



While compromise is normally an important virtue, and absolutely vital in our relationships with others, there is a context in which compromise is not good. In our worship of Jesus and obedience to His teachings, we must not compromise.

When we allow compromise to enter our walk with the Lord, we'll quickly become like everyone else in the world.

In response to this, Jesus says we must "Repent."

My dad loves 'Harrison Ford' movies. Because he can't see the TV screen very well, when we are together, we end up watching old favourites that he can follow simply by listening to the dialogue and sounds of what's happening.

Now, in case you're not aware, there are heaps of 'Harrison Ford' movies. And, of course, Harrison Ford is always the hero, who saves the day. Among Dad's favourites are "Air Force One", "The Fugitive", "Witness", "Presumed Innocent", "Frantic" ... but his all-time favourite is "Clear and Present Danger". We just watched this movie during the holidays, on VHS no less, so its story line is still in my mind.

In the movie Harrison Ford's character, Jack Ryan, is the Acting CIA Director. Within hours of stepping into the role, a close friend of the President, is murdered. Because he's the CIA director, he must lead the team in investigating the murder and in the process uncovers huge corruption buried right within his own government.

What's remarkable, however, is that since the movie's release, the phrase 'clear and present danger' has been adopted when someone wants to refer a danger that, although it's acutely obvious, in some way it is hidden or concealed to undiscerning onlookers. For example, just last year, a conservative US Judge, referred to Donald Trump and his allies, as a 'clear and present danger' for US democracy.¹ But, let's not get caught in a discussion on the perils of US politics.

Rather, let's open the third envelope addressed to the congregation in Pergamum. In the process we will discover that it is very easy to become blind to the clear and present dangers for our spiritual lives that lurk in our world.

¹¹¹ [Opinion | Donald Trump, 'a Clear and Present Danger to All' - The New York Times](#)

In case you haven't noticed, Jesus opens each letter with "These are the words of the One ..." For the Ephesian folk it was the "One who holds the seven stars ..." (Rev 2:1) For the Smyrnaeans, it was the One who is "the First and the Last who died and came to life again." (Rev 2:8)

Point 1 | The symbol of the double-edged sword coming from Jesus' mouth, indicates it is by Jesus' words that all of humanity will be judged.

And now for the Pergamum congregation He introduces Himself as the One "*who has the sharp two-edged sword.*" (Revelation 2:12) The slight difference in Jesus' title symbolises His authority to stand in judgement over his churches. For Pergamum, the sword was a symbol of Rome's authority and judgment.

However, Jesus' double-edged sword represents His ultimate authority and judgment over the world and His church. That's why he doesn't hold the sword in His hand; rather, it protrudes from His mouth, indicating that it is by His words that humanity will be judged. You may remember Jesus said,

"... There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." (John 12:48).

Jesus was reminding the believers of this ancient city, and us by extension, that when Christ comes again, His words will be the standard by which all humanity will be judged. Having established His authority, Jesus begins by reassuring them that He is well aware of the dangerous place in which they live.

Point 2 | Pergamum was a spiritually dangerous place in which to live. It was a cultured, cosmopolitan city where people worshipped many gods, and loyalty to the Emperor was prized.

As Jesus calls it, "a place where Satan's throne is". (2:13)

Just like Bill did a little bit of research about the history of Smyrna, I did the same for Pergamum. For many years Pergamum was the provincial Roman capital of Asia. And even though the capital was later moved to Ephesus, it remained the most important centre of the Roman Emperor cult. In fact, Pergamum was the very first city in the entire Roman Empire to worship the Roman Emperor. Over time several temples were built and dedicated to different emperors.

Pergamum was also well-known for its library, as it was the 2nd largest library in the world, second only to the library of Alexandria in Egypt. It contained over 200,000 books which is especially impressive when you realize that these were scrolls not like the books of today.

However, the librarians of Pergamum wanted to make their library even larger, so they invited Aristophanes, the director of the library at Alexandria to come to Pergamum. But when the leader of Egypt heard about it, he had Aristophanes arrested and put an embargo against Pergamum. This meant that Pergamum could no longer get the papyrus they needed to make the scrolls. So, instead of just giving up, the people of Pergamum went to work and invented an alternative that was known as "pergamene paper" – or 'parchment'. And parchment became the paper of choice for many, many years, until paper was later developed by the Chinese.

Given Pergamum's enthusiastic support of Rome, and their loyalty to the Emperors, it's clear why there arose a 'battle of the gods'. This is probably why Jesus goes on to say in verse 13:

"Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Interestingly, Antipas, is the only other person called 'a faithful witness' in the book of Revelation, and it is this preparedness to 'bear the name of Christ despite the persecution', that really pleased Jesus about this church.

Point 3 | There were some in the congregation of Pergamum who were compromising their allegiance to Jesus, accommodating false teachings and dabbling in ungodly worldly practices.

But verses 14 and 15 Jesus identifies some very serious issues He has with some in the church.

