

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
LETTER 3 | THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM: THE COMPROMISING CHURCH
REVELATION 2:12-17 | 4 OCTOBER 2009
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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When we settle for less than what we could have had, it's called **COMPROMISING**. When we choose *Chips Ahoy* instead of *Mrs. Fields*, we're **COMPROMISING**. When we decide to have sex before getting married, we're **COMPROMISING**. **COMPROMISING** is doing anything less than God's best for us. No finger pointing. It's a big club. We've all done it. And depending on the *whos, whats, whens, wheres, hows, and whys* of our choices to **COMPROMISE**, the consequences run the full gamut –from *minimal* to *nearly unbearable*. **COMPROMISING** is simply changing the question to fit the answer.

This morning we come to the third of the seven letters from Jesus in **REVELATION 2-3** ... the letter He wrote to the Church at Pergamum, which has often been referred to as **THE COMPROMISING CHURCH**. What happened in this flock was that out of a fear of persecution they chose to let the pure message of Jesus get polluted, watered down, and **COMPROMISED**. And when they received this letter, they learned that Jesus didn't like this. Which brings us to our first **FAITH LESSON** today ...

FAITH LESSON ...

When it comes to being a follower of Jesus Christ, we either *STAND WITH HIM TOTALLY IN FAITHFULNESS*, or *WE STAND AGAINST HIM IN COMPROMISE*. But it's Jesus Christ who gets to define what it means to be His disciple, not you or me.

Teresa and I have three sons ... Ryan 25, Jesse 23, and Ian 20. One of the things we loved doing when they were little guys was play games. Board games. Inside games. Outside games. Guessing games. We liked them all. *Shoots And Ladders, Hide And Seek, basketball, Go To The Head Of The Class, I Spy, Tag, Go Fish*, and more.

Have you ever been taught a game by someone who knew you'd never played before and when it's to his or her advantage they changed the rules a little bit? Or maybe you've been the one who's done this. Either way, it's no good. I remember Ryan pulling this on me when we were playing *Wall Ball* at Edwards Elementary years ago. Remember *Wall Ball*? It's a simple game that's been around for a long time. If you know anything about *Wall Ball*, then you know that there are basically only two rules.

RULE # 1 ... *HIT THE BALL AGAINST THE WALL AFTER THE OTHER PERSON HITS IT ... BUT YOU CAN ONLY LET IT BOUNCE ONCE. AND THE FIRST ONE TO 15 POINTS WINS.*

RULE # 2 ... *TRIP THE OTHER PERSON, AND MAKE THEM THINK THEY TRIPPED THEMSELVES.*

I got the first rule. It was the second one I was a little less clear about. In fact, the problem was that Ryan seemed to be the only one who was clear about **RULE # 2**. And as we went along, game after horrifying game –Ryan started adding more rules ...

“Dad, when the ball comes back from the right side of the wall and it’s less than about three feet up from the floor, then, if you hit it with both hands, you’re out. Seriously, you’re out. Got it?” “Dad, backspin *CAN ONLY BE USED* by the player who weighs less and who’s wearing black, Converse Chuck Taylor high tops. Got it?”

Ryan looked so serious when he told me this new rule. But I wasn’t born yesterday. So eventually I told Ryan that if he played me one more game with no additional rules, and gave me a 14-point lead, I’d let him live. And he agreed. Gang, when we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the rules are pretty simple.

RULE # 1: God’s *GRACE* reaches out to us. We confess our sins and receive God’s forgiveness. And in that moment God begins teaching us a whole new way to be human –a way based on His rules, not ours.

RULE # 2: We see God’s *HOLINESS* in the thoughts, words, priorities, and actions of Jesus Christ. We make the choice to model our lives after Him ... choosing to say “no” to the desires of “our old self”, and “yes” to the patterns of God’s *HOLINESS* as seen and heard in Jesus Christ. Then day-by-day, and choice-by-choice, we begin the journey of being transforming into the character of Jesus Christ.

But somewhere along the way, a lot of Christians today –just like the people in the Church at Pergamum, think they can change the rules. But the rules for being in a relationship with God aren’t complicated ... and God doesn’t want them changed or ***COMPROMISED***.

RULE # 1: God’s *GRACE* invites us to come to Jesus Christ (and *keep coming* to Him), in repentance, confession, and surrender.

