Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Danger Facing the Church
Scripture: Revelation 2-3
Code: 1299

About five or six years ago, I brought to the attention of our church family a study from Revelation Chapters 2 and 3. And I said at that time that these two chapters were so very, very important, so very strategic to the life of the church that I really should teach those two chapters at least once every year. I confess that I have not been true to my impassioned promise at that time. But the Lord has laid it upon my heart this morning to draw our attention as a church family back to Revelation Chapter 2 and 3.

And since last week, we took a little break from our study of Matthew having completed Chapter 23 and since we will begin now Chapter 24, in the interim I just want to use this time to draw you to these two great chapters in John's Revelation Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, because I believe that they speak to us in a very profound way, a very poignant way, a very direct way here in our church life here at Grace Community Church. And one of the things that I am very much aware of and I trust that you are as well, is the biblical truth that Satan endeavors to thwart the purposes of God. And that is why the Bible says be sober, be vigilant for your adversary, the devil, goes about as roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Be sober and be vigilant. And James like Peter suggests to us that we need to resist the devil. He will flee from us. Paul tells us that we wrestle not against flesh blood but principalities and powers and rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness and the heavenlies. And all of these passages gives us the teaching that we are in a battle with the enemy. At some particular points in our lives, it has become more than just teaching. We have encountered it in a very overt, very active, very aggressive, very definable way.

And I really believe that we at Grace Church in this particular point in our history not only because of our church but because of the church culture in which our church exists. The mentality of current 20 th Century American Christianity stands on the brink of tremendous danger. In fact, I really feel this not just as a mental exercise but I feel this is a heart concern. I really grapple in my own spirit with the imminent danger that I see facing our church. And I suppose that I sought from the Lord some way to communicate this before I ever was reminded that Revelation 2 and 3 would speak to the issue. I've been drawn recently to read about it because more and more people are beginning to write critically against the church and I don't mean the liberal church. I mean the evangelical church.

To try to point out the danger into which it is falling, the traps that are being successfully set for the church, which unwittingly seems to be moving in the wrong path. I've been peaked by this reading. The discovery that others are seeing great dangers facing the evangelical fundamental church of

Jesus Christ. Now I can't speak for to broad a picture. I mean I know what I know and nothing more but there's one area I can speak for and that's Grace Community Church, which continues to be my life and breathe in many ways on a day-to-day basis. And I really believe this church stands in imminent danger and I would less than true to the calling of God if I didn't warn you and warn myself as well.

The Apostle Paul in his communion with the elders on Miletus in Acts 20 said he not ceased to warn them night and day with tears for a period of three whole years and warned them that there would be perverse men among them who would rise up and lead them astray and there would be others coming from the outside who would destroy them. He warned the church at Ephesus. His warning should have been heeded because that's exactly what happened and the church of Ephesus as we should see later went out of existence. And it was the best of churches.

Satan's activity against the church is not always overt, depending upon the nature of that assembled people, depending upon the particular style and commitment of their life, it may be very covert. It may be extremely subtle. It may be indistinguishable and indiscernible to the untrained and undiscerning eye. But I really sense in the life of Grace Community Church that we stand at a point of imminent danger. It isn't that I'm discouraged with everything. I'm not. In fact, I'm thrilled with so many things. I'm thrilled with people coming to Jesus Christ. I'm thrilled with people training to be effective in communicating Christ. I feel thrilled with people who teach the word of God and those who come to learn it. I'm thrilled with those who give generously, so graciously to the kingdom of God and to it's advance so that we are able to do the things that we believe God has put in our hearts to do. And as you saw on the little note on the grace of giving today, because of the generosity of the spirit of God and your response to that in a prompt and obedient heart, last week's offering enabled us to meeting two very, very great obligations and that is to provide additional youth staff for a full year and a new van for our ministries.

I'm rejoicing in that response. I'm rejoicing in many, many things but at the same time, in one sense it's a halfhearted rejoicing because while half of me is thrilled, half of me is deeply anxious and concerned. It is not a psychological anxiety based upon lack of faith. It's a spiritual anxiety based upon knowledge. I know how Satan works and I can sense his movings and I believe I sense them in ways that can be best dealt with by an understanding again of Revelation 2 and 3. So open your Bible to that passage. Now let me just give you brief background. Most of the Book of Revelation is intended to speak about the future, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of it lays out in marvelous detail and detail couched in words of grandeur and vision but nonetheless detail how it will be at the time the Lord returns; talks about judgment; talks about signs and wonders; the manifestation of various creatures who are the emissaries of Satan as well as the manifestation of the son of God, the Christ of glory. It talks about the future. But in Revelation 1, 2, and 3, before you get into the future, it talks about the present.

