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### **Sin Soaked Culture Revelation 2:12-17**

This morning we continue in our series in Revelation. Christ reveals His special messages to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. They are real churches to real people and equally powerful and applicable to Christ's church in America today. We have been using a motion memory poem to help us remember the truths held in these letters. So everybody stand up. By the end of this series everyone will be able to outline the first 3 chapters of the book of Revelation and tell a little bit about each of the seven churches. Do not make me feel lonely up here.

Add to the poem.

Pergamum living in Satan's den (devil fingers above the head)  
Stand up, stand out, stand firm in Him (step up, open arms, fist in hand  
compromise, tolerance eroding little by little. (Right arm up in air as to  
say whatever, then left arm. then right thumb and finger signally little)  
Stand up, stand out, stand firm in the middle (circle body with hands

The tragedy of the modern church is that Jesus' strategy for penetrating the culture with the good news of the gospel has been reversed. Instead of being in the world but not of the world, too many of God's committed people are of the world but not in the world. They have been both captured and intimidated by the culture. They have been seduced by the world and have adopted the world's ways as their own—they are "of" the world. They have succumbed to social segregation—they are not "in" the world. Christians are supposed to be like a great ship in the middle of the ocean—in the world but not of it. Unfortunately, most Christians are more like a ship in dry dock filled with water—they are not in the world making a difference, but they are filled with it accomplishing nothing. When we are in danger of compromise, of moral tolerance...what stands in the way? What is it that plugs the leak of moral compromise?

After recognition of the problem we must have the guts to stand. To stand up and do something about it.

Pergamum was a church surrounded by a sewer of sin. Their whole society and culture was saturated and sin soaked. Every where the believers turned sin was groping at them. It was very easy for them to compromise with the immoral culture they lived in. When the subtle danger of moral compromise comes knocking on your back door. What are you going to do? How are you going to overcome and stand firm for God? What is going to help you stay true? Turn with me you Bibles to the book of Revelation. It is the last book in the Bible so you will find it with ease. In the second chapter, Jesus himself speaks His word of encouragement and challenge to the churches. In Revelation 2:12-17 we read of the church at Pergamum. Pergamum was a city about 20 miles inland and 50 miles north from Smyrna. Pergamum means "citadel" in Greek. The city was situated on the top of a high hill dominating the valley below. It was an Acropolis. or Hill-city. Typically we think of Athens and the acropolis, but any elevated Greek city is an acropolis. There is 3 mile long winding road to the top where the views are spectacular. It was a wealthy town like the first two, but was the most wicked of all seven. It was the home to pagan cults of Athena, Dionysis and Zeus. In Pergamus there was a huge alter to Zeus. 4 stories high and 90 ft square. A museum in East Germany excavated this structure and rebuilt a large part of it.

Pergamum was famous for its University with a large library which housed over 200,000 volumes. These were actually rolls or scrolls made of parchment and placed in thousands of holes in the walls. This library was later given to Cleopatra as a gift from Mark Antony. Pergamum was also famous for manufacturing a parchment paper called pergamena. The very first parchment was made and used in Pergamus. Made from the skin of goats or sheet. When you get a diploma for graduation, it's sometimes called a sheepskin. It all started here in Pergamus. The people of Pergamus were educated and prided themselves of the power of the written word. They understood the power in words. Christ knew, as he wrote to the church in Pergamum. (READ)

Each letter draws from part of the vivid picture of Christ described in chapter one. Here Christ draws up the picture of the power of his

Word. Out of Christ mouth comes the double edged sword. Even though the pen is mightier than the sword, it is the words of Christ that cut and penetrate sharper than a two-edged sword. Hebrews 4:12. Christ is the One who will always have the last word. It is the Word of God that will confront sin and compromise. It is the Word of God that brings healing and salvation. The words of Christ cut both ways. In condemnation and in salvation.

Christ begins with an encouragement for the believers who go to the church of Pergamum. He says, "I know" Again, Christ uses not the normal word for I know all the facts, I know because I've been taught it. I know because I read about it in a book or heard about it. No this is I know because I have experienced the same difficult thing you have. He has lived in the same circumstance. In the midst of where Satan is in control of so many people. I know where you dwell. Some of us live in homes where we are the only strong believers...and Satan is clearly has the influential hand. Some of us work in places where it is clear that God is not the one that is honored there and your beliefs and values are ridiculed and downed. Some here attend schools where the teachers are exposing views that Satan would be pleased with, where your classmates honor those activities that Satan enjoys, where standing out for God puts you in the untouchable social class. Jesus says, "I know where you dwell..and yet I commend you for holding fast to my name. refusing to deny my faith"

When we are in danger of moral compromise or tolerance of the worlds evil what is going to keep us on track? Point number one. Stand up for Jesus...even when it's not safe. Jesus encourages those believers at Pergamum, you continue to cling to my name, cling to my faith. Jesus referred to faith as my faith because He is the true source of faith. When our faith is properly placed in the right person we can stand strong. People can have very sincere faith, but unless it is placed in the proper person it does little good. The power of faith is based on not in the sincerity of the faithful one but in the character of the one in whom that faith is placed.

