

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WILL WE BE?

Courageous or Compromised?

TEXT: Rev. 2:8-17

INTRODUCTION: As I told you, last week, the seven churches of Asia, to whom the risen and exalted Christ sent messages of both encouragement and warning, were real historical churches, the ruins of which have been discovered by archeologists. In fact, you can buy a bus tour that will take you from one to the other. If you start at Ephesus and drive to the other churches in the order in which Christ gave His messages to John, ending in Laodicea, and then return to Ephesus, you would go in a rough circle.

From the church at Ephesus that had lost its passionate love for Jesus, the drive north to Smyrna would take about an hour and fifteen minutes. Of course in John's day, if you walked or rode a donkey, it took much longer! Continuing up the road another couple of hours, you would arrive at ancient Pergamos, sometimes called Pergamum.

These two cities had many things in common, but the churches within them were drastically different.

I. TWO SIMILAR CITIES WITH DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT CHURCHES

- The cities

CHARACTERISTIC	SMYRNA	PERGAMOS
Famous	<p><u>Wealthy</u></p> <p>Politically important</p> <p><u>Beautiful</u> –“Glory of Asia”</p> <p>It was a model of city planning – long, wide streets that ran from the sea inland. The most famous of these was called “The Golden Street.”</p>	<p>The <u>Capital City</u>, first of the ancient Attalid Empire, but in the day of John, it was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia. When Christ sent His message, Pergamos had been the regional capital for more than three centuries.</p> <p>It was by far the most famous city of Asia.</p> <p>Pergamos was known for its <u>library</u> which contained</p>

		<p>over 200,000 volumes, every one of them hand written. In fact, we get the name parchment, which is a paper made from animal skins from the Greek name for Pergamos.</p>
<p>Centers of Pagan Worship</p>	<p>At the harbor stood the Temple of Cybele. As one journeyed along the way he came to the Temple of Apollo, Temple of Asklepios, and the Temple of Aphrodite. At the far end of this boulevard where the hills began was the Temple of Zeus.</p> <p>Everywhere in Smyrna, the splendor of pagan worship was manifest.</p> <p>By far, the most serious threat to Christians and to the gospel came not from the followers of these mythological gods, but from the required Worship of Caesar.</p> <p>The first temple erected for the worship of the goddess of Rome was built nearly 200 years before Jesus was born, and it was built in Smyrna.</p> <p>In A.D. 26, around the time Jesus was beginning His public ministry, Smyrna competed with six other cities for the right to build a temple to the reigning emperor Tiberius as a god. They won. Smyrna became an enthusiastic center for the</p>	<p>Pergamos was also filled with man temples to pagan gods. Present in the city were the Temple of Athena and the Temple of Dionysos.</p> <p>There was also a notable Temple of Zeus with a throne for the mythological king of the gods cut out of a huge rock outcropping that is probably what Jesus is referring to when He says of Pergamos, “Where Satan’s throne is.”</p> <p>Of supreme importance to the citizens of Pergamos was the Temple of Asklepios. Asklepios was the supposed son of Apollo and took up his father’s role as the god of healing, and thus was called by the people “The Savior.” This pagan imposter was called the god of Pergamos.</p>

	worship of whatever monarch sat upon the throne of Rome.	
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Are there some things that just gall you? You know, some things that among all the wrong things you can imagine just irritate and anger you the most?

Do you know that there are things that gall God? There are sins that anger Him more than other sins.

Proverbs 6:16–19 NKJV

16 These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,

18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil,

19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

I think this was one of the things that galls God. People were calling this false god of healing “The Savior,” rather than trusting God’s own Son, who was and is The True Savior, who not only brought healing to men but the gift of eternal life. I believe this lie galled God.

		However, as with Smyrna, the most serious threat to Christians and to the gospel came from the required Worship of Caesar . Pergamos was the first city to build a temple specifically to Octavius Caesar and it became a center of Caesar worship. Thus our Lord called the place “ Where Satan dwells. ”
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Understanding the setting a little better, let us read the messages of the risen Christ to each of these ancient cities.

Revelation 2:8-11 NKJV

8 “And to the angel of the church in **Smyrna** write,

'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

Revelation 2:12-17 NKJV

12 "And to the angel of the church in **Pergamos** write,

'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

17 "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 to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*." '

So, what do we learn about the churches from the message sent to them by our Lord?

- **The churches**

The central issue of life for each of these churches and for all the Christians who were a part of them was the requirement by the Roman Empire to worship the emperor.

- The required worship of Caesar was simple. **Annually, each person must in the presence of officially designated witnesses take a pinch of incense and burn it, saying with their mouth, "Caesar is lord."** With these few words said, the officials would give to them a certificate, good for a year, that they had done their religious duty. **That being done, they were free to worship whatever gods they chose the rest of the year.**
- Most people in the empire accepted the requirement as one of the lesser burdensome things imposed by Rome. Many even did it gladly, grateful for

the “Pax Romana,” the Roman Peace, under which they lived which made life better in many ways and much more predictable.

