

Text: Revelation 2:12-17 (Pew Bible, pg.1216)

Title: “No Compromise” Pt.1

Open your Bibles to Revelation 2:12. If you are a newcomer to our gatherings let me just share with you that our church is going through a time of intensely seeking God. As we approach our 100th anniversary as a church, we feel it is so important that we consecrate ourselves as His people. If we are to be a part of the greater things that God wants to do in our city we must prepare ourselves by turning to the Lord in renewed commitment. It takes time for this kind of work of God to soak into every fiber of our church. We must not grow weary. I’ve been encouraged to hear testimonies of how God is doing a deepening work in many lives and how our prayer groups on Tuesday have been adding new people each week. Don’t grow weary in this great work. Read Revelation 2:12-17.

ILLUSTRATION – In the late 1800s and early 1900s there was a district in downtown Fort Worth known as Hell’s Half-Acre. It was called that because of the rampant evil that was concentrated in that little section of our city.

Well Jesus sends a letter to a church in a city that didn’t just have a “Hell’s Half-Acre.” It was a city that was Hell’s Headquarters. Jesus says in v.13:

Revelation 2:13 - I know where you live—where Satan has his throne ... where Satan lives.

So Pergamum was a focal point of demonic activity. As one of the largest cities in the ancient world, and it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. Probably the main reason Jesus called Pergamum the “throne of Satan” was that it was dominated by several pagan cults, the main one being the imperial cult of Caesar ... the worship of the Roman emperor. And because of all of this there was a powerfully oppressive atmosphere of darkness and evil that hovered over the city, like spiritual smog.

And located in this satanic city was a church ... a church that Jesus challenges to be radically faithful with uncompromised devotion to Himself and His Word.

This letter is just as much addressed to the Travis Avenue Baptist Church, standing at the threshold of our 100th anniversary, as it was to the church in Pergamum. We live in Hell’s Headquarters, as well. Satan is alive and well in our city and our land. We must live with “No Compromise.”

Now remember that each letter has a similar outline. Christ beckons us to look upward, then look inward, then look forward. So let’s first...

LOOK UPWARD

Every letter begins with a revelation of some aspect of the glory of Christ. It was the vision of Christ that was to sustain the church as they faced challenges from outside and inside the church.

Revelation 2:12 - “These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

The sword described here is long sword that is sharp on both sides ... it cuts both ways. The one wielding this kind of sword used it *defensively* against an attack, and *offensively* to destroy his enemy.

The writer of Hebrews said this about the Word of God:

Hebrews 4:12 - For 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.

Hebrews 4:13 - 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.

What this tells us is that we read God's Word, and God's Word reads us. This Book reveals what is true about God (that He is holy and righteous), and what is true about us (that we are unholy and unrighteous). And the entire world is accountable to the One who holds this sword.

And this vision of our Christ is what gives us courage live with no compromise in Hell's Headquarters.

LOOK INWARD

Jesus' all-knowing gaze looks into the church and sees that there are at least two groups:

FIRST, there are believers in the church who are living uncompromised devotion to Him.

Revelation 2:13a - I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.

The Lord says to these radically faithful men and women, "I know where you live. I know what you're facing. I know what you are sacrificing. I see your faithfulness. Well done."

But this uncompromising devotion to Christ and His Word was not unanimous in the church.

SECOND, there are certain individuals or groups in the church whose lives are shot through with compromise. Now specifically there were two corrupt groups:

Revelation 2:14 - There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam...

Balaam was an OT false prophet who conspired with a pagan king to defeat Israel by causing them to compromise their distinctiveness as the people of God ... to intermarry with pagans, to commit sexual immorality and to worship pagan idols. So there was someone in the church who was teaching church members that it didn't matter how they lived out in the world. You can study more about this in Numbers 22-25.

Revelation 2:15 - You also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

This was another group, similar to the Balaam cult. Biblical scholars are not sure exactly what they stood for, but they probably encouraged believers to flaunt their spiritual freedom. They taught, “You are saved by grace, so live however you want to live. You’re free to engage in the pagan revelry that goes on all around.”

This is not just a problem in Pergamum; it’s also a problem in the city and church that we will visit next week, the church in Thyatira. Both churches face a serious threat from compromise. And there are two kinds of compromise that go hand in hand ... doctrinal and moral. Doctrinal compromise always leads to moral compromise. What you believe will ultimately shape how you behave.

I want to talk to you today about doctrinal compromise. You see it all started with something that was taught and ultimately believed by certain people in the church. However if we have a vision of Christ as the One whose Word is the final authority in all things then then it will result in this:

1. WE WILL BE CONVINCED OF THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD.

Revelation 2:12 - “These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

Now the vision of Christ found at the opening of each letter connects back to the main vision of Christ recorded in Revelation 1. There we are told that ...

Revelation 1:16b - Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.

Jesus is not holding this sword in His hand; it’s in His mouth. You cannot separate Jesus from His Word. You can’t say I believe Jesus is God’s Son, and not believe that every Word He said is true.

The sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus is not just the red letter verses in the Gospels in your Bible. John 1:1 says that Jesus Himself is the Word. So there’s a sense in which the entire Bible is the Word of Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Church, if we are to be God’s radically faithful people in our world that is Hell’s Headquarters we must be convinced of the truth of God’s Word. Next...

2. WE WILL BE CONSISTENT IN THE STUDY OF GOD’S WORD.

If we are convinced that this Word is really true, then we will be consistent in our study of this Word.

Remember that the problem in the church in Pergamum was that there were people in the church who were following teachings that were not consistent with the truth of Scripture. If you don’t study Scripture consistently you won’t be able to recognize error when you see it.

I love what the Bible says about the disciples who lived in ancient Berea:

Acts 17:11 - Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Notice they examined the Scriptures every day.