And it talks about the church and how the church is to be warned. For example in Chapter 1, we meet Christ. And we don't see him here in second coming glory. We see him in the present as it were. And in his beautiful description that John gives in Chapter 1:9-18, Christ is pictured there, clothed with a garment down to the foot, girded with golden girdle, his head and his hair were white like wool, white as snow. His eyes like a flame of fire. His feet like fine bronze burning in a furnace. His voice like the sound of many waters and so forth. Here is Christ in this glorious imagery. And he is seen here moving among some lamp stands, some little candlesticks. Each candlestick with its light represents a church. The churches are named in Verse 11 - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodiceans. Now those seven churches were seven towns in Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. Those churches were really started if you will by the spirit of God using the Apostle Paul. Paul was instrumental in the church at Ephesus' beginning and Acts 19 it describes that. And out of the ministry of the church at Ephesus and Paul's three pastorate there, these other churches were founded in Asia Minor.

And the Lord is pictured here moving as it were among the seven churches of Asia Minor, checking out the lamp and how it's burning, how much oil, how bright is the flame, what is necessary to do that church or on behalf of that church. And is moving in ministry within his church and as he moves through in Chapter 1, he evaluates the seven churches. And then in Chapters 2 and 3, he writes them each a letter and the letter is intended to be his reaction and response to them as a church.

Now the seven churches then represent seven actual churches and these are actual letters written to actual churches. But they are beyond that, symbolic of different kinds of churches. Because there are Laodicean churches at every age, there are Smyrna type churches, Sardis type churches, Philadelphia type churches, Thyatira type, Pergamos type, Ephesus type, there are those types of churches in any period of time. Each one has a unique distinctive mark. Furthermore, there are in any one church, Thyatira type people, groups of people like the Ephesians, groups of people like those in Sardis, groups of people like the Philadelphians, groups like the Laodiceans. So they are real churches and then they are models of types of churches and then they are also illustrations of the types of groups that can be in any church. You see if a church is a "Laodicean" type church, it is only to say that the dominant group of people there are Laodiceans. It isn't to say that there aren't others there.

So we have here then a very, very composite picture of the church. A picture that helps us to understand what a church can be. The kind of character it can develop. And as the Lord evaluates and writes to these churches then, he writes to our church as well. And we must heed his warnings because we could become these kind of churches. In fact, we may already be. And there are certainly in our church, all these types of people. And so this stands then as a very important warning to us. Now let me say at the outset, two churches receive no warning out of the seven. Two receive no warning at all. The church at Smyrna received no warning. Chapter 2:8-11 discusses that church

and it received no warning. It was also the persecuted church. That ought to tell you something. Persecution is a purifier.

The church was under heat. The church was in persecution and that has a way of cleaning out everything doesn't it because people don't hang around to give their lives for something they are totally committed to. So where you have persecution, you have purification. So the purified church receives no warning. No we are not the church purified by persecution. We don't have that. There's a second church that receives no warning. Chapter 3:7-13, that's the church at Philadelphia. They receive no warning either for they were a church marked by aggressive evangelism. Aggressive evangelism. And so we learn something.

The church that is under suffering tends to be preserved as pure. The church that is aggressively pursuing the world to bring them to Christ is also preserved. But there are five other letters, which contain warnings for every church to hear because they tell us how Satan works and what we have to be aware of. Now I want you to know that as I said earlier, I really believe Grace Community Church is a unique church. God has blessed us. Do you realize that this church is beyond the minds of most people to even conceive of a church being? Do you realize that 50% of the churches in the United States have 76 or less people and that 90% of them have under 300? Pastors can't even conceive of a church like this, let alone its myriad of activities, its myriad of implemented ministries, its myriad of training opportunities and options for involvement, discipleship and on and on. God has given us a marvelous and unique, very rare experience in this church and we are a church that endeavors to be true to the word of God.

We stand uncompromisingly for the veracity of Scripture, its authenticity, its inerrancy, its inspiration. We believe absolutely in the trinity, the three members of the trinity, the incarnate God in Christ, in human flesh dying as a substitute for our sin, rising again literally and bodily for our justification, ascending to heaven and interceding for us and coming again in glory and power at the end of the period known as the tribulation to set up his kingdom. We believe in the things the Scripture teaches. We believe that there must be discipline in the church as well as discipleship. We preach salvation by faith plus nothing. We teach maturity. We teach that people ought to be working in the body for the edification and the building up of the body. I mean we are all together as it were in terms of our biblical commitment and we've been blessed. I mean we have been blessed, profoundly blessed by the sovereignty of God. Not by anything we've done, not by the genius of man but by the sovereignty of God.

