

SPECIAL INTERLUDE

Revisiting Church History In Light Of The 500th Anniversary Of The Protestant Reformation III. Pergamum: The Compromising Church - Heeding Scripture Alone To Overcome Compromise (Revelation 2:12-17)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We believers at Nepaug Bible Church consistently face pressures to compromise our Biblical faith:

(1) Bill Dunn's article, "Catholic Conference tops Fenway" in the Republican-American, October 13, 2017, p. 2D, promoted the "Connecticut Catholic Men's Conference" held "in Bristol" where "hundreds of regular, everyday guys" got together in what the article claimed was "more spiritually fulfilling than a pilgrimage to Fenway Park."

Such words may make the gathering sound inviting, but the article added there would be opportunity for "Confession and Eucharistic adoration," Ibid. However, "Confession" where one confesses his sin to a priest and he absolves him of it usurps Christ's role in 1 Timothy 2:5 as man's sole mediator with God and "Eucharistic adoration" involves the sin of idolatry in worshipping Jesus in the communion elements themselves (as we will later explain)!

The article also noted that "the keynote speaker" had been transformed from "a Bible thumpin' fundamentalist . . . into a faithful member of the Catholic Church," Ibid. Such a shift is not at all commendable, for the Roman Catholic Church claims salvation is by faith plus works, a gospel that Scripture anathematizes at Galatians 1:8-9 with Ephesians 2:8-9, so the keynote speaker had gone in an apostate direction!

(2) We face pressures to compromise our faith as a church body: last week, my wife and I witnessed two of our members face great pressure from an errant religious entity to compromise their beliefs and/or practices.

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God want us to overcome the pressures we face to compromise our Biblical faith?!"*

- I. **We know from past studies that the Revelation 2:12-17 message to the Church of Pergamum was for the Compromising Church of A. D. 300-800 (J. Dwight Pentecost, Things To Come, 1972, p. 153), and Revelation 2:12 exposes this Church's need to handle pressure to compromise out of livelihood concerns:**
 - A. Christ said He had the sharp, two-edged sword, referring to Hebrews 4:12 with its context that warns believers not to return to their past religion (Heb. 2:1; 6:1-6), but to recall how they had overcome the "soft" persecution of *public exposure* for their *Biblical beliefs* and its *resulting loss* of *possessions*, Heb. 10:32-34! They were to live by faith in God's livelihood supply like Israel was to have done in the wilderness, Heb. 3:7-4:10.
 - B. To explain, *believers of the Compromising Church era were pressured to compromise with past pagan error or face "soft" persecution of public exposure and loss of possessions. They were to heed the discerning Scriptures versus compromising Biblical beliefs with paganism and trust God to meet their livelihood needs.*
- II. **Christ then described this Compromising Church's heritage, lauding it in Revelation 2:13 (as follows):**
 - A. These believers dwelt in **Satan's** realm where God's faithful martyr "Antipas" (abbreviation for *antipatros* = "against father," Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 75) had been slain.
 - B. This signified how Roman emperors, titled *pater patriae*, "father of the Fatherland" (britannica.com), in the past era had slain believers who opposed worship required by them, so Christ lauded the stand of past martyrs!
- III. **Yet, Jesus critiqued the Compromising Church for mixing Scripture with mystery religions, Rev. 2:14:**
 - A. After its persecution era, the Church faced pressure to conform to satanically led Constantine's agenda to unite his empire ecumenically (Williston Walker, A Hist. of the Christ. Chch., 1959, p. 105): (1) as a lifelong pagan, Constantine never cared about Christian doctrine, only compromise to unite his empire (Dave Hunt, A Woman Rides the Beast, 1994, p. 158) (2) Though he freed the Church from past "hard" persecution, Satan used him to pressure the Church to compromise with pagans to unite his empire, Ibid., p. 157-158; Ibid., Walker, p. 102.
 - B. Christ thus critiqued some who came to hold the doctrine of Balaam who, for wages taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before Israel to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols, Rev. 2:14; 2 Peter 2:15.
 - C. To explain, Constantine made the "strong, close-knit, hierarchically organized portion" of the Church that called itself "Catholic" exempt from taxation, without economically favoring any other religious group, Ibid., Walker, p. 105. Pagans thus joined the "Catholic" group to avoid taxes, and "(p)aganism survived . . . in the . . . rites and customs condoned, or accepted and transformed, by an often indulgent ["Catholic"] Church, Ibid., Hunt, p. 203-204 in citing Will Durant, The Story of Civ., 1950, v. IV, p. 75; v. III, p. 657 (brackets ours).
 - D. Thus, *transubstantiation*, the belief that the communion elements are changed into Christ's real body, arose in the "Catholic" group (Ibid., Walker, p. 90-91) by *mixing Scripture* with *paganism*: (a) the mystery religions had taught that "sharing a meal with the god is to become a partaker of the divine nature," Ibid., Walker, p. 90.

