

When the Church Compromise

The Church of Pergamos
Revelation 2:12-17

The message to the Church of Pergamos is to a church that moved away from Jesus Christ through intermarriage (that is, mixing corrupting and ungodly practices in with their faith). When a church or an individual reasons that a little bit of worldliness won't hurt, they are at the beginning of their downward slide away from God.

Degeneration is the law of all life apart from God. Rust, decomposition, decay and corrosion are a common event in the material universe. The sun, rain, and even the atmosphere carries elements of destruction. Even the stars in the heavens grow old. The only One who never decays in all existence is God.

The risen Lord, Jesus Christ speaks to the churches in Asia Minor and shows us that the same law is at work within the Church. Jesus says,

“Apart from Me, ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

The church or the individual that stands apart from Christ is in danger of degenerating in their spiritual walk and fellowship with the Lord.

Life never stands still. The further we remove ourselves from God's truth and the practice of His Word, the more rapid our spiritual decline. At Pergamos the church mixed their pagan culture into their worship and into their way of life.

Pergamos means, “through marriage” or “mixed marriage.” It is a compound Greek word comprising, *Per* meaning “mixed” or “through” and *Gamos* meaning, “marriage.” Because the church at Pergamos mixed parts of the pagan world system around them into the church, they began to degenerate in their fellowship with God.

Ephesus was the first church mentioned in Revelation. A church of great desire unto the Lord. It had zeal with a simple structure and their sole strength was resting on the Lord. But their attitude of love began to slip. This was a literal 1st Century church, but it also represented the common problem that plagued the 1st Century – they were losing their first love.

Smyrna was the second church mentioned. It was a church of myrrh because many faithful believers were suffering and dying for their faith.

Though this church literally existed in John's day, history shows us that the church universally suffered through ten periods of persecution between AD 100 and AD 313 (Rev. 2:10). Then edicts of the Roman persecution ended.

Pergamos is our third church. It existed in the apostle John's day, yet the problems of hierarchal government within the church, and divided allegiance became a prominent problem for most churches, from AD 313 to about AD 600.

PERGAMOS' HISTORY

It's Beginnings

The city has ancient roots and predates 600 BC. The residents were a powerful tribe, which resisted Persian dominion. When Babylon fell in 539 BC a very interesting thing happened. Many of the Babylonian Magi migrated to Pergamos to establish their occult system of worship in the city. They were trained in the deep arts of the occult and for centuries dominated the rule of the city.

I suspect this is the reason for the title Jesus gave the city, "**Where the seat of Satan is.**" History traces the movement of the "Seat of the first false religions." It was first established by Nimrod in Babel and remained in Ancient Babylon before it migrated to Pergamos in 539 BC.

The first fruits of this demonic move to Pergamos were the explosion of pagan cults. Unlike Ephesus, which had the shrine to Diana. Or Smyrna, with the temple to the Emperor. Pergamos was filled with the occult. They had **Dionysus** – A feminine sexual cult. The Greek god of wine, dying and the resurrection. **Asclepius** – A snake wrapped around a pole and was the medical cult, the god of healing, reincarnated as a snake. **Athena**, the god of Mt Olympus and skilled trader and practice of **Emperor Worship**. **Zeus** was the most prominent god in the city. The altar of Zeus was the largest altar in the world.

The intellectual library built by the Magi was the second largest library in the world at that time with over 200,000 books. They had the largest medical center in the world dedicated to Asclepius. It was a city of cultural beauty and was a city of barbarism and intolerance to Christians.

In Revelation 2:13 we find a believer by the name of **Antipas** killed in the city. We know nothing about him, but we do know he must have had a real

struggle with the hostile cults ruled by Satan. Antipas means, “*against all*” and his stands must have appeared to be against a whole city teeming with idolatry.

PERGAMOS - A MIXED CHURCH

It was a church of faithfulness and a church of falsehood.

The Faithful Part of the Church – Rev. 2:13

They preached the gospel in the face of oppression. Revelation 2:13a says, “***They held fast to Christ’s Name.***” They preserved under pagan pressure “***And hast not denied my faith***” (Rev. 2:13). They stood up and said, Yes, I’m a believer in Jesus, even when it meant being mocked or were beaten for their faith. They increased in size and new believers were added . . . so they never gave up.

The False Part of the Church – Rev. 2:14-15

Two things were happening within the walls of their assembly.

(1) The Doctrine of Balaam: The sole strength of the Church was being mixed with an allegiance with the world. Instead of trusting Jesus, they tended to trust the world. It was a practical compromise of the faith. Jesus called it the **Doctrine of Balaam**.

Balaam was a prophet who was hired by a nation to bring a curse upon Israel. Every time Balaam set out to curse Israel, God interfered and made Balaam only pronounce a blessing on the nation. Frustrated that he could not earn the fortune the Nation of Moab was offering him Balaam then proposed another plan – a simple plan.

He encouraged the king of Moab to send beautiful women to work in the marketplace outside the camp of Israel. He encouraged the Moabite maidens to flirt with the young Hebrew men. And eventually these young men began to chase after them.

The Moabites promoted intermarriage and invited the Hebrew men to their worship rituals. Thus, Israel unwittingly practiced false worship. Balaam knew this would arouse God’s anger and cause His wrath to fall on Israel. Israel compromised their faith.