I am as much a spectator to Grace Community Church as you are. I don't understand why it happened anymore than you do. Except that God did it and we have been blessed. Blessed. And therein lies our vulnerability because we can become so content and so smug and so coldly orthodox and so self-satisfied and so non-vigilant that Satan's subtle activities can literally tear out the foundations underneath us and that's what concerns me. I mean I have seen plenty of great big

buildings that seat several thousand people and don't have a hundred in them on a Sunday morning. They are all over the place. Stone quarries. Monuments to some board in days gone by. And we could stand in danger of the very same thing. And I really do not want to build a white elephant in Panorama City but it's been done throughout history in places with better leadership and more godly people than we have because Satan is very, very subtle. Now how does it happen?

Let's take a look at Revelation 2. Now this letter is addressed to a spiritually strong church. This church is probably more like Grace Church than any other church given in this section. It is a spiritually strong church. It was founded if you will by the apostles themselves. It was taught by the apostles. Paul was its pastor for three years and you don't get them even close to him. But if that wasn't enough, succeeding Paul in the ministry as pastor there was Timothy. They had the very best there was. They were strong in doctrine. They were earnest. They were zealous. I mean it looked like it was everything, as it ought to be. That church was born in a riot. When Paul preached in the 19th chapter of Acts, the people turned from their idols. There was an absolute of overturning of the whole city. A riot broke out. That church was extracted as it were, kicking and screaming, out paganism. And it was a monumental event when God gave birth to the church in Ephesus. And it needed a man with the power of Paul and then he stayed for three years and never failed to declare the whole counsel of God. So it was a properly born church and properly nourished and praying church.

Now Ephesus was a tough place. Ephesus was the center of the worship of Diana of the Ephesians. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the temple of Diana or Artemis and it was filled with munics and prostitutes and priestesses and unnumbered heralds blowing trumpets and flutists and wild dancers and orgies and feasting and all of the horrors of pagan activity. The worship was a kind of hysteria where the people worked themselves into frenzies of shameless sexual mutilations. Heraclitus said things happened in that temple that never happened among animals and just pulled out of the middle of that was a redeemed community of believers, proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ against the great atrocities of pagan and idolatry in their own city.

And in fact, as I said, it started a riot when the church was born so contrary was it. And so you've got to know that the beginning was great. Look at Verse 2, I know your works. I know what your like he says. I'm not under any illusions about you. You are a labor. Or literally, you are a service, diligent service, wholehearted service, service with great effort. The best way to see it, energetic labor. I know you work hard. That's commendable in a church to work hard. People in our church do that. I recently talked to a man who said there was a church in this area looking for a pastor. A young man had become the candidate and he had dreams and visions and ambitions and desires for that church and he unloaded those on the board of men talking to him, talked about what he wanted to see God do in the community and his heart was so full and they voted him down and the answer was we voted him down because he'd make us go to a lot of meetings and he'd disturb our comfort.

That wasn't true of Ephesus. And by the way, that's a fundamental church with that attitude. That wasn't an Ephesus attitude. They were busy. They worked hard. I mean they were active. Not only that, I know you're endurance or your steadfastness, your hypomone, your courageous patience, your gallant dealing with whatever comes along by way of hardship. I mean you can take it. I mean this church took it. When they pulled themselves out of paganism, it wasn't over. That was the beginning of the battle and they had to stand true and they had to stand uncompromisingly and they did.

I mean they had great leaders. People really responded. So he says I know you work hard and I know you've endured without compromise and I know how you cannot bear those who are evil. You even suppress evil. You can't stand evil. You have a righteous and holy indignation. You are intolerant of sinners. I know that about you and that is so commendable. Isn't it? I mean they love righteousness and you have tried them who say they are apostles and are not and found them liars. Strong doctrinally. I mean if somebody came along teaching something that wasn't true, they put them on trial to find out whether they were true or not. If they weren't true, they were gone. I mean here's a church working hard, true to the faith uncompromisingly, hating sin and preserving sound doctrine. Boy that is a strong church, good church. A lot like our church. I mean we're that way. People work hard. I mean we endure without compromising whatever comes along and we do the best we can to demonstrate an intolerance of sin and suppression of evil and we're committed to strong doctrine. They had the best foundation imaginable.

