

Pergamum - The Compromising Church by E A Terry Delivered 08 30 20

Numbers 25: 1 – 13; James 4: 1 - 10; 1st Timothy 6: 2b – 12;

Romans 12: 1-2; **Revelation 2: 12 – 17 (Sermon)**

Jesus begins His letter to the church at Pergamum by assuring them that He knows their circumstances.

Satan's throne was in the city of Pergamum. (verse 13)

Then Jesus complemented the church at Pergamum for remaining true to Him and for not renouncing their faith even though they lived in an evil place and they were suffering intense persecution because they were Christians. (verse 13)

Pergamum was the capital of the Roman Province in Asia minor.

Pergamum was also an important pagan religious center.

Pergamum was the first city to build a temple to Caesar and Pergamum was the official worship center of Caesar.

In addition, there were several other pagan shrines and temples to the Zeus who was the Greek weather god, the pagan goddess of sex, the pagan god of alcohol, and the pagan god of healing.

In verse 13 we read; ***“I know where you live – where Satan has his throne.”***

Satan is not in hell today and Satan has not been in hell.

Satan will not be banished into hell until after the Millennium. (Revelation 20:1)

Satan is roaming the earth, (Job 1:7) deceiving the nations, (Revelation 20:3), tempting God's people (1st Thessalonians 3:5), and seeking to devour someone. (1st Peter 5:8)

In verse 13 we are read about ***“Antipas, God's faithful witness, who was put to death”*** in Pergamum.

Antipas was probably the pastor at Pergamum and tradition tells us Antipas was burned to death.

When Satan could not get the church at Pergamum to denounce their faith in Jesus Christ, Satan slipped in the back door and got some of the Christians in church at Pergamum to compromise their faith.

Satan was successful enticing some of the Christians at Pergamum to adopt secular thinking and to seek physical pleasures and material possessions over spiritual blessings.

The church at Pergamum adopted a worldly view.

The church at Pergamum did not standing firm in their convictions.

In verses 14 and 15 Jesus said, ***“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”***

The “*doctrine of Balaam*” mentioned in verse 15 is the doctrine of compromise.

You can read about Balaam in Numbers 22-25.

Balaam was a prophet of God but Balaam is often remembered for his talking donkey.

After the Israelites conquered the Amorites the Moabites thought that they would be Israel’s next target.

So Balak, who was the King of Moab, tried to hire God’s prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites.

At first Balaam refused King Balak’s money to curse Israel. But when king Balak offered more money to Balaam, Balaam decided to go and meet with the Moabite king.

But, along the way to Moab The Angel of The Lord intervened.

Balaam’s donkey stopped and turned off of the road and into a field because The Angel of The Lord stood in the middle of the road with a drawn sword.

Remember Balaam was God’s prophet.

Balaam’s donkey could see The Angel of The Lord but Balaam did not because sin blinded Balaam’s spiritual eyes.

When The Angel of The Lord spoke to Balaam, Balaam confessed his sin and offered to return home.

Instead, God allowed Balaam to go to king Balak, but God gave strict orders for Balaam to only speak the words that God gave Balaam to say.

So Balaam did go to king Balak but instead of cursing Israel, Balaam blessed Israel four times.

And throughout this meeting with Balak, Balaam up-held the Name of The Lord and Balaam refused to deny the Word of God.

However, Satan never gives up.

Later on in Numbers 25:1-3 we find that Balaam gave into his desire for money.

Balaam told the King of Moab have some beautiful young women from Moab tempt the men of Israel into sexual immorality.

So Balak, the king of Moab, paid beautiful Moabite maidens to seduce the men of Israel.

These beautiful young Moabite women invited the Israelite men to their pagan sacrifice feasts which were focused on immorality and idolatry.

And in short order, the Israelite men were eating at the tables of false gods, having sex with these pagan women, and bowing down to worthless idols in Moab.

The result was God ordered the deaths of these rebellious Israelites.

Balaam's desire for money clouded his thinking.

Balaam, who was a prophet of God, should have known better than to offer any advice to the King of Moab that would corrupt the men of Israel.

Balaam compromised his morals, his faith, and his commitment to God because of his love of money.

You see, Balaam wanted the best of both worlds.

Balaam wanted to enjoy the blessings of God but Balaam also wanted to have lots of money.

In this letter to the church at Pergamum Jesus tells the church that they have gone the way of Balaam because some of those Christians wanted the blessings of God but at the same time were indulging in sinful behavior.

Additionally, some of the church leaders compromised their duty by allowing worldly sinful behavior in the church to go unchecked.

While the whole church did not believe in the doctrine of compromise, but the church leaders allowed some members to adversely influence the church.

