

## The Danger of Compromise – Rev. 2:12-23

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Story of Hunter & Bear (A Russian Parable)

1. A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear.
2. When about to pull the trigger, the bear spoke in a soft, soothing voice, "Isn't it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Come - Let us negotiate."
3. Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, "I want a fur coat."
4. "Good," said the bear, "that's a reasonable request. While you want a fur coat, all I want is a full stomach. Let's see if we can't come to a compromise."
5. So they sat down to negotiate, and after a time the bear walked away alone.
6. The negotiations had been successful - The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat.

#### B. Compromise

1. Compromise is necessary at some points in life.
  - a. most relationships between people require *some* level of compromise as various desires and expectations arise
  - b. marriage involves a *lot* of compromise
  - c. but this is the healthy compromise of dying to self in order to love & serve another
  - d. *politics* is known as the art & science of compromise
2. While compromise may be necessary as it relates to *relationships*, there are some things we must *never* compromise on.
  - a. we can't compromise the traffic laws
  - b. we can't compromise the specifications and tolerances of things like the space shuttle; or we get another space shuttle disaster
  - c. we don't want the pilot of our flight to New York compromising with the co-pilot on a new destination because they're tired of flying to New York.
  - d. and we must never compromise our faith in God.

#### C. Today –

1. Today we'll be taking a look at two churches who were compromised by compromise.
2. Pergamos & Thyatira

### II. PERGAMOS

#### A. V. 12

**12“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:**

1. As in all 7 letters to the churches of chs. 2 & 3, Jesus dictates this letter to the Apostle John, telling him to address it to the “messenger” of the church at Pergamos.
2. Then He describes Himself by using part of the vision John had had of Jesus in ch. 1.
  - a. the sharp two-edged sword John had seen had been coming out of the mouth of Jesus and spoke of the piercing nature of His Word
  - b. the Word of God is often referred to as a sword
  - c. Hebrew 4:12

**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

d. Ephesians 6:17

**And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**

- e. as it comes forth from the mouth of Christ it speaks of “judgment”
- f. and this immediately gives us the flavor of the letter - things are seriously wrong in Pergamos.

**B. V. 13**

**13<sup>a</sup>“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.**

1. Pergamos was the political capital of Asia, and much like the previous city, Smyrna, Pergamos was devotedly loyal to Rome.
2. Jesus says here that Pergamos was the place of Satan's throne.
  - a. a throne is the seat of civil government.
  - b. and in Pergamos, there was an *official policy* on the part of the Roman governor to persecute Christians
  - c. Satan was using the power of the State to oppress believers.
3. But the Church at Pergamos had remained faithful in the face of this persecution:
  - a. there had been one period of persecution that was *extremely* severe during which a man named Antipas had been put to death
  - b. the early church father and historian Tertullian tells us that Antipas was a leader among the Christians in Pergamos and had been arrested as a traitor against Rome.
  - c. it was a false charge, but was used to have him tortured.
  - d. the hatred of the officials toward the faith grew so intense, they thought to once and for all scare the Christians into submission.
  - e. so they placed Antipas inside a bronze bull and placed it in the flames where he roasted alive.
4. While many in the church at Pergamos were faithful, there were others who began to give way under the pressure of persecution.
  - a. they saw that if they just *backed-off* a bit and began to *compromise* with the world, the pressure eased.
  - b. but they felt the guilt of conviction when they compromised --
  - c. so to deal with the guilt, they *rationalized*
  - d. this rationalization developed into a full-blown doctrine of compromise.
  - e. and Jesus says -

**C. Vs. 14-15**

**14<sup>a</sup>But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup>Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.**

1. The story of Balaam is found in the Book of Numbers 22-25.
  - a. it took place during Israel's trip to the Promised Land.
  - b. their route took them along the border of the nation of Moab, and the king of Moab grew fearful that Israel would invade.
  - c. so he called for a well-known prophet named Balaam to come and *curse* Israel.
    - 1) apparently Balak, the king, didn't understand how prophecy *works*.
    - 2) he thought if Balaam cursed Israel, they *would be* cursed by God
    - 3) he didn't understand that a prophet only speaks what God *intends* to do, he doesn't *tell* God what to do.

