

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

Pergamos: The Church at Satan's Throne

Scripture: Revelation 2:12-17

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For now, let's open our Bibles to Revelation chapter 2. We're going to be looking at verses 12 through 17, the letter to the church at Pergamos.

In chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation there are letters by the Lord Jesus written to seven churches. They were actual historical churches, churches that really did exist. These messages were directly given to those specific churches because of the very specific issues at hand.

However, these letters transcend those churches, as do the letters of the New Testament which are typically written to churches or individuals and also transcend those churches and individuals to be applicable to all of us. These letters likewise describe not only a single church in history but a kind of church that exists through all the history of the church. And so they are very instructive for us.

As we look at this third letter to the church at Pergamum, or Pergamos, either is correct, we meet a church engaged in compromise. The first letter, you remember, was written to Ephesus, the church that left its first love. The second letter was written to Smyrna, the persecuted church. And this letter is written to a compromising church. This church is beginning to be linked inseparably to the world. And this church has decided that it can maintain some kind of Christian credibility and also associate itself with the sins of the past. Pergamos is a picture of any church that courts the world, any church that marries paganism in any form. The church at Pergamos is a picture of any believer, any Christian who weds the world, as we shall see.

As we go through these letters we note that they all have pretty much the same components, and we'll run through those components and by doing that the letter will unfold to us. First is the correspondent...the correspondent, or the one who writes. Verse 12 says, "To the angel, or the leader, the messenger, the one who will take this letter back to the church at Pergamos, probably one of their pastors, to the messenger of the church in Pergamum, write:" And that is, of course, the Lord Jesus telling John to write, John is the pen man, he is the one who picks up the quill, as it were, and puts the words that Jesus gives him. He says, "Write this, the one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this..." And I've noted for you that every time these letters begin with a reference to the author, this is typical of ancient correspondence. Modern correspondence ends with the author's

name, ancient correspondence began with the author's name. And this author is identified as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword.

We know who that is from chapter 1 verse 16 because back in chapter 1 you have the vision of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is described in verse 16 as having in His right hand seven stars which, you know, are the seven leaders of the churches, as is noted for you in this same text. And out of His mouth, it says, came a sharp two-edged sword. So the Lord is described as holding the leadership of the church in His hand and out of His mouth coming a sharp two-edged sword. Now when you go over to chapter 2 verse 12, the one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this...Jesus Christ then is the author.

And in this case you will notice that the description of Christ that is selected is that which articulates His judicial authority. It sees Him as judge, it sees Him as executioner. What is it that is the sword coming out of His mouth? Perhaps Hebrews 4:12 says it as well as any, "For the Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any...what?...two-edged sword." It is the Word of God coming out of His mouth that is like a two-edged sword. It's a double edged sword to speak of its facility and alacrity and judging and moving fast from side to side and wreaking havoc as it moves. It is an instrument of judgment falling on those who are deserving of that judgment.

In Revelation chapter 19 we see the same imagery in verse 15. Jesus Christ in His return is described here, heaven opens in verse 11, a white horse, the one on it is faithful and true, He comes in judgment and making war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and so forth. And in verse 15, "And from His mouth comes a sharp sword." And here it tells you what it's for. "So that with it He may smite the nations." It is a sword of judgment. The two-edged character simply means it moves fast and rapidly and devastatingly in both directions. It cuts everywhere it turns.

The introduction to Christ then in this letter is not a happy one, it is not a promising one, it is a threatening one. When He introduced Himself to the church at Smyrna in verse 8 He said the first and the last who was dead and has come to life, that's encouraging because some of them were dying for the faith in Christ and He was writing them as the one who was resurrected, who had conquered death for Himself and for them. In the letter to the church at Ephesus He introduces Himself simply as the one who holds the seven leaders in His hand and moves among the churches, which are represented by the golden lampstands, not threatening at all, speaking about His control and His care and His concern as He moves through His church and His protection over its leaders. Here is the first negative introduction because this is a church that is facing judgment. This introduction of Christ is the right introduction for the church at Pergamos. The church at Pergamos was in serious danger and that danger was going to come from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the one who wields the sword. This particular sword is the sword of judgment that is used to cut down those who disobey the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is clear from the very letter which we'll study tonight as we go through it that Pergamos was compromising. Pergamos obviously was a church made up of Gentiles primarily who had been converted out of paganism. They had, no doubt, been converted to Christ and there was some great transformation but times have changed and they have now gone back and picked up some of their pagan habits. They have married the world, as it were, and are in danger of the judgment of the Lord of the church. Disaster is looming on the horizon.

