The Church without Boundaries
Revelation 2:12-17
11-8-2026

The child looked to be only 4-5 years old but he was making quite a scene in the middle of the store. His mother looked embarrassed, and from the tone of her voice, she was feeling very helpless. Those who were aware of what was happening, felt uncomfortable as we watched the drama play out before us.

As they walked through the store, the small boy was constantly talking back to his mother. When she said it was time to go, he refused to budge and threw a tantrum. When she tried to get him to leave, he started yelling and calling her names. When she tried to take his hand, it quickly escalated and he began kicking her. As they slowly made their way to the exit, he continued to berate and hit her while she did nothing to stop him.
It was clear who was in control.

While this was an extreme example it is not unusual for parents to compromise their role to appease a rebellious or unhappy child

> **As popular Christian author, family and child psychologist, John Rosemond wrote, "Our society has come to believe that it is wrong to make a child feel bad and the parents' role is to affirm and please their child.**

It's not uncommon to hear things like school boards and districts removing books and changing curriculum because of parental complaints that issues like the civil rights movement and slavery make their children uncomfortable.
Though I suspect it is really the parents that are uncomfortable

> **It forgets the often-quoted wisdom of George Santayana that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.**

as difficult as it can be, sometimes the most loving things we can do is say no and set boundaries, to stand up for what is true and right instead of compromising them to be accepted

without boundaries, anything goes and compromise becomes the order of the day

What is true of parents is especially true in the church
When our primary concern becomes making people comfortable, feel good, and be happy, compromise with the world will become more important that being faithful to our Lord and His word

When we are less concerned with what God says to us than what the world may think of us, we have compromised our faith.

> **That's why Jesus warned in Luke 6:26 us to beware when all men speak well of you.**

That is what was happening in the church of Pergamum, the third church addressed in the book of Revelation
It was in danger of becoming a church without boundaries, willing to compromise the truth of God's word to find acceptance and approval from the world.

Each of the 7 letters to the churches draws on the description of Jesus found in chapter one, highlighting the particular characteristics that were most relevant to the church being addressed

So to the church at Ephesus, Jesus is the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands and holds the seven stars in his hand. Because he walks among them and holds them firmly in his hand, he knows of their hard work, good deeds, and zealousness for what they believed.
But he also knows they had lost their first love, become harsh and judgmental.
So calls them to repent and recapture it before it is too late.

To Smyrna, He is the first and the last, the one who was dead but is now alive. Because He is the eternal one who faced the worst life could throw at him and came out victorious, he understands what they are going through and will stand with them in their afflictions and poverty and persecution.

And now to the church at Pergamum, he says in 2:12,

> **"*"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.***

It is the sword of God's word which 1:16 comes out of his mouth to penetrate the darkness of our lives to expose sin
As Gods word, not mans, it is the standard by which all nations and peoples shall be judged and held accountable

> **As Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us, "*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. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*"**

And the message to Pergamum therefore concerns his word and remaining faithful to it, calling them to live up to his standards

Unlike parents who might be afraid to say no to their children because it may upset them, God does set boundaries
There are things to which he does say no, stop, don't
His primary concern is not to keep us happy but rather what is in our best interest

I. The message begins as each of the messages to the seven churches begin, with commendation

> ***"I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. 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."*** **(Revelation 2:13)**

That they are commended for remaining true to His name is saying a lot in a city like Pergamos
Where opposition was great and where Jesus says Satan lived and had his throne.

It was a city with a long and proud history which vied with both Ephesus and Smyrna for preeminence.

Ephesus may have been called the first and greatest city of Asia. The ancient Greek geographer and historian Strabo said it was second only to Rome in importance and size.
Smyrna was widely accepted as the first in beauty, called the flower and glory of Asia. Here Strabo said it was a flower of beauty such as earth and sun had never shown to mankind.

But because of its history, Strabo said Pergamum was by far the most famous city in Asia
For a variety of reasons, many considered it, not Ephesius, to be first and greatest overall.

