

Session 3: Pergamos: A Church with Compromise (Rev. 2: 12-17)

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing on Friday night through the seven churches of the book of Revelation with a view toward intimacy with God. We are on the church of Pergamos—the third church—a church that the Lord was beckoning and calling out of compromise. There were a number who were faithful in their midst, but there were some who were compromising blatantly, and then others who were tolerating the compromise. The Lord was correcting those two groups—the group that was compromising and the group that did not care that the others were compromising, though they themselves were living a clean life. But they were passive and tolerant about wrong ideas being proclaimed in their community, and this empowered other people to walk in sin.

This is a standard which is unusual in the Church today. It is understandable to confront people in compromise, but the Lord was confronting the group that was silent and tolerating the compromise as well. As I read this letter from the Lord's heart, I feel the challenge of the Lord in a new way—just to see a different facet of His heart which we do not think about that much.

REVELATION 2:12–17

Let's read it. Revelation 2:12: "To the angel of the church of Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.'" The Lord is describing Himself as the One with the sharp two-edged sword, because He is going to show forth His sword to this church. Each of the descriptions that the Lord gives of Himself is an indicator of what He is going to magnify in His character and His ministry to that church. He is going to show Himself as the zealous One—zealous against His enemies. That is the part of His personality which He is going to magnify. In terms of His ministry, He is going to show that He acts decisively and that He intervenes against His enemies.

So He shows Himself as the God who has the sharp two-edged sword. He says in verse 13 (paraphrased), "I know your works, and I know where you dwell. You dwell where Satan's throne is. You hold fast to My name and you do not deny the faith." That is one facet of one group in the church.

THREE GROUPS OF PEOPLE

There are three actual groups that He is speaking to. He is speaking to the group that is compromising, the group that is tolerating the compromise, and then the group that is faithful to His Name, who will not deny the Lord under pressure. He says, "You hold fast to My name, and you did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (Rev. 2:13). So He says it is Satan's throne or where Satan dwells, where he manifests his activity.

Verse 14: “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam.” That is the category I was talking about. Those were teachers in the Body of Christ at Pergamos who taught the doctrine of Balaam. Balaam—Numbers 22–25— is the one who taught Balak, who was a king, to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel: to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

TWO DOCTRINES LEADING TO COMPROMISE

Verse 15: “Thus you also have those”—this is the second category of compromisers— “who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.” There were teachers who taught the doctrine of Balaam and those who taught the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. There were two different groups of people who were numbered among the compromisers. Also among the compromisers were the members of the body who actually participated and accepted these teachings.

He says in verse 15, “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” He says in verse 16, “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” He is talking about those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam and those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, two different sub-categories of the compromisers. Those who embrace the teaching in their lifestyle—but He is also talking about the people who allow it, those who are not participating in it. They do not teach it, but it does not trouble them that this doctrine is being taught. They do not stand up against it. And He says in verse 16, “Repent.” He is telling all these different groups to repent. “Or else I will come to you and I will come to you quickly” (v. 16, paraphrased).

Now this is not a passage right here about the second coming. He is talking about coming to them in a manifestation of His discipline in the church. He says, verse 16, “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”

THREE PROMISES

Verse 17: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes” —now He is going to give three promises—“... I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. I am going to give you a taste of it now and some more in the age to come” (v. 17, paraphrased). This is a two-fold promise. They are going to enter into some of this now and into some of it in the age to come.

Number two: “I will give him a white stone.” Number three: “On that stone, I will give that person a new name which is written on the stone and which nobody knows except for the person who receives it” (v.17, paraphrased).

JESUS ENCOURAGES THEIR FAITHFULNESS

The primary message to this church from the Lord is that He is encouraging their faithfulness. We do not want to lose sight of what He is telling those who are holding to His name faithfully, in the midst of this demonic city.

Some cities have greater manifestations of darkness and evil. And they were at the epicenter of darkness in terms of an earthly city. It's as if He says, "I understand that and I honor you for the stand you take"—He says, "Even in the face of martyrdom, there are those of you who, in the midst of evil, are not yielding to sin, and in the midst of evil, you are not yielding to the fear of martyrdom. You are not yielding to fear, nor are you being pulled by the sin of that city." Now the sin of that city was immorality. There is immorality in every city, but some cities are known for it—meaning, there is a measure of it that is distinct from other wicked cities. They stand above the other dark cities of the earth. And this was one of those cities.

