Overcoming Compromise — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 2:12–17 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, April 25, 2021 · *We Will Overcome*

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If you're just now joining us, we've been in a series on these seven churches in the book of the Revelation. That's the last book of the New Testament. So if you want to take your Bibles and turn there, we're going to be in chapter two, starting in verse twelve this morning. We're on church number three in the series of the seven churches and we've seen that each church has a different problem and it's kind of the way the enemy works. He never attacks the same person the same way twice and he attacks different people in different ways.

And the same is true not just of individuals, but of churches. And so when it came to the church in Ephesus, we saw that the attack of the enemy was to distract them, was to get them so busy doing things for God that they stopped communing with God. So they still believed the right things and did the right things, but they lost their first love. With the church in Smyrna, we saw that the enemy attacked through physical persecution, through social pressure, through maligning and slandering and kind of alienating Christians from the wider culture and tried to use that to get them to jettison and abandon their faith in Jesus Christ.

The church that we're looking at today is a church in Pergamum, and the strategy of the enemy at the church in Pergamum was different than Ephesus and different than Smyrna. The strategy at the church in Pergamum was to get them to compromise on little aspects of the Christian faith that maybe to them seemed irrelevant or unimportant, but that ultimately undermined the effectiveness of the church and invited the judgment and discipline of God. And so the title of the message today is "Overcoming Compromise." I heard a story a couple of weeks ago about a store that was broken into and the thieves who broke into the store went up and down every aisle touching every item.

But instead of destroying the items or taking them home, just kind of stealing them, they took the price tags of the very expensive items, took them off of those items and put them on

the very inexpensive items. And then they took the price tags of the very inexpensive items and they put them on the very expensive items so that the next day, when the store opened up, the items of inestimable value, I mean hundreds of thousands of dollars, were being sold for pennies on the dollar. It was unbelievable. Who wants to do a sale like that?

Amen. Everybody wants to do that. But then the items that were in the store that were not very valuable, that were just kind of cheap plastic, they were being sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars and it just brought all kinds of chaos. And I think a similar dynamic has actually taken place in the context of the local church. That's certainly what was happening in Pergamum. The church, in an effort to appease the culture and to be liked and accepted and to maybe escape some of the persecution that was coming their way— what they did was they turned down the volume on those aspects of the Christian faith that were offensive to the culture.

So, well, we're not really going to push that. We're not going to really believe that. We're not going to preach that from the stage. We'll tell the truth if we're really forced, but we're not going to amplify those themes. And so we're going to turn down the volume on the things that the culture doesn't like, and we're going to turn up the volume on the things that the culture does like. And so we're going to major on the minors and we're going to minor on the majors. We're going to emphasize what the Bible doesn't emphasize and we're not going to emphasize what the Bible does.

Does that make sense? And every generation faces this challenge. Every generation has to answer the question, does truth actually matter? And in our generation, we have to answer the question, is there even truth? We come from a kind of postmodern response to the Enlightenment. Some of the philosophers of our day and age say there is no truth, that truth is a construct that is enforced on us by the powerful, the elites, and that truth is a construct that they just made up in order to preserve their power. And so we need to deconstruct the truth.

We need to create our own truth. And you hear phrases like this all the time in our culture of my truth, I'm telling my truth. It's not the truth, it's my truth. And that comes from this compromise that I think has been made as it relates to what the Bible actually teaches about truth. And generations before us have fought this fight, some of them effectively, some of them not. This is a fight that every generation has to win. Otherwise there is a drift that takes place in the church, just like there's a drift in any organization.

This is not unique to Christianity. If you've seen organizations that have a really charismatic founder who has a vision and a mission and he takes the company forward into incredible heights of success because he rallied around that mission and vision. But then when a new CEO comes into play, whether it's his son or somebody from the outside, that new CEO is kind of soft on the vision, he's kind of soft on the mission, and all of a sudden the

organization starts to drift. Leadership books call it mission drift, and then the company ends up going belly up or under and no longer as effective as it used to be.

