

Revelation Chapter 2 Part 2- John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "Christianity and compromise".
 - a) One of the great questions Christians ponder is where does one draw the line in terms of behavior? What is acceptable and unacceptable behavior for a believer?
 - b) While this lesson doesn't cover all the possible answers to that question, it does tackle the subject. The idea here is to give some guidelines as to how a Christian is supposed to live.
 - c) First, let's review where we left off and then tie it to the theme of this lesson: Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation are seven specific letters to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. Each church is in a different city. In my last lesson, we covered the first two letters. In this lesson, we cover the next two letters, which finishes Chapter 2.
 - i) Each of the seven letters reads like a "report card" to that church. It describes good and bad things they are doing. The application to us is that God's standards for these churches are also God's standards for you and I. We are to read these letters and understand that God judges our behavior the same way He judges the behavior of the Christians in those churches.
2. Let me give a brief over of the bible text of this lesson: This text is two specific letters written to two churches: One is to the church in Pergamum and the other is to the church in Thyatira. Both are cities that existed in what is today part of modern Turkey. Each church is told some good things, and then comes the "however". The negative issues are the key themes to each letter.
 - a) Understand that each of the seven letters have a theme. We also get the impression that each of the seven churches is unaware of their key point raised in each letter. The same way we may be naïve about our good and bad points, so are these believers.
 - b) Keep in mind that before and after each "report card" is other bible text. Prior to the report card is a word-picture that ties to Jesus. These word-pictures also tie to the theme of each letter. The report card is then followed up with a warning to all Christians in effect saying, "model what they are doing right and avoid what they are doing wrong".
 - c) To put it another way, in each letter Jesus is being described as the "judge" prior to the report card, and after the good and bad things written about each church. He gives some specific information to all Christians that tie to the theme of that particular letter.
3. This leads me back to the theme of this lesson: compromise. What these two letters have in common is compromises of their behavior so that their church became less effective.
 - a) In order to define the problem, first, let's define the goal: The goal for all Christians is to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ. The goal of every Christian should not only to be saved in the first place, but also to make a difference for Jesus. Our eternal rewards are based on our faithfulness to whatever God has called us to do.
 - i) Let me start by saying what is not the goal: We don't get "points" based on every person we lead to Christ. We don't get "points" based on the number of times we went to church in our lifetime.
 - ii) We are rewarded based on our commitment, which is the physical evidence of our faith. Our salvation depends upon our faith that Jesus is God and died for our sins. Our life should then naturally follow based on that belief.
 - iii) If we believe Jesus is the Lord of our lives, then we are to do what He says.
 - iv) If we believe Jesus is our Lord, then we study the commands of the bible and follow accordingly. A soldier may believe his commanding officer really "is" his commanding officer, but the evidence of that authority comes from obedience.
 - v) Our rewards in heaven come from our obedience to what God calls us to do. The specific's are different for each individual. God gives each of us specific talents and gifts. The question then becomes, what have you done with those gifts?

4. A few more thoughts on the topic of "Christianity and Compromise":
 - a) Anytime a Christian is not focusing on his or her "goal" is the danger of compromise.
 - b) Let me explain what compromise is not: Going on a vacation trip and missing church one particular Sunday. Compromise is not missing a particular activity at church because one has some family commitments. A Christian still has to go to work, raise the kids and get the laundry done. Compromise is only behavior that is not God's will at that moment.
 - c) Compromise is when one turns from what God called them to do in order to fulfill our own desires. To put it another way, Jesus wants to be in charge of every aspect of our lives. The emphasis is on "every". If there is some aspect where our ego still wants to be in charge, we are in danger of compromise. If we go to church every Sunday and truly believe Jesus is Lord, yet there is still one sin we commit regularly and don't want to change, we are in danger of compromise.
5. Before I get into the specifics of this chapter, it is important to talk a little about going to church.
 - a) One of the things to notice is Jesus' emphasis on "group effort" as opposed to individual effort. The goal is for churches to be effective witnesses for Jesus. As I stated in the last lesson, God's desire is not millions of solo efforts for Jesus. He desires group effort.