2. Balak then took him to a vantage point overlooking Israel and said, “Okay Balaam – Give it your best shot – curse them.”
  - a. Balaam paused, looked out over the vast multitude and proceeded to give an eloquent blessing.
  - b. Balak was furious!
  - c. so he took him to a different location and once more invited Balaam to hurl evil at Israel.
  - d. and once more Balaam gave a wonderful blessing.
  - e. so Balak, in frustration told Balaam that he had intended to make him a very rich man, if only he had cursed Israel, but now the fortune was forfeit.
  - f. just last Thursday evening I saw an add on TV that was pretty funny
    - 1) a guy and gal were sitting in a parked car in the rain
    - 2) at the same time, they said to each other – “I need to tell you something.”
    - 3) the, “Okay, you go first,” and finally, *he* did
    - 4) he said, “I can’t marry you right now.”
    - 5) with a sign of disappointment she said, “Oh.”
    - 6) he said, “what did you want to tell me?”
    - 7) she turned a small piece of paper toward him and said quietly, “I just won \$64 million in the lottery.”
    - 8) the look on his face was one of stunned disbelief!
  - g. when Balaam realized the wealth Balak was willing to give him was slipping through his fingers—he quickly back-tracked and explained to the king of Moab that while he couldn’t prophecy a curse on Israel, he did know a way to *bring down* a curse on them.
  - h. he then gave Balak a strategy for getting God to turn against Israel
    - 1) he told the king to select the best looking women of the kingdom and have them dress up in the most seductive garments they could find
    - 2) they would then walk through the camp of Israel, enticing the young men
    - 3) when the Jewish men approached them, the women were to offer themselves to them, *if* they would agree to offer worship to the gods of Moab.
    - 5) you see, Balaam knew God well enough to know that if Israel fell into idolatry, God would send severe judgment among them.
  - i. Balak followed Balaam’s advice, and a plague ripped through the camp of Israel like a hot knife through butter.
3. Jesus said -

**I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.**

- a. the problem with the church at Pergamos was that there were outright heretics *who were being allowed* to carry on and continue within the church.
  - b. Jesus had commended the Ephesians church because they didn’t allow either immorality or false teaching in their midst.
  - c. but here we have a church that accommodated heretics,
  - d. and what the heretics were doing was telling people it was okay to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.
4. It’s important to realize these were central activities in the pagan worship of that time.
    - a. most major social events were held at pagan temples and all of the trade unions worshipped a patron deity.
    - b. so whenever there was a community event or a meeting of those who worked in a particular trade, they would meet at a pagan temple, offer sacrifices to an idol, which they would then feast on themselves; many of the men would then visit the local temple prostitutes.
    - c. it was all part of the pagan social scene and was considered a part of normal civic life.
  5. The Christians stood out because they could not and would not visit pagan temples, engage in feasting on foods offered to idols, or visit ritual prostitutes.

- a. they wouldn't because it was understood that the followers of Christ did not do these things.
- b. in Acts 15, when the main church in Jerusalem was trying to figure out just what Gentile Christians had to observe in order to be included in the Church, they concluded that they had to avoid foods offered to idols, so that they could maintain fellowship with their Jewish-Christian brothers, and they must of course abstain from all immorality. <sup>[1]</sup>
- c. the Apostle Paul had made this clear in his letters – especially in 1 Cor. 8
- 6. For taking this stand, Christians were deemed to be *uptight fanatics* and *dangerous* to society for the reforms they stood for.
- 7. And this is largely what led to them being persecuted.
- 8. So someone suggested that they could *duck* persecution if they just went along with these things.
  - a. they said, “Look, it’s okay to go the pagan temples and enjoy their feasts –
  - b. after all, idols are nothing! There’s only One God and it’s Him we worship.”
  - c. “And it’s okay to visit the temple priestesses because, look, everyone’s doing it. It’s no big deal. Besides, God will understand.”
  - d. “And think of it – by going to the temple, eating and visiting one of the women, you’ll be building relationships with the lost so you can use to share you faith in Christ with them.”
- 9. This is precisely what the Nicolaitans were teaching, so Jesus goes on in v. 15 and says -

**15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.**

- 10. But friends, take careful note of what Jesus says to the church at Pergamos in v. 14.