All people, all orgs, all churches have a tendency to drift to a place that they don't want to be. And so it's incumbent upon us to fight for integrity, fight for purity, fight for staying aligned underneath the design of God for the church and to overcome the temptation of compromise. And so to kind of answer that question for us today, we're going to look at this third letter to the church in Pergamum. Let's pick it up in Revelation chapter 2, verse 12. This is Jesus, of course, writing to pastors of local churches there in Asia Minor.

He refers to them as angels— which, I'm not going to ask you to refer to me as Angel Wes, but if you want to, you can. But he says, write to the angel of the church in Pergamum. Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword. Now that's a reference to Jesus that comes from Revelation chapter 1, where it describes Jesus as having a sword coming out of his mouth. He says, I know where you live— where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding on to my name and did not deny your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death among you where Satan lives.

And we don't know much about this guy, Antipas, but his name literally means against all. So the culture had kind of pressed in on him, abandon your faith, compromise, you need to worship Caesar as Lord, or whatever the case was, and he stood against everybody and said, no, I'm going to stand strong on the truth that is in Jesus, and he lost his life for it. So he commends them for being faithful in the face of persecution and hardship. But then he turns and says, but I do have a few things against you.

You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Now that's an Old Testament story, so if you don't know the Old Testament very well, then that maybe goes right over your head. But it was basically a group in the church that was perverting the truth. In the same way, verse 15, there's another group who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Different name, similar kind of MO; they were perverting the truth, leading people astray.

And so he's confronting this pastor. He's saying, so you and your church need to repent. Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. And that sword being the word of God, the Bible. So let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Now that's a lengthy passage, a little more lengthy than what we've read in the past couple of weeks. So what I want to do is try to summarize it with four convictions that if we will adopt

them in our generation, I think they will keep us from compromising on the things that matter the most and help us overcome the temptation to compromise in our own generation. The first has to do with the authority of Jesus, the second with the inevitability of persecution, the third with the nature of sin, and the last the sequence of God's judgment.

So four convictions. But before we do that, you actually got to know a little bit about Pergamum because you don't really understand why the Christians compromised in the way that they did until you understand the context of Pergamum. It would be like living in the city of Abilene, but different. Imagine if you didn't live in Abilene, but you lived in Satan's hometown, which is what he calls Pergamum. Imagine living in the Washington, D.C., of Satanism. Okay, that's the dynamic. And to kind of paint a picture, Pergamum was, what William Ramsay says, the home of Roman authority.

It was unlike any other city in Asia Minor because it was the capital of Rome.[1] It was the home of Roman authority in the sense that it had the second largest library of any city in that day and age. Think of this as the city where all the influencers lived. Think of the who's who of our society. You know how they live today in Hollywood. The best actors, the most influential people. They live in the D.C.s and the Hollywoods and the big uppity-do towns. That's what Pergamum was. It was the home to the key influencers and the key influences, the key institutions that kind of said what's what and who's who when it comes to the way our culture functions.

It was also a home of great idolatry. It had several temples to various different Roman emperors. It had temples to Dionysus and Athena and Demeter, and then there was, uniquely in Pergamum— they didn't have this anywhere else in the ancient world. But there was this humongous 40-foot-tall monument to Zeus, who is the god of thunder, if you know your Greek mythology. And a lot of commentators say that the reference to the throne of Satan was a reference to that monument because it was shaped like a throne. All of that in some ways is irrelevant.

I just paint that picture to tell you this was not only the seat of Roman authority. It was not just the capital of Rome. But Satan had basically infested the institutions of power. He had infected the minds of the politicians. He was basically a puppet master of these influencers and influences in the Roman world so that his master schematic of how to conquer Christians and resist what God's redemptive plans were in the world, all of that was kind of permeating from Pergamum. It was kind of like the headquarters for satanic activity, for his schemes.