 - b) There is a concept in life where a "group" can accomplish more than that same number of individuals working alone. There is a synergy to a group effort. That term "synergy" refers to the greater power generated by the combined group than each individual can generate. That same principle applies to churches as well. What we can accomplish for Jesus as a group has greater power than the individuals working separately.
 - c) Remember that one of Jesus' commands is to have love for the fellow Christian. (Ref.: John 13:34, 15:12, and 15:17.) Well, it's pretty hard to love each other if we're not hanging around each other in the first place. ☺ There is no specific command given by Jesus in the Gospels that we must collectively get together in church groups, but it is pretty hard to show love to the fellow believer if we're not gathering together on a regular basis.
6. Now let's discuss Satan's goals and then discuss how that affects compromise:
 - a) As we get into the latter chapters of Revelation, we will understand that Satan eventually gets sent to hell as the chief prisoner. Nobody knows that exact date and it is not written in the bible. What we do know is that the number of Christians is finite and not infinite. There are only "x" number of people in heaven. Therefore, Satan wants to delay "x" as long as possible. Since God uses people to spread the Gospel message, one of Satan's goals is to make the Christian church as ineffective as possible. One method He uses is persecution. People who are scared due to persecution become ineffective witnesses. Satan's best method of attack is compromise. If Satan can get us to focus our lives on things other than God, we become ineffective witnesses. That is a key point of this lesson.
 - b) Probably the best teaching parable on this issue is Jesus and the "four soils". This is taught in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8.
 - i) The basic idea is Jesus compares people to farming seeds living in 4 types of soil.
 - ii) One of the four types of seeds never becomes saved. I call it the "bad seed". They hear the gospel message and it doesn't take root. They don't believe it.
 - iii) The last of the four is the "good seed". The idea is that seed is on good soil and produces a bountiful crop. This is an effective witness for Christ.
 - iv) The second of the four types became ineffective because it was scorched by the sun. It represents being an ineffective witness due to persecution.
 - v) The third type of seed was ineffective, Jesus said, because of "but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22b NIV). That last sentence describes this lesson in a nutshell. People become ineffective witnesses for Jesus due to either 1) worries of this life and/or 2) deceit of wealth. Remember that money and material things are not evil of themselves. It is the love of them or the priority of them over God that causes the problem.

7. Which surprisingly leads us back to Chapter 2: The letters to Pergamum and Thyatira.
- a) In each case, there were false teachers in the church.
 - b) In each case, there were people in the church blatantly sinning and turning against God.
 - c) In each case, there was compromise to a point where the church is becoming an ineffective witness for God.
 - d) Let me put it another way: In order for non-Christians to see the effectiveness of a church, outsiders have to see us as "different". If people in a church act no differently than non-Christians, what's the point in joining the church in the first place?
 - e) People who have lived a long life will tell you of the futility of living an immoral lifestyle. It destroys both the physical body and the soul. God is saying to us both through His word and "instinctively" that living for pleasure and living for oneself leads to decay.
 - f) In summary, if a church is compromising with sin, it becomes an ineffective witness.
 - g) But doesn't everybody sin? Don't we all make mistakes? Of course. That shouldn't stop of us for setting higher goals for ourselves. It means when someone in leadership commits some sort of serious sin, they lose that right of leadership for a while. When we do sin, and realize it is wrong, we confess that sin and work with each other to draw closer to God. All Christians are sinners. We draw upon God for the strength to live this lifestyle. We then help each other to live this life.
 - h) Confused? Good. ☺ Then its time to start. We'll come back to this theme as we go along.
8. Verse 12: "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.
- a) Verse 12 gives the "to" and "from" of this letter in that order. Let's start with the "to".
 - b) This letter is written to the angel city of Pergamum. The King James says, "Pergamos".
 - i) As stated in the last lesson, the term angel also means "messenger". It could be written to the messenger delivering this letter or the angelic being in charge of each of the specific churches.
 - c) The city of Pergamum was the government center of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. As one commentator put it, "If Ephesus was the New York City of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, Pergamum is the Washington D.C.". It was a prominent city.