ILLUSTRATION – When you eat a meal some of that food is turned into energy that is the fuel for your physical life. So you eat every day. And when you consume the word of God, the Holy Spirit turns it into the energy that is the fuel for you to live the life of a Christ-follower. Some of you have no spiritual energy for the life of faithful witness and service because you are not consuming enough fuel from God’s Word. You need a daily, steady diet of the Bible.

Next ...

3. WE WILL BE COMMITTED TO OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WORD.

Revelation 2:13a - Yet you remain true to my name.

You really only believe what you ultimately obey. Stop to think about this. Jesus said...

John 14:15 - If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Now do you believe that is true? Most of us would say “yes.” But if you or I choose to disregard and disobey some part of God’s Word, Jesus looks at that and says, “You really don’t love me, no matter what you say with your lips.” You really only believe what you ultimately obey.

ILLUSTRATION - Now, ignorance is no excuse for disobedience. You’re driving through a school zone talking on your cell phone and you get pulled over by a police officer. You know you weren’t speeding but the officer says, “You were talking on your cell phone.” You might say, “Well officer I didn’t know that was against the Law.” You didn’t know because you didn’t read the sign posted at the school zone. So unless you get a merciful officer, you’re getting a ticket. Ignorance is no excuse.

And if we are committed to obedience to God’s Word then also...

4. WE WILL BE CONFIDENT IN THE PROMISES OF GOD’S WORD.

Revelation 2:13b - You did not renounce your faith in me...

We are sustained by the Word of the Lord. His Word contains rich promises, and as we lay hold of the promises of God we are strengthened to remain faithful to Him.

I think about Abraham’s faithfulness of God that was fortified by His confidence in the promise of God to give him a son even when he was well beyond the ability to father a child.

Romans 4:20 - Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

So we are convinced of the truth of God's Word, consistent in our study of God's Word, committed to obedience to God's Word, confident in the promises of God's Word, and ...

5. WE WILL BE COURAGEOUS IN THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD.

Revelation 2:13 - You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

So there was a sad day in the church at Pergamum when news began to circulate among the believers that something awful had happened to one of their fellow church members, a man by the name of Antipas. We don't know exactly what happened, but apparently in the satanic atmosphere of Pergamum Antipas was faithfully and courageously witnessing for Jesus. It may be that he had refused to make an offering at the altar of Caesar. Instead of saying "Caesar is lord," Antipas courageously proclaimed "Christ is Lord." He would have probably been arrested and tortured and commanded to recant. Antipas refused. After a while the Romans would have made an example of Antipas by executing him ... maybe with a sword!

As the believers in Pergamum gathered can you imagine their conversation? "Did you hear what happened to Antipas? I can't believe they killed him. Who will they come for next?"

In the wake of that severe trial I'm sure that the believers in Pergamum must have thought carefully about this. "What will I do if they come for me? If they take me away from my family, and confiscate my house, and threaten to execute me if I don't deny Jesus? Is Jesus that valuable to me that I would be willing to lay it all down ... I mean lay it *all* down?"

ILLUSTRATION – And by the way, this is happening in many parts of our world today. We hear from our church planters in India that they regularly face this kind of persecution. Perhaps you have been reading about the Iranian pastor who has been sentenced to execution because he refused to recant his faith in Jesus Christ.

What we know about these believers in Pergamum is they decided that if the authorities came for them like they came for Antipas they would not renounce their faith in Christ. And they didn't.

Why? They did it because they treasured Jesus more than their stuff, than their houses, than their safety, than their very lives. They did it because they took seriously the Words of Jesus...

Luke 9:26 - If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Now to the rest, Jesus has only one solution to their problem. Now look at...

Revelation 2:16 - Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Jesus has only one solution for the problem ... just one. Repent! Admit it and quit it. When He sees compromise in any way in the lives of His people there's only one option ... repent.

Notice Jesus said, "Repent, or else I will soon come to you." We're not talking here about the Second Coming of Jesus. What Jesus is promising here is a visitation to the church, but not the kind they might expect. Jesus says, "I will come and fight against them with the sword of my mouth." How does Jesus come to people and fight against them with His Word? It has something to do with Christ coming to his people with judgment and discipline for those who disregard His Word.

Friend, you may look at your life, and not take your relationship with Christ or your lifestyle for Him that seriously. You may not be all that concerned that you are not being radically faithful to Jesus Christ, that you are not being true to His Word. You may not think that it is that big of deal that you are living a compromised lifestyle, that the way you live your life most of the week is not that different from the way your pagan friends live their life. And you may think it doesn't matter. But friends I want you to understand that it does matter to Jesus. When Jesus looks into this church His penetrating eyes see those who are living radically faithful lives for Christ, and He sees those who are living pathetically compromised lives.

Just think about it: If I can flippantly disregard a clear teaching in God's Word, then it betrays the fact that I really don't believe God is God. If He is God can I really mess with Him ... can I shrug off His commands ... can I disregard His will and His Word?

We need the attitude of the psalmist when he said...

Psalm 119:161 - Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word.

We look upward, inward, and now we...

LOOK FORWARD

Revelation 2:17 - Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

WHAT IS THE HIDDEN MANNA? Remember that manna was that miraculous bread that fell from heaven while the Israelites were traveling through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. There was nothing to feed the millions of people, so God took care of them by giving them bread from heaven every day. Now when Jesus came along He taught this ... that He was the bread of heaven.

John 6:35 - Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Friends, we'll only live radically faithful, uncompromised lives for Jesus if we believe with all our hearts that He is more precious than life to us. When we get to heaven we will feed continuously on the life of Christ. But the promise for us today is that we get to start the feast now.

Jesus said, "Man does not live on earthly bread alone, but by spiritual bread, by the very word that proceeds from the mouth of the Father."