If you look back at what happened in the history of the church, you can understand this kind of thing. If you look at the sweeping history of Christianity in the western world, you will see churches that became worldly and what happened to them. You look, for example, at a time period say from the year 300 to 600 and you see that under the Roman Empire under the direction of Constantine in those early years, the church married the world. Heathen priests became Christian priests. Heathen temples became Christian churches. All children were required to be christened, they were therefore supposedly made Christians by putting a little water on their heads. Heathen days of feasting and drunkenness were made in to Christian days like Christmas and all other sort of saint days. And Christianity got lost in all of this. It was merely a mass state religion. And that is perhaps the most dominant period in the church history when the Pergamos mentality was evident.

But if we ever were in such a time, we are in such a time again today. The church, of course, has become worldly. The liberal or dead church, as we would perhaps want to call it today, those who have departed from the true faith and embraced the world are all around us. Those denominations, for the most part, died in terms of spiritual life and live on only in name. The church is impure. The church has sold out to Satan, it has wed the world and has long since been judged by Christ and stripped of any power or any spiritual influence. That's where Pergamos was and that's why the Lord identifies Himself as the one with the sword.

Now, secondly, we look from the correspondent to the city itself. What was the city like? And again I don't want to get caught up in geography lessons and sociology lessons, but just to give you a little bit of a feeling. This particular city is less than a hundred miles from Ephesus. Smyrna would be about half way if you were moving north, and that's what I told you...the route of these letters follows the route that would be taken to deliver them. Ephesus the starting point, and then on to Smyrna, and then on about 50 miles, 55 miles or so north to the city of Pergamos. It's about 20 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.

On the ancient side of Pergamos there is a village today, it's called Bergama(?), it's a Turkish corruption of the word Pergamos. There is still, I understand, a small Christian community in Bergama. Legend says that Pergamos was built by a son of Hercules. Supposedly was built on a lofty hill in the broad and fertile plain of the Caicus valley by this son of Hercules. By the time John penned this letter, it had been the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor for somewhere

between 250 and 300 years. The word "Pergamos" literally means parchment. Do you know what parchment is? Parchment is a writing material developed from animal skin. And apparently it was first developed in this area and thus the city of Pergamos took its name from that.

It was an important religious center where the pagan cults worshiping Athena, Asklepios, Dionysius which is another name for Bacchus the god of drunkenness and debauchery, Zeus...all of these things were there. The worship of the Roman Emperor was very big. In fact, this was the first city in the ancient Roman world to build a temple to Caesar. The emperor worship had reached the point of cultic form. He was no longer seen as a political or military leader but he was seen as a god. And in this city they built the first temple to Caesar. Further years indicated that they built further temples, and so the city had perhaps several temples of worship for Caesar. It came then the capital of Caesar worship. That city which was more given over to that than any other city in ancient Roman territory.

They had developed along with Caesar worship, of course, all of these other pagan forms of worship. And as long as you worshiped Caesar, you could worship somebody else. What made it tough for Christians was they didn't worship Caesar at all. They worshiped Christ and Him alone and refused on the one day a year when you had to burn incense to Caesar to do it, and therefore lost their citizenry rights and lost their lives in some cases. That would have been intensified in Pergamos because it was the capital city for Caesar worship, and probably it was required more than just one day a year in this city, and that's what precipitates the fatality that occurs in this city to one of the members of the church.

In the city of Pergamos also was a large university and a library we are told and this is quite remarkable in ancient times, a library of 200,000 volumes. Now if you stop and realize that you're talking about volumes which are hand written because there is no printing, not for a long, long, long time like 1500, and they were having to copy those by hand, you can understand that a volume...library volume of 200,000 is a tremendous significance. In fact, it was such a significant library that it was later sent to Egypt as a gift from Antony to Cleopatra. So the city had some prominence and some significance.