 - d) In each of the seven letters, it is important to study what the name of the city means. It is a clue to remember what that letter means. The word Pergamum means "mixed marriage". If you break that word into parts, the key meaning is there.
 - i) The first syllable "perg" is the same root word that we get for "perjury". The idea is to be "mixed" or "thoroughly mixed". To commit perjury is to be lying on purpose. It is a mixed message. The second syllable "amum" (NIV) or "amos" (KJV) is tied to the word marriage. It is the same root wordy that we get bigamy, polygamy and monogamy. Again, the idea is that of marriage.
 - ii) Putting the two syllables together, we have "mixed marriage". The church at Pergamum (or Pergamos) is fine on the outside, but inside it is a mixed marriage as there is compromise involved. That is a key theme of this letter.
 - e) OK, onto the "from" of this letter: It is "him who has the sharp, double-edged sword".
 - i) We know that all of Chapters 2 and 3 are dictated letters from Jesus.
 - ii) This two chapter long speech started in the latter part of Chapter 1 and mentions the reference "was dead and is now alive" (1:18). That's pretty Jesus like to me!"
 - iii) Chapter 1 gave a description of Jesus that was full of word pictures. One of those pictures was this sharp, double-edged sword.
 - iv) The idea of a double-edge sword is that it cuts both ways. The idea is that there is judgment of the nonbeliever for eternity, but there is also judgment for the believer. Christians may not lose their salvation, but they definitely can lose their effectiveness as witnesses for Christ. That is the "second edge" of the sword.

9. Verse 13: 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.
- a) Verse 13 is the "good news" of this church. It describes the positive attributes of this church prior to getting into the negative attributes in Verses 14-15.
 - b) Let's start with the Satan reference:
 - i) Verse 13 starts with "where Satan has his throne." It ends with "where Satan lives".
 - ii) One of the ideas to catch in this verse, and throughout the bible is that Satan is not omnipresent. He is not everywhere at once. (See also Job 1:7 and 2:2). You get the idea he can travel very fast. ☺ At the same time, he is not everywhere at once.
 - iii) It is said the two greatest mistakes a person can make about Satan is 1) He doesn't exist and 2) He is everywhere. We as Christians tend to give the devil too much credit for our sins and not enough for our own sinful nature.
 - iv) Since Satan is not omnipresent, then he has a "headquarters" somewhere. Jesus is saying that at this time in history, it was in Pergamum. It doesn't mean it always was there, and God knows where it is today, but at the time of this letter, Jesus is stating this was his headquarters as of the date of that letter.
 - v) So why here? Why not Rome or Jerusalem? The most likely answer goes back to Babylon. The bible can be compared to the "tale of the two cities", where Jerusalem is a center for true-God worship, and Babylon, going back to tower of Babel (Babylon) in Genesis 11 is associated with the worship of false gods and even Satan worship. There is strong archeological evidence that the Babylonian priests lived long after the fall of the Babylonian Empire. They eventually migrated and made Pergamum their headquarters. Many, if not most of the false gods of the Greek and Roman system have their roots in the Babylonian gods, albeit with different names. For example, Zeus is considered the greatest of all the Greek and Roman Gods. The main temple to Zeus is in Pergamum.
 - c) Getting back to the text, the reason all of this is mentioned is that this false god worship is in the "backyard" of the church in Pergamum. Jesus is saying in effect, "I know how hard it is for you to worship me with all of that stuff going on in your hometown".
 - i) To the Christian churches today in which Christianity is a small minority, this is a key letter. Christians in such situations are usually considered a "threat" to the other religions and are commonly persecuted. That is the scene in this city.
 - d) Let's get back to Verse 13: The second sentence says, "Yet you remain true to my name".
 - i) You can imagine what the local residents of Pergamum said to the Christians. "Look, if you are going to live and work here, you have to honor the local gods. After all, Zeus's headquarters are here. We don't want to offend him. We can't have this Christian stuff going on around here and get Zeus angry."
