

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Revelation: God's Revelation To His Servants Today On Events About To Occur

Part III: "The Things Which Are": Church History

C. Pergamum: Message To The Compromising Church - Relying On Christ To Afford To Avoid Compromise (Revelation 2:12-17)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Christian leaders like to think they do not compromise their beliefs, but if their **income** is threatened, a lot of them "fudge" in this realm: in Religious Trojan Horse, 2012, p. 422, Brannon Howse wrote that though "most pro-family organizations claim to be Christian . . . most of the New Religious Right will not reflect biblical Christianity because they don't want to offend their Catholic, Mormon, Word of Faith, or New Apostolic Reformation donors."

That is a stumbling block for those in the pew: Catholics and Mormons teach the false gospel of salvation by faith plus works, some Word of Faith leaders admit they perform acts done by occultists (Ibid., p. 363-364) and some New Apostolic Reformation leaders hold to extrabiblical revelation, Ibid., p. 481. If Christian leaders do not reflect biblical Christianity to get donations from such groups, those in the pew are led by example to tolerate or adopt error.

Need: Thus, we ask, "If livelihood pressures greatly lure Christian leaders to compromise their Biblical stands in the face of significant theological error, how can they and the rest of us stay Biblically true to the Lord?!"

- I. **In line with past lessons in this series, the Revelation 2:12-17 message to the Church at Pergamum was to the Compromising Church, A. D. 300-800 (J. Dwight Pentecost, Things To Come, 1972, p. 153), and Revelation 2:12 exposes its need regarding pressures to compromise its beliefs out of livelihood concerns:**
 - A. Christ said He had the sharp, two-edged sword, referring to Hebrews 4:12 that alone elsewhere in Scripture thus describes God's Word, and the **broad context** of **Hebrews 4:12** warns believers not to return to their past false religion (Heb. 2:1; 6:1-6) in recalling how they overcame the "soft" persecution pressure of (1) **public exposure** for their **Christian beliefs** with a (2) **resulting loss of possessions**, Heb. 10:32-34! They were thus to keep living by faith in God's livelihood supply like Israel was to trust God in the wilderness, Heb. 3:7-4:10.
 - B. Thus, **Church leaders were being lured to return to past false religions [or their errors] or face the "soft" persecution of public exposure and the resulting loss of possessions for remaining upright. Instead of compromising, they were to trust God for their material needs or face the convicting work of God's Word!**
- II. **In Revelation 2:13, Christ described the specific trial pressure that Christian leaders of the era faced:**
 - A. Christ **repeatedly** mentioned how these believers dwelt in **Satan's** realm or throne, where God's faithful martyr "Antipas" (abbr. for *antipatros* = "against father") was previously slain. Rome's emperors in the Persecuted Church era were titled *pater patriae*, "father of the Fatherland" (britannica.com), so "Antipas" **cryptically** refers to the martyrs of the past Persecuted Church era who had stood against emperor worship. Thus, Christ expressed how this Church era's leaders faced **pressure to conform to satanically led emperor Constantine's agenda ecumenically to unite his empire!** (Williston Walker, A Hist. of the Christian Church, 1959, p. 105)
 - B. Surprising to many, Constantine was a lifelong pagan; doctrine meant nothing to him, only compromise to unite his empire (Dave Hunt, A Woman Rides the Beast, 1994, p. 158). Satan used him to free the Church from "hard" persecution of the past era only to place believers grateful for his liberation under his influence so he could ecumenically unite them with paganism, Ibid., Walker, p. 102; Ibid., Hunt, p. 157-158.
 - C. Christ honored this Church for having held fast in its past suffering to His deity (i. e., His "name," Z. P. E. B., v. Four, p. 365) in standing against emperor worship and in holding to His "faith," salvation by faith in Christ.
- III. **However, Christ critiqued Constantine's favored "Catholic" unbiblical hierarchy of the Church for yielding to ecumenical compromise with paganism in shocking spiritual idolatry, Revelation 2:14:**
 - A. Christ critiqued this Church's leaders for holding the doctrine of Balaam who, for wages, taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before Israel to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols, Rev. 2:14; 2 Pet. 2:15.
 - B. To clarify, Constantine made the "strong, close-knit, [unbiblically] hierarchically organized portion" that called itself "'Catholic'" exempt from taxes put to the rich, but he did not favor the other sects, Ibid., Walker, p. 105. With this "Catholic" group favored, pagans entered it, and "(p)aganism survived . . . in the . . . rites and customs condoned, or accepted and transformed, by an often indulgent [Catholic] Church . . ." Ibid., Hunt, p. 203-203, citing **secular** historian, Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, 1950, vol. IV, p. 75; vol. III, p. 657.
 - C. In particular, **transubstantiation**, or belief that the elements of the Lord's Table are turned into Christ's real body, arose in this "Catholic" group, Ibid., Walker, p. 91. (a) The "priest" **idolatrously** (spiritual "fornication,"