What about the church? We move from the city to the church. How did it start? Well again we don't know. We do know, according to Acts chapter 16 that Paul passed through the area. This city, Pergamos, was in a region of Asia Minor called Mysia. And in Acts 16:8 it says Paul passed through there, whether in passing through there he effected some gospel ministry which brought some people to Christ in the city of Pergamos which was probably on the toll road, the Roman toll road through Mysia and Paul perhaps went through it, whether or not he had ministry there, we don't know. There's nothing in the book of Acts to tell us that he founded the church. The best...the best understanding would come from Acts 19:10 because in Acts 19:10 you remember that the Apostle Paul had this wonderful ministry in the city of Ephesus and it was so powerful and so far-reaching that verse 10

says that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. So at some point during the time of three years ministering in Ephesus, the word was bouncing out. People were traveling and moving, Christians were going up north through these various cities and taking the gospel and it was echoing through all of Asia Minor.

During that period of time, no doubt, the church at Pergamos was founded. But it was in a very pagan atmosphere, completely perverse to Christian testimony. In the middle of that was situated this little church to which Christ addressed the letter. In fact, in verse 13 you will note that He says, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." Satan's got his operations all over the world but he's got his throne there. That's quite an amazing statement. Make no mistake, my friend, his throne is not in hell, it's in this world. This is the field of his operation. Hell is the place of his incarceration, this is the place of his operation. His power was unleashed from this city and some in the Pergamos church had fallen victim to Satan and become thoroughly engulfed and meshed and even married to the world. Frankly, not persecution but this kind of compromise is the fastest way to destroy the church's life and testimony.

Now, let's look a little more closely at the letter and see the commendation. There's some good things to say. He says them in verse 13. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." They existed at the headquarters of satanic opposition. Now people say, "Well how would you interpret that?" Well, I would just interpret it the way it's written. Satan had obviously established the center of his operation there. I don't know why, but he had. It was the headquarters for his authority. You must note also that He says here, "Where you dwell where Satan's throne is," a mark of permanent residence. Satanic power was manifest right out of that city.

Now in Smyrna they had a synagogue of Satan. We noted that back in verse 9. But here is the very throne of Satan. The synagogue of Satan, I might remark, was perverted Judaism. The throne of Satan was this Gentile base of false religions. And so, Satan had set up his enterprise there and this little church was feeling the heat of it and it was in some ways succumbing to it.

Further we know that this church was without any particular apostolic ministry. We don't have any record that they had been exposed to any powerful leadership, that they had been exposed to any great solid teaching. But as I have said before, true faith is not fragile, only false faith is and they were standing against it.

Some of them, however, who had attached themselves to the church were being sucked into the world. They were having to meet the enemy on his own ground and it was not easy.

But they would succeed, the true church, because you remember the words of Jesus, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." I will build My church and the throne of Satan will not prevail against it. There was a true church here, there was a growing church here, there was

a real church there, a saved church, waging an uncompromising war right at the throne of Satan. They were doing well enough to be commended. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is and you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith." They were true. I say it again, true faith is not fragile, it is indestructible. It survives everything, even the onslaughts of hell.

Now just what is Satan's throne? What are we talking about? What can He mean here? Well it could refer to the emperor worship which was set up there, the worship of Caesar which then flows out pervasively through the whole Roman Empire, the first city to build a temple to Caesar. It could refer to the magnificent altar to Zeus. Zeus was sort of the head of the Pantheon, the supreme god. And one of the wonders of the world, this magnificent altar to Zeus, the largest most famous altar in the world was there. It was shaped like a huge throne. It looked like a throne and it was set on the Acropolis. The Acropolis means the highest place. They would always put their worship point at the heights in ancient times, and so they had built this famous throne, as it were, or altar to Zeus. Perhaps that was the throne of Satan.