RULE # 2: God’s *HOLINESS* invites us to become less and less like the old us, and more and more like Jesus Christ.

GRACE and *HOLINESS* are the two rules. And when we don’t understand these two parts of what it means to become a follower of Jesus Christ, it won’t be long before we’ll begin ***COMPROMISING*** one in an attempt to have the other one. Let me explain.

ON ONE HAND, if we accept God’s *GRACE* without an understanding and embracing of God’s *HOLINESS*, it won’t be long before we become ***LAZY CHRISTIANS***. We’ll know God loves us, and forgives us. But we’ll be devoid of any desire to grow up in our faith, and we’ll continue sinning as much as we did before coming to Christ.

AND ON THE OTHER HAND, if we embrace God’s *HOLINESS* without holding it in balance with an understanding of God’s *GRACE*, it won’t be long before we ***BECOME LEGALISTIC CHRISTIANS***... desperately trying to do good works so God will accept us.

In the first letter Jesus wrote in **REVELATION 2**, the church at Ephesus was identified as ***THE CHURCH WHO LEFT IT’S FIRST LOVE***. In the second letter Jesus wrote, the church at Smyrna was identified as ***THE PERSECUTED CHURCH***. And while it was

enduring horrible pressure and persecution, at the same time, it was staying true to Jesus Christ and His two-sided message of **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. Way to go Smyrna!

But in this letter Jesus wrote to the Church at Pergamum, the world had entered into the church. And because of this infection, it began moving away from the centrality of Jesus and the simplicity of His two-sided message of **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. And this is why the church at Pergamum is identified as **THE COMPROMISING CHURCH**.



Pergamum was the oldest city in Asia Minor (which is now modern-day Turkey) and it was the official seat of the Roman government in the region. It was about 120 miles north of Ephesus, and about 80 miles north of Smyrna. Pergamum, is now called Bergama ... and when Jesus wrote this letter and sent it to the church there through the Apostle John, it had a population of about 120,000.

- **EPHESUS WAS THE GREAT POLITICAL CENTER OF ASIA MINOR.**
- **SMYRNA WAS THE GREAT COMMERCIAL CENTER OF ASIA MINOR.**
- **PERGAMUM WAS THE GREAT RELIGIOUS CENTER OF ASIA MINOR.**

It's interesting that the most **RELIGIOUS** city was also the most **COMPROMISING**. They wanted to hold onto the beauty of **GRACE**, but they denied the power of surrender that's only found in pursuing **HOLINESS**. They wanted to look spiritual on the outside, but inside, they were full of decay and death. And that's the trap that's easily fallen into when **GRACE** is pursued at the expense of **HOLINESS**.

REVELATION 2:12a (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

12a **“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:**

The word **Pergamum** means **marriage** ... which is interesting because Pergamum was the place where not only was the church **married to the state of Rome** ... under the leadership of Emperor Constantine ... but Pergamum was also where the Early Christian church became **married to the world**.

So this letter is specifically addressed to the people then and now, who'd begun moving away from living lives directed by the Holy Spirit and who'd begun living self-directed lives. To people who wanted to straddle the fence of trying to see how close they could get to the world and still stay in a relationship with Jesus. And this choice brings us to an important question that all of us have to answer with brutal honesty ...

Jesus, or the world? Which one am I most closely yoked to, most dependent upon, most surrendered to, and most in love with?

The first Jew, and one of the main characters in *The Old Testament* book of **GENESIS** was a man named Abraham. Abraham had a nephew named Lot who is one of the

people in the Bible whose life choices really exemplifies **COMPROMISE**. And it all began when Abraham and Lot got into a scuffle over where to graze their sheep. In the end, Abraham said with an unselfish heart, “Lot, look, instead of fighting, you choose where you want to graze, and I’ll take what’s left over.” And what did Lot do?

GENESIS 13:10-11 (NEW CENTURY VERSION)

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Lot saw the whole Jordan Valley and that there was much water there. It was like the Lord’s garden ... and he chose to live in the Jordan Valley. In this way Abram and Lot separated.

This is where Lot started **BACKWALKING** into **COMPROMISE**. And I like the word **BACKWALKING** more than **BACKSLIDING** because **BACKSLIDING** sounds like we have no control. “*Oh, no, I’m losing my grip! I’m SLIDING BACK into my own ways! Oh no!*” But based on your experience, that’s not what happens, is it?

