

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

THE COMPROMISING CHURCH
Revelation 2:12-17

INTRODUCTION:

A few decades ago, this Oriental creeping vine called “kudzu” was introduced into the Southeast part of our country for the purpose of providing ground cover and erosion control.

Any Southerner can tell you the result. This vine gradually encroached on the land and, where it was not constantly kept in check, it choked out all other plant life.

It climbs utility poles and following the connecting lines to span roadways and other obstacles in its steady onslaught to take over every inch of available land. In fact it now covers approximately 7 million acres in the Southeast.

In short, from its innocent beginnings, it has become a bane and a pest to the land. In much the same way, compromise seeks to infiltrate and take over the local church and its work.

Its beginnings always seem small and innocuous, but it stifles the true work of the Spirit in God’s people and smothers the Gospel in the twisting vines of a weak, watered down, worldly message.

Compromise in the dictionary is defined as, “a weakening of principles, a settlement or an adjustment of conflicting claims, and principles by yielding a part of each.”

It is also defined as, “an endangering, especially of reputation; or an exposure to danger, suspicion, or scandal...”

Compromise is slowly making its way through many churches today through current trends happening in the name of Christ that are undermining the authority of Scripture.

This compromise is taking shape through a movement called the emerging church.

This movement of so-called evangelical Christians has compromised the truth of Scripture and no longer view it as the ultimate authority. In fact the Scripture is no longer viewed as having clarity, but as being interpretively complex.

Because of this, many from this movement deny the existence of absolute truth and emphasize that our knowledge can never be certain.

In fact many emerging church leaders have replaced biblical proclamation of truth with an open dialogue in their services.

Many from this movement are seeking to deconstruct and reconstruct the church’s methods, standards and even beliefs.

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Not only is biblical preaching being replaced, but many within this movement are seeking to replace the gospel of Jesus Christ with an emphasis on a social and humanistic gospel.

For example, the leading proponent of the Emerging Church Movement, Brian D. McLaren does not even embrace the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross for sin.

In addition, an experiential mystical form of Christianity is being promoted to attract and reach the postmodern generation.

In so doing, Christianity is being dumbed-down as the Word of God comes under attack and images and sensual experiences are being promoted as the key to experiencing God.

Many church leaders from this movement are beginning to consider that the Reformation went too far and bridges are being established that lead in the direction of unity with the Roman Catholic Church.

In order to reinvent Christianity we are told that we need to go back to the past and find out what kind of experiences were successful to attract people to Christianity.

The experiences being promoted include the use of icons, candles, incense, and even Catholic liturgy for use in the worship service.

Clearly the emerging church movement is compromising the authority of the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But should we be surprised? No! Compromise is not something new facing the church. There is nothing new under the sun. In our text today in **Revelation 2:12-17** we read of the Compromising Church in Pergamum.

Remember that these churches mentioned here in **Revelation 2-3** are seven literal churches in the seven postal districts of Asia Minor; and that the Apostle John who records these messages had previously ministered to these churches before he was exiled on the Island of Patmos.

Remember also that we are examining these seven messages to these seven literal churches so that we might better understand the characteristics that Christ desires His churches to have.

So we will examine 6 aspects of the message to the church in Pergamum that we might understand the characteristics which Christ desires His church to possess.

I. We must first understand the Commission to write to the Church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12).

This commission is recorded for us in **Revelation 2:12**. John writes, “*And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write.*”

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Just as in the previous two messages, there are two features to this commission.

The first feature of the commission is that it is written to an angel. Remember that the term angel can literally be rendered “messenger” as in **Luke 7:24** or **James 2:5**.

So the letter is written to the messenger in the church at Smyrna. Remember that this messenger is likely the message giver and is best identified as the pastor of the church in Pergamum.

Why is this letter directed to the pastor? The letter is directed to the pastor not just because he is responsible for the spiritual condition of the church, but primarily because he is the one who can communicate this message to the congregation.

The second feature of the commission is that it is written to a specific church in a specific city. In this case it is directed to the church in the city of Pergamum.

It is necessary that we have a good understanding of what the city of Pergamum was like. So what was Pergamum like?

The City:

The city of Pergamum like the other seven churches of the book of Revelation was a city of significance.

1) The City of Pergamum was a city of Geographic Significance.

Pergamum was located in the western part of Asia Minor about 15-20 miles from the Aegean Sea.

Much of Pergamum was built on a large conical hill towering some 1,000 feet above the plain.