HE IS CALLING THEM TO REPENT

That is what He is going to say now in the second part of the message. He is going to call them to stand against the false teachings as well as the deeds themselves. He is calling the people who are yielding to compromise to repent, and He is calling for the people to stand up against the false teachings that are happening in the Body of Christ in their city. These teachings were specifically teachings that tolerated compromise.

There are many differences among different denominations and groups in the Body of Christ. There are the major doctrines of Scripture: the deity of Jesus, the infallibility of Scripture, and the resurrection. We cannot tolerate change to that. Then there are important but minor doctrines of Scripture: things relating to baptism, communion, many different things. We are not supposed to stand up against one another in the minor doctrines. They are important, but I am not wanting to fuel up people's zeal so that if they think anything is wrong anywhere, they are going to take it on in the name of Revelation 2:12–17.

THE ISSUE OF COMPROMISE

Jesus is particularly talking about the issue of compromise. It was a city of feasts. Now the feasts of the ancient world would be very parallel to the parties of the present world. But there was an added dimension because there was social pressure to attend these idolatrous feasts in the ancient world, in Asia. And the majority of the people, once they were at them, really engaged in the party spirit.

There was social pressure because attending these idolatrous feasts was connected to being loyal to the Roman Empire. To not go to these feasts and worship these idols was the same as saying, "I am not loyal to Caesar or the Roman Empire." That meant that you might be a traitor.

In that time in the world, so many nations were invading one another. You could not tolerate somebody who was not loyal to your city. The consequences were far greater than today because there were so many military attacks from one city to another, one region to another.

Having made this point about the social pressure they felt: they had to go to these feasts or they would actually lose their jobs. And the Lord held the line that they could not go and participate, even if they lost their lives, let alone their jobs. The Lord said, "You must not go" (v. 16, paraphrased). We do not have anything of that level in our society.

IMMORALITY AND DRUNKENNESS

The second dimension of what we know about the parties is that they were idolatrous: they were actually worshiping false gods. That was one part of the feasts. But an equally dominant part of the feasts was the immorality and the drunkenness. That is why the people liked it. They had to go because the state required it. In most cases, they had to go occasionally, but the problem is that once they had fulfilled the state requirement, many of them—even believers—were going because of the drunkenness and immorality as well.

The Lord says, “You cannot do this. This is wrong; this grieves My heart. I want you to break free of that. I want you to take a stand not only against doing it yourselves, but against the doctrine that allows that to happen” (vv. 14–16, paraphrased).

FALSE TEACHING ON GRACE

There is a lot of teaching in the Body of Christ today that allows compromise. It is always under the banner of liberty and grace, but it is false teaching, because teaching of a grace that empowers people to sin with confidence is a false teaching of grace. There is much of it going around the Body of Christ. Undoubtedly, many of you have run into it here and there at different times in your life.

Let’s look at Roman numeral III: Jesus’ revelation of Himself in this wicked city. He revealed Himself, His personality, and His ministry as the One with the sharp two-edged sword. In other words, He had zeal; He was a warrior. He had zeal against darkness, against that which declared war on Him. He had more than zeal: He was actually going to take action and intervene in people’s lives.

Often the Lord restrains His zeal. And then at a distant point in time, He intervenes. It’s as if He says, “The time has come when My restraint is over.” The Lord gives time for people to repent. It’s as if He says, “Tell them that soon I am going to intervene. My zeal has been burning for some time, but soon I am going to intervene in that very generation.”

THE SWORD OF HIS MOUTH

Paragraph A. The sword from Jesus’ mouth releases judgment on His enemies and it reveals the zeal of His heart. Several times in the book of Revelation—I think it is actually nine times—the word sword is mentioned. Many of those references are speaking of the sword that Jesus uses with His hand or the sword that comes out of His mouth. That would be the same thing. The sword that comes out of His mouth, the power of God, hits His enemies like a sword.

The sword that proceeds from His mouth is the word of God. It is not a metal sword coming out of His mouth. He speaks the word and the Holy Spirit moves with the same power as if a metal sword broke in and crashed in against the enemies of God. That is what He means by the sword of His mouth. He speaks and the Holy Spirit is so quick to do what He says with exact precision. That is the very sword of God. He does not have to do anything but speak it.

