver some *from* the wrath of God, while others it will be used to condemn them *to* the wrath of a holy God and pronounce a holy verdict upon them.

Beloved, never forget that God will use the authority of his Word to judge people one day. In Revelation 19:13 Jesus is called, "The Word of God."⁵⁰ He is the final and the full revelation of God. We need nothing more. We don't need anybody else to say, "God told me this and God told me that and here is some new revelation." We have all that we need right here. The Bible is clear about that.

And he has revealed himself as the Lord of the Church in his infallible, inspired, authoritative Word, the Holy Scriptures. No wonder it is the power of God unto salvation.⁵¹ In fact, in Revelation 19:15 we read that the sword is that which proceeds out of His mouth and it will one day strike down the nations.⁵² So, again, beloved, never underestimate the power of the Word of Christ that proceeds from His mouth.

⁴⁴ Revelation 2:12.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hebrews 4:12.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ephesians 6:17.

⁵⁰ Revelation 19:13.

⁵¹ See Romans 1:16.

⁵² See Revelation 19:15.

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Now, after the Lord's introduction we see five components here in this Scripture. Let me give them to you one by one. First we see the Lord's *praise* to the church. In verse 13 He says, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is."⁵³ The idea here is that Satan has taken up permanent residence in the same place where you live.

Now, remember, again, Pergamum was a Mecca for pagan idol worship. It was the very center of emperor cult worship. And, again, this is the very kind of orderly system that Satan loves to use to accomplish his diabolical purposes, and he controls these systems through his human surrogates that will do his bidding.

It is important to remember, as well, that Scripture teaches that there are special demons that are assigned to world empires. We see that happening even this day. Like you will recall the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece in Daniel 10. And these demons have been placed there as the generals to help orchestrate what Satan wants done in his world system. And so Satan is depicted here as the one that is ruling his kingdom of darkness upon this throne here in Pergamum, the very place where these dear saints live and serve and worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as I think about this, those saints must have smiled when they heard the letter read to them at this point because there is a measure of comfort and encouragement here, knowing how intimate the Lord is with His own, that He is aware of their situation saying, "I know where you dwell."⁵⁴ There is something comforting about that, is it not? I mean He knows where we dwell. He knows everything about us, every trouble, every pain, every tear, everything we do, good and bad and He even knows our enemies.

He goes on in verse 13 and says, "[I know that] you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."⁵⁵ So despite enormous opposition we see that they had remained faithful and steadfast even when one of their own, Antipas, was martyred. The word "witness" in the original language is *martus* (*mar'-toos*) from which we eventually got our English word "martyr" because of all of the witnesses of Christ that were martyred for their faith.

Now we know really nothing about Antipas except what we read here. But because the Lord refers to him as "my witness," he was probably one of the leaders of the church, perhaps even the pastor of the church and according to tradition during the era of Domitian's violent persecution against Christians we read that they roasted him alive in a brass bull.

Friends, I might add that whenever you hear of some hideous, gruesome, barbaric violence, whenever you hear of that, and we hear about it even today, don't we, on the news, hear of people cutting off our soldier's heads with Islam and so forth; *I want you to*

⁵³ Revelation 2:13.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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be reminded of the enemy that seeks to destroy you. Whenever you hear that will you be reminded of that? Because this is the same enemy that wants to destroy you and me. And don't give him an opportunity. And then we need to praise God for his saving grace that has snatched us from this fire.

So following the praise he addresses, number two, the *problem* in verse 14. He says, "But..." There is that word that we hate again. "But," yes you have got some good things happening here, but, however, "I have a few things against you."⁵⁶ And here comes the rebuke: "Because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality."⁵⁷

Here we learn that some, not all of the church, had bought into some kind of false teaching. They hold to the teaching of Balaam. And you will recall the story of Balaam in Numbers 22 through 25 where Balaam was a prophet for hire. He was hired by the Midianite and the Moabite kings to pronounce a curse on the children of Israel and you will recall that Balaam tried three times unsuccessfully to do that. And since it didn't work he devised another plan and that plan was to have those people lure the men of Israel into committing acts of adultery and fornication with the Moabite women and intermarry with them. And then along with that they would begin to worship their gods and eat meat offered to their idols and so forth.

Naturally, such blatant disobedience would then bring about God's judgment upon the Israelites and, thus, destroy them and then put an end to the fears of these kings who wanted to somehow protect themselves from the Israelites through hiring this prophet to pronounce a curse on them and so forth.

