

“To Pergamum: Do Not Compromise”

Revelation 2:12-17

Rev. Min J. Chung

(Lord’s Day Service, March 5, 2017)

Revelation 2:12-17

To the Church of Pergamum

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. 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. 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.’”

Introduction

First, we looked at **Ephesus - the Cold Church**. This church was cold because they lost their first love in God. They may have done many things correctly, but they did not have love in their actions. Jesus reminds them to repent and re-start living out their love for Him.

Second, we looked at **Smyrna - the Suffering Church**. This was a church that often encountered persecution. The persecution did not weaken the church but strengthened it instead. Jesus reminds them to be faithful even unto death.

Today, we look at **Pergamum - the Compromising Church**. Pergamum experienced persecution, but instead of holding onto truth, the church compromised their Christian life. Satan’s strategy was “if you cannot beat them, join them”. They fell into temptation and imitated the culture of the time.

We are living in the age of tolerance. The culture says tolerate everyone but the intolerant. The church, as a whole and as individuals, needs balance between being both doctrinally and morally pure. There needs to be a distinction between the church and the world, not blurred lines. In Matthew 5, believers are called to be the salt and light of the world. Pergamum’s problem was that they were too tolerant without discretion.

I. The address [12]

Revelation 2:12 - *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.’”*

The angel is probably the leader of the church or the person reading the letter. The city of Pergamum like Ephesus was in modern day Turkey. The church of Pergamum withstood persecution well but wrongly condoned dangerous deception. It’s modern day name is Bergama, the ancient capital of Asia, built on the cone shaped hill rising 1000 feet above the surrounding valley. *Pergamum* in Greek means “citadel”. The origin of the word is also “parchment”, for the city was well known for the parchment it had and made and for its use in the libraries. Pergamum had temples for idol worship: Emperor Augustus, goddess Roma, Asclepius, Zeus, etc. It was the first site for emperor worship so it became a main place where Satan worked in the first century churches.

In every letter to the seven churches, Jesus **introduces Himself with an aspect of who He is**. All of them are from Revelation chapter 1 as He reveals Himself. In Revelation 2:1 with Ephesus, Jesus calls Himself the one who **“holds the seven stars in his right hand”**. With that name, He communicates, “I love you. I am holding you. Remember to love me.” In Revelation 2:8 with Smyrna, Jesus calls Himself the one who **“died and came to life”**. With that name, He communicates, “I have overcome death. I can and will resurrect you even if you suffer and die.” The reference for the **“sharp two-edged sword”** (also in Revelation 1:16) is the first dangerous introduction Jesus gives to a church. He communicates, “I am the ultimate Judge. Do not compromise the truth. I will come to judge if you do not repent.” Sometimes we need to understand that there is danger in the world but there is more danger in the Lord because He is the judge of everything.

II. The encouragement [13]

Revelation 2:13 - *“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.”*

A. “I know where you dwell”

Jesus knew where the church was located, even if it was a dark place.

B. “where Satan’s throne is”

Satan ruled the city so he could be influential at the most politically and morally important place at the time. Satan is not God nor can be an opposition to God. Satan is not omniscient nor omnipresent.

C. “Yet you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith”

This church was committed to their faith in God and to witnessing ministry.

D. “Antipas my faithful witness”

According to tradition, Antipas was the first martyr of Asia. He was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle. He was well known.

1. He was the norm for the time.

He exemplified faithfulness unto death and **set the tone** for how the church should be and act.

2. He **changed the meaning** of the word “witness”.

Before Antipas, *witness* meant “someone who sees” or “someone who speaks about what he has seen”. Many scholars believe that Pergamum was the first place where *witness* was molded into what we now know as *martyr* - someone who is willing to die / has died for their belief.

3. He received the Lord’s title.

Revelation 1:5 - “*and from Jesus Christ the **faithful witness**, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*”

Antipas is compared to Jesus because of his martyrdom. Can you die for Christ? How does one become a faithful witness? By loving Christ more than yourself, overcoming temptation daily, and carrying your cross. (In actuality, it carries you.)

III. The rebuke [14-15]

Revelation 2:14-15 - “*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.*”

A. The teaching of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans

The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect in the church who compromised with pagan societies. The Nicolaitans tempted the Pergamum Church by deconstructing their beliefs to give them permission to sin.