1. It was first in power

Pergamum laid claim to being the official seat of Roman power for the region
As the place where the proconsul lived, it was the administrative center where he exercised the power of the sword from his seat of judgement
the description of Jesus draws a contrast with this, describing him as having the sword of judgement coming from his mouth

As the seat of Rome's earthly power, it was therefore the principal protector and overseer of Hellenistic culture
where nothing and no one of importance could enter the area without first going through it
Being the center of power which all too often was directed against the church, is it any wonder then that Jesus said it is where Satan lived and had his throne

If Ephesus was New York, and Smyrna was San Francisco, one writer said Pergamum was Asia Minors Washington DC

2. But it was also first in education

At the time of Johns writing, it had become like the Boston of Asia Minor, the center of learning in that part of the world
With over 200,000 parchments, its library was second only to the great library at Alexandria in Egypt

> **In the 3rd century BC, their king Eumenes tried to surpass even Alexandria when he persuaded Aristophanes, the head librarian in Alexandria, to come to Pergamum**
> **At that time scrolls and writing materials were all made of papyrus from Egypt.**
> **When the Pharoah, Ptolemy found out about this, he did what he believed would put an end to Pergamum's ambitions and placed an embargo on all exports of papyrus**
> **In response the scholars at Pergamum developed a new and what turned out to be a far superior material for writing made of animal skins. It was called a Pergamene sheet or Pergamene Charta which was later shortened to the word parchment.**

And it was there in the center of learning that the one whose word would judge the nations commends them for remaining true and faithful even to the point of death.

3. Pergamum was first in education, first in power, but also first in religion

Smyrna may have had the great temple to Diana, but Pergamum boasted of five major temples within it

one to Athena, goddess of wisdom and the arts
another to Dionysus, the god of wine

there was one to Asclepios, god of medicine
people came to Pergamum from all over the world to visit the temple and priests of Asclepios
He was called the Pergamese god, the god of healing represented by the symbol of the two intertwined snakes which is still the symbol for medicine today
And it was here that was found the closest thing to hospitals that the first century had
for this reason, Asclepios was worshipped and called the Savior whom people came to not just for physical healing but salvation as well

greatest of all the temples was the temple and alter to Zeus, king of the gods which they referred to as Soter Zeus or Zeus the savior.

The alter was shaped like a giant throne in honor of the battle of the giants celebrating their victory over the gods of chaos.
That throne, considered to be one of the greatest achievements of ancient sculpture and is now located in the Pergamum museum in Berlin.

The city had a long proud history of celebrating their various rulers as both gods and saviors
Smyrna may have built the first temple to the emperor, but Pergamum boasted of three separate temples devoted to the emperor
It became the center and rabid promoter of the imperial cult

How difficult it must have been for those early believers to walk through the streets daily hearing others proclaimed as savior
Where you could worship any gods you wanted so long as Caesar was one of them,
Pressure to compromise, to confess Caesar as Lord and offer the sacrifices so you could get along

Pressure we still can find today when it is okay to believe anything you want so long as you accept other views as equally true and valid, many paths to god, people say

> **As Erwin Lutzer, pastor of the historic Moody Church in Chicago pointed out, "the god of cultural America is as tolerant as a TV talk show host, as loving as a doting parent, and as irrelevant as last year's calendar.**

It was here in this center of learning, power, and religion that Satan lived and made his throne
Where it would have been difficult to remain true and live faithful to the Lord

Yet Jesus commends Pergamum saying good work, you have remained true and did not renounce your faith

> He who is faithful in little Jesus said, can be trusted to be faithful with much.

II. After the commendation comes the condemnation

Jesus continues in verse 14, "*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. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*" (Revelation 2:14–16)

If I were to summarize the condemnation in one word, it would be compromise

While the church had largely remained true and faithful, their official doctrines and teachings sound, their faith real though increasingly misguided and compromised

Jesus says they had some though certainly not a majority, who held to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans

Balaam, you may remember was a prophet of Midian found in the book of Numbers chapters 32-34
Balak the king had offered to pay him handsomely to curse the people of Israel for him in hopes that would enable him to defeat them in battle.
Yet instead, 3 times the Lord had him bless them
Apparently, Balaam still wanted that reward from the king so he told him that the way to defeat Israel was not by direct attack but by compromise, to subvert and corrupt them and the values and practices which God said would set them apart as His people
Through immorality, it would sever them from the source of their strength, which was the Lord
Balaam's name became a byword in Israel for moral corruption

And while scholars don't know exactly who the Nicolaitan's were, it is widely believed that too were connected with promoting immorality.