 - ii) I've always taken the view that people tolerate other religions unless it is a threat to their income or their lifestyle. Worshipping Greek gods often involved immoral sexual practices. They didn't want "those Christians" making them feel guilty about what they did. If you want the main underlying reason today people won't turn to God, it is because they don't want to change their lifestyle.
 - iii) The first accommodation of this church is that Jesus said, "They are true to His name". That is a great compliment when it was (off and on) a death sentence to be a Christian. It's easy to be "true to His name" for a Christian living in a country that is dominated by Christians. It is quite another when it is an illegal religion.
 - a) To live under such conditions, one would often wonder if it is worth it. Here is Jesus saying to them and us in effect, "I know you. I know what you are going through. I am proud of you."

- e) The third sentence says, "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".
 - i) This sentence mentions a guy named Antipas, who was put to death for the crime of being a Christian. We have no idea who this guy is. There are some theories, but that is about it. There are some writings going back to the 2nd century with some traditional stories, but for the most part, this guy would have been lost in history if not for the biblical reference.
 - ii) Here's the great part: If Jesus remembers by name someone as "trivial" as Antipas, then you and I can count on the fact Jesus is watching you and me. If Jesus is aware of the life and death of Antipas, He is very much aware of our life and death and is keeping tabs on our lives as witnesses for Him!
 - iii) You have to understand that tens of thousands and possibly millions were killed in the first few centuries for the crime of believing in Jesus. Here was this one guy, who essentially nobody heard of, and probably barely remembered was singled out. Take comfort in that. If God is aware of Antipas, He is aware of you and me.
 - iv) Whoever this guy was, he was probably made an example of by the local authorities in the hope of quenching the spread of Christianity. The exoneration was to the local church that survived that persecution.
 - v) This is a little off topic, but learn the Christian expression that says, "Dying for Jesus is relatively easy as compared to having to live a long life for Jesus!"
 - f) In this sentence, we also have this second reference to "where Satan lives". Since this was Satan's "headquarters" at that time, a Christian church in his town was probably a prime target for persecution.
 - i) Wherever Satan's headquarters is today, most likely, it is not your hometown or my hometown. If this church in Pergamum could survive with Satan having his headquarters in the same location, your church and my church can be an effective witness for Jesus. The point is, "If they could survive and thrive, so can us". We don't have Satan in our backyard, and thus we should be more effective!
 - g) OK, time for the "nevertheless". ☺ You can just feel that pink slip coming!
10. Verse 14: 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.
- a) Let's start with the phrase "You have people". In other words, this problem is not with everyone in the church in Pergamum, but with specific people in this church. Jesus is saying in effect, "There is a problem spreading in this church and I want it eliminated!"
 - b) OK, onto the specific problem being created by "these people". Jesus references the Old Testament story of Balaam and Balak. The text says these guys caused the Israelites to sin by "eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality".
 - c) Let's review the story of Balaam and Balak:
 - i) Balak was the king of the Moabites (Numbers 22:4).
 - ii) Balaam was an independent, non-Jewish "wizard for hire". Whoever this guy was, he had the power to bless or curse people with his words. His power must have been legitimate or else King Balak wouldn't have hired this guy in the first place.
 - iii) Balaam had the power to "channel God" and repeat His words. He would bless the Nation of Israel even though King Balak wanted him to curse the Israelites.
 - iv) The story of Balak and Balaam is told in Numbers Chapters 22 through 24.
 - v) Personally, whenever I read that story, I get Balak and Balaam mixed up. The way I remember who is who is that the word Balak ends in a "k" in English. The letter "k" is the first letter in the word "king". Therefore, when I see the word "Balak", I think "king". Anyway, it helps me remember who is who in that story.

- vi) In this story the Israelites, who were in the millions, left Egypt and are now wandering through the desert. King Balak is the leader of a nation of Moabites. With so many Israelites approaching his territory, this was a threat. As opposed to raising an army, it would be cheaper and save many lives if an effective "wizard" (for the lack of a better word) could curse them. Therefore, King Balak offered big bucks to Balaam the wizard to curse the Israelites.
