**The Church in Pergamos**

***The Compromising Church***

Sunday School Lesson 3

*Lessons from the Seven Churches*

*Revelation 2:12-17*

3/1/2020

**Introduction:** The next church recorded in the book of Revelation is the church located in Pergamos. This church was established by Paul as he travelled through the region of Mysia (Acts 16). It’s clear that the letter to the churches were given in order of the route that the messenger would take. Pergamos was roughly fifty miles north of Smyrna, along the Aegean Sea. While Smyrna was wholly committed to worshipping the emperor, Pergamos was the more religious city overall, with its many elaborate temples. It was also the capital of the Asian province of Rome. Many people came to the city every year to worship one of the false gods, practice the arts of medicine, or to study in the second largest library known in the world at that time. It contained over 200,000 books written on parchment paper. In fact, the name *Pergamos* means parchment. Needless to say, this was a very learned city, and it was home to several well-known philosophers. In the midst of all of this enlightenment and pagan worship, there was a Christ-preaching church. This church had to endure persecution similar to the church in Smyrna. It had to watch as one of its pastors was burned alive. Undoubtedly, there were others who suffered. Despite the suffering, the church never wavered in proclaiming the name of Christ. It never denounced the faith. Sadly, though, the church did give in to compromise. Is there a church that is more representative of the churches today than the church in Pergamos? There are churches all around the country that hold fast to the Gospel and the name of Christ, but there are not many who have rejected the urge to compromise. We live in the day of the compromised church. Let’s observe some truths about this church.