In 1871, a retired American businessman named Heinrich Schliemann, began excavating an ancient city in Turkey which to the amazement of many turned out to be the lost city of Troy. Today you can still see the ruins of its massive towers and walls which were 16 feet thick. According to Homer's the Iliad, the Greeks besieged Troy for 10 years without success. After the death of the hero Achilles, many wanted to give up the fight, but Odysseus, the king of Ithica, came up with a plan to get the Greek army into Troy. Odysseus built a huge wooden horse which he and some of his warriors hid inside of. After leaving it at the gates of Troy, the Greek army seemed to sail away. The Trojans, thinking they had given up and left the horse as a gift, brought it inside the gates. That nights while most were sleeping, the Greek ships quietly returned, the soldiers inside the horse slipped out and opened the city gates and the Greek army quickly conquered the city.

The story of the Trojan Horse and fall of Troy have come to represent the subversion of anything from within. That was what was beginning to happen in the church at Pergamos. Whereas Satan was trying to crush the church at Smyrna by persecution from without, he was trying to collapse the Pergamos congregation through corruption from within.

That is how our great enemy operates. He either tries to crush us with hardship and hostility, or to corrupt us with compromise. And we need to take heed to the fact that what 10 years of outward assault on Troy failed to accomplish, was done in one night when the enemy was

brought within. The Trojan Horse at Pergamos was what Jesus refers to here in Revelation as the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

While most are commended for their faith, yet in the name of love and acceptance, they seemed to be willing to accept immorality
Seeking acceptance, in the name of love and tolerance, allowing false teachings and practices to enter the church, wanting to make people comfortable

Moral compromise in the name of love and tolerance will sacrifice truth
And if we don't stand true to God and his word, what do we really stand for?

In many ways, this church was the opposite of the one at Ephesus
Where the Ephesians were commended for rejecting the Nicolaitans, yet in their zealousness for truth, had lost their first love.
The Pergamese on the other hand, were accepting the teachings and practices of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, and were sacrificing truth for a misguided sense of love and compassion

It's like people saying as long as you believe in God, it doesn't really matter what you believe about Him
Or the common view that there are many equal paths to God

And here Jesus stands with the sharp double-edged sword of his word and his standards, coming from his mouth by which he will judge the nations

Challenging his church to stand for him and keep the boundaries needed to remain faithful and true rather than compromising in a desire to find greater acceptance with the world

I used to have a friend that was a child psychologist. In one of our conversations, he told me about a woman who came in to see him who was having a lot of trouble with her son. He wouldn't listen, was acting out, and she wasn't able to do anything to control him. As they talked, my friend said it became obvious that the problem was that this mother had spoiled her son rotten, given him everything he wanted and always let him have his way. When he asked her why she doesn't just tell the boy no sometimes, the mother answered, because he might cry. My friend's immediate response to her was, So?

Sometimes in the name of love we fail to set any boundaries and become willing to compromise, willing to give in rather than say no because we don't want to offend or want to be accepted.
Yet scripture says God disciplines those he loves. He sets boundaries.

Jesus tells the church, repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against you with the sword of my mouth, he will hold us to his word and his ways.

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. Some of the bread of heaven which is Jesus himself, who said,

"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living

bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”” **(John 6:48–51)**

Along with this bread from heaven, he promises a white stone.
White stones were used in courts of law.
If someone was found innocent they were given a white stone, if guilty, a black one
In Christ we are forgiven declared innocent as he took our sins upon himself
White stones were also used like a ticket for entrance to some public event.
Along with being acquitted and forgiven, in Christ we are given a ticket to heaven

And with it a new name known only to Him.
Names weren’t just labels placed on people to identify them; they represented a person’s nature and character.
In Christ we are made new and whole, washed clean and pure in Christ.

Which is, of course, what we are about to celebrate here in a moment with the Lords Supper