But there's another element of their worship that fascinates me and it certainly must be included in any understanding of Satan's throne. Not only was he orchestrating Caesar's...the worship of Caesar from there to flow out to the Roman world, the known world, not only was there this massive altar on the Acropolis that looked like a throne and a Satanic one at that because it reflected a false religion, but there was the very bizarre and strange worship of Asklepios. Asklepios was the god of healing and Asklepios was known all over the ancient world as the Pergamese god, the god most associated with Pergamos was Asklepios. A very famous individual came from Pergamos, his name was Galen(?). And Galen was the second most famous medical person in the ancient world, the most famous being Hippocrates. Any doctor before he can go through the processes takes what is known as the Hippocratic oath which is the ethical statement made by Hippocrates that should be the standard by which any medical practitioner applies his trade. But next to Hippocrates was Galen was the second great shining medical mind.

In the city of Pergamos was a medical school. And this was a famous place of medicine. Mingled into their medicine, of course, was a lot of superstition. And the emblem or the idol of Asklepios was a snake. If you have ever seen the medical symbol, you will notice that in the middle of a medical symbol winding its way around the pole is a snake...that is the ancient god Asklepios, the god of healing. When you went to the temple of Asklepios you went there to be healed. In the temple harmless snakes slithered all over the temple floor. And in order to be healed you had to go in there and lie down and stay there. You slept on the temple floor and while you slept the defused multiplicity of the deity of Asklepios crawled over your body and infused you with his healing power. Satanic? Yes. Right from the old serpent himself.

So when you hear that Asklepios was there, the serpent god, that sounds Satanic. When you know that Zeus was there and big upon the hill looming over the whole place was an altar to this false god,

you know that Satan was there. And when you know they were worshiping the Caesars, you know that Satan was there. And when you put it all together, certainly this is Satan's throne.

In the middle of all of that, in the middle of the powerful work of Satan was a little church. And I love this, He says, "And you hold fast My name and did not deny My faith." That's the commendation. You hold fast My name. "My name" always means who I am, person and work. In other words, you have been faithful to Me. He's talking about personal faithfulness to Him. And then He says you did not deny My faith. You did not deny My truth, My gospel, the message of salvation by faith. You didn't deny Me, you never denied who I was and you never denied your faith in My gospel, My truth. You never deviated in your theology and you never deviated in your fidelity. You believed the truth and you sustained that belief faithfully, you stayed true, you didn't compromise.

The courage of their faith is evident. They stood boldly for Christ. They weren't ashamed of His testimony, even in the place where Satan's throne is. It wasn't easy...back to verse 13...you held fast My name, you hold it right now...present tense...you have not denied My faith, you don't deny it now, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

Antipas, we don't know who he was...probably their pastor, one of their leaders. My witness, My martus, My martyr, My faithful one...notice the "My's, would you? My name, My faith, My witness, My faithful one...Christianity is so personal, isn't it? So personal. You didn't deny My name, you didn't deny My faith, that's your commitment to Me.

And then there is My witness, Antipas, My faithful one, that's My commitment to him. I belong to you and you don't deny it, you belong to Me and I don't deny it either. I'm yours and you're Mine.

He identifies Antipas only as My witness, My martus. And that word went through an interesting metamorphosis. It basically means witness, martus, but it came to be martyr. Because so many of the witnesses that were faithful to Christ died, the word martus eventually became transliterated into English as martyr. And here is a person who is right in the transition, a witness becomes a martyr because the witness pays the price. You were faithful, you never denied My name, or My faith, even in the day of Antipas. My witness, My faithful one who was killed among you, in your midst.

Tradition says, fascinating, he was burned to death inside a brass bull. They had created a brass bull hallowed out, they set afire and put him in it. You saw that, it happened among you, you watched My faithful one, you watched My witness become My martyr and you never deviated from your faith and you never denied My name.

The faithfulness of that little church should be a challenge to all of us today. Antipas paid the supreme price for not compromising. Some of us aren't even willing to sacrifice our popularity or our

wrong desires for the sake of staying separated from the world. You have to ask...what in the world has happened to our sense of values? Here's a man who would rather die than compromise. We would readily compromise rather than change the simplest pattern of our selfish lives.

So, Pergamos, for the most part, was faithful. Then, fifthly, comes the condemnation. This is sad...the condemnation. Verse 14, "But I have a few things against you." I just hate to read that. So much good, so many faithful, but I have this against you. "Because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam." Verse 15, "You also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."