- vii) The problem is Balaam knew his source of power came from God. He didn't want to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, so no matter how much money King Balak offered him, Balaam only spoke whatever God said to speak. Balaam gave separate speeches reiterating what God said to him and blessed the nation of Israel. After the first blessing, King Balak offered this guy more money to change his mind. That didn't work. After the second blessing, King Balak offered him even more money. That didn't work. Again, Balaam understood the source of his power, and wouldn't jeopardize that power for any amount of money.
- viii) Then comes the key plot point that ties to Revelation: Balaam gave three speeches praising and blessing the Nation of Israel in Numbers Chapters 22-24.
 - a) The opening of Chapter 25 mentions Israelites taking Moabite women as wives and "before they knew it", were worshipping the Moabite gods. Remember Balak was a Moabite king.
 - b) What we don't discover until Numbers 31:16 is that it was Balaam's idea to persuade the Moabites to put their pretty women out where the Israelite men could see them and go downhill from there. ☺
 - c) Note that just because someone like Balaam is given a gift from God and even repeats God's words, he is not necessarily obedient to God's will!
- d) Let me paraphrase what Balaam probably said to King Balak: Listen your highness, sorry about those Israelite blessings, but I can't go against the source of my power. Don't take it personal, it's just good business. Still, you are a good customer, and you did bring your checkbook. ☺ Let me tell you some advice: I know men. They may be Israelites, but they are still men. Attack them at their weakest point, right behind their zippers. Men are physically attracted to beautiful women. They may be happily married and go to church, but what is visually appealing is a human weakness. Now go get some young hot Moabite chicks. Let them parade near the edge of the Israelite camp. Before you know it, the Israelites will be praying to your gods. Problem solved. Don't forget to make your check out to Balaam. That's with three a's." ☺

11. OK, the mini sermon on Balaam and Balak is done. Let's get back to Revelation:

- a) Jesus said in this verse, "You have people there (in your church) 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. "
- b) Jesus did not say Balaam was reincarnated and is now living in the Pergamum Church. Jesus said that the same type of teaching that Balaam did, is going on, here in this church.
- c) Let me paraphrase what the "Balaam of the Pergamum Church" is saying to those Christians: God loves all of you and has forgiven all of your sins. Still, you're living in Pergamum and we want to be good witnesses to the local residents. You want to win them over to Jesus, don't you? As they say, "When in Rome, do like the Romans". What that means is to go participate in their parties and go to their religious events. After all, Jesus ate with sinners, didn't he? Go ahead and sacrifice to their gods. You don't have to mean it in your heart, just do it! That way they won't kill us and we'll be loved by the local people. Maybe some will even come to church with us next Sunday!"
 - i) That's the way false teachings always come in: They mix some truth with lies.
 - ii) The mistake is trying to compromise on God's commands and God's truth in order to win others for Christ. It never works.

- iii) The truth is God forgives our sins. The truth is Jesus "ate with sinners" which means He preached the Gospel message to nonbelievers. The truth is God loves all people. The lie is that it is acceptable to compromise (there's that word again!) one's behavior in order to be a witness for Jesus!
 - d) Now let's discuss the sin at hand: The verse says the specific sins were "eating food offered to idols" and "sexual immorality".
 - i) Animals were offered up to the pagan gods. The "leftovers" were then sold in the marketplace. Anyone could buy say, a steak that was part of an offering to Zeus. It was considered a good religious thing to share in that offering.
 - ii) When you study Paul's letters, he said in effect that pagan gods have no meaning and it is ok to eat such meat. The only exception is if other Christians around you believe one should not eat such meat. In those cases, the Christian should refrain from eating it in order not to offend other Christians. (Ref: 1st Cor. Chapter 8).
 - iii) So, is this a contradiction? Jesus is saying here in Revelation that this church sinned by eating food offered to idols and Paul says in effect it is "no big deal".
 - a) The answer is to read the verse again. The point isn't the food offered to idols. The point is Balaam's advice was wrong. The point is false teachers and false prophets teach that compromise with truth is acceptable.