1. THE CHURCH NEEDED TO BE REMINDED THAT COMPROMISE DULLS THE SHARPNESS OF THE SWORD OF THE LORD. (REVELATION 2:12; HEBREWS 4:12)
2. **Notice that the Word of God is meant to be sharp and to cut through the soul and spirit of a man (Hebrews 4:12).** The Bible is controversial. The Bible is difficult for the world to hear. We see this in the ministry of Jesus. When Jesus spoke, confrontation with the world followed His words. If they did not like His words at that time, then they certainly do not like His Word now. I’m reminded of the times where the disciples sought to have Jesus curb His speech. They told Him that the pharisees were offended by what He was saying (Matthew 15:12-14). Did Jesus cater His speech to these pious religious leaders? No, He definitely did not! He told His disciples that every plant that was not planted by the Heavenly Father would be rooted up. In other words, He told them that His words would separate out the true followers of God from those who were not. That’s what the Word does. A preacher should never worry to preach the Bible. Will the preaching of the Bible cause some to leave the church? The short answer is yes. That’s what Jesus told us it would do. Yet, our goal is not to have the highest attendance. Our goal is to preach the whole truth in Jesus Christ.
3. **Notice that Jesus is the owner of the two-edged sword. It’s not ours to change (Revelation 2:12).** The Word of God belongs to Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh. Consequently, He is the One responsible for the sword’s sharpness. He allows us to use His sword in fighting the spiritual battles taking place on this earth. The act of compromise is interjecting ourselves or something else into a matter instead of letting the sword do its work. Our words and thoughts are not sharper than the Word of God. The world’s words and thoughts are definitely not sharper than the Word of God. When we mix them with God’s Word, it definitely does not result in iron sharpening iron. Jesus was reminding the church in Pergamos that he was the owner of the sword. He did not appreciate their allowing the sword to be dulled. If they continued to compromise, He would have to personally intervene to ensure that His Word was cutting asunder as intended.
4. THE CHURCH NEEDED TO BE REMINDED THAT COMPROMISE DENIES THE PURPOSE OF SACRIFICIAL LIVING. (REVELATION 2:13; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:10)
5. **Notice that the purpose of suffering is to make the church stronger (2 Corinthians 12:10).** Sacrificial living is preached all throughout the New Testament. Through sacrifice, we are made stronger in Christ. Also, sacrifice separates out the true believers. Those who are just there for entertainment or other reasons will not stick around when persecution starts. The church had seen great persecution. As mentioned, their pastor was burned alive. Antipas wasn’t just burned at the stake. He was placed in the brass bull. This was essentially a brass slow cooker that was used only to kill in the most malicious way possible. It was a natural deterrent, as no one wanted to be thrown into the brass bull. Certainly, this type of cruelty got the attention of the church. They knew that they could not deny Jesus Christ, but they also had no desire to follow in the footsteps of Antipas. Alternatively, they found a way to do both. They found a middle ground between the church and the world. They probably reasoned that such a compromise was better for the furtherance of the Gospel. Yet, this compromise did not make the church stronger. It only weakened it.
6. **Notice that compromise embraces the persecutor and denies the sacrifice (Revelation 2:13).** There was a reason that Jesus mentioned Antipas to the church. He wanted to remind them that Antipas laid down his life for a reason. He laid down his life because he was unwilling to water down the Gospel. He was unwilling to compromise. They were not honoring his death. Essentially, their compromise stated that Antipas didn’t have to die. It made his death meaningless. Additionally, their compromise welcomed acceptance of the false gods whose names were praised through persecuting the church. Today, we should recognize that too many martyrs have laid down their lives for us to turn around and so easily compromise the doctrines that they would not give up.
7. THE CHURCH NEEDED TO BE REMINDED THAT SATAN ALSO ATTACKS THE CHURCH THROUGH COMPROMISE, NOT JUST PERSECUTION. (REVELATION 2:13-16; NUMBERS 22)
8. **Notice that the church was literally in the place where Satan resided (Revelation 2:13).** Satan does not currently dwell in Hell. The Bible tells us that Satan has not been bound yet. Instead, he roams the earth seeking whom he may devour. Jesus told the church at Pergamos that they were dwelling in the place of Satan’s seat. Pergamos was the headquarters of Satan during those days. As stated, this was a religious city. All of the major false gods were worshipped here. There were three temples built to worship the Roman emperor. There was a forty-foot throne to Zeus built in the city. The false god of healing, Asklepios, had its main temple there. People would travel to Pergamos to be healed in this temple. In order to get healing, you had to sleep overnight in the temple on a bed of snakes! Clearly, this was a Satanic movement. There was also a large statue there for the goddess Athena, and there was a large following of Dionysus, the god of debauchery and drunkenness. The worship of this false god is too perverse to mention in this lesson. The church understood that Satan’s presence was there, and they actively worked to promote the name of Christ in this wicked city. However, they failed to understand that Satan does not only attack viciously. He also attacks subtly.
9. **Notice that Satan attacked the church by subtly inserting acceptance of other gods (Rev. 2:14; Numbers 22).** Jesus’ first issue with the church was their willingness to let those who hold the doctrine of Balaam into the church. What does that mean? Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet who was hired by the Moabite king, Balac, to curse the nation of Israel. God would not allow Balaam to carry out this curse, although Balaam certainly tried. Instead of cursing the people, Balaam counseled Balac to get the Israelites to compromise themselves. He did this by having the Moabite women seduce the Israelites. Once they had been brought into Israel, they turned their husbands over to accepting foods and things offered to idols. This brought a great curse on Israel. The apostles had told the churches not to eat the foods offered to idols. They knew this was a bridge to further acceptance of idolatry. Yet, some in the church were encouraging this behavior, likely as a way to avoid offending others. They figured it was harmless enough to eat the food, especially if it kept them alive and safe from persecution.
10. **Notice that Satan attacked the church by causing them to take advantage of the grace of God (Revelation 2:15).** The second issue that the Lord had with the church was that they had compromised by allowing the hated doctrine of the Nicolaitanes to permeate in the church without correction. This doctrine can be summarized by saying that it allowed for Christians to live however they pleased. There was no need for separation. There was no need for abstaining from sin. They had essentially been made as gods now to do however they pleased. As a result, there were those in the church who were engaged in all types of wickedness and debauchery. Of course, not everyone believed as these people believed, but no one had the courage to stand up to them. They were probably just glad to have them in the church. They were also glad that these people were not persecuting them. Perhaps, they accepted these people because they wanted to show that they were more tolerant than the paganistic heathens living around them. Clearly, they needed to be reminded that God expects holiness from His people. He did not save us to sin; He saved us FROM sin. We ought to openly admonish anyone who uses the grace of God as a cloak for their lasciviousness. While it’s admirable to be a church that preaches the Gospel, the Lord also expects us to be a church that teaches people how to be His disciples. We cannot be an effective disciple for Christ if we are taking advantage of God’s grace.
11. **Notice that Jesus was prepared to send someone else to fight if the church continued to compromise (Rev. 2:16).** Jesus concluded that they needed to report, or He would come quickly and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. That means He would send another messenger to preach the Truth. We must understand that if we compromise, God will look for another to stand in the gap and fight.