He knows how difficult it is to live for god while surrounded by Satan's strong influences, where many have put Satan and self on the throne of their lives instead of God. He knows your difficult family

situation. He knows your neighborhood, your working situation. He understands how difficult it is right now.

There will be times when standing up for Jesus is not safe. Here in verse 13. Jesus reminds them of someone they knew well Antipas who stood up for God and lost his physical life. Most of us here don't know anyone personally who has been martyred for their faith. We may know far too many in the future, possibly some of us will be called to stand up for Jesus even when it is not safe. I think of several weeks ago when a missionary father and his two sons in India were burned alive in their car by radical Hindu's. I think of the shootings in Columbine High school where the teens were asked at gun point do you love Jesus and then when they refused to deny His name...they were blown away.

There will be times when it will not be easy to stand up for Jesus and do the right thing. There is no guarantee of physical protection from attacks. It is not safe. I wonder when it is easiest to see Christ...when there is blatant physical attacks or when it comes in more subtly, sneaking in the back door of compromise and tolerance of evil..little by little. The Pergamum believers seemed to do when standing up for God when the attacks are obvious..but struggle with the little compromises that erode slowly..ever so slowly. Point one stand up for Jesus even when it is not safe.

Point two. Stand out for Jesus even when it is not popular. v.14-15  
But...v.14 Jesus says I have a few things against you...some hold to the teachings of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit immoral acts..in the same ways as the Nicolaitians."

One cannot understand the book of Revelation unless one understands the Old Testament stories. In Numbers 22 to 31 we find background for this statement, the story of Balaam and Balek. We don't have time to read the whole story now, but let me give you the Reader's Digest version. Now Balek was a king of the Moab, and as the children of Israel being led by Moses got closer to his land..Balek became terrified. He knew his people didn't stand a chance of defeating Israel in a military battle. So...he sent word to a guy named Balaam for some help. Balaam was famous for negotiating divine favors from any god...for a price. Divine blessing and cursings were his business. So King Balek says,

name your price Balaam but come and curse these Israelites and stop them from wiping us out. Balaam was not a believer in Yahweh, the God of Israel, but God chose to communicate to Balaam. Balaam wants to curse the Israelites but God says no. Those are my people. Don't mess with them. So..Balaam sends word back to King Balek. Sorry I can't do it. Balek begins to plead. Please I will fill your house with gold. God allows Balaam to go but warns him to only say what God tells him to say. On the way to the country of Moab. Balaam's donkey stops in the trail. Refuses to go forward. The donkey can see something that Balaam cannot. So he gets out a stick and starts beating on his donkey. The donkey still refuses to go and starts talking to Balaam. Why are you hitting me? Balaam must think that a talking donkey is quite normal and he replies, if I had a sword I'd have killed you by now you are embarrassing me in front of all these people. If I can't even control my own donkey how am I going to be able to control a whole nation of people. The donkey then replies speaking logic to Balaam. "Look at me..I'm your donkey. Have I ever stopped and refused to go forward before in all the years that you've owned me? Do you not think I have an excellent reason for doing so now? At that moment God opened Balaam's eyes and he saw angel of the Lord, with a sword in hand, standing in the middle of the trail. The angel warns Balaam again to only speak what God allows him to and when he arrives in Moab he is only able to bless the Israelites not curse them. Even changing the location of his oracle does no good. He would try to curse, but only a blessing would come out. Balaam is unable to curse the people of Israel and stop their progress. So instead he counsels King Balek how to destroy them from the back door. He counseled King Balek to instead put a stumbling block in the way of Israel. Weaken Israel by encouraging the most beautiful women of Moab to go down and entice and intermarry, invite them to the pagan feasts, bring in their worship of Idols. Ruin Israel from the inside out..little by little. Balaam was a religious man who frequented in religious tolerance. Teach them that all things are fine in this ecumenical soup. All roads lead to God...just in a little different way. Immorality is OK as long as you keep going to church and stay religious. Numbers 31:16. Because of Balaam's seed of compromise, God had to purify and allowed 24,000

men of Israel to be killed. What a waste. What destruction and damage compromise and tolerance can bring.

Pergamum was dwelling in the middle of Satan's den and was being slowly seduced by the sin-soaked culture. Satan is no dummy. He knows that if he cannot beat us up front, he will undermine from behind. Evil will creep in the back door if we let it.

It doesn't happen all at once otherwise we would notice it, hit the red alert button and change. Compromise happens little by little. On October 31, 1983 the Korean Airlines flight. 007 departed from Anchorage, Alaska for a direct flight to Seoul, Korea. Unknown to the crew, however the computer engaging the flight navigation system contained a one and a half degree routing error. At first the mistake was so small it was unnoticeable. One hundred miles out, the deviation was still so small as to be undetectable. But as the 747 continued through the Aleutians Islands and flew out over the Pacific, the plane increasingly strayed from its proper course, eventually taking the flight path directly into Soviet air space. Soviet radar picked up the error and fighter jets scrambled into the air to intercept. Over mainland Russia, the jets shot flight 007 out of the sky and all those aboard lost their lives. Poor choices may seem to hurt us in only minor ways for a while, but the longer you go, the longer they are left unchecked, the more harm they will bring.