cf. Ezek. 16:15-34) "worshiped" the wine and bread as Christ Himself (Loraine Boettner, Rom. Cath., 1978, p. 179) before (b) "eating things sacrificed to idols" in lifting up his hands to offer the elements as Christ's real body in sacrifice to God before ingesting them and feeding the consecrated bread ["host"] to the laity, Ibid., p. 176. [The Catholic Church teaches that the priest offers up Christ's body **not** to an *idol*, but to **God** in *heaven*. However, where an object like the consecrated bread ["host"] is **believed** to *be God*, a worshiper "will base his concept of God, consciously or unconsciously, upon the image" extolled as God, forming an errant view of God, so the worshiper eats the "host" unto the idol of his own imagination. (Z. P. E. B., v. Three, p. 248) Such idolatry can lead to worshiping demons as Paul reports occurs with Gentile pagans in 1 Corinthians 10:19-21!]

IV. Christ also critiqued that in the same manner, some in the Church held to Neoplatonic views with their errant idolatry and unbiblical oppression of believers spawned by Plato's pagan ideology, Rev. 2:15:

- A. Jesus said that in the way the "Catholic" group yielded to paganism, this Church yielded to the doctrine of the "Nicolaitanes," the group we learned in our sermon on the Apostolic Church era promoted pagan Platonism.
- B. To explain, Augustine (A. D. 354-430; Ibid., Walker, p. 160, 170) tried to "construct a Christian philosophy out of Platonic materials," B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Aug., reprint 1956 (1974), p. 375. However, Plato held there were two worlds of reality, a lower, imperfect one witnessed by the senses and an upper "World of Being" with perfect knowledge beyond man's senses (G. Carruth, ed. in chief, The Vol. Library, reprint, 1917 (1974), v. 22, p. 2025. That left Augustine identifying Plato's higher "Good" as the Christian "God" to yield idolatrous pantheism where man is but an extension of God (Ibid., Walker, p. 98, 163-164). He then taught salvation faith was authored by God, not man (Ibid., Warfield, p. 378; E. M. Burns, West. Civ., 1963, p. 272)
- C. So, akin to the "Catholic" group, Augustine influenced others unto (1) *idolatry* in pantheism (2) and unbiblical *hierarchical* "conquering of the people" in Platonism [see our Apostolic Church sermon] by denying free will.

V. Jesus called the errant leaders of the Pergamum Church to repent or face Scripture's critique, Rev. 2:16.

VI. Then, Christ offered to provide for the incomes of pastors who stood against this compromise, Rev. 2:17:

- A. Jesus offered "hidden manna" to local pastors in the powerful, close-knit, government favored "Catholic" hierarchy that could publicly expose and expel them for standing against its compromise with paganism, Rev. 2:17a. The manna in the O. T. was God's livelihood supply for Israel in the wilderness, and as Christ offered a "hidden" manna, He offered a secret livelihood supply for pastors who paid the price in avoiding compromise.
- B. Christ also offered a "white stone" with a "new name" on it known only to the overcoming recipient, Rev. 2:17b. Greek writers Plutarch [Life of Pericles 64] and Pliny [Letters 6:11] reported how upon returning to their hometowns, winners in the Olympic Games were given white stones with their names engraved on them to signify that they would get livelihood support for life from state funds, ancientbiblehistory.com, "White Stone." Thus, if uncompromising pastors lost their jobs and thus faced stiff taxes from the state for not belonging to the favored "Catholic" group, God would secretly and for life provide for their financial needs!
- C. The key overcomer in this era was Athanasius (A. D. 295-373): he stood against the Arian heresy that Christ was a created being, suffering five banishments by Constantine and other rulers! He was honored in the end, and the Church today holds his biblical stands on Christ's eternity and the Trinity, Ibid., Walker, p. 109-116.

Lesson: *Christ called believers, especially Church leaders, to hold uncompromisingly to Biblical truth regardless how their fame and livelihoods were threatened for doing so, trusting God to meet their needs as His reward.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) May we not compromise our stands on the truth though it costs us our reputations or our livelihoods, and may we do so by trusting Christ to meet our needs.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In a sermon like this, we need to explain as follows what we do to avoid the errors of the Pergamum Church:

- (1) In regard to transubstantiation, we say the elements of the Lord's Table are always mere juice and crackers.
 - (2) In regard to Augustine's Neoplatonic errors, (a) we hold God is not creation itself as in Platonic pantheism, but distinct from it as transcendent God, Romans 1:23-25. Thus, (b) we also hold that man, distinct from God, authors his own faith of his own free will in trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, Luke 7:48-50 with John 3:16.
 - (3) In regard to the Arian heresy, we hold Christ is Eternal God, Creator of all that was created, John 1:1-3.
 - (4) In regard to the Trinity, we [as did Athanasius] hold God is One with respect to divine essence (Ephesians 4:5) and Three with respect to Persons, Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14.
 - (5) In regard to Church hierarchies, we oppose them and call our leaders to be humble examples, 1 Peter 5:1-5.
- May we trust in Christ to be saved, and trust Him alone for our livelihood so we can avoid compromise.**