

Theme: The church must not be fooled by Satan or his servants into compromising with idolatry or sexual sin, and must call all members to repentance for such sins.

I. Intro - Orwell and Huxley

- A. Two of the great books of the 20th century
- B. 1984 - Orwell's nightmare of coercion by Big Brother
- C. Brave New World - Huxley's nightmare of seduction by pleasure
- D. Neil Postman quote on Orwell vs. Huxley
"What Orwell feared was those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, because there would be no one who wanted to read one. ... Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture. ... In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us." Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves To Death
- E. Many have been buying 1984 recently; WikiLeaks of CIA hacking will increase this worry
- F. But Orwellian coercion failed and Huxley's seduction worked in Pergamum

II. Jesus Speaks To His Church In Pergamum

- A. The church in Pergamum
To the angel of **the church in Pergamum** write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. Revelation 2:12
 - 1. 70 miles north of Smyrna; 15 miles inland

- 2. A large, important city - 150,000; former capital
 - 3. Second greatest library in world behind Alexandria
 - 4. 'Parchment' derived from 'Pergamum' - legend says first used here
 - 5. Important center for pagan and emperor worship
 - 6. Massive altar to Zeus on towering acropolis
 - 7. Asclepius - god of healing - symbol was the snake
 - 8. It took its idolatry & emperor worship seriously!
- B. Jesus the Sovereign God speaks to his church
To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: **These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.** Revelation 2:12
 - 1. Image here is not comforting, but rather alarming
 - 2. Sword - a sign of judgment
 - a. 6 times in book - a sign of judgment in others
 - b. Sword was also sign of capital punishment
For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for **he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.** Rom 13:4
 - c. Pergamum was one of the rare cities allowed to use capital punishment - sword is an apt symbol for it!
 - C. The One Who speaks to the church is the Sovereign One in whose hands are life and death. He - not Caesar - has ultimate control.

III. Jesus' Word For the Church In Pergamum

A. A word of praise for faithfulness under persecution

I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. Revelation 2:13

1. I know where you live - I know all you have endured
2. Satan has his throne and lives in Pergamum
 - a. Lives or dwells - same word for both where church and Satan 'lives'
 - b. Satan has his throne there!
 1. Might refer to altar of Zeus towering over city
 2. Might be Asclepius whose symbol is a serpent (Revelation 12:9 - Satan is the serpent)
 3. Might be because of emperor worship
 4. Probably includes the mix of all of these - a strong Satanic amalgamation
3. This is a tough place to live - and they have remained true and not denied Jesus!!
4. They did not renounce Jesus - even when Antipas was martyred!
5. The word for witness is μάρτυς - from which we derive our word martyr
6. Antipas is called the faithful witness - the same title given to Jesus Himself in Revelation 1:5
7. There is high praise for a church under severe persecution

B. A word of correction for compromising

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Revelation 2:14–15

1. Nevertheless I have a few things against you
 - a. In spite of praise - there are problems
 - b. Similar word to Ephesus & Thyatira - but just a 'few'
2. Some hold to teaching of Balaam & Nicolaitans
 - a. Hold same word for their faithful adherence to Jesus
 - b. Some are compromising by holding to false teachers
 - c. Balaam and Nicolaitans seem to be very similar
 - d. The problem with Balaam (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16)
 1. Reference to wayward prophet in OT
 2. Balak asked Balaam to curse Israel but he could not
 3. But to get favor he advised Balak to trap Israel
 4. Stumbling block - trip peg on a trap
 5. Trap - eat meat sacrificed to idols; sexual immorality
 6. Balaam knew if Israel compromised God would punish them
 7. The same two temptations were in Pergamum
3. The problem of idolatry and sexual immorality
 - a. Scripture often links idolatry & sexual immorality
 1. Exodus 32:6-8; Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16

2. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Romans 1:23-28; Gal 5:19-21
3. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 10:6-8; Revelation 2:14; 2:20
4. A false view of God & sexual immorality are closely linked, and when the people of God compromise in one, sin in the other is sure to follow