Although Scripture makes it clear that He actually swings a sword as well with His hand, when He comes back. There are scriptures that indicate that as well. So the sword is mentioned in two ways. The sword of His mouth is the power He releases when He speaks in judgment.

TWO APPLICATIONS

Paragraph B. This is a very powerful evil city. The state was killing the Christians. It was legalized murder against Christians. The sword of His mouth—its first application—was to encourage them. It was letting them know that He had more power than the Roman Empire. His sword was actually mightier than the sword of Rome. The first application of the sword of His mouth was against the persecution.

The second application of the sword of His mouth was against sin in His Church. Because His sword strikes against His enemies and sin is His enemy. If sin is being invited and promoted in the Church, then the enemy is inside the Church.

TWO GROUPS

There are believers who are struggling against sin and they declare war on sin. They stumble, they sincerely repent, and they set their heart against it. That is called immaturity. You have every reason to have confidence in the grace of God while you are maturing. But there is a difference between those believers and the ones who say, “You know what, nobody is catching me. I am just going to give myself to drunkenness and immorality.” They decide that this is going to be their lifestyle for a season. That is declaring war against the Lord. But that does not mean that He does not love them.

As a matter of fact, He loves them so much that He is going to use the sword, which He is aiming against the Roman Empire, to deliver His people from compromise. Not because He does not love them, but precisely because He does. He told the church of Pergamos, “In a moment, I am coming after everyone in My church who is declaring himself in agreement with sin.”

Again, guy A and guy B may be committing the same sin, but guy A is declaring war against it. He hates it. He is seeking to get free. He is fasting and praying to get free. He is confessing it. Guy B is planning more ways to do it and boasting about it whenever he is comfortable to boast. Both of them are in the Church. One of them is in big trouble with the Lord, and the Lord gives His mercy. The other one—well, He gives mercy to both of them, because the sword of the Lord is His mercy to wake them up. They want to be woken up before they meet Him face to face.

END-TIME APPLICATION

The sword of the Lord—using the first application against the Roman Empire—is going to be a very important passage that we are going to draw from, confess, and pray in the generation in which the Lord returns, when the literal Antichrist government is far more powerful than the Roman Empire and is wielding the sword against the end-time Church. We will call on Him whose mouth is like a two-edged sword to speak on our behalf against the enemy. This will be a very important passage, Revelation 2:12. It is a passage that the saints can use in intercession in a

place of persecution: “Lord, release Your sword against the enemies.” In other words, “Stop them! Intervene in power!”

I KNOW YOUR WORKS

Roman numeral IV. He says, verse 13, “I know your works.” In other words, “I know your ministry, I know the labor you are doing for Me.” This is important because they are ministering; they are staying true, serving in the midst of such darkness.

Some folks just draw back and quit, if the darkness is really intense. They think it is enough if they do not deny the Lord. But there was a portion of the church in Pergamos who were more than maintaining; they were actually serving and ministering to others, leading people to the Lord in the midst of this kind of danger and peril. They were standing up and they were going forward.

Jesus says, “I know your works. I have noticed them; I see them. I am writing them in My book, and I have not forgotten. I know how hard it is to maintain your ministry assignment in this environment” (Rev. 2:13, paraphrased). Not only did they minister to the saints, they ministered to unbelievers as well. “I know you dwell where Satan’s throne is and I know you are holding fast to My name. You did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My faithful martyr” (Rev. 2:13, paraphrased).

THE WORD “MARTYR”

The word “martyr,” by the way, is often the same word as “witness.” A martyr and a witness is often the same word, although there are times where it can be a different word. It is translated “martyr” and “witness.” “My martyr” and “My witness” are interchangeable. “My faithful witness” is really what He is saying about Antipas, which is interesting because Jesus called Himself the faithful witness back in Revelation 1:5. Now He is calling Antipas a faithful witness. He is giving one of His own names to this martyr. What a precious reality. He “was killed among you” (v. 13).