And so that's why Jesus says you're at the throne of Satan. And if you can imagine being a Christian in a place like that— I don't know what the similarity would be in our day and age. Think of being a Christian in Las Vegas or Hollywood or any place where it's just clear the culture cannot stand you. They hate you. They hate what you believe. They hate what you

represent. They hate you with a passion and want to see you go away. That's the Christians in Pergamum. So it's interesting when Jesus introduces himself to that church in that context, he introduces himself in a particular way.

Do you notice what he said? He said, write to the angel of the church in Pergamum, thus says the one who has the double-edged sword coming from his mouth. And anytime you hear the word sword in the New Testament or Old Testament, you equate it with authority. When Paul talks about the government authority in Romans 13, authority this, authority that, the government has authority instituted by God, he says the government does not bear the sword in vain. So the sword was a symbolic way of saying authority. So Jesus is essentially saying you're under the authority of these politicians and these cultural influencers, and in a way you're under the authority of Satan because Satan has made Pergamum his headquarters.

But you need to take your eyes off of the authority of these institutions and these politicians, and you need to put them back onto the authority of heaven, because I am the one who possesses true authority. I'm the one with a double-edged sword coming from my mouth. And so he's essentially saying, you've listened to these politicians long enough. It's time to start listening to me. You've listened to these cultural influencers long enough, it's time to start listening to me. You need to decide, are you going to fear man? Are you going to fear government?

Are you going to fear these powerful people, or are you going to fear the Lord? And that's a question, if we're going to overcome compromise, that's a question we've got to settle. Now don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that you can either obey God or the government, because obviously Romans 13 says you should obey the government as a way of obeying God. And it's not to say that every time the government or politicians or cultural influencers, it's not to say every time they say this should be the way things are, that it always contradicts the way God says the way things are.

Sometimes there's alignment, there's agreement. And in America, for a large period of time, there was a close alignment between the culture and Christianity. We had a thing called cultural Christianity. So that what the culture believed was in large respects similar to what Christians believed. But as time has progressed and the Christian influence on our nation has begun to wane, there's a discrepancy between what the culture says and what Christianity says. And now there's an even increasingly stark discrepancy between what the government says and what Christianity says. And there may come a day, there is now a day, on certain questions where the government says this is what's true.

And God says, no, no, this is what's true. And when there is a conflict between the authority of man and the authority of God, Christians say, I will submit to the authority of Jesus Christ because his authority supersedes the authority of any other authority on earth. And that's a

conviction we've got to settle if we're going to overcome compromise in our day and age. We've got to settle: the authority of Jesus supersedes any and all other authority. And I know that it's culturally unfashionable to say those things. It's not as unfashionable to say them here as it would be to say in a more autocratic or even a theocratic or what do they call those countries that are dominated by just one ruler?

I'm dropping the name, but like a North Korea, or— dictator, yeah, dictatorship or tyrannical kind of government. We have freedom of speech, we have freedom of religion, so it's not as outlandish to say that here as it would be to say that there. But in North Korea, it's almost impossible to be a Christ follower because to say I submit to Jesus Christ instead of Kim Jong-un, it's off with your head. But Christians have to settle, that is what I truly believe. And the crazier thing than that is that for Christians today, the authority of Jesus Christ, because Jesus presents himself as having this double-edged sword.

If you go to chapter 1 when Jesus talks about the double-edged sword in the book of the Revelation, it's a double-edged sword that comes from his mouth, which is a reminder that the authority of Jesus on earth is enforced through his word. It's not some special vision. It's not as though Jesus incarnates himself on the earth again, but that he rules his people through his word. And there's nothing more culturally unfashionable than that. That Christians would believe the Bible is inspired by God. You would believe the Bible is true and without error.

You would believe these antiquated, old-fashioned ideas about two genders and God's design for the family and God's design for sexuality. The fact that you believe that makes you so old-fashioned and so judgmental and so narrow minded and so mean spirited. Who are you to say those things? And Christians have to settle. No, I say these things because Jesus has said these things, and Jesus' authority is greater than what I think, and greater than what anybody else says. The book of Hebrews 4:12 says the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, which means it's a sword of judgment, yes, but it's also a sword of blessing.