When you and I choose **COMPROMISE**, **SELFISHNESS**, and **WORLDLINESS** we don’t **BACKSLIDE** into it ... we **BACKWALK** into it. **BACKWALKING** begins when we make the choice to walk away from God’s **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. **BACKWALKING** begins when we think we can live life according to our own rules, instead of God’s rules. And when we do this, we’re like what the Apostle Peter wrote about in **SECOND PETER 2:22** ... we’re like “**a dog returning to its own vomit.**” Ya, nice word-picture, right? But isn’t that what it’s like when we **BACKWALK** into sin? From a distance it often looks warm and inviting. But then as we get up close ... and we see it, smell it, and finally taste it, and it’s awful. And I see another great **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

When we’re BACKWALKING away from God’s GRACE and HOLINESS, we need to learn to cry out to Him and say, “God, keep me from sin, and help me turn my feet again to Your path! I can’t do this on my own any more! I need You!” Gang, GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT HAS THE POWER TO KEEP US FROM SIN, NOT JUST CLEANSE US FROM SIN.

Lot **BACKWALKED** into sin and **COMPROMISE** when he took his eyes off God and became prideful and greedy. And we all have the capacity to do this in our own areas of temptation and weakness. But let me tell you something that I’ve seen in my own life, and in the lives of people who I’ve worked with as a pastor for nearly 30 years ... When a follower of Jesus Christ **BACKWALKS** away from God’s **GRACE** and God’s **HOLINESS**, they end up being the most miserable person in the universe.

Because once we’ve known God’s goodness, and known the power of the Holy Spirit, life can never be the same. And when we’ve tasted the reality of God and then make the choice to **BACKWALK** away from God, our heart becomes hard. And in fact, we’ll find ourselves thinking things, and doing things we never thought about or did before. And it’s because of the deception and the hardness of our hearts. And this is what was happening with some of the people who made up the Church at Pergamum.

REVELATION 2:12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

Remember from studying the two previous letters of Jesus here in **REVELATION 2**, that He’s sending these letters “**to the churches**”, “through” the angels of the church. The Greek word **angel** simply means **messenger**. And the **messengers** in the church were the **pastors** who brought the message of God’s WORD to the flock.

Also remember that in each letter, Jesus identifies Himself as the author of the letter by referring to Himself by a name or title used for Him, either elsewhere in the Bible, or in the book of **REVELELATION**. And in this letter, Jesus describes Himself by using the words He uses in **REVELATION 1:16**. And the “**sharp two-edged sword**” Jesus has is the same metaphor used for **the Bible**, the WORD of God, in **HEBREWS 4:12** and **EPHESIANS 6:17**. And here’s what Jesus does with the Bible when we allow Him to use it in our lives, and in our life together as His church.

Jesus uses the **two-edged sword** of His WORD to **CORRECT US** and to **PROTECTS US** (**JOHN 17:17**; **FIRST CORINTHIANS 11:31-32**). Jesus uses His WORD to not only equip us to stop living like the world, but also as a way to keep the world’s influences toward **COMPROMISE** out of our lives, and out of the church.

Jesus could see that some of His people in Pergamum were settling for **COMPROMISE** and **BACKWALKING** into sin ... that they were trying to live according to their own rules instead of according to His **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. And so He comes to them, and to you and to me, with the **two-edged sword of His WORD** to bring **CORRECTION** and **PROTECTION**. And it’s our **HEARTS** and our **MINDS** that need God’s **CORRECTION** and **PROTECTION**. Because these are the two *great battlefields* of life. And because the Bible is a “**two-edged sword**”, it cuts into **HEARTS** and our **MINDS**.

FIRST, THE WORD OF GOD CUTS INTO OUR MINDS, and by it’s Light we’re able to see Truths that are otherwise be hidden from our sight.

SECOND, THE WORD OF GOD PIERCES OUR HEARTS. The “**sword of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul tells us in **EPHESIANS 6:16**, is the **WORD of God**, inspires awe and reverence within us for God, and for God’s WORD, we’re touched with the Truth of God’s love and forgiveness towards us. Jesus wrote this letter to speak to the **MINDS** and **HEARTS** of the people in the church at Pergamum 2,000 years ago, and to our **MINDS** and **HEARTS** today.