SATAN’S THRONE

Now He is going to say it again: “Where Satan dwells” (v. 13, paraphrased). It is where Satan’s throne is. That means his authority. Where he dwells is where his activity takes place, where it is openly manifest. Wherever there is a dwelling of darkness or a dwelling of light, it is talking about a manifestation of it in that city.

Paragraph A. Number one. He says, “I know that you dwell where Satan’s throne is” (v. 13, paraphrased). It is important to know that Satan has several places, which would be epicenters—places of unusual manifestations of his authority and power. There are a number of those cities in the earth. Not every city, but there are several of them. Nobody is sure if this is the sense of Satan’s throne in the singular sense or in the rare sense. My guess is that it is in the rare sense (I do not know for sure)—meaning, Rome was surely as wicked and evil as Pergamos was. It had as much idolatry, persecution, and just dark activity going on. I think of Rome as being Satan’s throne in the west, and Pergamos as being his throne or city of unusual display of demonic

authority and activity in the east. That may not be true. It might be that there is one city in the singular sense where Satan's throne is. According to history, surely Rome was equally, if not more, wicked than Pergamos was.

I would assume that where there are powers and principalities—in Ephesians 6:12, demons are called powers and principalities—there are thrones and dominions. So I am thinking of the phrases from Ephesians 6:12 and Ephesians 1:21–22 where Jesus is above all thrones, demonic and angelic. And I think of the word “throne” as being an unusual place of Satan's activity. Not the only place, but one of very few in the world. Either way, it is a very intense environment. That is what we care about. They had an unusual number of false gods being worshiped in that city. Four major Greek gods had a center of activity there, and they had murder and persecution.

Whenever blood is shed with injustice, there is always demonic activity. And the Church was also buying into the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The combination of those three dimensions: the false gods, the murder and persecution, and the false teaching in a church which was promoting compromise—these three elements together combine to make Pergamos a city of unusual Satanic authority and activity. Paragraph two: I assume that Rome was a center of Satan's activity of the same level in the west, as Pergamos was in the east.

YOU HOLD FAST TO MY NAME

Paragraph D. He says, “You hold fast to My name and you did not deny it” (Rev. 2:13, paraphrased). He watches the faithfulness in character as well as the risk and danger of persecution. These are two totally different issues. He watches faithfulness to His name. These people were in the presence of darkness in a city that was steeped in darkness, and they did not deny the Lord under the pain of persecution, under the threat of it, nor under the weight of the immorality. They stayed true and they would not deny the Lord's name. They held fast to the Lord's name in terms of doctrinal purity and in terms of faithfulness, to stay true even unto death.

The Lord will give us power to hold true to His name. Every command in the Bible is a promise of enabling. Every command is a promise of enabling. When the Lord tells us to stay true to His Word, He will help us by the very fact that He tells us to. We are not having to hold true in persecution much. There are times that we take a stand and it is uncomfortable, even among the Church, but in this hour in most of our lives, the issue is to stay true in the realm of purity in the midst of an evil city. The Lord will give us power to do that.

THE SWORD OF THE WORD OF GOD

Paragraph E. One of the ways in which we will stay true to His name is by speaking the sword of His word, by speaking the word of the Lord like a sword that goes forth—meaning, when Jesus was attacked by Satan in Matthew 4, He spoke the Word of God, and that is the same thing we do. We speak the Word of God. Many believers do not do that when they are under attack. They just hang in there and hope they get through it. We need to speak the sword of the Word of God. Because when we speak the Word of God in the name of Jesus against attack, as the confession

of our soul in obedience and the confession of our authority against darkness, it is like a sword that strikes against the kingdom of darkness.

Notice in Revelation 12:11 that it is the word of their testimony. When we speak the Word of God, that is our testimony. It is what we believe and how we are taking a stand. It is like a sword that is liberating and freeing us from the powers of darkness. Having pastored over many years—most believers grit their teeth; they do not speak the Word. We need to speak the Word. Jesus had to speak the Word against Satan. If Jesus had to in Matthew 4, how much more do we need to speak the Word when our soul is being pulled by darkness?

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM AND OF THE NICOLAITANS

Roman numeral V. He said, “A few things I have against you, because there are those who hold the doctrine of Balaam” (v. 14, paraphrased). Balaam was a prophet who taught King Balak—Balak was a king and Balaam was a prophet—to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. He did this by getting them to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

“Thus I also have against you that you have people in your congregations—teachers, not just folks who privately hold it—who teach the doctrine of the Nicolaitans openly” (v. 15, paraphrased). It’s as if He says, “I hate this.” I tell you, whatever the Lord hates, we want to line up and hate.