In Verse 3, you have born (that is you have endured), you have shown patience and then at the end of the verse, you labored and you didn't fade. It just reinforces their commitment and he says you even had the right motive. You did it for my namesake. You weren't doing it for the sake of the reputation of the church. You weren't doing it for making a name for yourself. You did it for me. You were even plugged into the right motive. It was my glory, my name. You say how can a church like this go wrong. Verse 4, nevertheless - boy that nevertheless ought to be underlined. Nevertheless, in spite of all of that, I have something against you.

What is the penetrating eye of the Lord see? I mean you look at the church on the outside and you're going to give it the church of the year award. Put a plaque up. This is a model church folks but the penetrating eye of the Lord, the piercing eyes like flames of fire as 1:14 puts it, sees beyond all of that stuff and a fatal flaw is revealed because you have left your what? First love. You left your first love and I suggest to you people that that is right where Grace Church is. I believe in my heart that there are people who are a part of Grace Church who have left their first love.

And they are a burden. They are a burden on the church. They are a burden on those who pray and seek for the ongoing and excellence and the building of the church. They have sound the retreat in the midst of the war. They have taken a vacation when there is a call for duty. There love has cooled. Their zeal has died. They are smugly indifferent and I believe they're here. This was one of

the best churches in all of history. And yet the penetrating eye of the Lord found a fatal flaw. They left their first love. They didn't love Christ the way they used to. The hot heart was gone. The passion was gone. The zeal was gone. The glow was gone. It was all the same stuff. I don't understand that. I really don't.

I mean personally I don't understand it intellectually. I don't understand it personally because the longer I'm a Christian and the longer I know the Lord Jesus Christ and the longer I dig into the word of God, the more my love for him grows. And the warmer my heart becomes and the more devoted and dedicated I am. People say well after you've been in the same church for 15 years, don't you get a desire to go somewhere else? No. The longer I am here, the greater my desire to be a part and see what God wants to do. But I don't understand how that in one sense, I can be doing that and I can be increasing in my devotion and my love along with many other folks and some people who are going along with us and the same information, learning the same kind of stuff are going in the other direction and they don't have the warmth of heart and passion of Christ they had when they were converted.

And what it is is years and years and years of not applying the truth they are hearing. It's years and years of listening without doing, without changing, without having accountability. It's having heard over and over how important it is to pray and not praying. Having heard how important it is to study the word and not studying the word until finally the hearing doesn't mean anything because you have seared your conscious. It just doesn't register much. The honeymoon was over in Ephesus. I mean the one thing that could drive me out of the church, the one thing that could make me run as fast as I could run away would be the feeling that all of a sudden I was a spiritual commitment point and I was in love with the Lord Jesus Christ as a growing kind of experience and the people were somewhere back here in indifference and apathy. I don't think I could survive that.

A young pastor came to me this week back in Kansas City and he had a gaunt face and a weary look and a broken heart and he said I'm in depression, I'm in despair. He said I have been working with the people for seven years and he said after seven years, he said they hear nothing I say. They make no responses except to criticize and judge and not want me to disturb things. If I will conform to what they want to hear, I'm fine. As soon as I command in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ a new kind of commitment, they are angered with me. He says I'm in total depression. I have to do something in my life. I've written 200 other churches a letter and explained to them the kind of man I was with the kind of ministry I wanted and I have had no response. He says what do I do?

I said shake the dust and get out. I said shake the dust and get out. Find some people who want to be what you know God wants them to be even if it's a little group someplace and take off with them but don't waste your life on people who are locked in apathy. Because your life and your call and your training and your ministry is too valuable to God's kingdom to waste on people who are utterly indifferent. If in fact that's what you feel God is leading you to do, do it.

Now there may be times when the Lord says stay because I'm not done refining you and I told him that. But if you sense that is over, time to go. And there are churches where the thrill is gone. There are people in this church the thrill is gone. They don't have a big appetite for the word. There's not a longing for a prayer. They are not exhilarated when you hear about a baptism service. You are not rushing to be at the Lord's Table to commune with him and the elements. You don't have a great overwhelming sense of joy when you say his praise. It's just routine stuff and then you can come and go. You can take it or leave it. If you don't have anything better to do you're here. If you do, you're not.

I mean it can happen. You know? This is a good place and that's why I often pray to the Lord, turn up the heat, Lord, turn up the heat. I do. Half of me wants to write the congressman. Half of me wants to vote that down and turn the persecution on. You understand what I'm saying? Go ahead and write though. I'm not in control of that. My job is not to give you trouble. My job is to give you the word. God will bring the trouble. He'll refine us. I mean if it's a - I'm not talking about a church in general. I'm talking about you. Look at your life. Look at your life.

