

Introduction: Dismiss Kids, Welcome Guests, Pg. \_\_\_\_\_,

**“Don’t Compromise”  
Revelation 2:12-17**

*Read Revelation 2:12-17*

INTRO: Spring is coming... The ice is melting... and one of my favorite signs of spring is that moment when you come out of the Kendall/MIT on the Red Line, and you move across Longfellow Bridge on a sunny day, and what do you see dozens of sailboats moving about on the Charles River.

Now, I’m no sailor, though I think it would be really cool to try, but it is obvious that a sailor’s greatest asset is also he greatest challenge. What is that? WIND!

Wind is required to for those sails to be filled and effective to move the boat to the destination. The only problem is that the wind changes. It blows from different directions, which means a sailor has to constantly keep his eye on his destination on the one hand, and the wind on the other.

What a metaphor of the Chrsitian life. We need WIND, the wind of God’s Spirit (John 3), to bring us life and get us to our destination. But there are competing winds that seek to compromise our commitment to Christ. This is what Paul talks about in Ephesians 4 (not being tossed by the waves and every wind of doctrine), and this is what Jesus is getting at in his letter to Pergamum.

It is so easy for us to be knocked off course. A little slip here, a small step there, a tiny concession, leading to bigger and bigger compromises that betray our commitment to Jesus.

We’ve all been there to one degree or another.

**The Point: Do not compromise your commitment to Christ.**

*Read Revelation 2:12-17*

**1. Don't compromise when facing spiritual opposition.**

Jesus begins his letter to his church in Pergamum by saying: “I know where you dwell...” What if he would he stopped right there? I mean for Bostonians, we would have started playing “Dirty Water” – “Oh... Boston you’re my home, dun, du, du, dunnn.” We take pride in our city. For the past few years, I’ve chanted to my girls: “Where we from? YOU KNOW WHERE. MED-FID!”

But Jesus words about Pergamum do not raise excitement: “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. . . . (And then bookends) . . . , where Satan dwells.” WHAT?! WHY would he say this?

Satan’s throne and address. (historical cultural context vs. The greater reality)

- The city of Pergamum
  - There was a shrine to the “healing-god” Asclepius, whose symbol was a serpent. (Even today the most common medical seal is the rod of Asclepius with two snakes wrapped around the rod.)

- But more than that, Pergamum was the key center in the region for the Roman Imperial Cult worship. It was the first city to build a temple for a Roman ruler (Augustus). False worship was rampant.
- The influence of Satan
  - And all of this pointed to Satan's influence. His work was alive and well, including the persecution of Christians, even to the point of death.
  - What Jesus is saying is that Pergamum was a hotbed of Satan's influence. He had a major stronghold in that city. The opposition was intense!

Did you know that we are in a spiritual battle? We would be naive and biblically uninformed to assume that the demonic is not alive and well in our city.

What is spiritual warfare?

- **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:10-12)**
- C.S. Lewis talked about how that people often fall into two errors about the demonic. One is to disbelieve like a materialist, who denies the supernatural. The other is to fixate on them where it devolves into an unhealthy interest.
  - I'd venture to say that far too many Christians today are functional materialists. We need to wake up.
  - Why are so easily distracted? Why are we so frequently discouraged? Why is that we give into the same old temptations? And then when we do feel excessively unloved by God (as if that could ever be true) as the devil levels accusation after accusation against us?
- We have an enemy! He does not play nice. He attacks us when we are weak and vulnerable. He is working to disrupt our fellowship with God and effectiveness for God.

We must be alert, take up our armor and fight back! We not only put on this armor to stand firm - that's more defensive. We put on the helmet, breastplate, belt, shield, shoes, sword, and PRAYER! To march forward and take Ground! It is both resisting and taking back what belongs to the kingdom of light! (EXPLAIN BRIEFLY - all we need right here: salvation - can't touch me - kill me but you can't kill me! Ha!; FAITH - trust - stepping out in simple obedience - with God's truth and prayer. Shield, sword, shoes, prayer, helmet, right living))

That's what this LENT season better be about, if we are to be in step with Christ. Sleepy prayers won't get it done. Remember: "The intensity of the opposition is because of the enormity of the gospel opportunity."

T: We have an enemy, and this enemy influences the culture where we live. We see specifics in verses 14-15.

## **2. Don't compromise when pressured by the culture.**

Balaam, Balak, and the Stumbling Block for God's People.

- This historical narrative Jesus refers to is found in the Book of Numbers 22-24. Here is what you need to know.
- Balak was King of Moab, a neighbor country to Israel. He feared Israel's size and military power, so he hired one of Israel's prophets, Balaam, to pronounce a curse on his own people. Though Balaam could not curse them, he suggested a different tactic to the King. Just send some of your women over to entice the men of Israel, this will not only lead them astray through sexual immorality, but it will also lead them into spiritual idolatry (Numbers 25:1-3, 31:16). And that's exactly what happened.
- What does this have to do with these Christians in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome?