CORRECTION FOR COMPROMISE

Paragraph A. “A few things I have against you.” He is talking to the church He loves. The Lord says, “I have this against you. I am not against you as people, but I have this against you.” The Lord can be for you as a person but against an issue of compromise in your life. The Lord’s correction is not rejection. The Lord corrects us; He is not rejecting us. He is telling them, “I am for you, but I am against this dimension of your church life” (vv. 14–15, paraphrased).

There are two different groups: the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans. They were two similar but distinct groups. Some commentaries say that He is saying the same thing twice. No, it is clearly two different groups. For our purpose, they have the same bottom-line issue which they allowed: they taught the doctrine of liberty and grace in a false way. They said that it is OK to participate in the partying and in the immorality. It is OK to engage in it, because the grace of God freely gives you salvation anyway. The grace of God will cover you. It does not matter. Jesus effectively said, “I hate that teaching. I hate it! It is not true.”

FALSE TEACHING ON GRACE TODAY

This teaching is so prevalent in the Church today. It is all over the church of America. Youth groups and old groups alike—both groups teach this. It is enticing and even winsome, because who does not want grace? Who does not want to teach grace? Everybody wants grace. So they just mask the deception under the title of grace. Then they run with it.

It's as if the Lord says, "I do not buy it and I do not like it. I do not like it that you are silent about it. I do not like it that you tolerate it. It is not enough to just stay away from it. I want you to stand against it." He says, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation" (Jude 4). They turned the grace of God into lewdness. What that means is that they turned the teaching of grace into the liberty to live in a lewd manner. "Lewd" is immoral. It is more than sexual immorality. It would involve any kind of indulgence of the flesh. "Licentiousness," is what some translations say. They turn the grace—they turn the teaching of grace and twist it to where people have confidence to live in lewdness. They believe that they do not have to repent, because salvation is a gift anyway.

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

Paragraph C. He says, "You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam" (v. 14). Again, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans boil down, in our context, to the same thing: it gave people the confidence to participate in these temple feasts, which were big parties. If it were at the university, it would be the fraternity party. They would go and say, "Hey, the grace of God is keeping me clean." They would end up compromising in the midst of it. And some of the leaders taught the people that it was OK to do that.

The guy says, "I am only witnessing at the party." You know what? They are delirious. They are not paying attention to you. Their spirit is not sober and neither is the rest of them. If you really want to witness to them, witness to them in another setting. Do not play games with the grace of God and with your own soul. I have been a pastor for thirty years. Ninety-nine percent of the witnessing that happens there is really a failure. What happens is that the witnessing goes the other way and the believer yields. I have watched this for years and years and years. It starts off with a good witness—"I am going to go and witness."

Find a guy or a gal that you are going to witness to and witness in a different setting. They are alive twenty-four hours a day. That is not the only time you have a chance. They will be alive tomorrow. Go talk to them in a different setting.

BALAAM AND BALAK

Here is what, paragraph D, Balaam did. He taught King Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. Balaam is a prophet. King Balak is the king of Moab, of the Moabites, a neighboring nation, right next door (Num. 23–25, paraphrased):

This foreign king says, "Hey, Balaam, can you pronounce a curse against Israel so that the God of Israel cannot give them power and blessing, so I can go in and fight them and beat them?"

The guy says, "What?"

"You are a prophet; you have power. Why do you not curse Israel before I attack them, and maybe I will beat them then?"

“Curse Israel? Wait, it does not work that way. I cannot just curse Israel so that you can beat them in war.”

“Tell you what: I will give you a lot of money.”

He says, “OK.” So he went and got ready to give a word to curse Israel.

But God said, “Give a blessing to Israel.”

Balaam came back and says, “I will bless Israel.”

King Balak says, “What? I paid you good money to curse Israel.”

He says, “Every time I get into the spirit of prophecy, the truth comes out.” He did not exactly say that. Four times he tried it—four times. And every time he tried to curse Israel he said, “Yea, I bless thee, Israel.” It came out the wrong way. And this was the deal he was getting the money for, from this evil king Balak.

