

SESSION 3

Uncompromising with Truth



QUESTION 1:

What is a product you are unwilling to compromise on?

THE POINT

When it comes to biblical truth about Christ, there is no room for compromise.

THE PASSAGE

Revelation 2:12-17

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Chameleons are fascinating little creatures. If you put a chameleon in a jar with green grass, it will begin to turn green. If you add some red berries, it begins to take on the color of the berries. Chameleons change colors to blend in. It's their way of adapting to their environment. They also change colors to warm up or cool down, or to communicate fear or anger. Again, this is a way to adapt to their environment.

Some people are like chameleons. In whatever situation or environment they find themselves, they adapt and “take on the color” of that environment. Their thinking and behavior adapt so that they blend in and look like the world around them. For followers of Christ, our true color should never be compromised. We have been called to live a life devoted to Christ and not compromise the truth of who He is and who we are in Christ.

The church at Pergamos compromised their faith in Christ by “changing their color” and becoming like those around them. As a result, Christ rebuked them.

Revelation 2:12-13

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

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Jesus' third message was to "the church in Pergamos." Pergamos was located north of Ephesus and Smyrna and was about fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea. This city of around 160,000 was the religious and cultural center of the region. As a cultural center, some estimate that Pergamos may have housed as many as 200,000 papyrus and parchment volumes in its library. As a religious center, it was home to four major pagan temples: (1) the temple to Athena, the goddess of wisdom and the arts; (2) the temple of Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy; (3) the temple of Zeus, the ruler of the heavens and father of the other gods; and (4) the shrine of Asclepius, the god of medicine, which was expanded into a popular medical spa. These temples were built upon the city's most prominent place, the acropolis, which rose nearly a thousand feet in the midst of the city.

In the Roman Empire, Pergamos had been given the rare power to carry out capital punishment, which was symbolized by the sword. To the church in Pergamos, Jesus made it clear that He is the one who has the authority to judge by identifying Himself as the one who "hath the sharp sword with two edges." When John saw Jesus in his earlier vision, he described "a sharp twoedged sword" (Rev. 1:16). The writer of Hebrews declared the Word of God was "sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,

and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). By His powerful word, Jesus truly is the One who ultimately judges.

Jesus was well aware of the city where this church lived. With four major temples dedicated to pagan worship, Pergamos could certainly be identified as “where Satan’s seat is.” In a city and culture that thrived on the worship of multiple false gods, the believers were to be commended because they were holding on to the name of Christ. To the culture around them, Jesus was just one of many gods, but these believers knew

His name was above all other names and only through Him could one be saved. They held strong to the fundamental truths about Christ and would not deny their faith.

We know little of “Antipas,” specifically mentioned as a martyr. Legend says Antipas was slowly roasted in a large brazen bowl as a sacrifice to the false gods for refusing to acknowledge Caesar as lord, but this cannot be verified. While we don’t know the details of how he died, we do know he stood for the truth of Jesus Christ and ultimately paid the supreme price with his own life.

Persecution continues today around the globe. Many believers, like Antipas, are standing strong in their faith even if it means

Pergamos

COMMENDED FOR:

1. REMAINING FAITHFUL TO CHRIST AND HIS NAME EVEN UNDER THE THREAT OF DEATH

REBUKED FOR:

1. HOLDING TO FALSE TEACHING
2. EATING FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS
3. PARTICIPATING IN SEXUAL IMMORALITY

dying for the cause of Christ. They are keeping a bold witness to others in the midst of whatever Satan throws at them. We too need to stand with Christ no matter what and be identified as His faithful witness.

QUESTION 2:

What does a faithful witness look like today?

Revelation 2:14-15

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

KEY WORDS: **Balaam ... Balac** (v. 14)—These are references to a group in the church that was teaching heresy. The names refer to two characters in the Book of Numbers (Num. 22–25; 31:8,16).

Nicolaitanes (v. 15)—This was the group whose false teachings were influencing some people in the churches. Possibly they mixed Christianity with pagan idolatry and ritual prostitution.

Even though Jesus commended their witness, He still condemned several actions being lived out among the people in this church. While many were remaining faithful to God and doing the works of Christ, others were compromising the truth by mixing it with false doctrine. Jesus mentioned two specific errors.