What's He saying? This is what I have against you, you have these people there who believe these false things and you are allowing it. You're not dealing with it. You're allowing them to feel comfortable. I have a few things against you...two, namely..."Because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam." You have them, it's your responsibility, you're not putting them out of the church. You're not dealing with it. It wasn't a question of their denying the Lord's name, they wouldn't do that. It wasn't a question of denying the faith, they wouldn't do that. It was a question of being soft and tolerant to error. There are some in your church who have wed the world and you're allowing them to feel comfortable.

And He directs Himself at two heresies. One identified with an Old Testament character, the other identified with a New Testament period character, anyway, by the name of Nicholas. He says you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam. We don't have the time to go back but you can take your Bible, go back to Numbers 22, 23, 24, and 25 this evening after the service and you'll fill in the whole story of this fascinating character by the name of Balaam. You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam. Rather than go into the whole thing, the Lord directs Himself at exactly what He has in mind. What was the problem with Balaam? What's the doctrine of Balaam or his teaching? "Who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality."

Balaam was a prophet for hire. Balak, king of Moab, wanted to get rid of Israel. The Moabites and the Israelites were always after each other. Balak wanted to get rid of Israel. So he went to Balaam who was a prostitute prophet and could be bought. And he paid him to curse Israel. He felt that if Balaam would curse Israel, he had such prophetic powers that Israel would be under the curse. Three times Balaam tried to do it. Every time he tried to do it he failed. So he got another plan. If he couldn't curse them, he'd earn his money another way, he'd corrupt them.

So what did he do? He devised a plot. His plot went like this, the Moabite women will move in among the Israelite men and the Moabite women will sexually seduce the Israelite men, suck them in to inter-marriage. And once they're inter married it will pull them in to all the idolatry life of Moab. Life of Moab could...the life of Moab could be reduced to a simple statement, it could be described as

fornication and idolatrous feasts. It could be described as gluttonous orgies of lasciviousness. It could be described as debauchery and prostitution. And so, Balaam tried to work his plot and have the women of Moab seduce the men of Israel into inter marriage and then he could bring Israel into a blasphemous union with Satan and idols and fornication and that would debase Israel, that would destroy their power.

You want to know something? It worked. The doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that the people of God can inter marry with the heathen and thus will become what the heathen are. There were some people in this church saying it's okay to inter marry, inter mingle with the pagan system. We are not to be separate, we are not to be aliens, we're to inter marry with unbelievers, we're to get involved in life around us, mixing the old patterns, the old morals, or lack of, the old idolatry with the new Christianity. Of course our Lord had called for a clean break but always there are the seducers, always there are those who come in and want to get God's people to break from the separation and mingle with the world. God absolutely condemned such a union in Israel and here the Lord Jesus Christ condemns such a union in Pergamos. We're reminded of 2 Corinthians 6 where Paul says, "What fellowship has light with darkness, what concord has Christ with Belial? Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." But here there were some people in the church saying you can be a Christian and worship idols, you can be a Christian and commit fornication with a heathen priest, priestess at the temple or priest. You can go to the debauchery and the orgies and the festivals and the feasts and still come here and pay your homage to Jesus. They were teaching that.

And what was worse, the saints were doing nothing about it, absolutely nothing. James 4 says, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." There can be no compromise, there can be no inter marriage with unbelievers. But you have some there and they're advocating it and they're teaching it and you're not stopping them.

And so, people are eating things sacrificed to idols and committing acts of immorality. Back at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, the Apostles sent out a message to the churches and said, "Don't eat things offered to idols, it sucks you back into idolatry, it may be an abuse of your Christian freedom, it makes weaker brothers stumble, it conjures all the old life patterns, and the council at Jerusalem also said stay away from all immorality. And they were really mandating not the obvious private sexual sin, but the public orgies that went on in pagan life. This issue was settled long ago, having been discussed and mandated from the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and still here are some decades later saying God tolerates this.

