



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES, INC.

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VOLUME XIX

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 2016

ISSUE 5

## THE COMPROMISING CHURCH

By His grace and power, Jesus Christ established a church in Pergamum. Founded in 29 AD, this city held the honor of being the provincial capital of Roman Asia. It was a magnificent city of wealth and beauty. Pergamum housed a library of 20,000 volumes, quite an attainment in the ancient world. This city also had spas that attracted people from all over the world.

Statues, altars, and sacred groves filled Pergamum. The people of this city worshiped many gods. Yet, they had two that received the most attention. Dionysius, represented by a golden bull, was the god of royal kings. Asclepius, represented by a snake, was the savior god of healing. People would come from all over the world to worship at the temples dedicated to these gods.

At the same time, Pergamum overflowed with temples to Caesar and Rome. Of all the seven cities in **Revelation 2-3**, the church in this city was the most liable to clash with the worship of Caesar and Rome. Intense, ecstatic worship of Caesar and Rome filled this city. Any refusal to worship Caesar and Rome would be met with hostile resistance.

In the midst of the luxury and idolatry of Pergamum, Jesus Christ placed His church. This church exhibited faithfulness to Christ in spite of its location and circumstances. This church did not flinch in the face of persecution because of Christ. Yet, Jesus points out an even greater danger. It is the temptation to compromise the faith. This church was in danger of being overcome by compromise from within rather than persecution from without.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine Christ's message to the church of Pergamum. We need to see what Christ said to them and how it applies to us. I'd then like to suggest some ways that this text can be used in praying for your church and yourself.

### The Character Of The Savior

Jesus Christ reveals to each church a different aspect of who He is. This revelation of His character applies to the particular situation of the church. Jesus tells the church at Pergamum, "These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges" (**2:11**). Jesus portrays Himself as a warrior with a sharp, two-edged sword.

It's an unusual picture of Jesus. As you read the gospels, Jesus is portrayed as a suffering Servant, a compassionate Savior. As you work your way through the New Testament, you see that same emphasis. Yet, Revelation emphasizes that Jesus is the Warrior-King who fights for His people. Jesus is the Warrior-King who will judge, defeat His enemies, and establish His rule (**Revelation 19:11-21**).

Why does He emphasize this aspect of who He is to this church? Rome had given to the city of Pergamum the rare power of capital punishment. The sword symbolized this power. By revealing Himself in this way, Jesus wanted His church to know the He, not Rome, had the power of life and death.

He wanted them to understand that all power and authority belonged to Him, not Rome. It is Jesus, not Rome, which will have the ultimate conquest of all world powers. Jesus, not Caesar, was the Warrior-King that would protect His people, pronounce judgment, and defeat His enemies.

This was especially comforting to these believers. They lived in a city that adored and worshiped Caesar. They worked in a city that exalted Rome and its power. Jesus reminds them that He is the King – the great Warrior with a sharp, two-edged sword.

This is a message of comfort to Jesus' church whether in the first century or today. We have a Savior who is a Warrior! He will defend His people. He will vindicate His people. He will help His people. We do not have to fear any earthly authority for our King has a sharp, two-edged sword to fight with. He will conquer all His enemies, pronounce judgment, and reign over all.

## The Conflict With Satan

After revealing His character to this church, Jesus announces His knowledge of what they had been facing. This church had been involved in an intense conflict with Satan. We know this because of two phrases that Jesus uses. First, He says that Pergamum is the place where “Satan’s seat is” (2:12). This phrase points to the fact that Satan had a permanent residence in this place. Satan had made a home in Pergamum.

Second, Jesus says that Pergamum is the place “where Satan dwelleth” (2:12). This indicates that Satan exercised a special authority and power in this place. He had many instruments to work through here. The devil was able to work powerfully in the city of Pergamum.

It’s not hard to see why Jesus said these things about Pergamum. It was a city given to idolatry. Caesar was worshiped and adored as Lord of all. People from all over the world came to Pergamum to worship at the temple of Asclepius, the savior god of healing. This god was represented by a snake. The way people worshiped him was by feeding a live snake. They sought his healing by lying in the dark temple at night and allowing snakes to slither over their bodies. No wonder Jesus said that this was the seat and dwelling of Satan!