Is it a fair description of your Christian life that you don't have the love of Christ that you once had? Is that a fair description? If it is you have gone the wrong direction. Howard Hendrix once said that the older the Christian is the more he ought to be devoted to Jesus Christ because he's had more years to cultivate the intimacy of that relationship. You see? I mean how can that be happening the other way? How can it happen except by constant disobedience? So if you are falling out of that first love, if you are abandoning that first love, if you are finding yourself orthodox but lifeless, indifferent to the church and willing to do anything and everything but sow as it were everything you have lock, stock and barrel into the service of Jesus Christ, you better do a little examination because the honeymoon is over.

See that's the fear that I have in this church. That's the subtlety of Satan. We just grow an apathetic church. So many people say they are praying for us. So many people kept coming up to me, we pray for you everyday. Our family meets every morning at 7:30. We pray for you because we know you have a ministry that God is going to use and we just pray that you'll be faithful. We pray for your church and so forth and so forth. And I say thank you, thank you. I wonder if everybody in our church even does that. We've got little people out in the cornfields in Kansas and Iowa; we are the ones that feed them. It comes to them through tape or radio or whatever and every day they meet to pray for us. I wonder if we pray for us.

I wonder where our hearts are in those things. Well what do we do about it? Verse 5, remember. I mean if you are going to correct that kind of thing you have to remember. What? Remember where you were before you fell. Remember how it was. Remember the joy, the exhilaration, the great enthusiasm and excitement of those great glory times. Reach back to the way it was when you were

thrilled with all that was Christ and all that was yours in him. Reach back to the joy and the moment when you first understood some great spiritual truth, when it first dawned on you what it meant to be redeemed, what it meant to be filled with the spirit, what it meant to be obedient. Reach back to what it was like when you discovered a great truth in the Scripture that liberated you from some misunderstanding, some confusion in your heart.

I mean go back and get a hold of something. Not only remember but secondly repent because it's sin to be apathetic. It's sin to leave that first love. It's sin to be cold and lifeless and indifferent. It's sin not to be a hot heart for God. It's sin not to be as it were on fire for him. It's a sin not to be loving Jesus more now than you did yesterday. It's a sin. So repent. And then repeat. What do you mean repeat? Do the first works. Go back and behave like you used to. You ever see them use that technique on a child who is in a coma called patterning? The child can't move anything so everybody comes over all day long and they move everything the way it ought to move. What they are trying to do is let the activity somehow restore the thinking. It used to be the thinking period of the activity and now they are trying to go backwards and let the activity create the thinking.

That's what it is when you say your new life inside created the activity. Maybe now you need to be patterned. You just need to crank up the activity and maybe it will rejuvenate the thinking. Get back at it. Repeat the first works. Bible study, prayer, fellowship, devotion to God, praising God, serving. Verse 5 says or else - boy under line those two words. God gives or else here. I'll come to you quickly. Remove your lamp stand out of its place unless you repent. And he did. Sad. Ephesus today is rubble. Ruins. God came and took the church away. That was the end of it. I mean it was over. They didn't repent. They didn't repeat. They didn't remember even. They never did it. I mean there they were this orthodox, evangelical, fundamental church that founded all the other churches, born out of a revolution, living in the city of Ephesus, the Los Angeles of their day, snatched out of the midst of that paganism in a riot, given birth and leadership by Paul and Timothy and all the best that God had to give them and they went out of existence totally because they left their first love.

The second church I want you to notice is Verse 12 of Chapter 2 and that's the one that I want to major on. So don't worry. I'm not going to take the same amount of time with each. Verse 12 to the angel the church in Pergamos. Right. If Ephesus was guilty of losing first love, leaving first love, Pergamos is guilty of compromising with the world, compromising with the world. See as soon as your love for God cools, it has to go somewhere. Invariably it will go to the world. As soon as you stop loving the Lord the way you should, you start loving things the way you shouldn't - money, entertainment, fashion, whatever. The compromise spells disaster.

Verse 13 we'll start there. I know your works, he says. That's not in all the manuscripts. Perhaps best to leave it out here but the idea is the same. He says I can look at you and see where you are. I can penetrate you. I know where you live. In other words, I know it's tough in your town where Satan's throne is. You're right there, at the end of Verse 13, where Satan dwells. I mean you are in a

hotbed of satanic activity and there was several reasons why he said that. It could refer to the fact that Pergamos was the center for the worship of Cesar, satanic worship of the Roman Emperor. It could refer to the fact that Pergamos was the place where they built the God Zeus an altar. It was the largest, most famous altar in the ancient world, the altar to Zeus and it was shaped like a throne, like a throne.