The second group in the church at Pergamum condemned by Jesus was the Nicolaitans.

The Nicolaitans were a group who claimed to have a special revelation from God that was not given to other church members.

These Nicolaitans tried to take over the leadership role of the priesthood in Judaism.

They claimed freedom from God's Law so they indulged in sexual immorality and in eating food that had been offered to idols.

The Nicolaitans espoused a life of self-gratification.

Both groups embraced the doctrine of tolerance and both groups gave into compromise.

While these religious or philosophical beliefs may seem strange to us today, people in our day are just as guilty of compromising and deceiving ourselves by justifying and tolerating sinful behaviors.

You see, we pick and choose the parts of the Bible that suit us and we ignore the parts of The Bible that we do not agree with.

We rationalize what we want to do by saying; "*God will forgive me.*" or "*It's ok for me to do that this one time.*"

Today many church leaders do not enforce church discipline and allow the sinful behavior of some members to go unchecked in an attempt to avoid conflict in the church.

Listen to a portion of a prayer for America that Billy Graham offered several years ago.

Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance.

We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good, but that is exactly what we have done.

We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and we have reversed our moral values.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called it choice.

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem.

We have abused power and called it politics.

We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have bought the devil's lie that sex outside of marriage is a person's private business.

Divorce is expected.

We have given equal rights to gay couples and called it tolerance.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from sin and set us free. Amen!

Friends we as individuals, as a church, and as a nation have compromised our morals and our faith.

Today we are just as guilty as the Christians at Pergamum were.

This morning we all need to look at the sin in our lives the same way that God looks at sin.

God's word to us today challenges each of us to ask ourselves; "*How have I compromised my faith?*"

"What worldly pleasure am I longing for?"

“Is my behavior pleasing to Jesus?”

Does my joy come from The Lord or from self-gratification, or from my money?

Jesus gave us the remedy for compromise in verse 16.

“Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Repent means to admit our sin, to turn from our sinful attitude and sinful acts and to turn to God.

Jesus is not patient with compromise.

The tense of the verb ***“repent”*** Jesus used here means to repent immediately.

We are not to ignore or to water down any of God’s commandments.

God’s word is crystal clear all sex outside of marriage is a violation of God’s law.

As Christians we are to reject the world’s morals and values and we are to resist Satan’s temptations.

We are to trust The Lord and we must believe that God knows what is best for us.

The Balaamites and Nicolaitans were told to repent immediately of their evil ways and the church in Pergamum was told to repent of its failure to deal with the problem of compromise.

God was calling them to quit compromising the truth, quit condoning what was ungodly, and / or stop craving worldly pleasures and worldly things.

The consequence for not repenting is that we will face the judgment of God’s Word.

Remember Hebrews 4:12 says, ***“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.”***

The Christians at Pergamum may have compromised God’s word to avoid being killed by a Roman sword but they could not escape God’s judgement.

Remember in verse 3 we read these words; ***“These are the words of Him who has a sharp double edge sword.”***

God is very serious about dealing with sin.

So serious that He left His throne in heaven, came to earth as a man, willingly suffered and died on a cross to pay the price of our sins and to free us from the power of sin.

Remember Numbers 25:9 tells us that God caused 24,000 Israelites to die in one day because they compromised their morals and their faith.

Jesus' warnings to the church at Pergamum and to us today are not just suggestions. Jesus' command to repent is to be taken seriously and to be acted upon speedily and with determination.

God's Word to us today as individuals is clear.

We all know God's commandments.

The problem is we want worldly pleasures and worldly things in addition to God's blessings.

We all need to examine ourselves to make sure that our lifestyle is not compromising our morals and / or our Christian beliefs.

We are not to deviate from God's requirement to lead a pure life.

We are not to ignore or compromise God's Law.

As Christians we are to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

James 4:4 says ***"You adulterous people don't you know that the friendship with the world is hatred with God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."***

In verse 17 we read; ***"To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."*** (Revelation 2:17)

The ***"hidden manna"*** refers to spiritual nourishment Jesus will give to His faithful disciples.

In Biblical times white stones were given to the victors in athletic events just like we give trophies and medals to the winners today.

Notice Jesus said He would give a ***"new"*** name to His faithful disciples.

In Biblical times a person name was changed to reflect a major change in their character or status.

As examples, God changed Abram to Abraham and Saul to Paul.

Today many women take their husbands name when they get married.

God's Word to us as a church is not to compromise what is true.

We must confront sinful behavior within the church and we must resist worldly values and secular ways of raising money.

God is very serious about dealing with sin in our lives and in His church. ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what The Spirit says to the churches.”*** (Revelation 2:17)

AMEN