It's a sword that convicts and confronts, but it's also a sword that confirms and establishes and encourages. It's just like good preaching. Good preaching should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Amen. It's like preaching that will— it's like the sun can harden wax— no, harden clay or melt wax. That's what the word of God is. And when Jesus says my word is a double-edged sword, I think he's reminding them what I'm about to do to you is afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. First thing he does is he comforts the afflicted.

He gives a commendation in verse 13, which leads to our second conviction. The commendation was that they were holding fast to his name. It's a present tense verb, so it's this idea of ongoing action. They weren't in and out. They weren't hot and cold. They were

steadfast in their commitment to the basics of the orthodox faith. They were saying we may compromise on secondary issues, but when it comes to the primary issues, we are in, baby, and we are not coming out. So it doesn't matter how much persecution we get.

It doesn't matter even if they kill us for our faith in Jesus Christ, we will not abandon the faith. And he commends them for that. He says, you are faithful, you did not deny my name. You are like Antipas. You were against all. I'd rather God be found true and every man a liar than to abandon my faith in Jesus Christ. And so the conviction or that commendation I think should lead to the conviction that in the Christian life we should not be surprised by persecution. As some people say, it's a feature, not a bug.

You've heard about programming where there's bugs in the system. That shouldn't have happened, you shouldn't have got that error message. Well, when it comes to Christianity, you experiencing persecution for your faith— it's just part of what it means to be a Christian. Even in America, even when there's religious freedom and freedom of speech, you will be persecuted for your faith. And if you don't believe me, all you have to do is live a godly life in Christ Jesus publicly for a few days and you'll feel it. All you got to do is turn on cable news and listen to the way they talk about evangelical Christians.

I read an article the other day that was blaming evangelicals for the pandemic. Or maybe they were blaming evangelicals for a resurgence in the pandemic because they were anti-science and they didn't believe in all the things that the CDC was putting out. But it was just kind of like Nero did back in the day. We got to blame somebody, so let's blame the Christians. That happened in Rome. It happens today. It's just part of what it means to be a Christ follower. And it's crazy, there are other religions who believe some of the same things that Christians believe related to sexuality and marriage and all those things, but you never see those religions being persecuted, at least not here, in the same way that people persecute the Christians.

It's like there's this unique hatred for believers and Jesus says don't be shocked by that because that's just the way it is. People will reject the truth. People who are living in darkness don't want to have the light turned on. And when you live as lights in the world and you bump up against them and light up the darkness that they don't want exposed, they are going to persecute you. And the reason I think this helps you overcome compromise is because you can today settle now what I'm going to do in that day when that day comes.

Knowing that day will come, I'm not going to be surprised by it. I'm not going to be caught off guard. I'm going to settle now how I will respond when culture confronts me on these questions that are unfashionable. When they say, who are you to say there's salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus, who gives you the right to know it all and to believe those things? Or who makes you the expert that there's only two genders, that God made

them male and female. When our scientists and our philosophers tell us we can have as many genders as we want.

Who are you to offend others by disagreeing with them in those ways? What will you say in those days? Will you be able to stand strong? Will you be able to say, well, you know, I know that you disagree with those things, but my authority comes from Jesus Christ, and the authority of Jesus Christ for me is represented through his word. And so when the word says he made them male and female, or when the word says that there's salvation in no other name than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that's just what I believe.

I would rather agree with someone who predicted his resurrection and pulled it off than I would a man who has opinions of man. And I'm not trying to be judgmental. I'm not trying to be mean-spirited about it. I'm not even trying to shove it down your throat. I'm just going to stand strong in what I believe about the truth of Jesus Christ. Will we stand strong or will we compromise? You will compromise unless you settle today what you're going to do on that day. Because when that day comes, it will be persuasive.