**But I have a few things against you, because you have there those . . .**

- a. and then he goes on to list the two heretical groups
- b. Jesus flatly condemned the gross abomination and butchering of the truth the Balaamites and Nicolaitans espoused
- c. but the real problem with the CHURCH at Pergamos was that they *tolerated* these guys IN their church!!!!
- 11. The leadership of the church was weak and had not expelled the spiritual poison from its midst.
- 12. They'd made a compromise with error, and the result was that more and more people in the church were being made sick with it.

#### **D. The Progression**

- 1. As we study the 7 letters to the churches in chs. 2 & 3, we find that they represent 7 sequential ages of church history
- 2. Ephesus represents the Church just after the time of the Apostles
  - a. it was busy, faithful, pure, and doctrinally right on
  - b. but it had left the passion of it's first love
  - c. it was all light and no heat.
- 3. The next period of history saw the church enter a time of official persecution, when it became the policy of Rome to oppress the faith: We see that in the letter to Smyrna.
- 4. Pergamos is the 3<sup>rd</sup> church, and what happened is that the devil realized persecution was not going to thwart or hinder the expansion of the gospel –
  - a. on the contrary, the tougher the persecution, the more the church seemed to thrive and grow.
  - b. Tertullian remarked that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”
  - c. the heat of persecution was like a hothouse that helped believers grow quickly.
- 5. Well, satan is no dummy; he's skilled in the ways of war and quickly changed tactics.
- 6. If an outside attack wouldn't work, he'd try something from the inside; and the devil went to church - if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.
- 7. His tactic became one of *compromise* – to corrupt the church through *moral pollution*
- 8. And by so doing, hinder God's blessing and power in the church.

9. The strategy of compromise became two-pronged attack:
  - a. get the *average believer* to compromise with the culture around him/her &
  - b. get the *leadership* to compromise with those who promoted this idea.
10. The leadership ought to have confronted, rebuked and then booted these guys, working diligently to refute their heresies.
11. But they hadn't – they *permitted* them to carry on and spread their deceits.
12. I don't think it's difficult for us to understand how this happened and why the leadership failed to take a stand.
  - a. the false teachers were probably popular and had quite a following.
  - b. indeed, maybe they drew a crowd or were big contributors.
13. Confronting them would probably have led to the loss of large numbers of members.
14. So they grinned and bore it, even though, in their heart of hearts they knew what these guys were teaching was in error.
15. They were more concerned with their *position* than with the health and safety of the flock.
16. And you can be sure the doctrine of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans was popular!
17. But not with Jesus!

#### **E. V. 16**

#### **<sup>16</sup>Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.**

1. Jesus calls them to repent!
  - a. they were not to tolerate heresy!
  - b. just as a healthy body expels poison, they were to do the same.
2. If they don't - Christ says he will come in judgment.
  - a. what form that judgment will take we aren't told but it will be swift and quick.
  - b. the hope is that once the compromisers were confronted and told to depart, they would realize their error and repent.
3. The enduring lesson we learn from this church is the need to maintain our separation from the world and not allow ourselves to become entangled in it and its sin.
  - a. God's word to His people has always been, "Come out from among them and be separate."  
[2]
  - b. in James 4:4 we read that the one who makes him/herself the friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God.
  - c. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters." [3]
4. We must *resist* the subtle temptation to compromise our commitment to the Lord by adopting the ways of the world.
5. We must resist it -
  - a. in ourselves &
  - b. when we see it rising in our brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - c. we ought to go to those who're getting into dangerous territory and share this letter with them – showing Christ's attitude toward moral and spiritual compromise.
6. If compromise isn't resisted early on, then it grows into something hideous, as we see in the next church –
7. We'll take a look at v. 17 and the promise Jesus made to the overcomers in our study on Wednesday.