Well, as the story goes God quickly intervened, though not quite the way Balaam hoped it would happen. And we read how God executed 24,000 of His people who had committed such sin. So the teaching of Balaam here refers to the practice of sexual immorality that results in worshipping the idols of those lovers and those wives and sacrificing meat offered to those idols. All of this, again, is a clear violation of the counsel of Jerusalem in Acts 15.

Evidently some in the Church at Pergamum were indulging in these kinds of practices. Having studied as much as I can find on the way these pagan rituals would work I can give you a little bit of a scenario of how this would happen.

You are living there in Pergamum and you at least claim to be a believer. You are part of this church, but you have given the devil an opportunity in your life. You are really not following Christ. You are probably not even a Christian, but you think you are and you have got friends that you work with, coworkers . . . and part of the culture, instead of going to the baseball games and the football games, what do you do? Well, you go to the feasts and the festivals with all of the pagan idolaters. And you go in there and the

⁵⁶ Revelation 2:14.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

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temples are filled with prostitutes and you are then encouraged to kind of participate with everything that is going on . . . and what you would do is they would have various kinds of animals and if you just took some small, even an insignificant part of an animal, you would put it on the sacrifice altar to Caesar and it would be burned and then you would get to eat the rest of the meat. And people, I am sure, would say things like, “Hey, you know, I know you are into this Jesus thing, but don’t get yourself into trouble, you know, just put a little meat on there, it is no big deal. Come on. And then, you know, let’s have something to eat and enjoy the party.” And then the music begins to play and music gets mixed with wine, the prostitutes begin to dance and undress and the seduction begins to take place. Before you know it, people are indulging themselves in immorality and idolatry with the voice of their friends in church saying, “It’s no big deal. Grace covers it all.”

Well, obviously some in the church were participating in this kind of wickedness. But, beloved, please hear something. Worse than that the church was tolerating it. No discipline. By the way, can you see the three enemies at work here? The flesh and Satan and the world, don’t you see how they work together? It is an amazing thing?

As a footnote. You say, “How do you fight this?” My there are numerous sermons that could be given on this, but just briefly Paul says in Romans 13:14, “Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”⁵⁸ In other words have no premeditated forethought about participating in wicked things. Don’t even let it enter your mind. 2 Corinthians 10:5, “[Take] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”⁵⁹ David said, “Thy word have I hid in my heart,”⁶⁰ that what? “I might not sin against thee.”⁶¹

Galatians 5:16. “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”⁶² In other words, submit to the Spirit of God as He has revealed Himself through the Word of God. Walk with Him. Choose to go in the same direction at a regular, regulated pace that the Spirit of God would have you go. Surrender to Him and you won’t carry out the desire of the flesh.

Paul told Timothy, “I want you to flee from youthful lusts.”⁶³ The idea of start running and never even look back. Keep running your whole life. James 4:7, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”⁶⁴

Beloved, please learn from this. May I just encourage each of you to be very, very serious about guarding your own heart and your own mind? Stay away from the slippery slope of sin. It is easy to somehow abuse our Christian liberty and think, “well, you know, I can get over here and the Bible doesn’t say anything about that.” And before you know it, you are starting to slide and you will pick up momentum all the way to your demise.

⁵⁸ Romans 13:14.

⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

⁶⁰ See Psalm 119:11.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Galatians 5:16.

⁶³ Se 2 Timothy 2:22.

⁶⁴ James 4:7.

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You know, there are so many examples of this and Satan has got so many temptations. I was thinking of one the other day. There is a very, very popular show out called *American Idol* and obviously it is a show for American idolaters. And think about it. Here is a show where people literally compete to be worshipped, to be worshipped by other people who are jealous of them who wish they could be worshipped like them.

And what happens? We watch this type of garbage and who do our kids want to be like, Christ or that person? They want to be like that person. Think of all the heroes that Satan raises up to somehow tempt us. All of these people out there who hate God. And imperceptibly Satan conforms us to this world, indiscernibly, unsuspectedly, but systematically we see Christ honoring values and virtues being replaced by that of the world. It is little wonder why there are so many ostensibly Christian churches today that are literally filled with immoral idolaters. They worship a God they have made in their own image.

I think of apostate churches today where you literally have pastors and so called bishops who are homosexuals, churches filled with homosexuals. I know of churches that have leaders that are involved in immorality and many people in the church know it and they don't do anything about it. That is exactly what we have here at the Church at Pergamum.

I think of other so called churches like the Roman Catholic Church. Think of the scandals of immorality in the Roman Catholic priesthood. It is legendary. And, again, many other churches. You can go into them where even in a worship service you will look at the young ladies and they are dressed like trollops, and you look at the young men and watch how they act and you can tell they are absolutely enslaved by their lusts.

