



7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION

Seven Churches // Sermon 4

Pergamum: The Compromising Church // Revelation 2:12-17

If you have your Bible, turn with me to the book of Revelation.

- We will be in **Revelation 2:12-17** today.

The hardest lesson for the church to learn is this: Our greatest danger is almost never out there.

- Persecution can hurt us.
- Opposition can slow us down.

But those things rarely destroy us.

- The real danger comes from in here – from the poison of compromise.

Compromise is the church's Trojan horse.

- It slips in quietly, looks harmless, and before long, it leaves the church divided and powerless.

That's exactly what happened in Pergamum.

- They wanted the best of both worlds – part Jesus, part world.
- But when Jesus shows up, He doesn't come smiling.
- He comes with a sword.

Here's the question every Christian has to answer:

Will I be faithful to Jesus, no matter the cost, or will I compromise to fit into the world around me?

There are three (3) things I want to show you in this text:

1. **Jesus commends faithfulness in hard times.**

[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.

Jesus doesn’t minimize the pressure of their environment. He says: / know...¹

- That’s not just awareness – it’s divine empathy.

Jesus is reminding the church: I see the difficulty of your assignment...I see your pressures and temptations...

There two quick things:

A. **Pergamum is a place of deep darkness.**

Notice the weight in this statement: “...*where Satan’s throne is.*”

Pergamum was a city saturated by idolatry.

- Sam Storms refers to it as ***Satan’s City***.²
- It was the center of all pagan worship.
- It had a massive altar to Zeus, the king of the gods.
- The people of Pergamum were required to worship the Roman emperor.

And as this text says, this is the city where ***Satan dwells (lives)***. **If Satan has a zip code, it was Pergamum.*

And Jesus is saying, *I know it’s hard to be a Christian in Satan’s city...*

- When everyone else is bowing to Caesar, and you stand alone and bow to the Lord.

I can’t help but think of the story in the Book of Daniel of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

- In Babylon, they were commanded to bow to the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar.

¹ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 58.

² https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/god-s-people-in-satan-s-city---revelation-212-17?utm_source=chatgpt.com

But when the music played, they refused to bow. They stood tall.

Pergamum is a place of deep darkness.

B. Faithfulness shines brightest in the darkest places.

Jesus says: **Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith...**

- The phrase *hold fast* means *to grip tightly under pressure*.
- It's the picture of a sailor clinging to the mast in a storm.

They even had a hero of faith: Antipas.

- Jesus called **Antipas**, "**my faithful witness.**"
- Greek for *witness* is where we get our word *martyr*.

Tradition tells us he was *burned inside a brazen bull for his faith in Jesus.*³

- When this happened, the church didn't scatter in fear; they clung tighter to the gospel.

This text teaches us this: *Even when our context is corrupt, we can choose courage over compromise because we have Christ.*

Even in the middle of spiritual hostility, faithfulness is possible – it's commendable.

We might not live in the city of Satan, but we certainly live in the city of his demons.

- We encounter darkness in our workplaces, classrooms, and neighborhoods – they're all over.

Jesus says, ***I know where you live...and I know it is hard.***

- But stand firm! Don't bend or bow to the pressures around you.

Faithfulness is not about the ease of your environment but the strength of your grip on Christ.

Jesus commends faithfulness in hard times.

2. Jesus warns against compromise.

After commending them, Jesus confronts them. He moves from praise...to problem:

³ <https://biblehub.com/topical/ttt/m/martyrdom--antipas.htm>

[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.

Not everyone in Pergamum was faithful.

- Jesus links their problem to the teachings of Balaam.

What are the teachings of Balaam? This reaches back to Numbers 22-25; 31.

- Balaam was a sorcerer who had one job – to lead God’s people into sin, namely idolatry and sexual immorality.
- He wanted God’s people to resemble the world.

“When Satan cannot destroy a church through persecution, he will attempt to defile it through seduction.” - Sam Storms

In Pergamum, false teachers (Nicolaitans) were recycling Balaam’s tactics. They whispered:

- *Why not attend the feast? You don’t have to believe like they do...*
- *What’s wrong with a little immorality? Everyone else is doing it.*
- *It’s ok to go there and do that – God will forgive you.*

Church, that’s the voice of compromise: *It’s just once, or it’s not that big of a deal...*

Compromise always starts small.