Yet, the church in Pergamum had not flinched. They had continued to do good works. Jesus declared that they held fast to the name of Jesus (2:12). They continued to confess Jesus as Lord even though the city confessed Caesar as Lord. They praised and shared the name of Jesus in this city. At the same time, they did not deny the faith (2:12). They continued to cling to the truths of the faith. They would not forsake the gospel. They were unwilling to deny Jesus and His Word.

One believer remained faithful to death. His name was Antipas, which literally means “against all.” We’re not sure who Antipas was, possible a pastor or leader in this church. However, this faithful leader remained steadfast for Christ and His Word. He paid the ultimate price with his life. He stood as an example to the believers in this church. He modeled holding fast to Jesus’ name and refusing to deny His faith.

Antipas and this church stand as an example to modern believers. Jesus commended them for their faithfulness. In doing this, He calls us to exercise this same faithfulness. We are to do this regardless of our conditions. These believers held fast to Jesus and His Word even where Satan’s seat and dwelling was. Our focus must not be on our circumstances but on the Savior who loves us and died for us. He strengthened them; He can strengthen us.

Jesus promises three things to those who will be faithful and will overcome (2:17). First, they will receive hidden manna. Just as God sustained Israel in the wilderness with manna, Jesus will sustain us spiritually by His grace and power. Second, He will give us a white stone. In Pergamum, a white stone allowed you to enter and enjoy a great banquet. Jesus promises the great banquet of heaven to those who will be faithful. Finally, Jesus will give a new name that no one knows. What name is this? I don’t know. However, God does and the person who receives it will. In fact, if we knew what this name was, this verse wouldn’t be true! These are the encouragements Christ gives to His people, whether in the first century or today.

## The Compromise With Sin

While Jesus commends them for their unyielding faithfulness, He does have a complaint against them. The church tolerated people who held to the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitines (2:14). While it stood steadfastly for Christ, it yielded to compromise. It tolerated evil in its midst.

What is a doctrine of Balaam? In the Old Testament, Balaam was a prophet who betrayed his calling. Because of their size and power, the king of Moab wanted to hire Balaam to curse the people of Israel. He knew that they could not stand against Israel unless they were cursed. Yet, the Lord would not allow Balaam to do it. Balaam wanted the money but could not do what this king had asked.

In order to get the money, he showed this king how to destroy Israel. In the ancient world, people would worship many gods. Balaam instructed the king of Moab to encourage the Israelites to worship the gods of Moab along with the Lord. The worship of these gods included sexual immorality and feasts in honor of the gods. By enticing them with sex and food, the people would worship these gods and would come under God’s judgment.

There were people like Balaam in the church at Pergamum. They believed and taught people that it was acceptable to worship the Lord and to take part in the worship of the other gods. This involved sex with temple prostitutes and eating food dedicated to idols. These people believed that they could worship and honor Jesus while committing sexual immorality and eating food dedicated to false gods.

It was a compromise with cultural customs of the society. It was a tremendous temptation for these believers. These feasts were integral to the social life in

Pergamum. Yet, Christ called them to make a clean break from their old ways and pagan worship.

Christ complains that the church was compromising with this evil. They were tolerant of these people and their teaching in the church. They also tolerated the Nicolaitines who presumed on the grace of God with evil activity. Tolerating this ungodliness was as evil as teaching and practicing this.

Amazingly, what Satan couldn't do through persecution, he was accomplishing through compromise. This church had stood strong against persecution but yielded to compromise. However, they compromised with the culture around them. There were some at Pergamum who wanted to hold fast to Jesus while yielding to the customs and sins of the culture. They believed you could have a right relationship with Christ while clinging to the sins of the culture.

This text reveals that Jesus Christ is angered by compromise. How do we know this? Listen to the words of Christ, "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (**Revelation 2:16**). This church is on the verge of being judged by the jealous anger of Christ. Make no mistake about it – Christ will not tolerate compromise. He is angered by it and will judge it. Christ raises His strong complaint against the church for not raising its voice in protest.

What could the church do? They needed to repent. Repentance is the only right response to our Lord's anger over the evil in their midst. While there were some who taught and believed this, the church had tolerated them. Being tolerant of their sin made them just as guilty.