My friends, please remember, this is the Church of Jesus Christ that he has purchased with his very blood. In Ephesians 5:26 we read that:

That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.⁶⁵

And then I hear the voice . . . oh, I have heard it so many times: "Wait a minute. The Bible says, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.'"⁶⁶ And I think, oh, my. And, friends, I want to be kind to you. If you are saying that at this moment, but please understand, to use that text in this context betrays a profound ignorance of the Word of God. You need to rightly divide the Word of God. The context there is simply that we are to judge only after we have taken the log out of our own eye. And then we are to be discerning. And it says in verse five of Matthew, "And then you will see clearly to take the speck out of

⁶⁵ Ephesians 5:26-27.

⁶⁶ See Matthew 7:1.

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your brother's eye."⁶⁷ And the Lord goes on to give a criteria for judging false teachers within the Church. "You will know them by their fruits."⁶⁸

By the way, do you know what the first command was that the Lord of the Church, that Jesus gave to His Church? Do you know what the first command to the Church was? How to discipline sin in Matthew 18. The whole process for judging those who are living in sin and doing so with impunity. Jesus said in John 7:24, "Judge with righteous judgment."⁶⁹ And in 1 Corinthians 5:12 we are told that we are to "Judge those who are within the church."⁷⁰

The New Testament is filled with passages about how we are to be discerning and deal with sin because a little leaven does what? It leavens the whole lump.⁷¹ Sin is a negative influence in your life and certainly in the Church.

Well, the church at Pergamum was a failure in this area. Notice what else the Lord adds to his rebuke in verse 15. He says, "Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."⁷² Now, you will remember that the Lord praised the Church at Ephesus because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, he said, "Which I also hate."⁷³

And may I remind you that though the evidence is scant, they were thought to be a sect that followed one of the seven original men who served with Stephen in Acts six, a Jewish proselyte who apostatized named Nicholas of Antioch.

Well, obviously from this text, they, too, in other words "in the same way," it says, led people into the way of Balaam's immorality and idolatry.

So what we have here are tares that are among the wheat that are a part of the church body there at Pergamum. They are phony Christians who are taking Christian liberty to extremes and maybe even some believers who had gone to a point where they are disobeying God in this way, practicing immorality and idolatry. And certainly if that becomes a practice and they don't repent of it and feel that conviction, then there is every indication that they are not a believer.

Well, many in the church remained faithful and pure. They obviously neglected their duty to maintain the purity of the church through discipline by allowing fellow members to somehow live in such wickedness.

⁶⁷ Matthew 7:5.

⁶⁸ Matthew 7:16.

⁶⁹ John 7:24.

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:12.

⁷¹ See 1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9.

⁷² Revelation 2:15.

⁷³ Revelation 2:6.

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So what would the Lord have them do? This takes us, thirdly, to the *prescription*. Verse 16. “Repent, therefore.”⁷⁴ Repent is a term in the original language that means to change your mind and your attitude and decisively commit yourself to changing the direction of your life. Repent!

Now this was a command to both the immoral idolaters as well as those who tolerated them. For some this would be a call to repentance unto salvation. For others who knew Christ that might have gotten involved with this, it was a call to repentance unto obedience.

Beloved, may I say it just as clearly as I know how. There is absolutely no place for tolerance of any kind of sin or false doctrine in the Church. Holiness and sin are mutually exclusive. Doctrinal and moral tolerance, however, today is an insidious problem in the life of every church. You know, tolerance is kind of the virtuous buzz word today, isn't it? “We all need to be tolerant.” And many Christians and churches really cannot be distinguished from the world. You look at their lifestyle, their attitudes, their values, their priorities, their pursuits and frankly they mirror the world that we are supposed to *not be part of*, the very world that rejects Christ's.

In fact, there are many church services today that work hard at making sure that the unsaved, those who are spiritually dead and at enmity with God, feel perfectly comfortable in their services. And whenever you talk to those leaders in those services you will quickly find that there is absolutely zero church discipline that ever takes place.

Yet, after Paul condemned the character and conduct of the world in Ephesians four he said, “But you did not learn Christ in this way”⁷⁵ James four says, “Friendship with the world is hostility toward God.”⁷⁶ My friends, it is our difference from the world that attracts people to Christ, not our similarity with it. 1 John 2:4, “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”⁷⁷ Verse 15 goes on to say, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”⁷⁸ That is clear, is it not?

Well, this was the cancer that was allowed to spread in the Church of Pergamum, the same cancer that has utterly destroyed many churches and rendered powerless many denominations. James says in chapter one and verse 27, “Pure and undefiled religion consists ultimately of keeping oneself unstained by the world.”⁷⁹

You know, every Christian needs to be reminded of Peter's Word in 1 Peter 2:11. He says, “I urge you as aliens and strangers.”⁸⁰ And, boy, don't we feel like that as believers

⁷⁴ Revelation 2:16.