It will feel strong. It will feel overwhelming, overwhelming for you to abdicate and to compromise. And so settle now what you will do then. So conviction number one, Jesus' authority is greater. Conviction number two, persecution is a feature, not a bug. The third thing he does is he talks about sin, and that's where he condemns them for some of this false doctrine that was going on in their church. If you look at verse 14 and 15, you get a little description of this idolatry. He says in verse 14, I've got some things against you.

You have some people in the church who hold to the teaching of Balaam. Now notice it's not the whole church. All right? So remember, the church is holding fast to his name. The church in large measure is doing good, but there's a little group in the church, like a small group, a Sunday school class, who's holding to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites, to eat meat sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Now again, if you're not steeped in Old Testament stories, you don't know that, so I'm going to tell you that story in just a minute.

The second group or the second problem was that there were those in the church who held to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. And unfortunately we don't know a whole lot historically about the Nicolaitans, but I will tell you this. The name Nicolaitans is a compound of two Greek words. The first one is the word Niko or Nike. That's where we get our English word Nike. It means— what do you think it means? Victory. It means conquering, means you win. This word, laitans, comes from the Greek word laos; it's where we get our word laity, or the lay people or common people.

And so a lot of scholars think that the Nicolaitan heresy was a heresy that said you can reject God's authority and you can reject the truth. If that's what you want to do. It's basically the

individual rules. It's victory of the laity, victory of the people. So whatever you say, whatever the society says, then that's what goes. And if you want to worship God on Sunday and raise heck on Monday, then that's totally fine for you to do. There's no necessary correlation between what you believe and how you live. And so the essence of the false teaching at Pergamum said, you could reject the authority of God, you could reject the truth of his word and not suffer any of the consequences.

And I'll tell you, we have people who preach this kind of dynamic today. It's all over the place. And if they don't preach it outright, they at least preach it implicitly. You know, God's full of love, God's full of grace. He doesn't really care how you live. All that matters is that you believe. All that matters is your spiritual sphere. The physical sphere is kind of irrelevant. You can do whatever you want with your sexuality and do whatever you want with your substances and with your body, just so long as you believe the right things.

If you have that special knowledge, then anything goes. And that's what happened with Balaam. All right. So Balaam, for those of you who don't know, he was what you would call a prophet for hire. I know that this is hard to imagine, but there are preachers in the world who just preach for the money. All right. You see them on TV. You guys ever seen these kind of preachers? Sow a seed into my ministry. You know, I'll give you my special sweat cloth with the holy magic sweat on it. And those people make me sick.

But there's a whole industry of Christian prophets. And that was Balaam. Balaam was a Christian prophet. He was a prophet, P-R-O-F-I-T. He was a profit prophet. And he was a prophet for hire, so Balak hired Balaam to do some prophetic work for him. Now who's Balak? Balak was the king of the Moabites. The Moabites were a country just like many countries in that day and age. And at that day and age, Israel was kind of growing in their strength. They were becoming a political force to be reckoned with. They were invading countries, taking them over.

It was not pretty. It was like it was conquest. It was domination. It was something that if you were a king of Moab, you would say, I don't want that to happen here. So because I love my people and my country, I want to try to protect them from the invading force of the Israelites, and so I'm going to hire this prophet, this Jewish prophet, to curse Israel so that they won't be successful in invading Moab. So that's what he does. He hires Balaam. Balaam comes, he tries to curse Israel the first time.

He can't do it because he recognizes Israel's blessed by God. I'm not going to curse people that God has blessed. And so Balaam— or Balak, I'm sorry— I just can't do it. So Balak gives him more money. Hey, let's try it again. Let's try it on this mountain. Then he does it again. Again, he can't curse them. He can only bless them. So Balak says, well let's do it a third time. He takes him to Peor, the third mountain, gives him even more money, and gives him a

threat. If you don't do this, then you're not going to get any of this money, and it's not going to be pretty for you.