 - iv) As to sexual immorality, this is a binding law for Christians, as taught in both the Old and New Testament. The idea is that a good marriage requires hard work and is a struggle at times, just like our relationship with God. Divorce is never listed as an unpardonable sin, but it is not encouraged either. Our loyalty to our spouse is a model of our loyalty to God. That is why adultery is a synonym for idolatry against God. In both cases, one is cheating upon their commitment vows.
 - e) Back to the big picture, what we Christians have to have a balance of love for each other, love for human beings, but at the same time, have zero tolerance for false teaching. Sin cannot be tolerated in the church. It is not about being perfect. It is about confessing sins when they are committed and helping each other live more like Jesus. That is how to avoid compromise in the church. It's the key point of this lesson.
 - f) Hey look, there are more verses in this chapter! ☺
12. Verse 15: Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- a) In the last lesson, I talked about what the Nicolaitans are. This is a transliterated Greek word that means "victory over the people". The idea is a group of false teachers that dominates the views of a particular church. There may have been a literal group called the Nicolaitans or it may refer to any false teacher that attempts to dominate that church.
 - b) In the previous verse, the issue at hand is that false teachers were like Balaam in that they taught how to entice the congregation in order to sin and compromise their faith. This person or group is like the Nicolaitans in that they had "victory over the people" by accomplishing their sinful goals.
 - c) Some argue that the Nicolaitans in Verse 15 is a separate problem from the Balaam-like temptations as described in Verse 14. If that's the case, then the problem in both cases is the leaders of the church are acting in ways that compromise the church's faith.
13. Verse 16: Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.
- a) The first word I want you to notice is the word "them". Jesus says He will fight "them".
 - b) If you are one of Jesus' children or "sheep" to use another idiom, Jesus is the Good Shepherd that protects His flock. (Ref.: John 10:11, 10:14).
 - c) What Jesus is saying in effect is, "I'm trying to get my followers to mature in their faith. I want them to learn how to deal with problems themselves. I want to "let go of the bicycle handle bars and see if you can ride all by yourself". If you don't deal with these problems in your church, I'll come and deal with it myself." Jesus will judge them by their deeds.

- d) Now notice the first word: "Repent". This means to change ones direction. It is the idea of admitting one's mistakes. It is to admit God was right and we are wrong. Jesus is saying the ideal solution is for the church to deal with the problem themselves. If Jesus has to step in, the problem will still be solved, but the church will become ineffective.
 - e) Now I want to backtrack a little to Verse 12: Jesus described himself as having a "two-edged" sword. The idea is that it cuts both ways. That sword is used against non-believers as a picture of enforcement of eternal judgment. The "other edge" is used to judge Christians. I take the view as long as one is committed to believing Jesus died for their sins and believes Jesus is the Lord of one' life, one cannot lose their salvation. At the same time, Jesus can still do some damage to Christians with that sword. ☺ This includes making one's church ineffective. That's the other side of the sword!
 - i) I bring this up here because Jesus says He "will fight against them with the sword of his mouth". This is the same double-edge sword as described in Verse 12.
 - f) Before I wrap up the letter to Pergamum, remember that most commentators also see a pattern by which each letter describes a specific period of the 2,000-year church history.
 - i) I could write many separate lessons on this topic alone. The focus of these lessons is how the bible affects our lives today, so I'm only going to briefly touch on this.
 - ii) There was a day when one particular Roman Emperor (Constantine) declared his allegiance to Christ. Historians debate the sincerity of that commitment, but that's another story. Beginning with Constantine, Christianity became the official religion as opposed to a persecuted religion. The church compromised Christian doctrine in order to get the masses to accept it. Pagan rituals were "Christianized" to gain public acceptance. Just as the Christians of this era compromised biblical teachings, so many see the letter to Pergamum as a description of this era of time.
14. Verse 17: 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.
- a) Note that the word "churches" in Verse 17 is plural. Remember the each of the seven letters ends with a general warning to all Christians to read and study all seven letters. The idea is this letter is specifically to the church in Pergamum, but the same judgment standard applies to all Christians and their churches.