Sir William Ramsey commented, “Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor it gives the traveler the impression of a royal city.

2) The City of Pergamum was a city of Historical Significance.

The history of Pergamum can be traced back to the 5th century BC and it served as the capital of a kingdom varying in size for 149 years.

After it was bequeathed to the Roman empire, it served as the capital of Asia for two and half centuries.

3) The City of Pergamum was a city of Cultural Significance.

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Pergamum was a center of learning, medicine and religious books. It boasted of a library with 200,000 volumes and became the home of many princes, priests and scholars who wished to study there.

So impressive was Pergamum's great library that Mark Antony later sent it to his lover, Queen Cleopatra of Egypt.

Pergamum's huge library was second only to that of Alexandria, Egypt. According to legend, parchment was invented by the Pergamenes to provide writing material for their library.

Seeking to build a library rivaling the one in Alexandria, a third century BC Pergamene king attempted to lure the librarian from Alexandria to his city.

Unfortunately, the Egyptian ruler got wind of the plan, refused to allow the librarian to leave, and in retaliation prohibited the further export of papyrus to Pergamum.

Out of necessity, the Pergamenes developed parchment made out of treated animal skins, for use as a writing material.

4) The City of Pergamum was a city of Religious Significance.

Pergamum may have been significant geographically, historically and culturally. But its main importance came in the realm of religion.

Where Ephesus was the political center of Asia Minor and Smyrna was the economic center of Asia Minor, Pergamum was the religious center of Asia Minor.

Pergamum had many temples devoted to idol worship and was full of altars and sacred groves. In Pergamum there were temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysius, Caesar and Asklepius.

It was the temple to Asklepius (the god of healing) that was one of the most important in the city.

A medical school was attached to the pagan cult of Asklepius, and the well-known symbol of the modern day medical profession (a serpent twined around a staff) was its insignia.

People came from all over the world to be healed by the god of Asklepius, who was worshipped in the form of a living serpent fed in the temple.

The serpent was intimately connected with one of the ways in which cures were effected. Sufferers were allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple, while non-poisonous snakes were released.

If the sufferer was touched by the harmless snakes during the night, it was equivalent to being touched by the god of Asklepius and he would be healed.

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Certainly the city Pergamum was a city of geographical, historical, cultural and religious importance. But, what about the church in Pergamum?

The church of Pergamum is only mentioned here in the Scriptures. It was most likely founded during the three-year ministry of the Apostle Paul in Ephesus while on his third missionary journey.

It says in **Acts 19:10**, “*All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.*”

Wouldn't it be great if we functioned in such a way that all those in Southern California heard the word of the Lord, because of our ministry here at Valley Bible Church?

II. Second we must understand the Correspondent of the letter to the Church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12).

The correspondent of this letter is identified in **Revelation 2:12** which reads, “*And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword, says this...*”

Here in **Revelation 2:12**, we not only see the commission to John to write the letter to the church in Pergamum, but we also see the identification of the real author of this message.

Who is the real author of this message to the church in Pergamum? It is none other than Christ, Himself as is the case in each of these seven letters.

But notice that Christ is identified differently in each of these messages. How is Christ identified to the compromising church in Pergamum?

Christ is described as the One who has the sharp two-edged sword. This title refers back to the vision of Christ in Revelation 1:16, where Christ is described as having this sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth.

The sword pictured here is one of Thracian origin and it is not surprising that it is described as coming out of the mouth because it was shaped like a tongue.

What is the significance of this picture of Christ to the church in Pergamum?

The New Testament likens the Word of God to a sword in both **Ephesians 6:17** and **Hebrews 4:12**.

It also predicts that the returning Christ will destroy the man of lawlessness with the breath of His mouth in **2 Thessalonians 2:8**.

Also, in **Revelation 19:15 & 21**, the same imagery is used to picture Christ as judge and executioner at His Second Coming.

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The imagery as it is used here in this message combines the force of a warrior defeating His enemies and His pronouncement of judgment upon them.

This does not sound too good for the church at Pergamum and is a less than positive start to Christ's message for them.

If Christ was writing a message to you, how might He picture Himself to you?

It is necessary for us to remember that Christ is the Judge over the whole earth and His penetrating omniscient gaze knows all there is to know about any of us, both good and bad.

He knows what you have done. He knows what you have said. He knows what you are thinking. He even knows when you are sleeping during the sermon.

