

Confronting Our Culture When the Culture Comes to Church (Conquering Spiritual Compromise in Christ's Body)

Sam Horn, Ph.D.

Northland Baptist Bible College

Revelation 2:12-17

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ' These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ '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. ¹⁴ "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. ¹⁵ "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight 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 him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." '

Introduction

Revelation 2 -3 contains the most comprehensive description of the 1st Century Church anywhere in the New Testament as seen from the perspective of her Head – Jesus Christ!

This portion of God's word reveals in very direct and intimate terms exactly how God feels about what He sees to be true about His Church – and this information informs us and helps us to evaluate our own church in order to bring it into line with God's divine expectations!

We tend to look at the church through a very different lens than the one God uses to evaluate whether or not one of His Churches is pleasing to Him – and at the end of the day – pleasing Him is the only thing that counts!

And to help us – He has told us the things that please and displease Him in His church!

We are taught from His letter to *Ephesus* that God is not pleased merely by our commitment to orthodoxy in doctrine and in practice if that right doctrine and right practice is not wrapped up in a passionate and personal love for Him! *Ephesus reminds us of the danger of displeasing God by failing to love Him passionately!*

We are taught from His letter to *Smyrna* that He is pleased by the faithfulness of His people in the midst of suffering! One of the primary ways He has chose to advance the gospel in the world is through allowing His church to pass through the fire of suffering – and when we remain passionately, lovingly, faithful in the midst of the fiercest part of the fire – it please Him immensely! *Smyrna reminds us of our need to remain fervent and faithful in the fire of suffering!*

The third letter is written to a church dwelling in the very heart of pagan darkness in the city of Pergamum. In this letter Christ is going to approve of things they are doing well but He is going to address a massive concern that if not corrected, will undo all the good being done by this church. The essence of His concern has to do with the assimilation of the culture into the church as the church at Pergamum attempts to live for His glory in a pagan context.

The City:

- Pergamum was 70 miles North of Smyrna and about 15 miles inland.
- It was one of the more famous and prestigious cities in Asia Minor – in John’s day, it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia.
- It has a long history of wealth and prestige – and was ideally situated for commerce, politics, and military ventures.
- Pergamum was the site of an immense library numbering some 200,000 volumes rivaled only by Athens and Alexandria in that part of the world.
- It housed the famous temple of Zeus with the largest statue of Zeus known in the world at that time – one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient world.
- And perhaps most importantly – it was the center of Emperor worship in that part of the world.
- Like Smyrna – it had been given the privilege of having a temple built to a living emperor when in A.D. 29 Augustus allowed a temple to be built and dedicated to his honor and worship.
- *It was therefore one of the most strategic places for the gospel and yet at the same time one of the hardest places in the world of that day for the church to exist and maintain a faithful testimony to Christ and His truth!*

The Church:

- We know very little about the founding or the history of this church other than there was a group of believers that God had called out of this pagan city and He had established them to be a beach-head for truth in the very center of one of Satan’s most important strong-holds for darkness.
- These believers were living in the midst of the most idolatrous and immoral pagan culture – and they were willing to pay the price for standing for Christ in the midst of this moral and spiritual darkness.
- And – this pagan culture was not passive – it was aggressively acting against them to the point that one of their number – Antipas had already paid for his faithfulness to Christ with his own life as a martyr.
- Clearly – this was a church that was doing a great job standing for Christ against the external enemies that threatened them.
- BUT – they were not doing so well against another, more subtle enemy – Satan had infiltrated the church with people who were living lives that contradicted the truth of the Gospel – and this church was willfully tolerating those people!

- If this continued, Christ knew that it would prove to be the undoing of this great and strategic truth!
- Churches like this are not initially destroyed by false doctrine – they are more often destroyed by a toleration of false living by those in their midst who believe better than they behave!
- And if a church doesn't address the issue of false living – sooner or later, the door is opened to false doctrine!
- And so Christ comes both to commend and to cleanse this church.

Christ - His Title: “He who has the sharp two-edged sword”

- This speaks of Christ's authority over His church to say what He will say.
- This speaks of Christ's ability to evaluate His Church accurately.
- This speaks of Christ's aptitude to execute righteous judgment on those in His church who *propagate error, promote idolatry, practice immorality, and permit a disregarding of obeying the demands of sound doctrine.*

I. Divine Approval (vv 12-13)

" And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ' These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ "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.

A. I Know Your Position: “and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.”

- These believers were living for Christ in a city that was:

1. _____ Correct
2. _____ Perverted
3. _____ Depraved

B. I Know Your Practice: “And you hold fast to My Name and did not deny My faith”

1. You hold fast to Christ's Name in the midst of _____
2. You remain true to Christian Truth in the midst of _____

But – in spite of the wonderful approval God gave to this church – there was a danger that He spotted in their midst – and in light of this danger, He gives them a direct admonition!

II. **Direct Admonition (vv 14-15)**

¹⁴ *"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. ¹⁵ "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

They had been vigilant in keeping pure doctrine and maintaining their commitment to Christ in the face of strong pressure externally – but – they had allowed something to come inside the church that would eventually destroy them if they continued to tolerate it in their midst!

There was in the midst of their commitment to sound doctrine a lax attitude toward sound living! In other words – they believed much better than they had behaved!

The real problem was not what they were teaching – their doctrine was sound and their faithfulness to Christ's Truth was commended. Their problem was not what they were teaching – but what they were tolerating!

A. ***A licentious lifestyle***

1. _____ – the error of Balaam
2. _____ – the error of the Nicolaitans

And this was being justified on some very deceptive grounds:

B. ***A loose approach to the application of Scripture***

And, when the Head of the Church evaluated them – He not only called this to their attention by admonishing them – He issued a strong warning in which He directs them to repent!

III. **Strong Appeal (vv 16-17)**

¹⁶ *'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight 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 him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."'*

A. ***The Spiritual Requirement – Repent!***

Christ is issuing a strong directive – do it and do it right now!

1. _____ – I will come quickly
2. _____ – I will punish severely

B. The Spiritual Reward – “I will give. . .”

1. _____ -- I will give strength and sustenance in the midst of this hard place!
2. _____ -- I will give a new character that is pure and permanent!
3. _____ – this speaks of intimacy with God – only you and God will know this name!

There are messianic and millennial implications to all three of these images! *“If you are faithful to me in this life in the midst of a pagan culture – and if you remain pure and holy by refusing to tolerate sin and the things I hate in your midst – then I will give you a sure and secure place in my kingdom!”*

Conclusion: *Are you Conquering Compromise or is Compromise slowly and subtly conquering you?*

The danger at Pergamum was their willingness to tolerate and give Christian fellowship to those who believed and taught that salvation gave a person a license to indulge in the perverse idolatry and immoral living on the surrounding pagan culture!

The church of Jesus Christ must not tolerate within her borders those who lower the standard of truth’s requirements! This is not a question of holding the truth. The church at Pergamum was orthodox. It is a question rather of the right application of truth. The error of these men is one that in subtle form, threatens all churches even until this hour! It is that if a man’s creed be right, his conduct does not so much matter. [But] truth never excuses sin! The test of doctrine is purity of conduct and character! (Morgan, p. 106-107)

Lessons for Life:

1. Compromise never comes _____
2. Compromise is always a departure in _____ from the _____ of sound doctrine!
3. Compromise may start in poor _____ but it always ends in the perversion of _____!

Either we will adjust our lifestyle to the truth – or we will end up adjusting the truth to fit our lifestyle!