Balak was a Moabite king who wanted to defeat Israel but could not on his own. He hired the prophet Balaam to bring curses down upon the nation. However, Balaam could not do this. Every time he tried to curse Israel, only blessings came out. Thus, Balaam advised King Balak to send Midianite women, who were known to be very beautiful. The Israelites were defeated by Balak because they were seduced and fell into temptation (Numbers 22-25).

At the time, the temples were places of worship and the way people worshipped the gods were by having sexual relations with temple prostitutes. Food was expensive yet there were feasts held in honor of the idols. In order to do business in the city, it would be better from an economic and social stand-point to do as the culture did.

B. Idolatry and sexual immorality

Malachi 2:14-15 - *“But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.”*

Idolatry and sexual immorality when together are so powerful and difficult to overcome. Marriage is **a spiritual union** that is anointed by God through the Holy Spirit. There is spiritual power in marriage. Sexual relation is also **a spiritual event**. So be careful with your spirit. According to Ephesians 5, we need to be filled in the Holy Spirit in everything we do.

How to be careful with your spirit:

1 Corinthians 6:16-17 - *“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”*

The world’s idea of marriage is a pornographic view: sex is only a physical act. This affects the way men and women treat one another in sexual relationships today. When sex is conducted without marriage, there is no spiritual anointing in that union. Spiritual union still takes place in the act, but instead of spirit’s nature connecting, it’s the sinful nature that connects. You damage yourself, your sexual partner, and others who could be affected (eg. future spouse, future partners). Even if someone has a fiancé(e), this does not exempt them from remaining sexually pure until the marriage is officiated. God is saying, keep yourself pure so that you can have power in your marriage and as much love you can give to your spouse.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

When doing these acts, it does not mean that you cannot be saved. These are the proof of one’s sinful nature apart from Christ. Jesus Christ is the **only** one who can sanctify and justify sins.

“And such **were** some of you” indicates a past tense to one’s state with sin. This is an encouragement to those struggling with sin that there is hope in being free from sin - in Jesus.

IV. The instruction [16]

Revelation 2:16 - *“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”*

A. “Repent”

Repent basically means “change”. Change your direction, change your way of life, change your thoughts. This does not mean change yourself. Instead, it is saying change who you depend on. Don’t depend on your own strength or merit but on the cross of Jesus Christ.

B. “I will come to you soon...the sword of my mouth”

Jesus is coming back within the context of allowing consequences for sin (not the second coming). Even though there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the existence of consequence is still important. We are addicted to sin. Consequences can be the pain that will replace the pleasure of sin. Think of consequence as discipline from a parent (eg. slap on the wrist, spanking, etc). It is necessary to teach a child the way in which they should go. This does not mean consequences will always happen; but ultimately, they are meant for restoration when they do occur. What Jesus endured on the cross is nothing compared to the consequences we will face. In this world, we will always receive less than we deserve because of Christ.

V. The promises [17]

Revelation 2:17 - *“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.”*

A. Hidden manna – our feast

Hidden manna is given to those who endure persecution.

Psalms 78:24 - *“and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.”*

John 6:33, 35 - *“For the bread of God is **he who comes down from heaven** and gives life to the world...Jesus said to them, **‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’**”*

The manna is hidden because the suffering is still present, but it is surely coming. Do not settle for cheap pleasure, but rather yearn more for Jesus.

Revelation 19:9 - *“And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”*

Man shall not live on bread alone (Matthew 4:4 & Deuteronomy 8:3). What we taste now is nothing compared to the feast that is coming.

B. White stone – our entrance

These stones had various purposes. When voting, white stones were an affirmation and black stones were a rejection. Jurors also used stones to vote for acquittal. White stones were also used to gain entrance to banquets. These stones were given to victors.

C. New name – our identity

Within a Biblical context, giving a name to someone indicated a **new status** with that person. This means that **both people are in a more intimate, personal relationship**, that they share in character and power. God does this with His people.

Knows means “deep experiential knowledge”. It’s spiritual, marital intimacy. No one else knows you like God knows you. Who (did/do) you want to be like? Who (did/do) you want to be with?

In the scripture, Jesus is that person. We want to be with Him and as we are with Him, we will become more like Him. Just as the bride changes their name, we will have a new name.

Conclusion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAmmvj-7g6o>

This video is about a wedding dance between a groom and a bride. Suddenly, the music can no longer play on the sound system. The couple is pleasantly surprised when the singer for the song plays live instead.

How much will we scream when we see Jesus face to face?