Could be because the God of healing, Asclepius, was known as the Pergamese God, and in the temple of Asclepius in Pergamos, they had non-poisonous snakes slithering all over the floor all the time and to be healed, people came and slept on the floor. And every time a snake crawled over them it was the touch of Asclepius. Want to know something; enough people were healed to keep people doing that. Demonic healings. They were right in Satan's dwelling place. Demonic healings, a big throne to Zeus, the worship of Cesar. He says I know it's tough where you are. I know you are in the hotbed of false religion. Satan that old serpent right there in your midst. I know that. And I know this, Verse 13 again. I know you hold fast my name. I know you haven't let go of your faith in Christ. I know you haven't pulled my name down to put someone else's up. I know you are not now worshipping Asclepius, Cesar or anybody else. I know you held my name up and you've not denied my faith even in the midst of pagan idolatry, you've been true. And some of you, Antipas my faithful martyr have been slain. So I know you are true to the faith. This is a good group, see, right in the middle of paganism.

But, see at the end of Verse 14. But. I have a few things against you. You have there them. Them, not the whole group but them, some of you hold the doctrine of Balaam. What was the doctrine of Balaam? Well he taught Balac to cast a stumbling block for the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed unto idols and commit fornication. The point is this. Balaam was making an effort to get God's people, Israel, to intermarry with the pagans. See the pagans were afraid of the Israelites. They came in and invaded their land. They were conquering them piece by piece by piece. The pagans knew we've got to get rid of this conqueror. The best way is to have them intermarry with us. We'll just mix them with us. We'll blend them right in and they'll lose their identity. So the intermarriage was a way to corrupt Israel. You can go back to Numbers 22:3,4, and 5 and read about it. Here Christ says to the church at Pergamos, you've got somebody in your fellowship teaching your people to marry the world, to lose the distinction, to lose the separation, to lose the uniqueness. You've got somebody communicating compromise, teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitaines, which apparently was some doctrine of compromise, some doctrine of evil compromise.

And then there's an even more distinct and graphic identification. It says repent or I will come unto thee quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. This identifies as them as an enemy of the kingdom of God. It isn't that they are just compromisers but as soon as you compromise with the world; you become an enemy of God. James 4 put it's very simply, friendship with the world is what? Enemy with God. You are the world's friend. You are God's enemy. It's that simple. I mean being on an equal yoke together with what? Unbelievers. How can two walk together accept that we

agree? What fellowship is light with darkness, Christ with lie of Satan?

This church married the world. Compromise with the world. Now that is a very subtle danger, people. I'm not assuming that you don't understand that. It is so subtle. So subtle. The church today is worldly. It is sickeningly worldly. It is perversely worldly. Christian people have literally bought the world's garbage. I mean just watch it. The critics come along and say the Bible isn't the word of God. So the church buys that and now we have seminaries all over the world pumping out people who don't believe the Bible is the word of God, calling themselves Christian schools, Christian churches. And then even those today who say we are evangelical, we just don't believe it an inerrant Bible. You are not evangelical. In fact some of them are saying we believe in inerrancy, we just define it differently.

You see the world came along, criticized the Bible, said it couldn't be true, so the church jettisoned the Bible. Well that's what the world is thinking. We certainly have to respect their intelligence. The world comes along and dumps evolution on us, so the church wants to let go of creationism and there are many churches where they've adapted some kind of mix between evolution and creationism as a concession to the world. And then a couple of lesbians decide they want to have their day in the sun. They start an ERA moving, a whole women's liberation movement and here the church is Johnny come lately behind every one of the world's movements advocating all kinds of women's liberation and overturning tradition and overturning biblical standards that have been in place for thousands of years. And I just received in the last two weeks a letter indicating from one of the very well known churches in America (you'd be surprised if you knew which church it was). They wanted to inform me that from now on they will be ordaining women to their elder board and ordaining women as pastors. Fundamental evangelical church.

Where'd they get that idea? In the Bible, not in real life. They compromised with the world. And then the church wants to tolerate homosexuality. And I read just yesterday where a leading evangelical in his new book says that his divorce was a gift from God to liberate him, to set him free, as he said, as he set Abraham free from _____ he used to pursue the land of Canaan. That's just nothing but compromise with the world. And then the church compromises its entertainment. We've got to have the whole world's gig. I see these so-called Christian entertainers, I get upset. I sometimes think if I see another parade of those over-dressed, egomaniacs, I'm going to put my foot through the TV set. I just - it's appalling. Something has to be happen, people. Something has to happen.