Balak is depressed. He says, “Man, this is not working, and I paid you well.”

Balaam says, “I’ll tell you what to do. I know how this works. You send your ungodly women over the line”—their state line (border)—“to invite the guys over to the party. They will come. I know those Israeli guys; they will come. They will get involved in immorality and idolatry. Then God will have to judge them. Get them to sin to where God becomes their enemy. There you have it.”

Balak the king says, “That is brilliant. I never thought about that. Get the covenant people to agree with darkness and then God has to attack darkness.”

So King Balak got the gals to cross over the line: “Hey, guys, come on over to the party.” The guys went over and got involved in the idolatrous feasts, which always had drunkenness in them. So they stumbled into immorality, and the judgment of God came on them. Then Balaam got his money.

GOD WILL JUDGE DARKNESS

Jesus says, “Teachers in the Body of Christ, you are doing the same thing that Balaam did. You are empowering the people of God to come under judgment instead of empowering them to walk in light and liberty. You are doing the same thing Balaam did. You are getting the people of God crosswise with God, so God has to judge them, because God is committed to judging darkness” (Rev. 2:14, 16, paraphrased).

If darkness is not repented of, God is committed to judging it. He is at war with darkness, and that is good news for us. If we decide to camp out in darkness, we put ourselves in harm’s way

with the Lord. Not that He does not love us, but He will wake us up and get our attention. He cannot change. He is light and cannot change.

A STUMBLING BLOCK IS A TRAP

Paragraph E. What they did was like Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block in front of them. A stumbling block is the same as a trap. The trap would spring and the animal would be captured. A stumbling block is a trap that gets triggered and then the person is caught in bondage. These teachers, by their—what seemingly was well-meaning—teaching on liberty were actually putting the people of God in the position to get trapped. The trap would spring so that they were ensnared like an animal and be caught captive to sin.

He said, “You put a stumbling block there. You set a trap” (Rev. 2:14, paraphrased). Regardless what age they are, teaching the young people that it is OK to live in their drunkenness and immorality as long as they do not go too far is setting a trap. They will get snared by it, the devil will get them, and then the discipline and even the judgment of God will come on the people that God targeted for blessing. That is the stumbling block He is talking about. It’s as if Jesus said, “Tell the leaders that I hate it when they teach this. I hate it! I hate it when you tolerate them teaching it. It is ruining My people, whom I love. You think you are liberating them. You are bringing them into slavery of darkness and demons under the message of the grace of God.”

THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE

Paragraph F. He says, “There is another group that holds to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” (v. 15, paraphrased). It is the same thing in essence. He says in Revelation 2:16 (paraphrased), “Tell them to repent. Repent of the doctrine of Balaam.” The Balaamite teachers are recognized teachers in the Body of Christ. These are not guys on the outside; they are in the Church.

The second group are the Nicolaitans. The third group are the people who are actually engaging in it—not only hearing it, but actually walking it out. The fourth group are the people who are quiet about it, particularly the leadership. He says, “You repent. All four groups—all four of you need to repent. If you do not, I will come to you quickly” (v. 16, paraphrased).

This is not the second coming. He says (v. 16, paraphrased), “I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Against some I will be more severe than against others. I will fight them.” Can you imagine Jesus fighting against you? Can you imagine having a ministry and Jesus is fighting against you in the ministry? The whole ministry?

Jesus is the One shutting the door. We are on the other side and say, “In the name of Jesus, I command that door to open.”

The Lord says, “You cannot use the name of Jesus and move Me. I am Jesus. It does not work that way. I am the One resisting you because I love you. I am fighting against you because I am fighting *for* you. That is why I am fighting against you. I am frustrating you because I love you. I am fighting against you because I am so for you and I am trying to wake you up before your time is over on the earth.”

TIME TO REPENT

He says, “I will come quickly to them,” because His zeal is stirred up. He gives time, but the time is up and now He is coming. Ecclesiastes 8:11 (paraphrased) says, “Because the sentence of judgment is not executed quickly, the foolish person does not take it to heart.” Because the Lord is kind in His patience and gives time to repent, the foolish man does not take it to heart. He says, “I guess God is sleeping and does not care.” It’s as if Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, “No, no! Take it to heart.”

