

**Letters from God**  
**Be Cautious of Compromise**  
***Revelation 2:12-17***

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**Introduction to Text:** We are in the third week of a series we are calling, “Letters from God.” Revelation 2-3 contains 7 letters written to 7 historical churches of the first century world. More than just ancient letters, these letters are absolutely filled with practical themes for us to consider today. The message of the first letter was to “Keep Jesus First.” Jesus identified the critical need that the Church at Ephesus had left their first love. The message of the second letter is to “Be Faithful until Death.” That brings us to the third letter—“to the church in Pergamum.”

**Text:** <sup>12</sup> "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

"The One who has the sharp, two-edged sword says: <sup>13</sup> I know where you live—where Satan's throne is! And you are holding on to My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the sons of Israel: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

<sup>17</sup> "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

**Introduction:** We have learned that God calls the church to (1) Keep Jesus first and (2) Be faithful until death. Today we learn that God calls the church to (3) Be Cautious of Compromise. Notice how the first two messages fit with the message to the Church in Pergamum. If Satan cannot persuade us to leave our first love, he attempts to put pressure on the church through persecution. If persecution does not steer the church off course, then he continues to do even greater damage by causing the church to compromise. Thus, we see the importance of this call to “Be Cautious of Compromise.”

If Satan cannot corrupt us by external suffering, he will attempt to bring us down by internal compromise. We must Be Cautious of any temptation to Compromise. How do we do maintain purity in the church?

**Recognize the Attention that must be given to Purity.**

I want to pause just a moment and alert you to the next letter in this series. The letter to the Church at Thyatira deals with this similar matter of compromise. Although, we will deal completely with this letter next time, we ought to suggest real quickly today that there is something of a progression in these two letters. Compromise today leads to further unraveling in our personal lives and in our churches.

Second, one distinction that we could make in the two letters is perhaps this first letter deals with doctrinal compromise while the text that we will explore next week deals with ethical compromise.

With that in mind, what can we do to protect ourselves from doctrinal error? In the first place, if we are going to maintain doctrinal purity, we must recognize the attention that must be given to doctrinal purity. Often times, the church has been guilty of not being vigilant against doctrinal error. Notice several things about this text that shows us the importance of remaining vigilant in this area.

**The Culture:** Twice in this text, we come to grips with the fact that they live where Satan lives. Verse 13 records that this is the place where “Satan’s throne is” and synonymously “where Satan lives.” Like the other cities we have considered, Pergamum, though not as large as the other cities, is a seat of Emperor and otherwise pagan worship. In addition, Pergamum for its day, was the home of the second largest library. Now, libraries are good, but literature, as the major media form of its day, was the hot seat of the anti-Christian worldview. I can sense that the point here is that, as host to the second largest library of its day, here is the first century version of something like today’s Hollywood.

Can we not agree that we live in a culture that is absolutely contradictory to Christ? Here is where this text begins to make immediate application.

**The Commendation:** Next we read the commendation. Like the letter to Smyrna, this church is affirmed for standing firm even in the face of martyrdom, but unlike last week, there is a charge against this Church for not being faithful in every area. Perhaps, here is one of the problems of churches today. When some things are so right, it is easy for us to look the other way when other things are so decidedly wrong. One of our chief forms of rationalizing sin or compromise is when we have right belief and practice in other areas.

**The Condemnation:** So, then we get the condemnation. The specific condemnation has to do with false teaching that has infiltrated the church. Again, I want to remind us of the main point this morning. If Satan cannot persuade us to leave our first love, he attempts to put pressure on the church through persecution. If persecution does not steer the church off course, then he continues to do even greater damage by causing the church to compromise. The point of the compromise for Pergamum is referenced back to an Old Testament account in Numbers. Balaam was a rival king of Israel who enticed the people of Israel into pagan activity leading them to believe that they could worship God and participate in some of the pagan worship activities. In a similar way, the Nicolaitans did the same thing in Pergamum. Their false teaching had infiltrated the church. I think the point is clear. Regardless of the exact nature of false teaching, teaching that stands contrary to the absolute truth found in the Word of God has no place in the church. We must know truth, first, and then stand against anything in contradiction to that truth. We must be vigilant in doing so.

**The Caution:** The caution could not be more succinct or more simple: Repent or else. Could anything be more of an urgent appeal regarding the danger of compromise?

**The Conclusion:** The unwillingness to confront will always lead to compromise. The text points out that this is the teaching of some not all, but the unwillingness of all to deal with the some had caused great peril. So, what do we do? That leads us to the second principle for maintaining purity in doctrine.

**Resolve to use the Bible as our sole Authority for Practice.**

- **Understand that there is a difference between Scriptural Standards and Personal Preference.**

I want to remind us of something that I taught about a year ago. We must learn to appreciate the differences in...

- Truth—Truth is found in the Word of God. Truth is truth! We cannot deviate from truth.
- Conviction—Convictions are based on the Word of God, but are most often based on interpretations of the Word of God.
- Preference—Preferences are just that—preferences.

Here's the point: We do not have the right, personally or Biblically, to impose our convictions and/or preferences on other believers. The inability to distinguish truth from conviction and preference is the source of most, if not all, of the disunity among believers.

#### **What makes the Bible our Sole Authority?**

**(1) The Bible is the Word of God.**

**(2) The Bible is eternal.** Preferences change, but God's Word will not change. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God remains forever."

The Greek mythology works of ancient literature give us the story of the Fall of Troy at the hands of the Greeks. The story of the Fall of Troy is told in the works of Homer and Virgil. After the Greeks besieged the city of Troy for ten years without success, the King of Ithaca, Odysseus, devised this plan to build a giant wooden horse—large enough to hold 30 or so soldiers. The Greeks placed this horse with the soldiers at the gates of the city and then left. The hope was that the Trojans would be convinced that Greeks had given up and left the horse as a gift. Just as the Greeks had hoped, the Trojans brought the wooden horse into the city. While everyone was asleep, the soldiers inside the horse slipped out, the other Greek soldiers returned, and the city of Troy was very easily sacked.

The story of the Trojan horse has come to symbolize the subversion created anytime the attack comes from within. Church, stand with me in defense of the truth of the Word of God! May we be ever vigilant against the Trojan horse of false and distorted doctrine!