A WORD TO THE COMPROMISING

Revelation 2:12-17

Introduction

➔ [From Illy]... FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

After attending the Moody Bible Institute, John and Betty Stam answered the call to serve the Lord in China. One day after they arrived, a band of Communist guerrillas entered their town, plundered the countryside, and killed many innocent people. Discovering that these lone foreigners were Christian missionaries, the rebels treated them brutally, and finally made martyrs of them. On the way to the place of execution they stopped at a small post office, and the clerk asked John Stam, "Where are you going?" He replied, "I don't know where the soldiers are going, but we are on our way to Heaven!" Later, Chinese believers found a hurriedly written note expressing the fearless and faithful testimony of these gallant followers of the Lord. It read, "As for us, may God be glorified, whether by life or by death!" Their sacrifice has inspired many others since that time to serve the Savior.

➔ [From Illy]... RESISTING UNTO DEATH

In the 17th century a young girl named Marie Durand lived in the south of France. She was attractive and intelligent, and life beckoned joyously to her. She was also a devout Christian and unashamed to speak out for her Lord. Soon the persecution in that area became so severe that her witness was no longer tolerated. She refused to be silent, however, and as a result was imprisoned. For 38 years, while life with its pleasures passed her by, she maintained a shining testimony. Her valiant stand for the truth was costly, but rather than yielding to pressure and renouncing her Lord, she stood firm. Although her imprisonment would deny her the joys of marriage and a family, she would not compromise her faith. The years of privation finally sapped her strength, and she died a martyr's death. Marie Durand had not only lived a life of inward holiness but had also "resisted to bloodshed" the outward tide of evil. Tourists still go and look with respect and sadness at a single word scratched on the dungeon wall: RESISTEZ—RESIST!

➔ [From Illy]... FAITH IN THE ARENA

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would gather in the Colosseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild animals. Paul Rader, an American evangelist from the early 20th century, in commenting on his visit to this famous landmark, said, "I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom they gladly died, and asked myself, `Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get this gospel to the ends of the earth?' I prayed most fervently in that Roman arena for the spirit of a martyr, and for the working of the Holy Spirit in my heart, as He worked in Paul's heart when he brought him on his handcuffed way to Rome." Those early Christians "lived on the threshold of heaven, within a heartbeat of home, no possessions to hold them back."

Those Roman martyrs were so confident in the cleansing blood of Christ that they were willing to shed their own in devotion to their Savior.

I begin with these stories to try to tie together the messages last week and this week. The message to the church at Smyrna was a message to a suffering church—a church that needed encouragement as they struggled under the weight of affliction, poverty and persecution. Today's message is to the church in Pergamum (Pergamos), also a church faithful in suffering, but a church with a serious problem. We'll get to that in a moment.

First, some background regarding the city and church in Pergamum. *Show location on map*. About 15-20 miles from the coast. After coming under Roman rule in 133 BC it became the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. Because of location it did not have a good trading position. It was an important administrative center and was also famous for its great library which is said to have contained more than 200,000 parchment scrolls.

It was also an important religious center. It was known for its worship of Roman gods and goddesses and for their supposed healing power. People came from all over the world to be healed by the god Asclepius, and Pergamum has been described as the Lourdes of the ancient world. The gods Zeus, Dionysius, and Athena also had notable temples in this city. Pergamum was also a centre for Caesar-worship, and had a temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus as early as 29 BC. It was the principal center of the imperial cult of emperor worship in this part of the world. But that is not all. Behind the city was a great cone-shaped hill that was the site of a multitude of heathen temples.

There is very little information about the founding of the church in Pergamum. There is no indication that Paul ever visited the city although it is possible that he passed through there after leaving Ephesus on his third missionary journey. The church was probably small and it is

obviously a struggling church, because of the nature of the religious and political climate of the community.

Now let us look into the message that the Lord has for this church.

I. Identification

Note the description - a double-edged sword. Once again he uses an image from John's earlier description of what he saw. Look at Rev. 1:16 – *"…from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword."* There are a couple of pictures that come to mind when I read that. The first picture is the power and authority of the Word of God.

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12 ESV)

"…and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," (Ephesians 6:17 ESV)

The second picture is that of judgment. Later in this book, John describes the coming of Christ to execute judgment on the nations.

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ***From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,*** *and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." (Revelation 19:11-15 ESV)*

That is the way Christ identifies Himself to this church—the One who has all authority and the holds the power to judge wickedness.

II. Commendation v. 13

There is an interesting picture painted for us in v. 13. This is a persecuted church. Yet in spite of the attacks made on this church by those on the outside, they remained true and faithful to Christ.