- b. They were often linked in practice in the ancient world - temple prostitutes
- c. Scripture is evenly split as to which is the first cause
 1. Idolatry - Ex 32; Acts 15, 21; Romans 1; 1 Cor 10
 2. Sexual sin - Numbers 25, 31; Gal 5; 1 Cor 6
 3. Idolatry is mentioned first in Revelation 2:14
 4. But Balaam used sex to lead to idolatry!
- d. The relationship between sexual immorality and idolatry is symbiotic, with each sin feeding off and fueling the other.

4. What Satan had failed to accomplish by the frontal assault of persecution, he accomplished through the seduction of immorality and idolatry.

- a. Same thing happened with Balaam. He could not directly curse them, but idolatry and immorality led to the removal of God's blessing and brought His hand of discipline
- b. Some in Pergamum have been seduced into idolatry and sexual immorality - and the whole church is being called to account for allowing this

C. A word of warning

Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.
Revelation 2:16

1. Once again we have the command to repent - this is always the way out of our sin
2. The whole church is commanded to repent - even though only a few had been engaging in idolatry and immorality
3. The church is called to do the hard work of correcting erring members and helping them to repent and forsake their idolatry and immorality
4. If the church does not, Jesus will come and deal judgment by the sword of His mouth - His Word.
5. Thus, it is not loving to allow members to continue to engage in the harmful sins of idolatry and immorality - it will only lead to painful judgment at the hands of God Himself

D. A word of reward

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. Revelation 2:17

1. The hidden manna and white stone with a secret new name are obscure to us
2. I think the manna probably refers to God's sustenance of Israel in the wilderness, and its fulfillment in Jesus
3. I think the white stone is probably a reference to stones that were used as "tickets" for entrance into banquets, and the name is the name given to believers by God Himself (see Isaiah 62:2; 65:15)

4. Those who refuse to enter the pagan banquets and all they entailed - including sexual immorality - would receive a white stone with their new name written on it, which would serve as a token to enter the heavenly feast and be given manna, the bread of heaven. This would sustain them in the wilderness of their present journey, but ultimately pointed to the heavenly feast that would be theirs.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Have I been seduced by idolatry?

1. Idolatry is not just little figurines of a god
2. Israel proclaimed the golden calf WAS Yahweh
3. If we refuse to deny Jesus, culture will try to change our conception of Him
4. Have I been seduced by the popular, non-judgmental Jesus?
5. Do I believe in the idol of "God is Love" - but is not holy?
6. Do I believe people's interpretation of their feelings and experiences - or God's unchanging, inerrant Word?

B. Have I been seduced by sexual immorality?

1. Our culture is awash in sexual sin of every type
2. We are no longer shocked by heterosexual sins like fornication, adultery, or serial monogamy
3. We increasingly accept homosexuality, transgenderism, and any other sexual sin - as long as it is consenting adults (as if that defines morality)

4. Do I believe the sexual ethic of Scripture or culture?

- a. Do I know that sex between a man and woman married to each other is holy and good - and everything else is wickedness?
- b. Do I know that God calls us to sexual purity in thought, word and deed?

5. Do I actually live according to the sexual ethic of Scripture?

- a. Culture says sex before marriage is normal, and to disagree is repressive. Do I engage in this?
- b. Culture says living together is the same as marriage, but Scripture says otherwise. Do I engage in this?
- c. If I struggle with same sex attraction, do I live in holy celibacy, or engage in sexual sin?

6. Do I understand Jesus will not stand idly by as I engage in idolatry or sexual immorality? And that he will reward resisting this seduction?

C. A concluding prayer to live uncompromisingly

Pergamum - The Compromising Church

Revelation 2:12-17

March 12, 2017

Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Teaching keywords: false teaching and heresy; Satan and demons; persecuted church; sexual sin; confession and repentance

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 1 Thess. 5:23-24

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