- Even many Jews did their political obligation to Rome with little more than grumbling among themselves.
- But by far, the one group of people who opposed even this little bit of worship of a human king was the community of believers – the Christians, the church. True believers would not offer incense to the emperor and their lips could only utter, “Jesus is Lord.” They were therefore outlaws by definition and subject to persecution at the hands of the state at any time. Persecution was not continuous everywhere, but it hung above the heads of believers like an axe suspended with a single thread.
- The flames of enthusiasm for Rome and Caesar burned especially hot in both Smyrna and Pergamos. The initial response by both churches was courageous and noble.

THE CHURCHES INITIAL RESPONSE TO CAESAR WORSHIP

SMYRNA	PERGAMOS
<p>The Christians and the church resisted the “Synagogue of Satan.” That is not, of course, the name inscribed above the door of the building. If it were like virtually every other synagogue in the world at the time, its official title was “The Synagogue of the Lord.”</p> <p>This was the name given the synagogue in Smyrna by the risen Christ because it was filled with Jews who both were willing themselves to accommodate Caesar worship, but who also despised Christians because of their faith in Jesus as Messiah.</p> <p>These Jews kept careful tabs on all the Christians and were more than eager to tattle to the Roman officials that this Christian or that Christian had no certification of their required worship of Caesar.</p> <p>But the Christians did not give in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They lost their jobs. ○ They were ostracized from society. ○ Their homes were robbed, and could not even report it to officials because of their own condition of not having 	<p>Likewise, initially, the church at Pergamos was faithful to the Lord and refused to worship Caesar.</p> <p>In His message to the church, the Lord spoke the name of Antipas, and called him, “My faithful witness.”</p> <p>Jesus does not describe Antipas beyond this simple title. Tradition says that Antipas was the pastor of the church at Pergamos. He refused to offer the pinch of incense and say, “Caesar is</p>

<p>the certificate of Caesar worship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The consequence was that even many skilled and hard-working people lived in abject <u>poverty</u>. <p>But they were faithful!</p> <p>They would not give in. They would not say, “Caesar is lord.”</p> <p>So the Lord Jesus said to them, “I know your tribulation and poverty, but you are rich!”</p> <p>You do not have the things money can buy, but you have the things that money cannot buy and that lasts forever.</p>	<p>Lord.”</p> <p>For that they locked him inside a hollow copper bull and <u>roasted</u> him alive.</p> <p>What courage!</p> <p>What faithfulness!</p> <p>Jesus called him, “My faithful witness!”</p>
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When my life is over, and that day draws closer with every breath I take, I hope I will have left a legacy of being

- a loving husband, who loved his wife as Christ loves the church.
- a good father, who taught my sons by word and example how to follow Christ.
- a caring pastor, who was a faithful undershepherd of the flock of God.
- A decent preacher/teacher, who helped people understand God’s perfect Word.

But concerning all the rest of my Christian life, which began when I was just eight years old, I only want to be called by my Lord

- His faithful witness, faithful in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Like their cities of Smyrna and Pergamos, these two churches had so very much in common at the beginning. But that changed with time.

THE CHURCHES FINAL RESPONSE TO CAESAR WORSHIP

SMYRNA	PERGAMOS
<p>As a whole, this courageous church remained <u>faithful</u>, and were willing to endure persecution for remaining loyal to Christ and to the gospel.</p>	<p>Not so, with the church in Pergamos. They fell under the influence of those who said, “You have to <u>compromise</u> to get along in the world.”</p>

Jesus called it the doctrine of Balaam in a reference to the O.T. fortune teller who taught the enemy of Israel how to defeat God's people by leading them to compromise God's standards.

- **To eat things sacrificed to idols** and **To commit sexual immorality**

As we consider what kind of church we will be, the same choice stands before us constantly, both as a church and as individuals.

Will we be courageous and faithful OR Will we compromise with the world?

There are so many points of possible compromise, it is impossible to list them all. I will mention a few I know there is much pressure to yield to.

- Sexual compromise – Special indeed is the teen or single adult who has not compromised themselves and remains a virgin. Do you know, that if you have compromised, you can repent of that, and become faithful in your sexuality?
- Financial compromise – Fudging on one's honesty. There are many temptations for all of us wrestling with insurance companies. There are always temptations in business.
- Compromise with the standards of God – Many Christians and many churches are now completely ignoring what God says about homosexuality. They have decided that God's Word is old fashioned and the world's new standards are more righteous – calling evil good and good evil.
- Compromise of the exclusivity of Christ – taking the side of the world that all roads lead to God who can be called by the names of false gods. It is sad, so sad that people who call themselves Christians make meaningless Jesus' death upon the cross saying that the Muslim can be saved by worshipping Allah and the Buddhist by following his teachings.

With which of these do you struggle?

Are you willing to repent and begin to stand fast in God's way to be found faithful?

Would you be willing to endure persecution in order to remain faithful to God's way?

Revelation 2:10 NKJV ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.