Stand out for Jesus even when it is not popular. There is such great pressure in our culture to deny overly or subtly a close connection with Jesus Christ. To appear less religious than they think you are. To appear that you are not near as straight and stiff as they may think. Pressure to fit in. To act and use words around certain people you would never dream of using here in the church building surrounded by other Christians. There is great pressure to blend in, to be a part, to join, to take on. Sure your religion is OK, just don't say I'm wrong or their isn't another way to God. This is syncretism. A compromise of blending. I read an article in the paper this week how so many in south America have blended pagan rituals with Catholic rituals. Even sorcerers and Satanic High priests have blended voodoo with religious rituals. As Satan knows if you can beat them up front then little by little erode them from the inside out.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 "Do not be bound together with unbelievers. Do not think that you can marry with the world and maintain spiritual integrity in your life. Do not think you can marry their values, ideas beliefs and still maintain your faith." For what kind of fellowship has light with darkness. What unity? What harmony? What agreement? We are the temple of God..how can the world to worship in God's temple? It doesn't make sense. I believe that in seeking to be all things to all men, the believers at Pergamum compromised the integrity of their faith. In any culture we have one standard to determine if it is from God or the World. We must be constantly testing all things by the word.

While Smyrna was attacked directly by the enemy, Pergamum was seduced by a sin soaked culture. I think that can be even more devastating than the direct attack as tolerance and compromise erode us from the inside out. When we are in danger of moral compromise or tolerance of the worlds evil what is going to keep us on track? Stand up for Jesus even when it's not safe. Stand out for Jesus even when it's not popular. And point number 3. Stand firm for Jesus...and He will refresh you. Verse 16. Repent. Take the step of change. Change your mind then change your actions, attitude and behavior. Christ is ready to force the issue. He is ready to confront areas of compromise in our life because he knows what we most need. While compromise says, Live and let live, don't rock the boat, ignore it and it will go away. While compromise says its no big deal...Christ is ready to confront. He uses strong words. He is ready to make war. Jesus recognizes that those in compromise don't see the little by little they have strayed from the truth. Wake up. He wakes them up with the power of His words that cut like a sword. A two-edged sword. A sword of salvation and a sword of condemnation. Christ will force the issue and make us to choose. What way will you go today? For self? For Satan? For the world? or for Jesus Christ. It's as if He draws a line in the sand and says, "Choose you this day where will you stand."

For those who choose to stand firm for Jesus, stand up even when it's not safe. Stand out for Jesus even when it's not popular..Jesus wants to refresh those who overcome the world. v.17. "I will give him some of the hidden manna." Manna was the bread that miraculously appeared in the desert to feed the hungry Israelites. Jesus Christ will be sufficient for all our needs. To those who desire to overcome in while dwelling in a sin

soaked culture, Christ will provide refreshment, food. The source of the refreshment will not be available to all. It will be hidden to some. Some will hear you praise God at how you were refreshed and they just won't understand. But you will because you are being refreshed by God Himself. It may be through the power of His Word. It may be through a song of praise. It may be through an encouraging phone call or note from a friend. It may not be obvious to others but you will know it has been specially crafted to refresh you..just when you needed it most. John 6:48-51 says that "Christ is the bread of life. Christ is the living bread and whoever eats of Him shall never die." Those who are true believers in Christ and refuse to take part in the pagan feasts..to them there will be a far greater feast one day in heaven.

Jesus goes on to say that those who overcome will receive a white stone a new name will be written on the stone. The one who possesses the stone knows the name. White stones were used for different things in time this letter was written. It was customary in Greek athletic contests to give the victor a white stone, or trophy as a symbol of victory. When we live for Christ and stand up for him even when it's not safe. When we stand out for Him, even when it's not popular. When we stand firm for Jesus Christ he will refresh and reward us. When we live for Christ, God does something special for us.

If anyone be in Christ he is a new creation old things are passed away behold new things come. Here is a new name written on the stone. I'm not sure what specifically is written their..but I would guess it is one of the names of God or a name that represents a believers new position in Christ as a part of the family of God. Jesus encouraged the believers in verse 13 that they held fast to His name." There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. It is in the name of Jesus that salvation comes to men and women. Jesus wants to change our name. He wants to change our allegiance, our values, our beliefs. He wants to put a new song in our mouth and change our name from lost to found. From discouragement to encouragement. He wants to change our name from enemies of the most high to friend of God. He wants to change our name from hopelessness to filled with hope and joy He wants to change our name from conflict to inner peace. he wants to change your name from defeated, discouraged to overcoming victor.

What is stopping you from begin an overcoming Christian that has a new name and walks in faith and victory? Are there any cultural influences that God has lifted to your mind that you and God need to begin working on this morning? Is there are area that God has lifted to your mind where you just released that somewhere back when little by little you have allowed immoral compromise to sneak its way into your life. Its time to deal with it this morning and repent. Get back right with God His sword, double edged is ready to move like a surgeons scalpel to excise the rotting flesh of compromise that clings to your life. God wants to change your name and bring you closer and closer to Him.