The Christians Living under Roman Rule in Pergamum

- There is little doubt the church was facing pressure from the Roman Imperial Cult, who believed everyone should worship Caesar and pressured people to do so.
- Additionally, the celebrations they held would degenerate into drunken sexual experiences.
- It is likely that the teaching of the Nicolaitans encouraged these Christians toward syncretism, a meshing of the two religious practices. Hey, you can worship Jesus, but be a good citizen, stay out of trouble. You can worship Jesus and Caesar.

But God is so clear. He will not give his glory to anyone else. There is no room for compromise!

**"How long will you go limping between two different opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21)**

The World we Live in Today Pressures us in Similar ways.

- Worship Jesus, and your job. Value you the approval of people more than God.
- Don't be content with your possessions. Look at everything they have. Want more.
- It's fine to bend God's sexual ethic. What's so special about commitment anyway? Be committed to yourself, your own desires.
- And all of the sudden after we hear these messages
  - Through the media.
  - And the institutions we work for.
  - And see them and hear them in the lives of our non-believing friends,
- all of the sudden we begin a subtle questioning of our own convictions. We dabble in places and practices where Jesus would not be found.

T: Jesus is after "zero tolerance" for evil in our hearts. (Anger Conference) And that is true even if other people in our church begin to drift, which brings us to our third point of consideration.

### **3. Don't compromise when others do.**

Antipas & the Faithful vs. "Some there who hold" (x2)

- There is a contrast in the church of Pergamum. On the one hand, you have those who are holding fast, continuing in faithfulness, among whom, the most notable was Antipas, who died for Jesus, not denying his name! On the other hand, you have some who hold the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

- You have those who have stayed committed and those who have compromised.
- We all need to ask the question:

### **How are you compromising your commitment to Christ?**

- Is there are way I am compromising my commitment to Christ? Is there anything I'm failing to get out of my life? Is there anything I'm failing to put into my life?

Let me give you three thoughts related to living in community as the church:

- We do not have to compromise when others do.
  - We can't excuse ourselves - oh they are... I was just following the crowd. Why?
  - As we think about our struggle against Satanic forces, evidenced in cultural pressure, we need to realize that ultimately, we are responsible. Here's what I mean: the world and the devil would have no influence over us if it weren't for our own fallen hearts that still possess deceitful and sinful desires. If we did not want that (in our flesh), they could do NOTHING!
  - IN CHRIST, sin has no dominion over us, no power. We do not have to sin. We do not have to compromise.
- We should consider the POWER OF WE - our VISION focus for the year.
  - By the way, if you don't think spiritual warfare is real... the very week I shared our Vision sermon on the Power of We, I started hearing about relationships struggling to maintain unity. People disappearing from our gatherings for really strange or unfounded reasons.
  - But as we think about the Power of WE in this area of compromise, consider this: Just as much as the Christ in you stirs up the Christ in me, so does the Christless in you stir up the Christless in me. When we fail to take our stand against demonic opposition and cultural pressure, we can expect others will be negatively influenced by us.
- When we compromise, we can expect the discipline of Christ.
  - Look at verse 16. The call is to Repent. Turn back. Get back to the love they had at first. Be faithful.
  - When Jesus says he will war against the teaching of the Nicolaitans, it's another echo of the Balak/Balaam story, where a plague came to the people of Israel for their rebellion and thousands died.
  - It's discipline for those who truly belong to Jesus and judgment for those who do not. That's what the sword symbolizes here. Jesus has the greater sword. He is the stronger man. His words of judgment are powerful and decisive.

### **4. Don't compromise by enjoying intimate friendship with Jesus.**

In spite of all of the difficulty they are facing in a culture fundamentally opposed to God. In spite of some compromising their faith, Jesus has some great words of encouragement for those who put him first.

*Read 17*

To the one who conquers... Who is the one who conquers?

- Look back at verse 16... the one who repents... when you blow it, come back. Get it right. Keep growing!

- Look back at verse 13... the one who holds fast (13), the one who does not deny his name (13), the one who is a faithful witness. "I'm with him. He's my Savior and my God."
- What's the promise? I love these, maybe my favorite of all the letters.

I will give...

- Hidden manna:
  - Manna was the bread like substance that God fed the Israelites with as they journeyed without food in the wilderness. Jesus says he will provide for us. He will satisfy us.
  - And this manna is feeding off of what he says about who he is. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mt 4). Jesus is the true bread, the true manna (Jn 6).
- White stone with a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.
  - No one agrees exactly what this white stone is, but it has been documented that guests at feasts were given a stone with their name on it as the ticket of admission. Makes sense to me.
  - But it's even better, the name on the stone is a name known only to Jesus and you. What is he saying, you will enjoy an intimacy with me that is unlike any other relationship you have ever known!
  - Jesus loves you like that!

In light of these promises for the future, how could we not pursue greater intimacy with Jesus right now? Intimacy builds intimacy. The more you praise, the more you will want to praise. The more you pray, the more you will want to pray. The more you read, the more you will want to read. Everything flows from the secret place of intimacy with God!

And by the way, this is the way we defeat idolatry and sexual immorality. What our hearts long for when we chase after all of those things, Jesus gives in the fullest measure!

*Conclusion:*

So as the band comes up to lead us in a song of response, I just want to ask you...

**How will you cultivate intimacy with Jesus this week?**

Pray.