



The Compromising Church

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To compromise - what does compromise mean? What is the definition of compromise? Here are two definitions taken from Webster's Dictionary:

1. A weakening, as of one's principles
2. To lay open to danger, suspicion or disrepute

Let us look at an account in the Old Testament that tells the story of compromise - the account of the prophet - Balaam. In **Numbers 22**, we see Balak soliciting Balaam to curse the children of Israel. In order to entice Balaam, Balak sent elders with money in hand to Balaam to hire him (v. 7). Verse 13 tells us that Balaam rebuffed them according to God's word. Then, a second invitation came. This time Balak sent more leaders, who were more distinguished, and they promised to honor him richly. Instead of immediately rebuffing them according to God's revealed word, Balaam went to plan B and invited them in and said he would talk to the Lord some more about it. This shows he was secretly hoping for another answer from God in order to satisfy his desires for material gain and recognition.

Some Bible readers might wonder at this point what Balaam really did wrong, since it seemed that he only wanted to obey God (v. 18,19). However, God was looking on Balaam's heart, and this was a test. That is why the Bible records that "**God was angry because he was going**"(v.22), even though God gave him permission to go (v. 20).

God saw that Balaam was willing to compromise the revealed will of God for material gain and for recognition. God was unhappy with Balaam because he tried to hold out for the possibility of satisfying self when he already knew God's way and God's command. The angel of the Lord declared to Balaam on the trip: "**Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me.**" (v. 32). Later, Balaam's counsel caused the Israelites to worship Baal and have relations with Midianite women (**Num.31:16; Num.25:1-9; Rev.2:14**). Balaam was finally killed by the sons of Israel taking revenge upon the Midianites (Num.31:8).

I know of a certain individual who thought that a little drinking here and a little drinking there wouldn't hurt. She allowed the devil to get a foothold, and now, she is an alcoholic.

Turn with me to the book of Revelation 2. Plan B worked so well in the book of Numbers that it is remembered all the way to the book of Revelation.

Today, we look at the third church listed in Revelation, Pergamum. Have you noticed something particular in your study into the Seven Churches of Revelation? Jesus intimately knows each church. Intimately! Jesus knows intimately the heart of each church! Just as he knew the hearts of people he met in the Gospels. He knew the heart of a man sitting in a tree that was a little on the short side. "Zacchaeus, you're turning around. I can tell." He knew what was in the heart of a man He met in the middle of the night, named Nicodemus. If Jesus knows, why do we try to cover anything up. There is no reason to avoid Jesus. He knows us, He loves, and He died for us anyway! **While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8.** We can be open before Him. That is why David was called, "A man after His own heart." Not because he was good, but because he was open. "Yes, Lord, I have sinned. Please do something about it. Change it." To be open is the first step in allowing Him to change us!

Jesus knows the Pergamum Church. He knows what they have faced and what they need to do to be an effective witness to their city. He knows the root of their problems, problems that some of them didn't know existed. He also knows what they need to do to overcome those issues and what their reward will be. Jesus knows this about you and me as well. You might fool me and I might fool you and we might fool ourselves, but we're not going to fool God. So we might as well stand open before Him and let Him clean up our acts.

Revelation 2:12, the third church: "**To the angel of the church in Pergamum write...**"

The city of Pergamum was quite interesting. It was the strongest city of the seven churches, almost impregnable. It was located on a high mountain ridge, making it an easy site to defend. In the second and third centuries BC, Pergamum, the capital of a kingdom with the same name, was a great cultural center. Its library contained over 200,000 scrolls. Many of these scrolls were made out of a material called, parchment, a highly refined form of leather. Parchment was developed in Pergamum when King Ptolemy V of Egypt cut off the export of Papyrus to Pergamum. They had to do something else. This was done because Eumenes, king of Pergamum in the third century BC, wished to have the greatest library in the world. The only problem was that Alexandria, Egypt had the largest library in the world. So, to do this, he tried to persuade Aristophanes, librarian at Alexandria, to move to Pergamum. This enraged the Egyptian king so much that he cut off all the export of papyrus so they couldn't make any more scrolls, and he imprisoned his own librarian to keep him from leaving. Necessity is the mother of invention, so parchment was developed and eventually surpassed the usage of papyrus.

King Attalus III stipulated in his will that at his death, Pergamum should be made part of the Roman Empire. In 133 BC this was done. Pergamum had major temples to several pagan gods and eventually had temples to three Emperors. Emperor worship was made very popular in this city. In fact, it was compulsory emperor worship that caused widespread Christian persecution and even the banishment of John to Patmos where he wrote this book. The Jews believed that this city was destined for divine destruction.