- You don’t wake up one morning and decide, “Hey, today seems like a great day to ruin my marriage.”
- “Today seems like a great day to drift from God.”

It begins with small concessions.

Think about it like this: It’s like erosion on a cliff.

- A cliff doesn’t collapse overnight.
- It happens because small waves keep hitting it, slowly wearing it down.

That’s what compromise does to the Christian life.

Let me ask you: Where are you tempted to compromise?

- **At work:** *Everybody*
- **In relationships:** *They may not love Jesus, but they really do love me.*
- **In sexuality:** *Everyone else is watching this (doing this); it's not a big deal.*
- **In theology:** *Maybe Jesus isn't the only way; maybe truth is relative.*

One pastor said, 'What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace.'

Jesus takes compromise seriously.

- Notice Jesus doesn't say, "It's no big deal." He says, "I have this against you..."
- These are strong words.

The Titanic wasn't sunk by what was visible above the surface, but by what was hidden below.

- Small compromises under the surface can sink a relationship, marriage, or church.

Jesus warns against compromise.

3. Jesus commands repentance and promises reward.

After exposing their compromise, Jesus gives them a choice.

A. Jesus commands repentance.

[16] Therefore repent.

These two words are simple, yet powerful.

- *Repent* is direct and urgent.

It's not simply feeling sorry; it's turning away from sin and turning back to Christ.

- It's a complete change in direction – away from compromise and toward conviction.

He adds: If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

The sword represents Jesus' authority, Jesus' Word, and Jesus' judgment.

- To resist His Word is to put yourself under His sword.

Jesus commands repentance.

B. Jesus promises reward.

[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.'

To the one who conquers (remains faithful, repents of compromise), Jesus promises three (3) gifts:

A. **Hidden manna:** Manna in the OT sustained Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16). It was intended to satisfy the soul. In the NT, Jesus calls Himself (John 6), "the true bread from heaven."

Here is Jesus' point: Compromise will always leave you empty, but Christ will satisfy and fill your soul.

B. **A white stone:** Listen to this:⁴

- (1) It could be used for a ticket to special banquets.
- (2) It could be used to vote for acquittal by a jury.
- (3) It could be used as a symbol of victory for an athlete.
- (4) It could be used to show the freedom of a slave.

Notice that all of these represent something amazing about Jesus.

Jesus provides Access to a banquet feast.

Jesus brings Acquittal from the penalty of sin.

Jesus brings Victory over sin and death.

Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

C. **A new name:** In the Bible, names represent identity and destiny. (Abram – Abraham. Jacob – Israel. Simon – Peter.) When you became a new creation, you were given a new name – this represented your identity with Christ forever.

The world may shame you, reject you, or write you off, but Jesus renames you and claims you as His own.

The problem with the church at Pergamum is that they were drifting from the Word.

- The Bible was no longer their ultimate authority.

⁴ <https://calvarychapel.com/posts/five-slippery-steps-to-spiritual-compromise-from-the-church-of-pergamum/>

And I wonder, EL, do we have the same problem?

- Is God's Word our final authority?
- If not, we are on the same dangerous path as Pergamum.

But there is good news.

- Jesus calls us to repent, to return, and to conquer.

If we do this, He promises that what He gives is far greater than anything compromise could ever offer.

BULLPEN:

Pergamum was not the biggest or wealthiest city in Asia Minor – that was Ephesus.

- It was more like Washington, D.C. – the center of power, politics, and religion.

It was often referred to as “*the greatest city in Asia Minor.*”

- It was an intelligent city – had a library with over 200,000 books.
- Now, this is hard for us to grasp because being a Christian in McDonough is not too hard.

But being a Christian in Washington, DC, that's tough.

Consider this thought: Jesus is revealing to us the location of Satan's throne. It's in the city of Pergamum – the “political capital.”⁵

This is a very strategic move because it's in the political capital that Satan can influence policy, politicians, and the people.

Imagine this: If your uncle showed up at your front door holding a sword, would you open the door?

- Probably not. You'd probably be thinking, “Uncle Dennis has lost his mind.”

It's the same way in the Bible.

- When someone shows up with a sword, it shouldn't make you feel warm and fuzzy.
- It's a picture of authority and judgment.

And Jesus makes it clear, compromise has no place in His church.

⁵ https://twocitieschurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Worldly-Church_Revelation-2_12-17_Kyle-Mercer_January-28-2024.pdf