Apparently, this was the tactic of the cults to bring the Christians into their camp. Therefore, believers were invited to their “feasts.” The Christians began to marry unsaved spouses. Tolerance was encouraged. Open dialog was promoted with the cult Priests. They looked for things in common, and the church became defiled.

This is not just a problem with those indigenous to Pergamos – Everyday Christians face decisions of compromise or faithfulness. Today’s world is challenging the church to compromise in numerous ways – Such as in all sorts of purity issues, fidelity in marriage, gender identity, creation, divine design, theology, ecumenicalism, and much more.

Many Christians have mixed themselves with the world so that there is little influence of Christ left in their lives. Many have adopted humanistic thinking. They lack spiritual conviction. They hold to a watered-down version of Christianity

Those who have let down their walls of purity, set their eyes on improper things. This creates a spiritual bond with the world. A marriage of **ideas**. A marriage of **values**. A marriage of **faiths**. In doing so **it breaks our bonds with Christ**.

The doctrine of compromise has penetrated today’s church. Seminaries have dialog with apostates. Religious leaders who openly deny the doctrines of God are permitted to lead in prayer and to take part in evangelistic campaigns.

Today believers think it is OK to visit bars, night clubs, casino’s, see sensual and provocative movies etc. This is the doctrine of Balaam in practice. You want to know how Jesus feels about this? Note the demeanor of Christ in Revelation 2:12.

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things **saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.**”

Christ reveals Himself to the Pergamos church as “he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” This “sword” refers to the Word of God -- [Heb. 4:12].

Christ has no tolerance with pagan practices and false teachings that are infiltrating the church. The cure for the Pergamos Church is the Word of God. The Word sanctifies the church [John 17:17]. Jesus prayed to our heavenly Father to, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” He also

declared in John 15:3 – “ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”

His word brings joy, for Jesus said, in John 15:11 “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” And in John 16:33 Jesus said His Word brings peace. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

The Dark Ages could have been avoided had the Word of God been heeded.

Parliamentary Compromise (Rev. 2:15). The Nicolaitans were within the church at Pergamos. At Ephesus the Nicolaitans were outside the church and recognized as false apostates. But at Pergamos these rulers over the people were coming into power.

This also is considered a compromise, because when there is a hierarchy beyond the local church people tend to lose sight on sin, worship and spiritual exercise.

The eldership becomes unaccountable to the people and God. Rather they usually become accountable only to their organization. The eldership in time tends to separate themselves from the people and eventually assumes all the spiritual responsibility. The people under this system lose their concern for a relationship with God. “Let the professional’s do it.” “Let the Priests tell us.”

THE HISTORY OF PERGAMOS HAS:

It was a Cultic Center. It was barbaric in nature and hostile towards Christianity. The Pergamos church had a faithful nucleus. They also had a number of compromising Christians and a growing number of false believers. But the practical compromises were overthrowing those who sought to follow the true faith.

Between AD 313 to AD 600 the Pergamos compromise spread into many of the churches in the Roman Empire.

After the Roman Emperor, Diocletian died on May 1, A.D. 305, Constantine and Maximinus II contended for the throne of Rome. Constantine marched outside the city of Rome to the Milvian Bridge and camped on the east side of the river.

During the night before the battle Constantine said he had a vision of a cross in the sky with the words written on it "By this sign conquer." He called together the Christians elders that night and was supposedly converted to Christianity. He won the battle the next day and immediately set the Christians free.

The Christians came out of the catacombs to find that they were now popular. They no longer had to hide when they worshipped. Pagan temples and priest once on Rome's payroll were cut back.

The church was now paid by Rome. They now had state money to build their churches. Church leaders who were once poor and poorly clothed were set on gold thrones with nobles and robed in beautiful garments. During the early part of this marriage with the state the church was wildly accepted.

But doctrinal problems soon arose with the followers of Arian who declared Jesus was created by God and not eternal. He said Jesus was of like substance but not the same substance as God.

They created a great council were Constantine, now the Pontifex Maximus and High Priest of the Pagan and Christian faiths, presided over the council in A.D. 325. The whole council stood as Constantine marched to the head of the assembly and sat on a golden throne.

In the midst of the discussion Arian swayed the council to the point that they would have voted to deny the eternity and deity of Christ. Then one man named Athanasius, a hermit from Africa sprang to his feet in his chiefly tiger skin robe. He stood against the whole council.

He tore back his cloak and disclosed the great scars from being thrown into the arena among the wild beasts. He cried, "These are the brand-marks of the Lord, Jesus Christ and I cannot hear this blasphemy any longer."

He proceeded to defend so clearly the doctrine of Christ, His deity and His eternity that no one doubted for a moment that God had sent this man. Had not Athanasius stood against all the compromising church it could have cast a fatal blow.

Still spiritual deadness prevailed. Worldliness of all sorts began to fill the churches and hierarchy gradually formed over all the churches.

The Proclamation to Pergamos

Repent or else (Rev. 2:16).

Jesus is calling to them to remember, repent and return to Him. In Rev. 2:17 Jesus gives a two-fold promise to those who stand against compromise. (1) Eat of the Manna and you will find “Spiritual Strength” – Return and keep the Word of God (cf. John 15:4-5). (2) Repent and return to me and you will find a “White Stone with a New Name” that is, you will receive “spiritual life” and a special reward.