Some explanations are in order--

"…where Satan has his throne…" - a couple of possible references:

1. It could be a reference to the fact that Pergamum was a principal centre for the worship of the Roman emperor.
2. It could be an allusion to the serpent, the symbol of Asclepius, which was seen everywhere in Pergamum. It symbolized healing to the residents there, but for believers it stood for evil and Satan. MacArthur adds this note regarding the god Asclepius – "…his snake-like form is still the medical symbol today. The famous medical school connected to his temple mingled medicine with superstition. One prescription called for the worshiper to sleep on the temple floor, allowing snakes to crawl over his body and infuse him with their healing power."
3. It could be a general reference to the way Satan ruled that city through the conglomeration of religious activities - heathen worship practices.

"…Antipas my faithful witness…" – quite possibly he was the pastor of the church there. According to tradition he was the first martyr of Asia, and was slowly cooked to death in a kettle of water. The word "witness" is literally "martyr" in the Greek. It means to witness to your faith in Jesus Christ through undergoing a violent death.

In the face of all these struggles and attacks, the church in Pergamum had remained faithful and true. Note v. 13 again. Nothing that was forced upon them by the enemies of Christ could sway them from their stand for Christ.

Yet this church had a problem. We come to verse 14 where we are confronted with …

III. Condemnation

What was the problem for which Christ condemned this church? It was compromise. While standing firm in the face of persecution and violence, they were in danger of being destroyed from the inside. Again some explanations:

Balaam - briefly review the story of Balaam - Num. 22-25:3; 31:15-16.

Balaam tried to prostitute his prophetic gift and curse Israel for money offered him by Balak, king of Moab. But he was unsuccessful as God turned his curses into blessing. So he devised a plot to have Moabite women seduce Israelite men into intermarriage. The result was the blasphemous union of Israel with fornication and idolatrous feasts.

So, even though the Israelites could not be cursed, they could be corrupted, by idol-worship and sexual immorality.

Nicolaitans - appear to be related to Balaam - their teaching seems to be centred on the idea that freedom in Christ gives on the freedom to engage in openly immoral conduct and idolatry. MacArthur, in his Study Bible, says this:

> "Irenaeus writes that Nicolas, who was made a deacon in Acts 6, was a false believer who later became apostate; but because of his credentials he was able to lead the church astray. And, like Balaam, he led the people into immorality and wickedness. The Nicolaitans, followers of Nicolas, were involved in immorality and assaulted the church with sensual temptations. Clement of Alexander says, 'They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.' Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license."

The problem here is one of compromise. Even though they would not give in to the hatred and violence of the enemies of Christ, yet they would tolerate in their midst the very things that would destroy them from within.

➔ [From Illy]... BEETLES IN THE REDWOOD

Greg Laurie, in his book The Great Compromise, says "A giant 400-year-old redwood came crashing down one day, and no one could figure out why. The tree had survived four centuries of storms, lightning, and earthquakes—what had felled it?

On closer inspection, investigators found that tiny beetles had found their way inside its trunk and had begun eating away its life-giving fibers, weakening its mighty bulk from the inside out.

That is what was happening to the church at Pergamum. And that is what can happen to us if we are not careful. Oh, I'm not talking about the specific doctrinal errors of the church at Pergamum. But we can be strong in the face of suffering, vigorously defend against those who would seek to come in and destroy us, yet harbour in our hearts the little things, the wrong thoughts, the false teachings that slowly but surely eat away and subtly destroy our very lives.

IV. The Command v. 16

God's answer to this dilemma is brief and to the point. In the original language it is one word – Repent. Repent of the sin of neglect and compromise, turn away from those things that you are allowing in your midst, and turn back to God. Deal with the things which are destroying you, or He will deal with those who err. And that is not a pleasant thought when you read v. 16.

V. The Promise v. 17

Read v. 17. ***"...hidden manna..."*** Just as God fed Israel with manna in the wilderness, so Christ supplies the true believer with spiritual bread that the unbelieving world cannot see. It is hidden from their eyes.

"...white stone..." When an athlete won in the games, he was often given, as part of his prize, a white stone, which was an admission pass to the winner's celebration afterwards. This may picture the moment when the overcomer will receive his ticket to the eternal victory celebration in heaven. We read in Rev. 9 of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Only those clothed with the righteousness of Christ will be there.

Conclusion

The greatest threat to the church at Pergamum was not external. It was internal, it was the willingness to compromise the truth for the sake of convenience, pleasure and profit.

What is the greatest threat to the success of our church and our individual lives? Again it is probably not external. It is not persecution which will destroy us, or the government, or even society itself. It is compromise, the willingness to embrace within ourselves the false teaching, or wrong actions or wrong attitudes which will eventually eat away our spiritual life. Carelessness, laziness in spiritual things. I confess my need in this area - a lazy Christian.

Call to repentance. If you are dying inside take this opportunity to confess it and to begin the process of rebuilding your relationship.