We need to remember that Christ is coming back! We will cover the return of Christ in about 30 years when we get to revelation 19. Provided that we get to Revelation 19 before He comes back.

This picture of Christ given to the church in Pergamum should motivate us! It should motivate us to repent of our sin! It should motivate us toward godly living!

Because, before His Second Coming depicted in Revelation 19, He will come back for His church at the Rapture according to 1 Thessalonians 4.

And His return is imminent! Are you living in light of the imminent return of Christ! Are you striving to grow in your faith in Christ? Are you taking advantage of the opportunities to grow in your faith in Christ?

III. Third we must understand the Commendation given to the Church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:13).

We see the commendation given in **verse 13** where Christ says, *“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”*

What exactly did the Lord commend the church in Pergamum for? He commended them for their faith in Christ!

First, He knew where they dwelted. Where did they live? They lived where Satan's throne is.

There have been many suggestions as to the identification of Satan's throne in Pergamum.

1-Some have identified it as the magnificent altar of Zeus that was somewhat throne shaped.

2-Some have connected Satan's throne with the worship of the god of Asklepius who was worshipped in the form of a serpent in the temple.

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3-Others point out that Pergamum was a leading center of emperor worship in the province of Asia.

The best conclusion likely includes all of those reasons. Since Pergamum was the leading center in Asia Minor for all of the major false religions and Satan's power was inherent in the evil religious character of the city.

The church in Pergamum was commended, because Christ knew where they lived. It was a testimony in and of itself that they could even exist in such a place.

Second, He knew what they did not deny. The believers at Pergamum continued to hold fast the name of Christ and did not deny the faith.

They did not deviate from fidelity to Christ, nor did they turn from the central truths of the Christian faith.

In fact, Christ offers an example of such faith. He mentions a particular individual of the church in Pergamum named Antipas.

He describes Antipas as, "My faithful one, who was killed among you."

Antipas was probably one of the leaders of the Pergamum church and possibly even a previous pastor.

Tradition tells us that he refused to offer worship to Caesar and was thus slowly roasted to death in a brass bull.

Antipas paid the ultimate price for his refusal to compromise. Because of his faithfulness, the risen Lord commended him by using the title, "My witness, My faithful one!"

Wow! What a complement! He was commended with a title used of Christ in **Revelation 1:15, 3:14**.

The mention of Antipas' faithfulness was a rebuke to those in Pergamum who were tempted to compromise with the world.

How about you? Are you willing to pay the ultimate price for your commitment to Christ? Are you willing to die for the cause of Christ? Can you be described by Christ as a faithful witness?

I pray that whatever trial and tribulation that we face, that we would remain faithful to Christ. I pray that we all could be described by Christ Himself as faithful witnesses.

IV. Fourth we must understand the Condemnation given to the Church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:14-15).

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The Condemnation to the church in Pergamum is found in verses 14 and 15. Christ says, “*But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. ‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.’*”

All was not well with the church in Pergamum. After commending the believers there, Christ informed them that He had a few things against them.

Why was Christ concerned? They had some there in Pergamum, who held to false teaching rather than to faith in Christ.

Specifically Christ was concerned with two heresies being tolerated at Pergamum, one associated with an Old Testament character, the other with a New Testament person.

1-First, some were following the teaching of Balaam (Numbers 22-25; 31:16).

Balaam was a notorious Old Testament prophet for hire in **Numbers 22-25**.

Fearful of the Israelites, because of what they had done to the Amorites, Balak, king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel.

After trying unsuccessfully three times to curse Israel, Balaam came up with another plan.

According to **Numbers 25** and **31:16**, He plotted to use Moabite women to lure the Israelites into the behavior of the godless world around them (compromise). Thus they were led into sexual immorality and idolatry.

Balaam’s plan succeeded, though not to the extent that he had hoped. God intervened and severely chastened Israel, executing 24,000 including many of the leaders according to **Numbers 25:4-5, 9**.

Like the Israelites who were seduced by Balaam’s false teaching some in the church at Pergamum were lured to compromise and mix with the pagan system around them.

The false teaching of the Balaamites led some in the church into the practice of the immorality and idolatry, while those who were not enticed into such practices simply looked the other way and tolerated these sins.

2-A second heresy tolerated at Pergamum involved a New Testament figure.

There were some in Pergamum who in the same way held the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

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The phrase *in the same way* indicates that the teaching of the Nicolaitans led to the same wicked behavior as that of the followers of Balaam.