### **III. THYATIRA**

#### **A. V. 18**

**<sup>18</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God,**

**who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:**

1. Thyatira was the smallest and least important of the 7 cities, yet it receives the longest letter.
2. It was located on the main highway through region and saw a lot of trade.
3. Being a commercial center proved to be the source of the problems in the church.
4. When Jesus describes Himself as the One with “eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass” we say “Oh-oh!” because these things speak of Jesus’s perfect knowledge and judgment.
  - a. He is the One who sees all; even what’s in our hearts
  - b. when we stand before Him, no one will be able to say, “Well, you don’t understand.”
  - c. Jesus not only sees what’s done; He sees WHY!
  - d. and His *judgment* is perfect because it’s based in His perfect and complete *knowledge*.

**B. Vs. 19-20**

**19“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.**

1. Thyatira was another busy church
  - a. *like* Ephesus, they had a lot going on.
  - b. but *unlike* Ephesus, it seems they’d not lost touch with the importance and priority of love.
2. What’s notable is that their diligence had *grown* with time rather than diminished.
  - a. this was a church that had matured in spiritual things and as time went by, they become *more* faithful.
  - b. as they grew, they became more effective.
3. But a poison had been introduced into the church that if not dealt with would ruin all the good.
4. Being a trade and commercial center, the craft & trade guilds I mentioned earlier were even *more prominent* in Thyatira than they had been in Pergamos.
  - a. these guilds were a lot like modern labor unions;
  - b. if you weren’t a member of the guild – you were boycotted and people wouldn’t employ you
  - c. since each guild had it’s own patron god, being a member of the union meant worshipping an idol to that deity.
  - d. the Christians couldn’t do this, and were thus excluded from the economic well-being of the city.
  - e. it was the old story of *you have to go along to get along*.

**20Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.**

5. This is shocking!
  - a. in Pergamos, the problem was the *presence* of those who held the error of compromise.
  - b. in Thyatira - there was a person who was given a platform to *teach* it.
6. Just who was this “Jezebel?”
  - a. it seems pretty clear she’s a real woman, as opposed to some *group* because in writing to Pergamos, Jesus spoke of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans.
  - b. but this is a *specific person* Jesus is referring to; we don’t know if her actual name was ‘Jezebel’ or something else.
  - c. the point is, in Jesus’s eyes - she’s a Jezebel!
  - d. if you’re talking with a friend, and you refer to someone as a *Jezebel*, it’s understood you mean a morally bankrupt and vicious person.
  - e. in 1 Kings 16 we learn Jezebel was a Philistine princess who married Israel’s king Ahab.
    - 1) as you read her story you see she was a paragon of evil.
    - 2) she’s the one responsible for introducing the worship of Baal alongside the worship of God.
    - 3) and when the priest of God wouldn’t go along with her spiritual innovations, she had them

rounded up and executed!

7. The Jezebel of Thyatira claimed to be a prophetess; she claimed to be the *voice of God*.
8. But her teaching went *contrary* to the will of God.
  - a. she repeated the errors of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans
  - b. but whereas they only *reasoned* that compromise was the best course to take in the midst of a world hostile to Christ –
  - c. she said that eating things sacrificed to idols and practicing sexual immorality was the very *command* of God!
9. She taught an *official doctrine of compromise*.
10. And the leadership of the Church at Thyatira *allowed* her to teach this damnable heresy; they *gave her a platform* to teach from, they *sanctioned* her lies.
11. The compromise of the leaders at Pergamos has now grown to be a compromise that not only *tolerates* error, but *promotes* it in Thyatira.
12. And Jesus will not allow His church to be this badly polluted by compromise -

### C. Vs. 21-23

**<sup>21</sup>And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.**

**<sup>22</sup>Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup>I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.**