Then there's another thing He has against them. Verse 15, "Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." That little phrase "in the same way" is important because the teaching of the Nicolaitans led to the same behavior. Nicolaitans were comparable to those who were following Balaamism. Some think this goes back to Nicholas who once in Acts 6 was appointed as a deacon but later defected and became an apostate, we can't verify that. But

apparently this man, whoever he was, Nicholas, like Balaam had advocated a mingled life style. He may have been kind of a pre-Gnostic, someone who believed he had entered in to ascended knowledge. He no doubt was a Libertine who believed that you could conduct yourself any way you wanted it. It advocated an extreme indulgence in sin, uncleanness, immorality and orgies based upon a perverted understanding of God's grace. It was an abuse of freedom.

You have people like that today who think they're free in Christ to behave themselves any way they want. I'll never forget having an experience with a well-known and popular preacher and writer whose wife came to me and said, "Could you help me? I have a burden for my husband, he needs help desperately."

And I said, "What's the problem?"

She said, "It's his life style. Women in every city, this has been going on for years, bar rooms, drinking, wasting money, involved in all kinds of sin."

I said, "Well I'll be happy to meet him and confront him." So I called and set up an appointment for a meeting place. I walked in a restaurant where I was to meet him and he was sitting with two unseemly women at a bar, drinking. And I walked up to him and said, "I'm here to speak with you," and pulled him away and said, "This is the first and last time I'll ever meet you in a place like this."

We went on to discuss the life style, the patterns of the life style. And he defended himself on the basis of grace and Christian freedom...went on to divorce his wife and marry for a third time.

There have always been the Nicolaitans who in the name of perverted grace and ascended knowledge think they can live above God's standard. There are always those of the ilk of Balaam who want to seduce God's people into idolatry and immorality and paganness and tell them it's okay. The point here is this, what was wrong in this church? The core of Christian people holding fast to the name of the Lord, that is to His person, not wavering on who He was and what He did, not denying the faith, firm in the gospel and believing it, were soft in dealing with error...serious error and all error is serious.

I heard the other day about a Christian magazine, national magazine that's doing an article on me, they haven't interviewed me so I don't know if it's true, but maybe they're doing it and are not interviewing me on purpose. But I'm sure the query of the article from what I heard is...why does John MacArthur write all these controversial books? What's...what is in to him? Why does he write these books? And the answer is as simple as understanding this text, I want to be faithful to hold fast the name of my Lord, I want to be faithful not to deny the faith and I also want to be faithful to expose error...lest the Lord Himself come against me and my church with a sharp two-edged sword.

Verse 16 brings us to the command. The command is very simple. "Repent," turn around and go the other way. This is a sin. He's not saying to them, "Now, folks, you're just too loving." He says, "Repent, this is sin and if you don't repent and do something about it I am coming to you quickly and when I get there I'll make war against them with the sword of My mouth. If it has to be, I'll come and I will slice them up if you don't repent."

You can't tolerate evil in any form. You can't allow it. First Corinthians 5 Paul says, "A little leaven does...what?...leavens the whole lump." You allow that, it festers and it grows. The church must be in constant judgment on teaching. There's no room for compromise. If we fail to exclude unbelievers from the fellowship of the body, we're in error. The church isn't designed for unbelievers to come and say whatever they want and be accepted as they are, it's designed for saints to hold the truth and unbelievers to come and hear the truth and in hearing it be saved. And when you allow unbelievers to come in and take part and participate in the church, you're going to have people who live a Balaam life style and a Nicolaitan life style and they'll mingle the church with their fornication and the church with their idolatry and the Lord says...I'll come with a sword in My mouth and I'll slice them up.

The church is never to be a place of the mingling of those things. It's never to be a place where unbelievers feel safe and secure. It's to be a place where unbelievers feel frightened though loved, fearful though welcome and where they can hear the truth and be saved. You can never suppress error by compromising with it. Yes, we want to reach out in love. Yes, we want to bring in unbelievers to hear the truth of Christ and experience our love and experience our kindness and our graciousness. But never give them the false security that they belong until they know Jesus Christ which knowing is made manifest in their life. Compromise is so serious Christ says if you don't stop, I'll make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

That in itself could be a reference back to Balaam. Back in Numbers 22 it says, "The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand." And you know what Balaam did? Smart guy, he bowed all the way to the ground. The Lord pulled a sword on Balaam, the Lord will come with a sword against a compromising church. You have to judge error, you have to keep the church pure.

