

A Caution Against Compromise (*Part 1*)
or **A Treatise Against Tolerance**
Revelation 2:12-17

Thought for the Day: Tolerating those who espouse false teachings and engage in sinful practices in the church will result in severe judgment from the Lord.

Compromise and tolerance are two of the key buzzwords in our culture today. Christians are expected to compromise their beliefs and convictions. It is demanded that they tolerate and accommodate the beliefs and behaviors of others. Not only toleration, but society calls for the endorsement and celebration of that which is vile and wicked. The letter to the church in Pergamum provides clear-sighted insight into the Lord's view of such compromise & tolerance.

I. The Greeting (2:12)

A. The Addressee

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

- The letter is addressed to the pastor, who was the primary messenger of God to the church.
- Pergamum was 45 miles north of Smyrna and 75 miles north of Ephesus.
- It was well-known for its idolatry and sexual immorality.
- Parchment was invented there and the city had a library of 200,000 scrolls.

B. The Speaker

...The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

- A description especially relevant to the church in Pergamum. (Cp. 1:16 and 2:16)
- The significance of the sword is made clear in Revelation 19:11-16, 20-21. It symbolizes the righteous judgment Christ will execute against His enemies.
"The two-edged sword is the symbol of the word of Christ, the assurance of judgment on the basis of absolute truth." (*Charles Ryrie, Revelation, p. 37*)
- What is especially noteworthy here is that Jesus is threatening to bring judgment upon people who are in the church (vs. 16). (Hebrews 10:30-31)
- There were actually two groups of people that the Lord was threatening to deal with:
 - 1) Those who held to the false teachings and evil practices of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (i.e., idol worship and sexual immorality)
 - 2) Those in the church who were compromising the truth and righteousness by tolerating those in group one.

II. The Commendation (2:13)

13 I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

- There were at least some in the church who maintained steadfast faithfulness to the Lord even though they were living in the very center of Satan's dominion. They were faithful in the face of intense intimidation!
- Like the church in Smyrna, the believers in Pergamum had suffered significant persecution.
- Jesus gave Antipas the title of "faithful witness," the title given to Jesus Himself in Revelation 1:5. Jesus gladly identifies Himself with those who bravely identify with Him.
- Jesus symbolically described Pergamum as the location of Satan's throne.
- Various false gods were worshipped in Pergamum, any one of which, or all of them together, being reasonably called Satan's throne.
 - 1) There was the worship of the Roman emperor (as in Smyrna). Pergamum had built the first temple in the Roman empire dedicated to the worship of Caesar.
 - 2) There was the worship of the Greek gods: Dionysus, the god of wine, and Asklepios, the god of healing—each of whom had their own temples.
 - Snakes were associated with the worship of both of these gods.
 - Even today, in connection with the medical practices, there is the symbol of a snake curled around a staff. This was the symbol of Asklepios.
 - Revelation 12:9; 20:2 – "...that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan."
 - 3) Other Greek gods that were worshiped in Pergamum included Athena and Demeter.
 - Bear in mind that behind every false god and false religion is Satan himself.
 - Pergamum may have been the most outwardly pagan city of all the ones mentioned in Revelation 2-3. (*Charles Ryrie, Revelation, p. 87*)
 - Pergamum was "such a uniquely pagan place that it was as if Satan had set up his headquarters there." (*Mark Hitchcock, 101 Answers, p. 87*)
 - 4) There was the worship of Zeus, who had his own altar on the Acropolis. This altar exists today and rises to a height of 40 feet. Since Zeus was considered to be the king of the gods, this altar could well be described as Satan's throne.
- Even if we feel like we are dwelling in the midst of Satan's territory, the Lord expects us to remain faithful unto Him!

NO COMPROMISE

Christ rebuked the church at Pergamum for toleration and compromise (2:14-15). Compromise involves blending the qualities of two different things or conceding principle. While believers should cooperate in society as much as they can, they must avoid any alliance, partnership, or participation that may lead to immoral practices. There can be no compromise between loyalty to Christ and the sinful pleasures of idol worship or sexual immorality. Christians may differ in some areas, but there is no room for heresy and moral impurity. Don't tolerate sin by bowing to the pressure to be open-minded. (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)