Look again at **Revelation 2:12**, "**To the angel of the church in Pergamum write... 'These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.'**" The two edged sword was the symbol on the clothing worn by the rulers of Pergamum. It symbolized the fact that the Roman Empire had given them the right of the sword, the right to execute people who were seen as dangerous to the state. Yet, we find in **Hebrews 4:12** that it is also the symbol of God's judgement and His Word. "**For the word of God is living 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.**" Now, that's God's double-edged sword. Once again, we find that God knows everything. He knows what people wear on their clothes: the double-edged sword. "We have the right to kill you if you mess with us." God said, I'm the double-edged sword. What comfort that was to Pergamum. "Hey, they had the right to kill us, but God is the ultimate judge. We will rely on Him." The church in Pergamum has suffered from the double-edged sword of that city and needs encouragement that God's judgement is the last word.

Revelation 2:13, "**I know where you live.**" You know, that could be threatening. You know, we hear of these stalkers. "I know where you live." No! God knows where we live, and that's a good thing, because He knows our circumstances, He knows what our home is like, He knows what our parents are like, He knows how we were raised, He knows where we live. The Greek word used for live indicates that the Christians of Pergamum weren't just passing through. This was their home. This is where they had decided to stay, no matter what. They meant to stay. They were not running away from their problems. They were not running away from spreading the gospel in a tough town. I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Remember Paganism and Emperor worship? Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives."

We know virtually nothing about Antipas. Theories as to his identification and manner of death abound. But we can take from this brief reference that he stood for Jesus at the cost of his life. You know, our lives are not more valuable than the gospel. The gospel is more important than I am. And Antipas realized that and stood for the gospel at the cost of his life, just as Jesus stood for us when we were against Him. There was no compromise in Jesus and there was no compromise in Antipas. Unfortunately, that can't be said of all of his fellow church members.

Revelation 2:14, 15, "**Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**"

You see, since the Israelites were impervious to the direct attacks of Balaam, he brought in compromise. The Pergamum church had withstood direct persecution yet were being conquered by compromise. Balaam convinced Balak to invite the Israelites to a feast. "We can't curse them, invite them to supper." It

turned out to be a feast to false gods. But some of the Israelites reasoned, "It was just food anyway. We're tired of the manna. Let's try some of this food. What does it matter. We know those gods aren't real." But part of the ceremony was also immorality. One thing leads to another. Many of the Israelites fell due to this compromise.

In Pergamum, if you wanted to do business, the business community met in the Pagan temples and feasted on food offered to idols. So, if you wanted to make business contacts, you went to the temple of the pagan god, or the emperor. Many church members who owned businesses didn't want to be left out. "We need to keep our businesses open, after all, it helps us pay more tithe to the church, so... You know, you can reason anything out, can't you. So they compromised and went to these feasts, but these feasts also included immorality and many were pulled in.

The story is told of a Seventh-day Adventist Church that were holding evangelistic meetings and then proceeded to advertise Professional ads on the radio. The manager of the radio station came to the meetings. And he sat there the first night. The Pastor was a little disappointed with the low attendance. He discussed this with the manager of the radio station who replied, "The advertisements you were using were too professional for this town. People won't come to that. You need to come in and make some home-town advertising. And I'll give it to you for free." And so, that's what the Pastor did. Day after day he went down to the local radio station. The manager let the Pastor talk live on the radio, inviting people to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And he let him have free use of all of his equipment to make tape recordings that could be played while he wasn't there. And so they became friends. One day, the station manager called the Pastor into his office. His radio station was a religious station and so the conversation turned to religion. And suddenly, the manager said, "You know that you Adventists go to church on the right day, don't you?" The Pastor replied that yes, we do indeed worship on the Biblical Sabbath and invited the manager to the next service. He hung his head, "I just can't." The Pastor figured out why he just couldn't. The manager was a member of the largest church in town. Much of his business came from members of that church. That's where he met them. He feared that by standing firm for what he believed, he would lose business opportunities, lose advertising, and be forced out of business. Another words - Compromise.

Immorality was also a part of the festivities in Pergamum and Christians were weakening in their resolve. They are commended for living in a tough place but are condemned for becoming like those they were supposed to be witnessing to.

The Bible doesn't tell us, "Leave sinners." But it doesn't also tell us to be like them, right? We need to be there to witness. Or else, who will do it? The Nicolaitans were very similar to those who held the compromising attitude of Balaam. They were of a Greek philosophy which held that you could do what you wanted with your life and your body because your soul was separate and unaffected by your actions.