Then finally the counsel in verse 17. "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Which is a long way of saying...listen, listen. Don't miss this. You've got to hear this message. And it's the Holy Spirit inspiring it as John writes it, as Christ gives it. And then this counsel is so wonderful, "To him who overcomes," who is the overcomer? Every time you see it in the book of Revelation, who is it? The believer. First John 5:4 and 5 says, "Who is the overcomer? The one who believes." And what is it that overcomes? Our faith, our belief. To the true Christians, He says, here is a promise after these fearful threats. He doesn't want panic. "To those who are the overcomers, the true believers, I'll give some of the hidden manna."

What's the hidden manna? Well you know what the manna was? Manna was, well I guess the closest thing we could call it is angel food cake. Manna was some kind of honeyed bread out of heaven. Remember when the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness and God was delivering this marvelous heavenly bread? He says I'll give you the hidden manna. Why does He say hidden? Well, according to Exodus 16:33 when they traveled, they took the ark of the covenant and inside the ark they hid some...what?...some manna. What did that represent? Oh I think it represented the bread of life. Who's that? Jesus Christ. Just as Israel received manna from heaven as its food, for the true believer He says I'll give you Jesus Christ. I'll give you the true bread, the spiritual bread from heaven which the world doesn't see, I'll give you that bread which will sustain you. Go back to John 6:51 and hear Jesus say, "I am the bread of life." I'll give you Christ. I'll give you all that is in Christ. I'll give you all the benefits of knowing Christ. You're an overcomer and I'll give you all you need to sustain your life forever.

Then He says, "And I'll give him a white stone." You say...what's that? Well, I don't know. A lot of options. Interesting to think about them all. Some say it's the white stone that's similar to the one on the breastplate of the high priest called the urim and the thummim by which the high priest could determine the will of God, and so what it means is I'll give you a stone by which you can determine My will. Some say it represents simply a diamond and I'll give you something that is very precious, namely eternal life. I'll give you something that is very precious that would only be given to one who is deeply loved, and since I love you so greatly like a man giving a woman an engagement ring, I'll give you a diamond to show you My love.

But there's an interesting little historical note, when a victor won in the games, whatever great games were being held, it was not uncommon for the victor to be given as part of his prize a white stone. And the white stone was his admission pass into the festival that was held following the games for all the victors. Could it be that the overcomer will receive the ticket to the eternal victory in heaven?

And then He says, "And a new name written on the stone," and I read where they would do that. They would give the victor, like a trophy, a stone with his name and he alone could use it as his pass. "A new name written on the stone which no one knows, but he who receives it." I can't tell you how many people have asked me...what is that name? A lady will come to me any time I preach on the book of Revelation and say, "What is the name that no man knows?" Folks, I don't know what the name is. If I knew what the name was then this verse couldn't say what it says, it would have to say, "And no one knows except John MacArthur." The only one who knows what it says is the person who receives it, that's how personal it is. What it is to me is some kind of personal message from Christ to the one He loves which is given as an admission pass into eternal glory. I'll know mine and you'll know yours and we'll know the Lord wrote them for each of us and for none of the others of us.

We don't want to be a compromising church. And so we've got to deal with issues lest the Lord come against us and smite us with a sword out of His mouth. We want our faith to be real, we want to hold fast to the name. We want not to deny what we know to be true. We want to deal with error in our fellowship. We want to be the true church, the true believers, the overcomers who some day will be given Jesus Christ in all His fullness as the hidden manna, who some day will be given the white stone to give us admission in to the eternal feast in heaven. And on that white stone will be written a special message privately from the living Christ to those He loves.

If you don't know Jesus Christ, the hidden manna isn't for you, the white stone is not yours. And all you have is the sword of His judgment. I'm not under any illusion, I know there are people in this church in that category, you are living out the doctrine of Balaam, you are living out the teaching of the Nicolaitans, you are here and perhaps as far as anyone around you knows you are worshiping Christ and you go from this place into idolatry and immorality. And the Lord will come and make war with you sooner or later unless you repent.

Father, we thank You again for the Word and for its power and conviction. Thank You for instructing us. We give you praise in our Savior's name. Amen.

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