⁷⁵ Ephesians 4:20.

⁷⁶ James 4:4.

⁷⁷ 1 John 2:4.

⁷⁸ 2 John 2:15.

⁷⁹ See James 1:27.

⁸⁰ 1 Peter 2:11.

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in this world? “I urge you as aliens and strangers.”⁸¹ I can really identify with that. He says, “to abstain” which literally means *hold yourself away*. I want you “to abstain from [what?] from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.”⁸² And the “fleshly lusts” there is referring to something far more than sexual temptations, but anything that might dishonor Christ or ruin your testimony. Hold yourself away from that stuff.

Every church needs to be reminded of Paul’s words of 2 Corinthians six and verse 14 where he says:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you."⁸³

Now we go from the *praise* and the *problem* and the *prescription*, fourthly, to the *punishment*. Here is what is going to happen if you don’t do it. Verse 16. “Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”⁸⁴

My, my, my, what sobering words we have here. God is serious about the purity of his people, about the purity of his Church. He hates worldliness that corrupts the values of his people and derails their priorities. Repent, He is saying, or else I am coming in judgment. And that can take on many, many painful forms, the judgment of God. But as we see here it is swift and it is certain even as it was with the 24,000 followers of Balaam.

And then, finally, He closes with a precious promise in verse five. Again, God is so merciful, isn’t He? He is so merciful. He says in verse 17a, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”⁸⁵ And here is the first part of the promise. “To him who overcomes,”⁸⁶ referring to believers, “To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna.”⁸⁷

Now you will remember that manna was that sweet bread that God provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was a symbol of His love for them. It was a symbol

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

⁸⁴ Revelation 2:16.

⁸⁵ Revelation 2:17.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

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of His provision for them. And the hidden manna here is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the bread of life, who also came down from heaven to provide His love through his grace and the provision of spiritual life for all who will trust him. What a blessed promise.

And He goes on to promise something else in verse 17. He says, “And I will give him,”⁸⁸ in other words, the overcomer, the believer, “I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”⁸⁹

Now there are various ideas about the meaning of this white stone. And it is hard to know with certainty so I won't be dogmatic with this, but having read and studied all of the different options, I believe this is probably best understood in light of the Roman customs of that day, that the Church would have been familiar with. And that was the custom where athletes would be awarded stones because of some great victory. And they would be given a name that would... or their names would be inscribed upon that stone. It is kind of like gold medalists today that receive some kind of a medal, only they would receive a stone with their name on it. And this stone would then be used as kind of like their VIP pass into banquets and celebrations that they would have.

So I believe the picture here is this. As believers we are going to be granted entrance into the eternal celebration of heaven because Christ has given us a new name. He has given us the stone.

Think about it. He has given us the *new covenant*. And because of the new covenant we read that we are made into *new creatures*. And as new creatures we read in the Word of God that we have been given a *new heart*. We have been given a *new mind*. We have been given a *new spirit*. We have even been given a *new song*. We have even been given a *new heaven and earth*. So why not have a *new name*?

Because we are overcomers by God's grace, dear friends, we are victorious in Christ. And because of that we will be granted admission into the Messianic feast, if you will, where we will celebrate the glory of His grace throughout eternity.

And notice He says that on that stone there will be inscribed a “new name.” In Greek it is *kainos* (kahee-nos'), it is an interesting term. It denotes something that is absolutely *new in quality*, something that is totally new in terms of a *different nature*. So this is a name that we have never been called before, something we don't know any thing about.

And, beloved, here is the point. Some day when we enter into the new eternal state, the Lover of our Souls will give us a secret name that reflects His intimate love for each of us, a name that is specific to each one of us, one that no one else will know.

Those of us who are married all have little pet names for our lover. And only she or he would know. You wouldn't want anyone else to know, right? It is the same idea here.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

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What a magnificent demonstration of Christ's eternal and intimate love for us, that we are His treasured possession. And for this reason He calls these dear people at Pergamum to holiness.

What an incentive we have, dear friends, to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, our mind, our soul, our strength and therefore as we do that we avoid *corruption through compromise*.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for these eternal truths. We thank you that you have loved us so much that you would communicate to us through not only the incarnate Son, but also through the Word, the Word of Christ, the Word of God. We thank you for its power, for its practicality. Lord, we would just plead with you that you would cause us to live consistently with these glorious truths, that you might be glorified in our bodies through our testimony and certainly in this church. We pray all of this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

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