This is where the beliefs of Balaam were leading to the beliefs of the Nicolaitans. In Hebrew, Balaam means: "One who swallows the people." In Greek, Nicolaitan means: "One who conquers the people." And that's what was happening.

But there is a remedy for these problems. **Revelation 2:16, "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."**

We've got the sword coming back. This is an interesting sentence. Notice that it calls for the church to repent or else Jesus will deal with the compromisers. "I will come to YOU and will fight against THEM." It is easy for us to wish that God would come and deal with troublesome people we have within our church family. "Oh, they're causing trouble. I wish God would come and do something." But God doesn't wish that. God says, "I want you to repent. I want you to do something about it. I want you to repent for letting that go on. I want you to take care of it so I don't have to come down and do it. Win them back. Winning them back to My way is every bit as important as to winning those not in the church at all."

In the next verse we find the second part of the remedy. **Revelation 2:17, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..."**

After we repent, we listen to the Spirit. This advice is given to all the churches in Revelation. It is one thing to turn around, it is yet another to make sure you are going in the right direction. I've watched people that turned away from a life-style of excess, whatever you can imagine, they were doing. And they turned around and repented and went the wrong way into a life-style of excessive legalism. From one extreme to the other. They weren't listening to the Spirit. Repent and then listen to the Spirit. After turning and following the Spirit, we are to keep our eyes upon the reward. "Now wait a minute," you say. "It's not the reward that matters, it's being with Jesus that matters." We should follow Jesus even if there wasn't a heaven to be found. Let's see what the reward is, first.

Revelation 2:17 continues: **"To him who overcomes, I will give him some of the hidden manna."** What is this hidden manna that I should think of it as a reward? The symbolism behind this statement is mind boggling! We will look at just enough to whet your appetite. You remember that manna was the food from Heaven that sustained God's people after the Exodus from Egypt. Why did the manna stop falling? They were beginning to eat the produce of the Promised Land. It was no longer necessary. Hebrew tradition held that manna would once again fall from Heaven when the Messiah came. By this, would He be known. Manna coming from heaven : Messiah. When Jesus fed the 5000, people wanted to crown Him king because they considered this the fulfillment of that tradition. Food out of nowhere.

Look at **John 6:25-35**. Jesus escaped after they tried to make Him king. This is the day after the feeding of the 5000. When they found Him on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for Me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval."

Then they asked Him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent."

So, they asked Him, "What miraculous sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus said the them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

The Jesus declared, "I am the of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty."

They were looking for manna to eat but Jesus was manna made flesh. He is spiritual nourishment. But when Passover came, they crucified Him and He became Hidden Manna. Just as a pot of manna was hidden in the Ark of the Covenant, Jesus was buried in the tomb.

But Jesus was not hidden for long! He rose again! He is now, even more than before, the Bread of Life. He is the True Manna! He has conquered death. The persecuted Pergumum people need not fear death because they are promised eternal life, and so are we. Jesus' divinity is no longer buried beneath His humanity! In actuality, the reward of those who repent and hear the Spirit is to have Jesus, through His Spirit now. And to have Jesus face to face for eternity!

But that is not all.

Revelation 2:17 continues: **"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."**

This gift of the white stone is nothing less than the assurance of salvation! Those who sat in judgement in those days did not need to read the verdict in a capital case. If the person was guilty and condemned to die, a black stone was placed before him. But if a person was acquitted, a white stone was place before him. Jesus said, "I will give him a white stone, because I died for his sins and I was raised again on Sunday morning so that you need not fear death." As in the old testament, if a person had also gone through a major transition in life, a name change happened. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, etc. Our new name will reflect our new character, the character of Jesus. This text is assurance NOW that we will be acquitted THEN! We will have that new name.

The people of Ephesus had works but little love. The people of Pergamum had love but little works. It takes both. We must trust and obey! But with trust and obedience, love is followed by works of the heart because we love Jesus. And then our witness will be sure! Don't allow creeping compromise to diminish your relationship with Jesus. Feed on His Word every day so that we, and those we meet, can live with the Bread of Life, the Risen Savior for eternity.

I leave you with this profound quote:

"Singleness of purpose, wholehearted devotion to God, is the condition pointed out by the Saviour's words. Let the purpose be sincere and unwavering to discern the truth and to obey it at whatever cost, and you will receive divine enlightenment. Real piety begins when all compromise with sin is at an end. Then the language of the heart will be that of the apostle Paul: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Philippians 3:13, 14, 8." Thoughts From The Mount Of Blessing Pg. 91