The Nicolaitans derived their name from Nicolas of **Acts 6**. According to the early church, Nicolas either became an apostate or the followers of Nicolas perverted his teachings.

The Nicolaitans abused the biblical teaching on Christian liberty. They propagated that Christians were free to live a licentious lifestyle.

Thus they freely partook in pagan festivities and indulged themselves in all sorts of sexual immorality.

As believers today, we are called not to compromise, but to remain committed to Christ and to hold fast His name and the historic Christian faith.

How about you? Are you living in such a way that you have compromised? Do you tolerate sin in the midst of the church? Do you overlook sexual immorality or false teaching?

We are not to ignore sin! And let me suggest that if you look the other way, you are just as guilty as those who practice such things.

We as believers bare the responsibility of restoring those who are compromising. **Galatians 6:1** says, “*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.*”

And **Matthew 18:15-20** gives us the process by which we are to attempt to restore those who have compromised and have fallen into sin.

Too many churches today have lost sight of emphasizing holy living or striving for righteousness in the lives of believers.

Too many churches today no longer emphasize using the Scriptures in our daily walk.

I pray that each of us would seek to live in such a way that we have not compromised our faith in Christ, that we have not compromised the Word of God, that we have not compromised the truth of the Gospel, that we have not compromised our testimony to those who do not believe.

I pray that the condemnation of Christ against the church at Pergamum would not be a condemnation of Christ to Valley Bible Church.

V. Fifth, we must understand the Counsel given to the church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:16).

Christ counsels the church in Pergamum in **verse 16**, saying, “*Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*”

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Christ's counsel, His prescription for correction was a command. It was a command to repent or else! The term *repent* [METANOEO] literally means to change direction. It signifies a turning from sin and a turning toward God.

Repentance involves three things: Contrition of heart; Confession of sin; and Change in conduct.

The entire church was found guilty because they tolerated heretical practices of a few rather than following God's word.

The church in Pergamum as a whole was given this urgent command to "repent or else." Or else what?

If they failed to repent, Christ would come and make war against them with the sword of His mouth.

If the church failed to repent they would face the battle sword of the Lord's judgment; The heretics for practicing their iniquity and the church for tolerating such heresy and iniquity in its midst.

We need to remember when we fall into sin that we need to come before the Lord with a contrite heart, confess our sin to Him and make a change in our attitude and actions.

We need to replace sinful attitudes and actions with righteous attitudes and actions.

VI. Sixth, we must understand the Challenge given to the Overcomers in Pergamum (Revelation 2:17).

The Lord closes His message to the church in Pergamum with a challenge to the overcomers. He says in **verse 17**, "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone which no one knows but he who receives it.*"

Remember the overcomer is defined for us by the Apostle John in **1 John 5:4-5** as being a true believer in Christ.

Christ gives a three-fold promise to the faithful in Pergamum. As in each of the seven messages in Revelation, the promise relates to some aspect of eternal life.

1-First, He promises to give them some of the hidden manna. This was a honey-flavored bread, which God fed the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness (cf. **Exodus 16:14ff**).

The hidden manna may represent Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life (**John 6:48-51**) and symbolize all the benefits and blessings of knowing Christ.

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But more than likely in this context, it refers to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb described in **Revelation 19:7-9**, where the church is presented as the bride of Christ. It refers to this future victory celebration.

2-Second, they will be given a white stone. The best understanding of this white stone is in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victor in athletic contests.

A white stone, inscribed with the athlete's name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. Christ promises the overcomer entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven by giving them a white stone.

3-Third, there will be a new name written on the stone. This will be a name, which no one knows except the one who receives it.

The new name is a symbol of the personal and intimate relationship that believers will experience with the Lord in heaven. This name will uniquely reflect God's special love for and adoption of every true child of His.

What a blessing to the true believer in Christ. A promise of participation in the eternal victory celebration! A promise of eternal life with the Lord in heaven!

How might we as believers compromise today? We may compromise our faith and witness by how we speak, by how we spend our time, or by what we read or fill our minds with.

This message to the compromising church in Pergamum should motivate us toward:

- an intolerance of false teaching!
- an intolerance of immorality!
- a practice of church discipline!
- an examination of our own lives!
- striving to pursue spiritual maturity in our own lives!
- and an anticipation for the return of Christ!

If Christ were to examine your life today would He call you, "My witness, My faithful one?"

Let us be careful not to compromise our faith and witness. Rather let us stay true to Christ and His Word looking forward toward future blessings!