Pergamum was a wealthy city. And for at least a century before, it was home to the world’s greatest library ... some 200,000 books of earthly knowledge and wisdom. This was the library, that in the middle of the 1st Century, Roman politician and general Mark Antony gave to Cleopatra ... and that she then moved to Alexandria, Egypt.

A SIDELIGHT HERE: I want to offer a **clarification** about the chart I shared with you last week about Christian persecution throughout the past 21 Centuries. It’s author, Patrick Johnstone, wrote that during the 16th Century the **PRIMARY PERSECUTION** of Christianity came from Catholicism. And here’s what I should have clarified ...

In the 16th Century, a Christian civil war broke out when a German Catholic priest named Martin Luther, turned against Catholicism and started a **reformation** that resulted in the formation of the Protestant church. And for a century Catholics killed Protestants, and Protestants killed Catholics. But the number of Protestant martyrs was much higher, because there were many more Catholics than Protestants.

During the first three Centuries, and then with it's exponential growth up through the 16th Century, the Early Church went from being the outcasts and scourge of society – and **VERY STRONG SPIRITUALLY** –to becoming part of the “in crowd” —and in doing so it become **VERY WEAK SPIRITUALLY**. The church went from the **CATACOMBS** to the **PALACES**, and from **PERSECUTION** to **ELEVATION**. And this shift proved to be a decisive blow to the Church's effectiveness at sharing Jesus Christ to the world. And it was at Pergamum that this central truth of living in a **RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST**, started being replaced by people just buying into Christianity as a **RELIGION**.

Gang, listen to me ... **RELIGION** is the worst thing that's ever happened to the human race. **RELIGION** was invented by people who thought they could **COMPROMISE** the messages of God's **GRACE** and **HOLINESS** by adding their own rules to what's required to be in a relationship with God. But **GRACE** and **HOLINESS** are all we need.

REVELATION 2:13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Jesus is saying that **Satan was now at home in the church** ... not just harassing Christians from the outside-in, but from the inside-out. But Jesus saw that although many people were turning away, some stayed true; including a man named **Antipas**.

All we know for sure about **Antipas** is that his name means, “**against all**.” Early Church tradition says that **Antipas** was seared alive inside a white-hot, hollow brass statue in the form of a bull. He lived up to his name because he had to literally stand “**against all**.” But Jesus knew what **Antipas** had done for Him and He put his name here because he was part of the Godly remnant in Pergamum who refused to give up His faith no matter what the cost. Way to go **Antipas**.

When I found Jesus Christ, I wasn't even looking for Him. But He was looking for me. I didn't see a blinding light, an angel, or Jesus Himself. But when I sat at that house just off 18th Street in Eugene, Oregon, on a hot July night in 1978, and asked Jesus to come into my life, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that something had happened.

None of my friends at the time were following Jesus (yet!) and I felt all-alone. I wanted to be with my old friends, but they were doing things I didn't want to do anymore. Like the analogy from the Apostle Peter, I didn't want to **go back to my vomit**. But as I baby-stepped my way to Jesus, I knew if I hung out with my old friends, I'd go right back into the same old stuff. And so I had to depend on Jesus and on my new friends ... on people who were also making choices to follow His two rules of **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. I had to get into His WORD, and invite it to get into me.

Friends, look at Pergamum and remember that we can't **COMPROMISE**. We can't say we're followers of Jesus Christ and then live like we're still following our own rules. We need to be **different**. And by **different**, I don't mean "weird." But we need to be **set apart**, and **distinguishable** from people who aren't yet in a relationship with Jesus. Because if Jesus hasn't made a difference to the very core in who you are, then you need to ask yourself if you really know Him.

REVELATION 2:14-15 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹⁴ 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

¹⁵ 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Here's Jesus' **CONDEMNATION** against the **COMPROMISERS** in the church at Pergamum. He **CONDEMNED** them for tolerating three sins: **FIRST** and **SECOND**, **IDOLATRY** and **SEXUAL IMMORALITY**, were the sins of Balaam. And the **THIRD** sin they tolerated was **GIVING POWER TO EARTHLY LEADERS THAT ONLY BELONGED TO GOD**. And Jesus called this the sins of the **Nicolaitans**.

Being **TOLERATE**, or trying to be spiritually and politically correct, we say, "Let's love everybody and not condemn false teachings!" Through the years, I've had people get upset because I identify false teachings as false. "But Gregg, you should be loving." And here's what I say in reply to this kind of thinking ...

