

Jan 24 10 Churches in Rev. #3 Rev. 2:12-16

Pergamum: THE COMPROMISING CHURCH

In these days of politics we hear so many words that might drive us nuts. Behind closed doors deals, buying this one's vote, persuasive powers, bridges to nowhere and lots more we have no idea about. No matter where you stand on the issues there will always be 'the good, the bad and the ugly.' We can never agree on all things and perhaps we never will. Get 10 people in a room and the next thing you know you have 10 opinions. Sometimes someone will change their mind. Some might compromise their ideas or their beliefs.

I remember a movie about a person who was on trial for a crime he was accused of committing. I think it was "12 Angry Men." I'm sure most of you older ones have seen it. When the trial was over the jury went to their room to deliberate. The foreman decided to take a vote believing everyone had made up their mind and would find him guilty. When he counted the votes he read guilty, guilty, guilty, all the way until he opened the 12 juror's vote which read "not guilty." One juror held out and thus began the movie saga and the personalities of each juror came out. After much discussion another vote was taken this time it was like, 10-2. Then another round or arguing amongst themselves and another vote and it was 7-5 and on and on it went until another vote where it was 1-11 in favor of letting the fellow

go. The only one not voting not guilty was now the foreman. And then after a bit, he caved in and they voted to set him free. All because one man held out. He would not 'give in' to what others believed but held firm to the truth as he saw it, which others began to see.

It was only a movie, but compromises were brought into being. I used my Thesaurus and it says these words can be substituted for the word 'compromise.' Words like: "cooperation, negotiation, concession, conciliation, finding middle ground, give and take, and confrontation, do a deal, bargain, meet halfway or give in." Pretty good words, don't you think? They don't sound like words that would mean something bad. But then there is the other side of that word. Compromise can be bad when we compromise our beliefs to serve Satan. I think there are things you can compromise on, and there are things that you should never compromise on. So let's see what lessons we might learn from the church at Pergamum, the one called the "Compromising Church." Hear God's word for God's people. He who has ears let him hear the voice of God. **READ 12-17**

God's problem with the church seems that they are a **compromising church**. According to William Barclay a great Bible Scholar of yesteryear the thought of that day in this city that was called the "seat of Satan" was that 'they sought to persuade Christians that there was nothing wrong with conforming to the world's

standards, and they urged the Church to use a cautious policy of compromise with the practices and the morals of the world.” But he reminds us that in the New Testament that Christians are described as *hagios*, which in the Greek means ‘holy, different or separate.’ Therefore if we do things like the world does, then how can we say we are ‘different?’ We are told we are in this world but not of this world. That means we are just on a journey here, a journey to our real home which is heaven. Our CEO, our Big Boss is God! We take orders from him. You can’t serve two masters, Jesus says. You can only give your allegiance to one. If we compromise our Christian beliefs or just brushes them aside, then how are we different? Doesn’t that make us look like hypocrites? Look at those in the great faith chapter in Hebrews that gave their lives by sticking to what they believed even though they were being fed to the lions or brought before kings as part of sports spectacular. All of them would not bow to Caesar. They kept their faith. Or take the 3 Hebrew children who would not bow down while all the others did. They very easily could have blended in amongst the others and bowed like the others did to honor the king. (Have everyone stand. Then have them sit, but have three remained standing.) But no! they stood erect. They would not bow down. In fact when they were getting ready to be tossed in the furnace they told the king they were not worrying for their God was going to take care of them. Then they turned the furnace up as hot as it could be then they shut the door and waited and watched. Sure

enough 3 guys were there sitting down on the floor talking to a fourth guy who just seemed to have appeared. They were laughing and talking and hugging each other. (Little Fish paraphrase.) Finally the king had the furnace turned off and out came the 3 Hebrew children alive and well and get this, not a hair on their body, nor a piece of their clothing either was singed or smelled like smoke. God had watched over them because they would not compromise their beliefs. They stood as others bowed. They had one God, One Lord, and it wasn't the king of Babylon.

The city of Pergamum was a place where Caesar worship took place. People in that city could go to worship any god or gods they wanted and still cry out "Caesar is lord." Church didn't change the way they lived their lives. But for the Christians it was another matter. They could not say that. Their cry was "Jesus is Lord." This began as a church that was full of love and good deeds. They kept to the creed that Jesus was Lord. That's the good thing. But like other churches through the years they lost their focus, they lost their first love, they lost their way. Might we say they became a social club rather than a church? They forgot to read the manual. They reverted back to their old ways. Over the years came teachers or preachers that began to compromise what they believed. And if you don't think that can happen it has happened even in our own country. Back a few years came the theory that God was dead. Well I guess not really dead, but that religion was dead.

You could believe what you wanted to believe. Religion was around to make you feel good; it had no bearing on your life. It was just a crutch for those who were weak. There was no God, no heaven, no hell, just have fun on this earth. Go do what you want. Take what you want. Some of you remember those days. It was the hippy days where people felt freedom. They could have sung “let freedom ring” but in reality they really weren’t free. It was the time of Aquarius, people into drugs, long hair, bell bottom clothes, long sideburns, and people against all authority. You were free to express yourself. Woodstock was popular and all that stuff. No one had a care in the world. Churches began to lose members because people felt they didn’t need the church because God was dead. People began to drop out of church, especially the mainline churches because the church wasn’t preaching the Good News about Jesus Christ. Pastor’s who went to liberal seminaries were learning from a new breed of profs who didn’t have born again experiences and who taught that the Bible wasn’t true or relevant for today. They spoke about peace and love and taking care of one another. Sin was a dirty word and not mentioned anymore. God was so loving he would forgive you without you asking for it. I knew of a person who believed he was called into ministry and went to a liberal seminary. His faith was strong when he went there, but it wasn’t long before sitting under these liberal profs that he began to suck up their teachings and the next thing you know

he dropped out of seminary and turned away from God because his new philosophy was that there was no God so why not go and have a good time.

