



Dear Church...

DRAW THE LINE

*Lessons from the Church of Pergamum
Revelation 2:12-17*

Note: We are picking up in our series begun by Pastor Mike Foster on March 3 and June 3 entitled “Dear Church,” which covers Jesus’ seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3.

REVIEW – Look back at what Jesus has spoken to us so far in this series:

- Revelation 2:1-7: “Dear Church in Ephesus...Love again! Remember your first love.”
(sermon date March 3, 2018)
- Revelation 2:8-11: Dear Church in Smyrna...You win against suffering.”
(sermon date June 3, 2018)

ENCOUNTER – Read God’s Word so that He can speak to you:

Revelation 2:12-17 –

¹²“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

¹⁴Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. ¹⁵Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”

TAKING STRIDES – “DEAR CHURCH” SERIES – JULY 15, 2018

BACKGROUND INSIGHTS...

- Pergamum was a respected city of influence in Asia minor. It was home to the governor, a university, and one of the most important libraries of the ancient world.
- Also in Pergamum were many idols including prominent alters to Zeus and Asclepius. Asclepius was a pagan god of healing who held a serpent-entwined rod. Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind in verse 13 when he said that Pergamum was “where Satan lives.”
- The “teaching of Balaam” in verse 14 is a historical reference to Numbers 22-25. As the Israelites were wandering the wilderness and subduing people groups through the power of God, the godless king Balak of Moab sought out an Israelite spiritual leader named Balaam. He wanted Balaam to place a curse on Israel so that they would not conquer his people. Though Balaam refused to put such a formal curse on Israel, he apparently advised Balak to encourage the women of Moab to tempt the Israelite men into marriage. Balaam knew that such a strategy would cause the Israelites to stumble into false worship. The “teaching of Balaam” probably refers to some sort of license to compromise pure faith by becoming like ungodly people around them.
- Verse 14 also refers to Nicolaitans. While we can’t be certain what exactly was objectionable about their teaching, they were evidently a dangerous group within the established church that was gaining traction in other nearby churches, like Ephesus (which was about 100 miles south). The pattern of their influence was probably like the “teaching of Balaam” described above. The only other time this group was mentioned in the Bible was in the letter to Ephesus in Revelation 2:6.
- The “white stone” (verse 17) might refer to a Roman judicial custom of giving a white stone for an innocent defendant and a dark stone for a guilty defendant.

EXPLORE God’s Word by asking questions of what you read.

1. In verse 12, Jesus is described as having a sharp double-edged sword. Read Revelation 1:16, 19:15, and 19:21 to see the other places where Jesus’ sword is mentioned in Revelation. Elsewhere in Scripture we learn that the “Sword of the Spirit...is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17), which “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit” (Hebrews 4:12).
 - a. What do we learn about this sword from these passages?

 - b. What does this tell you about Jesus’ authority in your life?

2. For what did Jesus commend the church in Pergamum?

3. In verse 13 we learn that a faithful Christian named Antipas was martyred in Pergamum, and yet the church remained true to Jesus. How do you think a martyrdom of a dear friend in Christ would affect you and challenge your ability to remain true to Jesus?

4. How specifically do you think the believers “remained true to [Jesus’] name” in verse 12?

5. Jesus is warning the church not to compromise by following the “teaching of Balaam” and the Nicolaitans. Given the background of Pergamum and the challenges the church faced, what types of compromise do you think they were tempted toward? It may be helpful to read the “Background Insights” above if you have not yet.

6. What compromises with the surrounding world do individual Christians today face in an increasingly post-Christian world?
 - a. How might a church compromise amid such a culture? What would that look like?

 - b. Why do you think Jesus takes compromise so seriously? What’s the big deal?

7. Jesus gives a warning in verse 16, that He may come to fight against those who have compromised. But notice that His fight isn't against all the Christians, just those who are compromising. What responsibility do Christians who remain true have to other believers given to compromise?

8. How would you go about confronting a fellow believer who is compromising in their faith? See Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20 for some additional insights from God's Word.

9. What are some areas in your life where you need to "draw the line" to prevent compromise?