1. **The doctrine of Balaam.** During Israel's wilderness wanderings, Balac, king of Moab was afraid of the Israelites. The Israelites had come out of years of bondage in Egypt, and

Balac was afraid they were going to rise up and kill him and his people. Balac sent word for Balaam to come and place a curse on the Israelites so that his army could destroy them.

Balaam was a prophet, and God told him not to place a curse on the Israelites, but instead offer words of blessings. Balaam knew he could not curse the Israelites, so instead he taught Balac how to manipulate and entice the Israelites into sin. He enticed them by causing them to believe eating food that was sacrificed to idols was acceptable. Balac also led them to believe sexual immorality was OK. Balac could not outwardly defeat Israel, but Balaam taught him how to defeat the Israelites through moral and spiritual compromise (Num. 22–25).

2. **The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.** Little is known about this sect, but it appears to have allowed people to live without rules against self-indulgence. It may have been closely linked to the teachings of Balaam. This would explain the attraction of pagan idolatry and sexual immorality. Like those following Balaam, the Nicolaitanes were leading people to compromise the truth that only comes through Jesus.

The church today must be careful not to trade the truth of Christ or compromise God’s Word and our walk with God. We are immersed in a culture that says, “If it feels good, do it!”; “Live and let live”; “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”; and “Surely God wants us to be happy and have fun.” But that’s not what Christ teaches. Compromise can never be a part of a believer’s life when it comes to standing on the truth of Christ.

QUESTION 3:

What are the consequences of compromise when it comes to biblical truth?

Revelation 2:16-17

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Jesus concluded His message to the Pergamos church with a stern and solemn warning that they must repent. He assured them that failure to do so would bring dire consequences. Failure to heed and repent meant the word that came from his mouth would be a sword that would fight against those following the false teachings. The Israelites had put Balaam himself to death with the sword (Josh. 13:22), and “the sword of my mouth” would be quick and fierce judgment on those who followed Balaam’s teaching.

Jesus is committed to fight against false doctrines and false practices within the church; therefore, as His followers, we also should be devoted to do the same. If the church at Pergamos would do that—repent and stand unwaveringly on the truth of Christ—they would receive two rewards.

1. **Hidden manna.** God provided manna daily in the wilderness for the Israelites to feed and sustain them. Some of that manna was “hidden” in a golden pot and placed inside the ark of the covenant as a memorial to God’s provision for His faithful followers. In Jewish tradition, this hidden manna has been preserved and would feed and sustain God’s people when the Messiah came. Like “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9), this manna symbolized eternal life. This thought alone should inspire us to never compromise when it comes to standing on the truth of Christ and His Word.

2. **A white stone.** We don't think much about rocks. In fact, most of us try and remove rocks from places we don't want them to be. This rock however would have been an incredibly precious gift in that time. "A white stone" could remind the church of the white stones given by judges to indicate they had found a person innocent. Or the white stone might symbolize the white stones that were often used as admission tickets to public events. Either way, the white stone was similar to the hidden manna in that it symbolized eternal life we gained through the forgiveness of Christ.

On this white stone "a new name" would be written. Names carried a level of authority, and to be given this special name by Christ Himself signified both Christ's authority over that individual and an intimate relationship with the individual. When we come to Christ, we are given a new name. We now share a relationship with Him.

QUESTION 4:

When have you seen someone refuse to compromise on biblical truth?

While this letter was written to the church at Pergamos, it also could have been written to many of our churches today. So many churches are turning away from sound doctrine and the truth of God's Word. If we compromise our position on biblical truth, then we also stand in danger of receiving judgment. God honors those with uncompromising faith, and we would do well to remain uncompromising in our churches as well as in our individual lives.

QUESTION 5:

What are some ways our church is like the church at Pergamos?

ENGAGE

*Use the acrostic below to identify what you believe about the Bible.
(An example has been provided.)*

Tru **S** trustworthy

W

O

R

D

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do with the truths from this passage?

- ▶ **Pray.** We live in a culture full of compromise. Pray, asking God to strengthen you to stand strong in the face of compromise. Pray also for your church to never compromise in matters of biblical truth.
- ▶ **Evaluate.** List ways people are tempted to compromise their faith or tolerate false teachings. Do a self-assessment to identify any ways you might have compromised on biblical teaching. Repent and determine to stand with Christ.
- ▶ **Confront.** If you know someone who is stepping into false teaching or compromise, lovingly confront that person and urge him or her to come back to the truth of Christ. Let God use you in the life of another, but it's important to do so by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