We cannot tolerate this and then this increasing materialism of the church. Staggering. Some of these people, they are literally swept up in the concept of wardrobe and jewelry. It's inconceivable to see these things being defended as evangelical and of course then they adapt the new theology called the health, wealth, prosperity doctrine. See Jesus wants you wealthy, blah, blah. Nothing but compromise. I mean it's Pergamos. It's all it is. Nothing but Pergamos. Ego stands in front of everything. The world says do your own thing, be your own person, so they do. It's that whole

sickening thing in the church that must be just as noxious to the nostrils of God, only infinitely more so than it is to us.

Martin Marty from the University of Chicago was interesting critic of Christianity wrote recently "Late Saturday night Mr. and Mrs. Invisible Religion get their jollies from the ruffle shirted, pink tuxedo men and high quaff eared, low neckline celebrity women who talk about themselves under the guise of born again autobiographies. Sunday morning the watchers get their jollies as Holy Ghost entertainers, caress microphones among spurting fountains as highly professional, charismatic leader entertains them. Are they to turn off that very set and then make their way down the block to a congregation of real believers, sinners, off key choirs, sweaty and homely people who need them, people they do not like but are supposed to love, ordinary pastors who preach grace along with calls to discipleship, pleas for stewardship that do not come off well oiled? Never."

"Since the electronic church you remind me at least preaches Christ and thus may do some good. Let it be. Let its members pay for it. But let the church catch on to what is going on and go its own way, undistracted by the offers of cheap grace or the language of the cross without the mutual bearing of the cross." He's right on target. See the moral departure and indulgent sins of the world is just replete in the church, just every place. Christians preoccupied with possessions and fashions and their egos and all this stuff and it's just part of the world that's all. We can see the church sliding down the scales. First the loss of first love and then comes compromise with the world and it just keeps going. Where does it go from there?

Let me just show you by drawing it together. The church at Thyatira. Notice that in Verse 18 of Chapter 2. In Verse 20 he says I have something against you. Oh he says in Verse 19, I know your work. I know your love, your service, your faith, your endurance, your work but I know the last works have even been more effective than the first. You know this again is an evangelical, fundamental basic church. It's the all right church. It's the typical church. But I have something against you. You know what it is? You allow that women Jezebel, now I don't think her real name was Jezebel. I don't think any mother on the face of the earth is dumb enough to name her daughter Jezebel. So I don't know what her real name was but she's Jezebel in this chapter. You allow that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, to eat things sacrificed unto idols. You know what you've got in your church? You've got a lot of problems. First of all, you've got a woman standing up in the place of authority, giving information. Secondly she's a jezebel woman, which means she is a woman who masquerades as if she worships the true God and the truth is she doesn't at all. She has her own idols. She's a woman out of place in your church. She has no business teaching to start with and in her teachings, she is seducing people to fornicate and to eat things sacrificed to idols. What does this mean? She's no doubt some liberated lady preaching that we've been liberated.

And man, fornication is all right. You say wait a minute. You mean a church that's doing the work of the Lord has love, service, faith, patience and all of this, has somebody in there, a woman, standing up overtly teaching the people can commit fornication? You couldn't call this an evangelical church. No you're right. You really couldn't but some try. This church was tolerating sin. Ephesian church left first love. Pergamos church compromised with the world. Third step, tolerates sin. Tolerates sin. She was saying we're free in Christ. You know. That may be the approach she was taking. Fornication is all right. Listen up. Personally I know of a pastor of a church. I preached in the church on several occasions. He came to the view and is still going around speaking that every young couple before they got married ought to take a shower together. After all it's only the old nature, why worry about it?

And recently heard of a church taught by a well-known Bible teacher where they are now showing pornographic films. Why? That's the old nature. They are liberated from that. They are out of bondage. In the name of liberty, tolerating sin. And then in the case of this woman, she even seduces them to eat things sacrificed to idols. Well you say that's not a black and white thing. No that's right. That's another indication of this misused freedom. See there were many gentiles who would be offended by that right? Because you know meat would be taken to the pig and temple and offered and all these people bring in their meat to be offered. The priest could only eat so much.

What they didn't eat, they took out the back of the place and sold in the marketplace. Some people had become Christians. They'd go into the marketplace. Buy the meat offered to an idol and say I can't eat that. That brings back all my old idolatry. That conjures up all the evil I've been saved out of. I can't possibly eat that. And somebody would say ah, go ahead and feed it to them anyway. In other words, we don't care if they're offended. We don't care whether they stumble. We are free to do what we want. We are not bound by what they say. So here is this liberated person who is saying fornication is all right. We can offend anybody we want and they just tolerated the sin of fornication, the sin of offending a weaker brother and the Lord says I gave her some time to repent. She repented not. I'll throw her in bed all right but it will be a bed of tribulation. I'll kill her children. He goes on like that.