Today churches still struggle with the teaching of the faith. Sometimes the people don't know what to believe. Some don't read the Bible. Some may not even have a Bible in the home. I had heard some of the Scriptures from going to church, but I had not read it myself. When I began to go to the Bible study I was like a sponge soaking up God's word. I never wanted the study to end as I listened to the pastor sharing what it meant. And then there were those in the group who related the Scriptures to their lives and things became clear and I grew in my faith so much that God turned me around and called me into his service to preach his word, to administer his sacraments, to care for his people. I once was blind, but now could see, was lost but now was found.

Or there are others who misuse the Bible. You know it was one of our presidents who didn't like some of the Scriptures so he tore out some of the pages he didn't agree with. I may have told you the time that I went before the Board for Ordination in another state with 2 other people and we were going over our sermons with those assigned to the three of us. One fellow had preached how Abraham was obedient to God and was about to offer his son on the altar as God had commanded. When God saw his faithfulness God stopped him in his tracks and gave him another

offering instead. One of the pastors who had read this sermon said he could never believe in a God who would ask you to do such a thing. In fact he said if he could he would remove all such Scriptures from the Bible. I was horrified. I couldn't believe he said that. I wanted to defend my God I was so mad. I couldn't believe he believed that. What was he preaching in his church since he was ordained and been in ministry for a long time? How much were his people changing? Where was Jesus in his sermons? Where was salvation? Grace? Forgiveness? Eternal Life? I hope even today that it was just a ploy to get this fellow to defend what he believed, which he didn't, because he was so shook. I knew I was in trouble. For you see I talked about the devil and his influence in the world in my sermon. They began to question me about what I believed and one said, according to my sermon, he could blame the devil for making him do all the bad stuff in his life. And I popped up pretty quickly and said no, that was not true. He is the tempter, but you, and you alone are the one that makes the decision to sin. You can't be like the comedian who became famous with his "The Devil made me do it!" phrase. When I got back to the dorm I called Carole and told her I was in trouble and that I felt like a fish out of water. I knew that night that I was not heading to that conference because I was not about to compromise what I believed.

Compromise! That is what we are talking about this morning. It is knowing what you believe and standing for that belief. "JESUS IS LORD!" Is the cry of true born again believers who follow Christ.

Paul teaches us to know what you believe. To remain strong in what you believe. Be open to what God wants to teach you. For Paul it took a roadside conversion experience that blinded him to wake up his heart and his mind. A Jew who had gone to seminary under the great teachers, a man strong in his Jewish beliefs, who now was arresting others for believing in Jesus. He had heartwarming experiences on the Damascus road that changed not only his heart but awakened him to the truth of Christianity because God transformed his life and he became the missionary to the Gentile nation. His letters today still teach the churches and warn them not to be swayed by fancy preaching and untested truths. He tells the churches and the people of God to remain on the road to life and persevere and believe in the one true God who sets us free and offers us eternal life and a crown of glory for not compromising what we believe. Don't take the wide road to destruction but the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

People today compromise lots of things. They compromise their morals because everyone else is doing it, it must be okay. Our consciences have been seared. Look what's acceptable in our society these days. Pretty soon we will not need rules, or beliefs because it will be an open society, which, when you read the

book of Revelation happens, when God's children are transported to heaven leaving non-believers here to fend for themselves and without God in the world, the world is in chaos. Sometimes we can't tell the difference between right and wrong because the rules of the world have been changed, but have they? Isn't it that we just ignore them? If we don't like them, just forget them. But you know, God's rules haven't changed. They remain constant. People can compromise their beliefs thinking it's okay to believe this or that but that is not true. Compromise! We do it sometimes. But we need to be looking at what we are compromising. Is it your integrity? It is your faith?

Listen to the warning God gives the church. He says, "Enough! Don't give in to them....I'm fed up and about to cut them to pieces with my sword-sharp words." That was from the message. The NIV is a little strong as it says, "Repent therefore!"

We've heard those words often. Repent! Change directions! Turn around! Stop going in the wrong direction! Listen up! Wake up! He who has ears let him hear! Don't compromise what you believe. Don't compromise your Christian walk. Don't be lulled into believing stuff you know isn't true. And if you aren't sure, go to the source. Go to God. If you think I am not teaching God's word, check it out for yourself. You all can read. You all have a bible you can read, read it. Don't just take my word for it, look for yourself. Seek him first. Seek his face and his wisdom and I can tell you this, he will not let you down.

Three churches so far. The Careless church of Ephesus; the Crowned church of Smyrna, and today the Compromising church of Pergamum. All coming close to having their candles snuffed out because they have lost their first love, they have strayed from the truth and they have begun to accept false teachings. Do you see any resemblances to your church? Do you feel like you are a member of one of these churches? Have you heard the voice of God calling out to you to change....to repent....to rethink church?

God says to those who remain faithful, and to those who do repent and return to God's ways there is a great reward awaiting you. He who has ears let him hear the voice of God as he calls out your name.....