So he tries to put the muscle on him. And again, Balaam can't curse Israel, but what he does do is he lets slip, even though we can't curse them from without, I'll tell you how you can corrupt them from within. All you got to do is take some of your really, really pretty Moabite women and put them in close proximity to these hungry, sexually deprived Israelite men— you know, when you're in the army, it wasn't like America, women weren't in the military. And so these were men who had not been eating meat because they were eating manna in the wilderness.

And they were sexually deprived, and they would act on that temptation. So sure enough, that's what Balak does. He puts some very beautiful women in close proximity to these men, and they cave to the temptation. If you look at the book of Numbers, chapter 25, there's a little summary of the incident. Numbers 23 to 25 give you the episodes of Balak and Balaam, but it culminates in this. It says, while Israel was staying in the Acacia Grove, the people began to prostitute themselves with the women of Moab. They played the harlot.

In other words, they had sex with these Moabite women. The women after the fact— because after a man has sex with a woman, they generally do whatever that woman says. So the women then after that invited them to the sacrifices for their gods. And the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods. So Israel aligned itself with Baal of Peor, and the Lord's anger burned against Israel. So Balaam told Balak the king, we can't curse them from without, but we can corrupt them from within. Here's how. Sexual temptation. And meat.

Which is every man's weakness, right? Good, some things just never change. But here's the principle. Jesus is using the story of the Israelites in Numbers 25 to talk about the spiritual compromise in Pergamum, and he's saying these believers are leading you astray, telling you that you can compartmentalize your sin. Because here's what the men in Israel were saying. We're blessed by God. Obviously, we're winning all these battles. We're winning all these victories. So since God is for us, who can be against us? Surely God doesn't mind what I do with my sexuality when I'm on the field.

Surely he'll give me a pass. I mean I'm still worshiping at the temple. My spiritual life is still good. It's just, you know, what I'm doing in the darkness with my flesh, with my body. Surely it's not that big a deal. It's not like I'm worshiping the idols. I'm just eating the meat. I haven't had meat in years. I just keep eating this bread and this meat is so tasty and so good. And so I'm not worshiping the idols, I'm just eating the meat. And then before they knew it, not only were they having sex outside of marriage, not only were they eating the meat sacrificed to idols, then they actually started to worship the idols.

Well, I can worship God and Baal at the same time. I can agree with the culture and agree with God at the same time. I can worship the culture on these levels and worship God on these levels. I can love God with my mind and my spirit and do whatever I want with my sex life and do whatever I want with drugs and alcohol and do whatever I want with X, Y, or Z. I can compartmentalize my sin. And Jesus is saying, you cannot compartmentalize your sin. Your sin is like yeast.

It grows and it spreads. And you ask anybody who's lived in sin for a season of time. They will tell you it never stays isolated, it always grows, it always permeates, it becomes a big ugly monster until it destroys not only you, but everyone around you. And that's exactly what happened in Numbers. If you go to Numbers 25, verse 9, it says 24,000 Israelites died as a result of the sexual immorality and idolatry. And I don't know if that was some kind of mean STD that actually killed everybody, or if that was just the Lord's punishment, but it took not only those individuals out, it took the whole community out.

And that's what Jesus is saying to this church. He's not just angry at the group who had compromised, he's angry at the pastor. He's angry at the church leadership who is basically saying, it's not that big a deal. You know, they believe rightly on all the major things, and so since they agree with us on the major things, who are we to enforce our morality on them on these questions of sexual immorality and meat sacrificed to idols. And Jesus is saying, no, you've got to address the sin in your church or it's going to ruin your church.

That's why the Lord gave us things like church discipline. That's why— we don't do it much today, to our shame— but we have to protect the integrity of the church if the church is going to be what the Lord wants it to be. If you go to 1 Corinthians chapter 5, there was a member of their church who was sleeping with his mother-in-law,[2] which just is gross, you know. Paul says even the pagans think that's gross, man. Get that out of there. But they were rejoicing. They were boasting. Look how tolerant we are.