1. Jesus is both slow & swift to judge.
  - a. He is swift to *declare* the judgment
  - b. but slow to *apply* it.
2. He has already given this woman time to repent, and with that time went the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but she refused to repent.
3. Just like in this room this morning
  - a. there are people here whom God has been working on for a long time
  - b. He's convicted you of your sin and your need of Christ, but you keep resisting
  - c. one day the conviction will cease, and God will honor your choice to reject Him.
  - d. and you will realize, all too late, that you've been a fool!
4. Jesus gave this woman time to repent – but she'd wasted the time and so now, all that's left for her is judgment.
5. For this false prophetess, her judgment will come in the form of a sickbed.
  - a. her couch of immorality will become the scene of her humiliation.
  - b. the picture here is the sexually immoral person who contracts a sexually transmitted disease that slowly wastes them
6. Jezebel has attempted to destroy God's people; God will destroy her.
7. I realize this seems harsh.
  - a. but it reveals just how much God loves His people.
  - b. He loves us so much, He hates what harms us.
  - c. He will judge and punish those who harm us, *if* they fail to repent!
8. While it's too late for Jezebel, there's still time for those poor souls who've been seduced by her lies.
  - a. if they will wake up from the spiritual daze they've been under and repent,
  - b. then they can be saved from her judgment.
  - c. if they fail to repent, then they will *share* in her judgment.
9. Jesus describes this judgment as *great tribulation*.

### D. Great Tribulation

1. According to polls conducted over the last few years, there doesn't appear to be a whole lot of a

*difference* between those who *claim* to be Christians and the culture around them.

2. A large number of Christians have given up on the idea of *absolute truth*; for them, truth is whatever works and whatever you want it to be.
3. Over a third think that couples living together outside of marriage is fine.
4. Lying and theft are understood as being permissible and even preferred in many situations.
5. What's really distressing is that every year the number of those who say there are other ways to heaven besides Jesus keeps creeping up!
6. All of this comes from the fact that we have people in the pulpits of our churches telling us the Bible isn't *really* the Word of God and that God doesn't really expect us to be holy – just really nice people!
7. Biblical Christianity with its call to resist the world and its lusts has been turned into religious *business* in which the Gospel is a product to be packaged, marketed, and sold.
8. The result is that all too many churches have become modern day Thyatiras - just a spiritualized version of the world.
9. Did you note that there was no persecution mentioned for this church?
  - a. no wonder!
  - b. there was nothing here the world found offensive!
  - c. oh my friends, isn't that exactly what the whole seeker sensitive church growth strategy is about – avoiding offending the lost?
10. When the Rapture comes and Jesus takes the genuine believers – I wonder how many of Jezebel's children will be left behind?

#### **E. Vs. 24-25**

**24“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25But hold fast what you have till I come.**

1. To the true believers at Thyatira the Lord says, “Hold your ground and don't let the sickness of spiritual and moral compromise infect you.”
2. That compromise had gone so far they were advocating *gross* sin, calling it “the depths of Satan.”
  - a. this was the perverted idea that grace and forgiveness can only be appreciated by those who've know the depths of evil.
  - b. they reasoned, if grace abounds where sin abounds, then *let the sin abound!*
  - c. as one rock & roll band sang some years back, “If you want to get to heaven, you got to raise a little hell.”

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

##### **A. Hold Fast**

1. Christians in every age have had to deal with the temptation to compromise.
  - a. whether it's been the pressure of persecution that makes us want to weaken our commitment and zeal -
  - b. or the attraction of the world's goodies that makes sin look so inviting
  - c. the pressure to compromise is ever there.
2. The flesh wants so badly to fit in and be indulged with pleasure.
3. But as the followers of Christ we're called to be *different*, to be separate.
4. Rom. 12:1-2

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**



5. There are a couple questions we can ask ourselves to see whether or not our faith has been compromised.
  - a. Whose acceptance do I look for: Christ's or the world's?
  - b. Are my habits in life dictated by a desire to please God or to be held in esteem by people?
6. Christ's words are still true, "No one can serve two masters"
7. That challenge Joshua uttered to the nation of Israel echoes down the halls of time to ring in our ears today, "Choose you this day whom you will serve."

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[1] Acts 15:28-29

[2] 2 Corinthians 6:17

[3] Matt 6:24