Romans 2:4 (paraphrased) says, “Let the kindness of God lead you to repentance.” Do not let the kindness of God convince you that you can keep sinning because He has been nice to you. Some people interpret God’s patience as meaning, “I guess it is okay to keep sinning.”

“No, interpret it differently. Interpret it as meaning that I am kind to you and I am giving you as much time as possible to understand My kindness so that you will repent.”

Because there is a time when He comes to a church and He comes to a family. He comes to individuals with the sword of His mouth. He has not given up on them. We are in trouble when He does not come after us. That is when we are in big trouble. As long as the Lord is speaking and correcting, that means He is committed to us still. If He is silent, it means trouble. We want the Lord’s correction.

GOD GAVE BALAAM A CHANCE TO REPENT

Paragraph D. It is interesting that in the Balaam story, Balaam was actually eventually killed by a sword. It is also interesting that years earlier, before he died by a sword, an angel appeared with a sword to kill him for disobedience, and his donkey spoke. Balaam is hitting his donkey. His donkey says, “Hey, the angel has a sword. He is going to kill you. I am not going to walk you right into it” (Num. 22:23–30, paraphrased). But that is another story.

The strangest part about that story is not that the donkey talked to Balaam. It is that Balaam answered her. This is a whole different level, because the donkey saw the angel. My point is that the sword was coming on Balaam, but God in His mercy stopped it. He supernaturally opened the mouth and the eyes of the donkey. It’s as if the Lord says, “Balaam, I am going to give you another chance.”

The Lord has lifted His sword to get our attention, and in mercy He has given us a chance. Balaam did not take it. He ended up dying by the sword. It is not an accident that the very imagery of the sword of His mouth—meaning He speaks it—and the discipline and negative activity of God happens in that person’s life.

THE PROMISES FOR THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

Let’s look in closing at the promises here. Three promises. He says in Revelation 2:17 (paraphrased), “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who

overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will give him a white stone, and on the stone I will write a new name. Nobody will know the name except the person to whom I write it.”

These are all promises to believers who press on in faithfulness. These are not promises of salvation, of justification by faith. I have read a number of commentaries and they reduce the promises to the seven churches, to promises that everybody has, whether they repent of those trends or not. These are not promises that equal the introduction of our faith, the salvation that everybody has. They are all in addition to the free gift of grace. They are given as incentives to get the Church to be diligent. We do not earn our salvation by diligence, but we are rewarded according to diligence.

HIDDEN MANNA

Number one: He says, “I will give them some of the hidden manna” (v. 17, paraphrased). Manna, as most of you know, was the bread that came from heaven. It appeared every single day, six days a week, on the ground when the children of Israel came out of Egyptian slavery. God gave them bread every day. They picked up the manna. What happened was, when they were done with the forty years in the wilderness, they went into the land and they took some of the manna and put it in the ark of the covenant by God’s instruction.

Then the ark of the covenant ended up in the Holy of Holies. The hidden manna was the manna that was hidden in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. That was the hidden manna. All of Israel knew what the hidden manna was. It was the manna that only one person could see once a year; that was the high priest. It is the manna that is out of sight. It is the manna that was in the Holy of Holies. The Lord is saying, “I am going to give you manna that is out of reach, except if I give it to you supernaturally” (v. 17, paraphrased).

INCREASED CAPACITY TO RECEIVE REVELATION

It is an increased capacity to receive the Word of God, to receive revelation. That manna—we can have hidden manna in this age. We can have a greater capacity to receive things that are out of reach, things that are the holiest things on God’s heart. This manna was in the Holy of Holies, the highest things that God has to give. In a limited way, we can receive some of the highest things that He has for His Church in this age.

In the age to come, those who were faithful and really diligent will have a greater capacity to receive from God in the age to come. All of us in the age to come, with our resurrected bodies, will all experience different capacities and different degrees of the glory of God. The idea that we will all be equal is not a biblical idea at all. It is not biblical that we are all equal. That is absolutely not true. We are all equally loved, but we will have different measures, degrees, and capacities of the glory of God in our resurrected bodies forever. We will all be different forever. It does matter what we do. He says, “Tell them that I will give them that manna” (v. 17, paraphrased).