Look at how loving we are. And Paul says, your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? In other words, sin, it's like yeast. All it takes is a little bit of sin and a sufficient amount of time and you're toast. It doesn't just destroy you, it will destroy everyone around you. So get this guy out of the church. Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch as indeed you are. And I would say sometimes even our church has a temptation in an effort to be loving, in an effort to be tolerant, in an effort to be full of grace, there is a temptation for us to get squishy where the Bible is firm.

And to say, well, it doesn't really matter and we're not going to really push that and we're going to turn down the volume on those things that are offensive and let's just focus on these unoffensive things and turn up the volume there. And Jesus is offering a warning to churches who fall prey to that compromise. I will come and visit you. I will take the lampstand away.

You will not be effective as a church. And I can point to churches, I can point to whole denominations who compromise on those kinds of issues, and the churches are dying or dead.

There's a whole branch of Christianity— in fact, actually, right now— liberal Christianity back in the day was the culprit. Now we have a new culprit called progressive Christianity. Which agrees with Christianity that Jesus is God, that he died on the cross for our sins. They agree on some of those things, but when it comes to how do we know truth. Is the Bible reliable? Can we live however we want to live with our sexuality and with kind of our licentious lifestyle decisions? They say there's all kinds of permissibility there because all you got to do is agree with the spiritual part.

Just focus on the spiritual part, do whatever you want with your body. I love what Reinhold Niebuhr[3] said of that kind of approach to religion, that kind of approach to Christianity. He said it's a God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom that doesn't have any judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross. In other words, you empty Christianity of anything that makes it Christian when you compromise in that way. And what was liberal Christianity a hundred years ago is progressive Christianity today. It's a temptation for every church, and it'll become an increasingly stronger temptation as our culture drifts further and further and further away from the truth.

And we've got to decide if we're going to be a church that stands strong on the truth or if we compromise in order to be culturally accepted. But if we compromise, Jesus says, you're inviting the judgment of God. Which is the last conviction I'll mention and then we're done. The last conviction is that judgment always begins in the household of God. It always starts there. There's a lot of Christians who like to point the finger at the culture, and the culture is — oh, our culture is terrible and our nation has drifted from God, and we need prayer back in the schools, and they decry the culture.

And certainly there is cultural decay to be decried. I'm not saying that it's not, but when it comes to God fixing the culture, he doesn't fix the culture first, he fixes the church first. It always begins in the household of God. And so the church must lead the way in repentance. Our church must lead the way in repentance. If we want to decry the evils of our culture, we have to first ask and answer, what seed of that cultural decay is present in me? What seed of that cultural decay is present in our church?

Where are we squishy where the Bible is firm? Or sometimes we become legalistic and we're firm where the Bible is squishy. And those are equally both compromises. And so we've got to ask ourselves the question, is that compromise alive and well in our church? And if so, will we lead the way in repentance? What's so interesting is that the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans was originally meant to help Christians escape persecution and suffering, but it ultimately invited the judgment of God, which is far worse. So the compromise is a trap.

So, Christians, you got to hold this mushy-middle, weird tension, right? Firm where the Bible is firm, squishy where the Bible is squishy. Not squishy where the Bible is firm, but not firm where the Bible is squishy. Truth and grace, grace and truth. That's the Christian way. And that's the way we want to be as a church. Not Pharisaical, not mean, not judgmental, like the Pharisees were, who lost the grace of God. So we want to be full of grace, but we also want to be full of truth. And Jesus says if you will do that, if you'll hold that tension and persevere through to the end, then there is a reward.

And the reward is in verse 17. He talks about hidden manna and a white stone with a new name. So let anyone who has ears to hear listen. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it. You guys ever heard that old hymn? "There's a new name written down in glory, and it's mine, oh yes, it's mine." Nobody knows— okay, no, most commentators don't know what that stuff is, just to be honest.