The way He identifies the problem is by using an example from the Old Testament. Years earlier, a non-Israelite prophet or sorcerer named, Balam, was hired by King Balak of Moab, to pronounce a curse upon God's people. But every time Balaam tried to curse God's people, God would frustrate his attempts and turn the curses into blessings.

Now Balaam made several attempts to undermine the Israelites, by using idolatry and immorality to tempt the Israelites away from only worshipping God. Finally, God's people gave in to these temptations and twenty-four thousand were killed under God's judgment. You can read all about this in Numbers 25 and 31:6.

So back to the letter to the Pergamummies* (*my coined term*), Jesus told them that just as Balam influenced God's people to do wrong things, "*you have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*" (v15) We heard about these people when we listened to what was happening in Ephesus. But unlike at Ephesus, some at Pergamum were actually embracing these false teachings. Like the Israelites long ago, they too were accommodating the ungodly practices, which also included idolatrous feasts and cultic, sexual rituals.

So, Jesus tells them exactly what they needed to do: *Therefore repent.*" (v16) They must repent by acknowledging the sinfulness of idolatry and sexual immorality and reject such practices. And for those who were not prepared to repent, Jesus gives them a clear danger to consider:

"If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."

Given the context, this is a warning of Jesus' coming judgment against the disobedience of not holding onto His word. Next week, when we listen to what Jesus has to say to the church at Thyatira, we'll see how serious Jesus is when we allow false teachings to ensnare His church.

Application | In what areas of our life are we compromising our allegiance to Christ and devotion to what Jesus taught?

So, what can we learn from this steadfast yet compromising church?

Although the parishioners at Pergamum were alert to the threats that existed around them, they were guilty of being blind to the deadly disease that was infecting their church family. We have been called to stand firm against anything that attempts to draw us away from our confession, AND whatever may threaten how we live out what we confess we believe.

We must ask ourselves, are we ignoring the clear and present danger that lurks all around us? Are we missing the compromises that so easily seep into our lives.

What will compromise look like? It will be different for each of us. We may be tempted to compromise our ethics, telling ourselves, "well, everyone else is doing it so it must be OK."

Or we may compromise what we allow ourselves to watch, or listen to, or what we read; or what we call entertainment, saying "What harm can it do?"

We may compromise the time we devote to prayer, bible reading and lingering in God's presence, giving precedence to our favourite hobbies, TV series or other pursuits. We think, "I'll just watch one episode" which turns into hours, while our bible remains unopened on the shelf.

So, what can we do?

We must ask the Spirit of God to alert us to the kinds of compromises that we are most susceptible to. And we must recognise that once we become infected with compromise, the infection rapidly spreads right through the entire church.

It's a bit like the contagiousness of a yawn. We've all seen how this happens. One person yawns, and before long everyone is yawning. And what's the comment we hear? 'I'm just so tired. I'm too weary to spend time doing this or that ...' and everyone nods and says, "You think you're tired, I'm exhausted!"

Spiritual compromise spreads through a church family in the same way.

D.L. Moody once said, "Christians should live in the world, but not be filled with it. A ship lives in the water; but if the water gets into the ship, she goes to the bottom. So Christians may live in the world; but if the world gets into them, they sink."

As we've seen in the first two letters, Jesus never ends on a note of judgment. Instead, He urges them (and us) to respond in obedience, so that the blessing of obedience may be poured out.

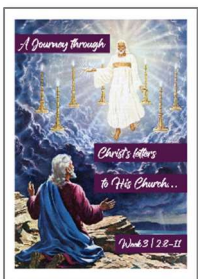
To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." (verse 17)

What beautiful rewards, blessings, provision that God has prepared for those who humbly obey Him. Just as He fed the Israelites in the wilderness with the manna from heaven, so too will God satisfy those who overcome evil by faith. Jesus will also give them a white stone and a new name. The symbolic imagery here is powerful. It means eternal provision and divine satisfaction experienced through intimacy with God.

So, let us not allow any seeds of compromise to grow in our heart. Otherwise, we risk discovering a spiritual garden overgrown with weeds of sin.

Rather, let us be listening to the conviction of the Spirit of God when He alerts us to ways in which we are compromising from living the life of holiness to which we were called.

Going deeper into what Jesus expects of his church ...



Look out for Week 4 of the "Journey through Christ's Letters to His Church" devotional:

This week we look closely at Jesus letter to the church at Pergamum.

1. A failure to repent of sin can bring discipline from God. It is therefore wise to periodically examine yourself. Reflect for a few moments and consider whether there might be any sin in your life and experience the freeing power of repentance.
2. Does false doctrine bother you? Do you ever feel tempted to turn a blind eye toward false doctrine in order to avoid conflict with others?
3. Compromise is a good thing in some contexts but can be very dangerous in other contexts. Are you allowing compromise to enter your walk with the Lord? Is the Spirit of God prompting you to repent of the sin of compromise?