MEANING OF THE WHITE STONE

Number two: “I will give them a white stone” (v. 17, paraphrased). There are several different views of what the white stone might be, because nowhere in the Bible does it tell us what the white stone is. All the other promises are clear. The Bible interprets the Bible.

A very prominent practice in the culture of the ancient world was, when a person would do a valiant deed for the community or in battle—maybe they would do a special service to the city or they would do a special service in battle to save the city—men or women, old or young, would be rewarded for this special service. They would be given a white stone and it would have their name on it. They would use that stone as what we would think of as a ticket. It would give them admission to places of privilege, particularly in the feasts. They would have seats of honor. It was like a badge. It was like an all-access pass when the big feast came. They could sit next to the king if they did something really good. Or they could sit by those in positions of authority. That was a common thing in that day.

I believe what the Lord is saying is that it has a parallel to that custom which was well-known in those days: “You are faithful and valiant in your obedience. You obey Me and you resist immorality. You resist the fearfulness that makes you compromise under pressure, and I will give you the white stone. I will give you the all-access pass, so to speak, at My feast. I will give you greater privileges.”

I am convinced it means greater privileges and honor at the great messianic feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, which I believe goes on for 1,000 years. I believe the feast continues for a literal 1,000 years. I cannot prove it, but I believe it. I believe that we will participate in that feast throughout the entire millennial kingdom in different dimensions of it. I believe this white stone is talking about our place of status and privilege beyond our initial salvation.

These rewards are being offered to motivate people already born again to be diligent. It is not calling them to be born again to get the gift of righteousness. They are already born again. He is calling them to press on to the end at a high level of maturity.

A NEW NAME

Then He says, paragraph E, “I will put a new name on it” (v. 17, paraphrased)—the name that is put on that ticket, so to speak. The word for “white stone” actually is a “brilliant stone.” It could speak of a diamond, a radiant brilliant stone. Do not just think of a little, boring, dead rock.

The stones the Lord gives will all be different. They will have light and glory and probably have fragrance and color, and there will be all kinds of dimensions to it that we are not immediately thinking of. The Lord gives a reward to the people who love Him. You can be sure that reward is thought through and it is a worthy reward.

He is going to put a name on it. All through the Bible, God gives people new names. I believe that name indicates the quality of our character and our obedience to the Lord. The Lord will have a name that is unique to you that describes the way you loved Him. Like in a family—a

mother or father will have a special name for one of the children. It is a name of endearment. Or they will have a special name for each other. There are names of endearment, so there is an endearment element to this.

I also believe this name will indicate their role. It will have an endearment issue, it will indicate their role, their privilege and their authority, and it will indicate dimensions of their personality that touch the Lord. He will write that name and it will be part of their intimacy with the Lord. Amen.



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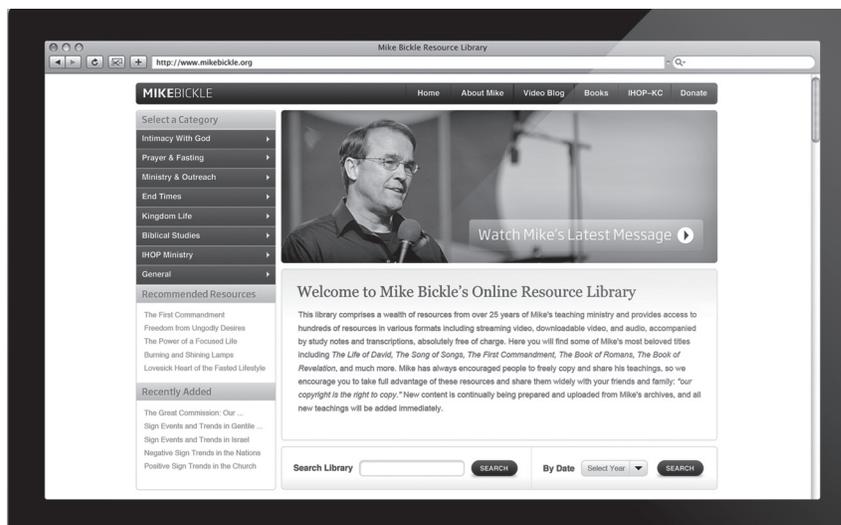
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