"I AM loving. But here's the deal: I love TRUTH more than I love ERROR. I love LIGHT more than DARKNESS. And I love SHEEP more than WOLVES. And as a shepherd of God's flock, I believe that a major part of my role is to protect sheep and train them to discern TRUTH from ERROR."

Gang, two of the main responsibilities of a pastor-teacher are to **GUARD** and **GROUND** the flock. And this happens as God's **WORD** is consistently studied and taught. Much of *The New Testament* was written to correct false teachings in the Early Church. And when we listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to us, sometimes we have to hear things that aren't easy to hear, but which have to be heard if we're going to **HEAR**, and **KNOW**, and **FOLLOW** the "**whole counsel of God**." Back to **vv. 14-15** ...

Balaam was an *Old Testament* prophet for hire. And in **NUMBERS 22-24** the highest bidder was a man named **Balak**, the king of Moab. **Balak** came to **Balaam** and offered him money to speak a curse against Israel. But all three times **Balaam** tried to curse Israel, God put a blessing into his mouth. So **Balaam** came up with **PLAN B**.

Balaam took some of **Balak's** women down to the children of Israel and used them to seduce the men into the twin-sins of **IDOLATRY** and **SEXUAL IMMORALITY**. **Balaam** became a pimp, and **COMPROMISED** the truths of God's **GRACE** and **HOLINESS**. He was a prophet of the **LORD** who sold out cheap and turned his back on God. He wanted to play by the rules of the world, and so he tampered with the Truth.

And a whole lot of Israelites bought into his lie and 24,000 of them died because of it. They **COMPROMISED**. They started worshiping **IDOLS** instead of God. They lowered God's standard of **SEXUAL PURITY** ... that sex was only to happen between a husband and his wife. And they paid for their **COMPROMISING** with their lives. And I see another **FAITH LESSON** for us here ...

FAITH LESSON ...

FALSE TEACHING always produces **FALSE LIVING**. When God's **WORD** is distorted, when the message of the Gospel is tampered with, when we water down God's **GRACE** or God's command that we be a **HOLY PEOPLE**, **FALSE TEACHING** has entered the camp, and **FALSE LIVING** isn't far behind.

Oh, things might look okay for a while, but when **FALSE TEACHING** remains unchallenged, eventually **FALSE LIVING** will be exposed, as the facade comes off and everyone –both Christians and not-yet-Christians see sin exposed as sin.

And the “teachings of Balaam” continue to threaten the church with **COMPROMISE** today: **idolatry, pornography, adultery** (having sex with someone when you're married to someone else), **fornication** (having sex with someone when you aren't married), and the result is the same today as in **Balaam's** and Pergamum's day: spiritual, emotional, and even physical damage. Because when we **COMPROMISE** and turn away from God's **GRACE** and God's **HOLINESS** ... when we try to live life according to our own rules, we always end up where we don't want to be.

A lot of people today sell out so cheaply. My grandfather lived for Jesus Christ for 87 years. And you hear that and you might say, “**Man, 87 years, that's a long time to stand with Jesus Christ against the world. Think of all the cool stuff he wasn't able to be a part of because he refused to COMPROMISE. 87 years, that's a long time to be going in the same direction.**” And my reply would be, “**Oh really? Well let me ask you a question, 'How long is 87 years compared to eternity?'**”

Which brings us to the third sin Jesus points out in **vv. 14-15**. The “teaching of the **Nicolaitans**.” “**Nicolaitans**” is a compound Greek word, made up of **niko (to conqueror)**, and **laitan (lay people)**, meaning “**conquerors of the people**”. The **Nicolaitans** were a heretical group within the church that claimed to be spiritually superior because they had a special relationship with God, and special revelations from God. And Jesus said “**I hate earthly leaders lording it over other people.**”

And gang, the teachings of the **Nicolaitans** is still alive in many churches today; wherever the pastor is put up on a pedestal and given spiritual supremacy over the lay people. These kinds of pastors claim to have a more intimate relationship with God than other Christians. And the people attending their churches often view themselves as spectators at a theater ... coming to church each week to watch their pastor's **performance**. But friends, the Christian life isn't a spectator sport. And Jesus Christ expects all of His followers to be players on the field, and part of the game.

And now, finally, in **v. 16** we come to the **CORRECTION** or the **INSTRUCTION** that Jesus brings to the people in the church at Pergamum, and to us today.