(b) That belief *along with* John 6:48-58 that claimed "the necessity of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ to have 'life'" led Church Father Ignatius to conclude that "the [Lord's] Supper confers 'life,'" Ibid., p. 89-90 (bracket ours). (c) Thus, transubstantiation arose by interpreting John 6:48-58 *in accord with* pagan mystery religion belief, (d) leaving the "priest" *idolatrously* (spiritual "fornication," Ez. 16:15-34) to worship the wine and bread as Christ Himself (Lorraine Boettner, Roman Cath., 1978, p. 179) and (e) "eating things sacrificed to idols," namely, lifting up his hands to offer the communion elements as Christ's real body in sacrifice to God before ingesting them and feeding the bread ["host"] to parishioners, Ibid., p. 176.

IV. Christ also critiqued this Church for MIXING Scripture WITH Plato's pagan philosophy, Rev. 2:15:

- A. Bishop 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). Plato held there were two worlds of reality, a lower, imperfect one witnessed by the senses and an upper "World of Being" of perfect knowledge beyond the senses, at the top of which reality was the "Good." (G. Carruth, ed. in chief, The Vol. Library, reprint, 1917 (1974), v. 22, p. 2025) Augustine identified that "Good" as **God**, forming *idolatrous pantheism* where man is an extension of God (Ibid., Walker, p. 98, 163-164), so Augustine came to teach that God authored man's faith. (Ibid., Warfield, p. 378; Edward M. Burns, Western Civilizations, 1963, p. 272)
- B. So, akin to the "Catholics," *Augustine mixed pagan belief with Scripture*, forming (1) *idolatrous pantheism* (2) and a *hierarchical* platonic "conquering of the people" [cf. Apostolic Church lesson] in denying free will.

V. Jesus called the Compromising Church to repent of these errors or face Scripture's critique, Rev. 2:16.

VI. Then, He offered to provide for the livelihoods of those who overcame compromise, Revelation 2:17:

- A. Jesus offered "hidden manna" to those who refused to compromise at the risk of economic loss, Rev. 2:17a: manna in the O. T. was God's livelihood supply for Israel in the wilderness, so in offering a "hidden" manna, Christ promised secret livelihood provision for those who paid the high price of avoiding compromise.
- B. Christ also offered a "white stone" with a "new name" on it known only to the overcomer, Rev. 2:17b. Greek writers Plutarch [Life of Pericles 64] and Pliny [Letters 6:11] told how in returning to their hometowns, winners in the Olympic Games were given white stones with their names engraved on them to signify they would receive livelihood support for life from the state. (ancientbiblehistory.com, "White Stone") So, if men lost their jobs for not compromising their faith and thus faced economic hardship for being removed from the favored "Catholic" group, God would secretly and for life meet their livelihood needs [out of state funds?!]
- 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. In doing so, he suffered five banishments by Constantine and others! He was honored in the end, and the Church today holds his stands on Christ's eternity and the Trinity, Ibid., Walker, p. 109-116.

Lesson: Christ called believers facing great economic pressure to compromise with paganism to resist that pressure by faith in His financial provision and heed written Scripture ALONE or face Scripture's debilitating critique.

Application: (1) May we trust in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. (2) If facing pressures to compromise or suffer loss, may we trust Christ to compensate for that loss as we heed and rely on Scripture ALONE to resist compromise lest we suffer the debilitating critique of Scripture on our sinful surrender to compromise our faith.

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

The errant beliefs of transubstantiation and of Augustine's claim that God authors man's faith, alike formed by mixing pagan beliefs with Scripture, are both corrected if we view Scripture *alone*, and we illustrate this as follows:

(1) Jesus' John 6:48-58 claim that one must eat His flesh and drink His blood for eternal life is later explained by Jesus Himself in John 6:63 as being a *figurative* claim, for Jesus there said, "(T)he flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." In the same context at John 6:26-35, Jesus was trying to get his hearers to shift from relying on physical food like the loaves and fishes He had recently fed them to trust in Him as the *figurative* "bread of life" that they might receive eternal life.

However, transubstantiation does just the **opposite** -- it combines faith in Christ with eating *literal* food in the communion elements to gain eternal life! Thus, focusing on **Scripture alone** shows one must interpret John 6:48-58 *figuratively* to refer to faith in Christ Whose atonement on the cross provides for redemption and salvation and **NOT literally** like Ignatius did by letting his interpretation of John 6:48-58 be influenced by pagan mystery religion belief!

(2) In Mark 6:6, Jesus marveled at the unbelief of His townspeople, so He expected **them** and *not God* to **author their faith**, countering Augustine's use of Plato's philosophy to form the view that God authors man's faith!

May we trust in Christ to be saved. Then, may we heed Scripture ALONE to overcome compromise.