The church today faces the same temptation. We live in a culture given to luxury, idolatry, and sexual immorality. It is tempting to think that we can hold to Christ and compromise with these evils. However, Christ calls us to break with the old life and with the sins of our culture. Our lives are to be governed by His Word and not culture. He desires that we love Him, pursue Him, and desire Him above all others.

### **How Do I Use This Passage For Prayer?**

The following are some suggestions on how you can take the truth of this passage and use it to fuel your praying.

#### **Adoration**

- Praise Jesus for being your Warrior-King who will defend, fight for you, and deliver you (**2:12**).

- Praise Jesus for His protection and victory over Satan regardless of how He opposes us (**2:13**).
- Praise Jesus for being the holy Savior who hates compromise and loves faithfulness (**2:14**).
- Praise God who acknowledges and honors His people for their faithfulness (**2:13, 17**).

#### **Confession**

- Confess any doubt or unbelief concerning Christ's willingness to fight for and defend you. (**2:12**).
- Confess any compromise that you are making with the world in your thinking, attitudes, speaking, or acting (**2:13**).
- Confess any denial of Christ in your life (**2:13**).

#### **Thanksgiving**

- Thank God for Jesus, your Warrior-King. Thank Him that He will send Jesus one day to put down all His enemies, pronounce judgment, and establish His reign (**2:13**).
- Thank Jesus for knowing where you are and what you're going through (**2:13**).
- Thank God that you can overcome Satan's schemes and opposition (**2:13**).
- Thank God that He empowers you to stand firm in the most difficult of situations (**2:13**).
- Thank God for His daily sustaining – "hidden manna" (**2:17**).
- Thank God for your future hope (**2:17; Revelation 19-20**).

#### **Supplication**

- Plead that your church will grow in their trust of Jesus Christ, their Warrior-King.
- Pray that your church and you will stand firm against opposition to the gospel (**2:13**).
- Plead that your church and you will cling to Christ and will share and defend His Word (**2:13**).
- Ask God to give your church and you a fresh hatred of sin and worldliness; pray that you will have Christ's attitude toward compromise (**2:14**).
- Pray that the believers in your church will forsake the lie the one can hold to Christ while clinging to the world and its sin (**2:13**).
- Plead with God for the grace and power to overcome and to be faithful no matter what until you reach heaven (**2:17**).

#### **Intercession For Your Area**

- Pray that the people of your area will see Jesus as He is – the Lord, Savior, Warrior, King, and Judge. Ask the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to who Christ is and that they will confess Him and surrender to Him.
- Ask that unbelievers will see the true nature of Christianity. Unbelievers believe that all religions

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are the same; all are equal. That's why they're baffled and angered that Christians proclaim that Christ is the only way to God and salvation. That's why they also see no problem incorporating the best of different religions into their belief system. Plead that they will see that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Pray that they will understand that salvation comes to those who confess Christ and hold fast to Him alone.

- Plead that the people of your area will see that Jesus Christ is their only hope. Pray that they will see how empty and useless the idolatrous lusts and pleasures of this world are. Ask that they will turn to Christ, confess Him, and find in Him the hope they need for this world and for the world to come.
- Plead that the people of your area would repent. Christ is a Warrior and a Judge with a sword. He will judge those who will not repent. Pray that they will turn from their sin and selfishness to Jesus Christ in true faith, confessing Him and clinging to Him and His Word.

**Prayer Closet News**

At the writing of this newsletter, we are moving equipment into our new facility. We are also in the process of getting everything in its place and getting all our materials organized. It has been a challenge the last

couple of weeks. Everything has been boxed up; some things have been at our old house and some things have been at the new facility. My brain has had a workout trying to remember where everything is!

Please continue to pray for this ministry. I would also ask you to consider giving to this ministry. Your donations make a difference in the lives of people. I just got off the phone with a pastor whose church is using our prayer evangelism and prayerwalking materials. They are laboring in a spiritually hardened area. Yet, as they have prayed fervently and scripturally, they are seeing breakthrough and conversions to Jesus Christ. Your prayers and your donations do make a difference across this country and world. Prayerfully consider partnering with this ministry to touch this world for the glory of God. Thank you for reading this newsletter, praying, and giving. May God richly bless you!

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