REVELATION 2:16 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

16 ‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Repent, comes from the Greek word **metanoia (to turn around)**, is a command that Jesus gives in five of the letters in **REVELATION 2-3** ... and we need to pay attention to His command. **Repentance** isn't just something we do when we first come into relationship with Jesus. It's something we need to do on a daily basis ... asking God to show us the ways we've turned away from His **GRACE** and His **HOLINESS** ... and to help us **repent**, or **turn around** and come back to Him and to His plans for our lives.

This is a solemn rebuke to those who call themselves Christians but who seldom turn to the **WORD** of God, who seldom pray, and who seldom seek God through meditation and spiritual listening. Gang, our spiritual health depends on you and I remaining attentive to the **WORD** of God, and to the messages God speaks to us. And here's the **PROMISE** Jesus gives to the Christians in Pergamum, and to us today, if we'll remain attentive to the convicting, instructive, correcting, and healing Spirit of God ...

REVELATION 2:17 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

What is “**hidden manna**”? After the Israelites left Egypt, and began wandering around in wilderness for forty years, God fed the them with **manna**, which was kind of like breadcrumbs that fell out of heaven every night. The Hebrew word for **manna** ... pronounced **manaw** ... literally means “**what is it?**” And so when the Israelites came out of their tents and saw it on the ground, they all said, **manaw, manaw**. And apparently, after this happened a few days, the name just kind of stuck. “**What is it?**” And after they'd eaten **manna** every way possible, they said, “Moses, we're sick of this **what is it!**” And it's always been interesting to me that the people who enticed Israel to despise the **manna** were the “**mixed multitudes**.” These were the **COMPROMISERS**. The ones who turned away from God's provision were the ones who wanted to have one foot in the bondage of Egypt, and one foot in the freedom of the wilderness. And likewise, there are people in the church today who say ...

“Not another Bible study! We need a *new revelation*. I'd rather hear a prophecy. Never mind if it isn't Scriptural ... it's a fresh word from God! I'd rather have *emotionalism* than *sound doctrine*. I'm tired of this same old manna. God, give me something new.”

But those who really know and believe Jesus Christ and the **WORD** of God are the real **manna**, long for the nourishment and provision of God that's new every morning. And if this is you, you need to start living out the life of Jesus Christ, the Living Revelation that's right here in front of you and living inside of you! Like the Christians at Pergamum, instead of eating “**things sacrificed to idols**” (cf., **REVELATION 2:14**), we

need to follow Jesus' admonition, and feast on the **manna, the bread of life** found in Jesus Christ through the WORD (**MATTHEW 4:4**; **JOHN 6:32**).

Gang, we won't get to Pergamum and to the place where we're settling for **COMPROMISE**, until we've first gone through Ephesus. Because **leaving our FIRST LOVE** always comes before **idolatry, sexual immorality, and COMPROMISE**.

But Jesus also promises that as overcomers we'll be given "**a white stone with a new name written on it.**" There are many ideas about the meaning of the **white stone**. One is that in ancient courts the jury would give their final verdicts by laying out a stone. A **black stone** would be a guilty verdict, and a **white stone** would be a vote for innocence and acquittal.

But what I know for sure is that throughout God's WORD, **white** always represents **righteousness** ... and when we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ we take on God's righteousness and we come to know God in a way we've never known before. Before we're in a relationship with Him, Jesus' name is usually little more than a swear word. But after we respond to **GRACE** and come into a relationship with Jesus Christ that's defined by **HOLINESS**, like the old song says, the name of Jesus becomes "**the sweetest name of all.**" And as we embrace God's **GRACE**, and God's **HOLINESS**, we begin to change from the inside out. We become **a new creation**.

Gang, let it be said that we're lovers of Jesus Christ who are making the choice, by holding tightly onto God's **GRACE** and God's **HOLINESS**, to not be **COMPROMISERS** ... but rather, people who are faithfully choosing to keep our eyes on God no matter what, and forsaking all else to follow Him and His plans for our lives.

NEXT SUNDAY ... CELEBRATION SUNDAY! COME EXPERIENCE THE MAJESTY OF GOD, THE "OTHERNESS" OF GOD, THE IMMENSITY OF GOD ... BUT ALSO THE GOD WHO IS INTIMATE, NEAR, AND WHO EMBRACES US WITH HIS LOVE! COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!

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