But I'll tell you what I think they mean. I think this manna is a reference to the fact that if we will persevere and endure, we will receive the satisfaction of— put it this way, Jesus satisfies our soul in a way that no one or nothing else can. And if you will persevere— that hidden manna symbolizes that satisfaction that the Lord will bring. In other words, you're tempted to compromise because, well, I want to engage in sexually promiscuous behavior. I want to watch porn. I want to satisfy my baser lust.

I want to satisfy the flesh. And Jesus is saying that the satisfaction of sin satisfies for only a season, and then it's gone. But if you'll persevere and stay with me and adhere to my designs, then I will satisfy you in ways that supersede that. What's funny is, the hidden manna— the manna is what the Israelites in Numbers 25, they should have been satisfied with the manna, but they wanted the meat. And Jesus is saying, if you'll just persevere, the meat that I will give, the meal that you will taste in my presence is the most tasty meal you've ever experienced.

And then this new name, I think, signifies the purity and the durability of the new identity that we have in Jesus Christ. It's a white stone, so that talks about the purity. It's a stone, so that talks about the longevity, the kind of the durability of the new identity that we have in Christ. And that's what a name was. Your name was your character. Your name was who you were. That's why when we name kids, it's so crazy how kids live up to their name. Does anybody else's kid do that?

My kid is living up to his name. Like I named my firstborn son Blaise after Blaise Pascal who was a Christian philosopher, but also really good at math. He invented— he helped pave the way for the invention of the calculator and calculus. And I swear my kid is a math whiz. I sometimes wonder, did I channel Blaise Pascal into my son by giving him that name?

Because, you know, I'm not good at math. I'm okay with words and English, but he's so good at math, it blows me away. So your name— my point is, kids live up to their name.

When Jesus was on the scene, he changed Simon's name to Peter. He changed Saul's name to Paul. He didn't just change their name. He changed their character. And so Jesus is saying, if you'll persevere, if you'll hold fast, if you will overcome compromise, who you are going to become, who I will make you, if you will persevere to the end— you can't even believe it. You can't even imagine. No one will even be able to imagine it who you will be if you will resist and overcome compromise. Your identity in Christ is a new identity.

The old is gone, the new has come, all those shames, all those regrets, all those secret sins that you don't want anybody to know about, all those weaknesses that you feel like you cannot overcome, they will be overcome through the power and transformation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so persevere. Let us be a people who overcome compromise, who are faithful to the end. And the best way to be faithful to Christ on that day, the best way to be faithful to Christ on the challenging day, the day in which we're tempted to compromise is to decide today to be faithful to Christ in every day, to be faithful to Christ at all times.

And so here's how I want us to close. I know that, you know, different people hear this message different ways, but I want to, as Taylor comes up and leads us through a time of response, I want to ask you to open yourself up to the Lord and say, is there any area of my life where there's compromise? Any area of my life where I'm squishy, though the Bible is firm, or I'm firm, though the Bible is squishy? Is there any area of my life where I'm resisting the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Any area where I say the Bible has got it wrong on that issue, I've got it right, or the culture has it right? So let's just bow our heads and close our eyes and just do business with the Lord. Remember, you're not responding to me. You're not responding to something I've said. If I've done my job, the Bible speaks, God speaks. So you want to respond to the voice of the Lord.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "the capital of Rome"; Pergamum was a leading seat of Roman authority in Asia Minor and served briefly as the capital of the Roman province of Asia before that distinction passed to Ephesus. Source: Wikipedia, "Pergamon." ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "sleeping with his mother-in-law"; Paul describes "a man … sleeping with his father's wife," that is, his stepmother. Source: 1 Corinthians 5:1 (CSB). ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "Reinhold Niebuhr"; the line "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" is from his brother H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (1937), p. 193. Source: Wikipedia, "H. Richard Niebuhr"; Theology Quotes, H. Richard Niebuhr. ↩