And the Lord says he's going to judge the choice to tolerate sin. But it comes so subtly you see. First it's the loss of first love and then as a compromise of the world and then you tolerate sin. See as soon as the world says oh it's all right to have women do this and that; oh it's all right to have homosexuals in the church; oh it's not so bad to have divorce and to remarry and pretty soon oh yeah that's what the world says. Pretty soon it becomes so much the constant dripping, dripping, dripping that we just all of sudden accept it and we tolerate sin.

But it doesn't stop there. There's another church and I just mentioned it to you briefly. And that's in Chapter 3, Verse 1 Sardis. You know where it leads? He says in Verse 1, I know you're works. I can see you. I know what you're like. I know the kind of church you are. You have a name that you live.

You have a church reputation. Oh everybody knows about you. You are the first church of Sardis. Everybody knows you. But you are what? You are dead. You are dead. No life. No life. You are just nothing. You make no contribution. You are dead. What kind of church is this? All program, no power. All program, no power. Pile of ruins. Stone quarry. People go there but it doesn't mean a thing. Dead. Like the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner by Coleridge. Corpse is men, the ship, dead men pull the oars and dead men steer the vessel. Dean men in the pulpit. Dean men in the pews. No life. Nothing happens. Oh God, save us from that because that leads to the last one. Chapter 3:14 the church of Laodicea. He says you are neither cold nor hot. He says I know you. I know your works. I know what your like. I can see you as I move among the lamp stands. I see you. You are not cold or hot. You are not for me or against me either. I wish you were cold or hot. You're like a drink. You either want it cold or hot. If it's a hot drink, you want it hot not lukewarm. If it's a cold drink, you want it cold not lukewarm. And if it's lukewarm, spit it out.

And the Lord says when I taste you; I spit you out, out of my mouth. That's the apostate church, the unsaved church. The Sardis church was orthodox but just absolutely dead, no life, nothing. Just formed. Just going through the routine. This is the church that's apostate. The unsaved church. You want to know something folks? I'm telling you. There are churches that are apostate today that once were dead. That once tolerated sin. That once compromised with the world. That once left their first love. That once were on fire for God. You understand that? It could happen.

Put the little line out there. I see Grace Church moving on that line. And I see that there are people in our church who have lost their first love. They have left that first love. They have walked away from them. I know that. There are people in our church who have compromised with the world. There are people in our church who tolerate sin and if I were to put our little line there, I'd say that we are still in the Ephesus category but I fear what will happen if too many of us leave their first love. Then we'll compromise to a greater extent and off we go. God help us.

As good as it is and as wonderful as we have it now, if people approach this church with apathy and indifference, come see, come saw, take it or leave it, come when you want, don't bother when you don't care, if that's the way it is, we're in trouble. And I guess when I realize we have 7,000 or 6 or 7,000 people here on a Sunday morning and probably our 30,000 plus people in this area who say Grace Church is their home, I say to myself every Lord's day where in the world are the other 27,000 people who float in and out at their own whim.

What are we dealing with? I just say this because this is the church which Jesus purchased with his own blood and we want it to be to his glory. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord, it's not depressing to be here. It's exhilarating. It's not unhappy. It's blissful. We wouldn't trade it for anything. So many good people, so many godly people, so many exciting, enthusiastic, exhilarating, loving, obedient, faithful, courageous, uncompromising, generous, humble, serving

people, it's so good. It's such a God-blessed, spirit-empowered, Christ-exalting place. And not for a moment do we express a hint of ingratitude or discontent. Only that we warn against danger so imminent and it comes down to my heart, Lord. I just want my heart to be right. I want to have the greater zeal than I've ever had in my life, greater love now than I have ever had in my life, greater fear of compromising with the world than I've ever had, a greater intolerance of sin than I have ever had and I want that for each of these people. Each one. God, help us to do some spiritual inventory. Go through the life. See if the honeymoon has died. See if the love has grown cold. See if the zeal isn't there. See if the passion has left. Confess it. And stop the consequent compromise with the world that so easily happens because if we turn the heat of our life, the zeal of our life, the fullest of our life away from you, it's going to go to the world and then comes the compromise and the tolerance. Save us from that, Lord.

While your heads are bowed just together with me, say Lord, make me what you want me to be silently in your heart. Make me what you want me to be, Lord. Don't let me leave that first love. Increase my faithfulness. Increase my love. That's our prayer, Lord and help us be faithful everyday I pray.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).