 - b) There are a couple of word-pictures that need to be briefly discussed in this verse. The first is "hidden manna". Back when the Israelites were wandering around the desert for forty years. A flaky white substance rained on the ground every night. The Hebrew word manna literally means, "What is it?" as they didn't know what else to call it. What ever it was, it was the main food to sustain the Israelites for forty years. (Ref.: Exodus 16)
 - i) So, what is "hidden manna"? There is no Old Testament reference to any manna being hidden, other than a jar of it being placed in the most sacred "box" in the Jewish Tabernacle, called the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 16:33).
 - ii) The most plausible theory is that it ties to Jesus calling himself the "bread of life". Some Israelites told Jesus how God provided their forefathers with manna and then asked in effect, "what will you provide?" Jesus responded with "I am the bread of life". (Ref.: John 6:30-35). The idea is Jesus is equivalent of the "hidden manna". It does not mean we cannibalize Jesus. It means we "digest" what He says and teaches. It is like when we say, "Let me chew on that for awhile".
 - iii) In other words, this is word-picture of hidden manna ties to the salvation of the believer. We will "partake" of Jesus, and be effective witnesses for Him if we continue in our faith and not fall to the compromising effects of false teaching.
 - c) The last reference is a "white stone". There are no "white stone" references anywhere in the bible and this appears to be a historical reference to that time era and culture.

- i) In the Roman courts of that day, if one were found innocent, a judge would drop a white stone in a jar. If one is found guilty and gets a death sentence, a black stone is put in that jar. Another example is the Olympic games. The winners would receive a white stone that was the entrance ticket to a victory party. Either way, the white stone was symbolic of victory and freedom. The idea ties to one's salvation and victory over temptation and compromise of one's faith.
 - d) The white stone "has a name, known only to him who receives it".
 - i) Sometimes husbands and wives have pet names for each other that they don't share with others. It is an intimate sign of love. This is a similar idea here. It is God saying in effect that He loves us so much, He has a "pet name" for us that is an intimate secret between God and himself.
 - ii) In Hebrew and Greek thought, names are associated with one's nature. It would be like renaming a person "grumpy" or "happy" based on their disposition. A similar idea is in play here. God renames His children with a special new name, associated with our new nature in Christ. I have no idea what my new name is. I have to admit I am curious, but I'll save that happy thought for the next life. ☺
- 15. Verse 18: "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:
 - a) We now start the fourth of the seven letters written in Chapters 2-3.
 - b) Let me give a brief history lesson on Thyatira: This city was mainly known for its trade guilds. Let's say you were a bricklayer. If you want to work in Thyatira, you had to belong to the local brick-laying trade guild. If a person needed a bricklayer, they would hire someone from this trade guild. In other words, it was real hard to get work unless you were a member. Each guild would then have its "patron god". Pagan ceremonies to that god were part of that guild ritual. A bricklayer would "have" to worship that god.
 - c) Now imagine being a Christian in this town. For whatever profession you were in, this town is very organized in trade guilds (or unions). The pressure would be on to go worship the pagan deity that is "in charge" of your profession.
 - d) The word Thyatira originally meant "citadel" as there was an ancient castle or citadel in this location. Later, (still prior to Jesus) the word "Thyatira" came to mean "continual sacrifice". There is a Roman concept of putting the Empire above oneself as a sacrifice. Even in the business world that dominated Thyatira, the city name became associated with sacrifice. This city, dominated by trade unions, all "sacrificed" for the businesses to be successful and honored the gods of that trade union. The reputation for self-sacrifice will tie to the good things Jesus says about Thyatira.
- 16. Verse 18, Part 2: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.
 - a) Like all the other letters, we start with a word-picture description of Jesus. Let's start with the title "Son of God": The term "Son of God" is like saying, Jesus has the "essence of God". It does not refer to a physical birth. This is a title, not an actual birth relationship. In Jewish thought, to call someone the "son of..." means you had the same power and essence of the father. It's like the cliché, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree".
 - i) The Christian deity concept of "Father and Son" is they both are one and both God, but the Father is greater than the Son in terms of authority.
 - ii) The reason this title is given is that Jesus will come down hard on false teachers in Thyatira. Jesus is stating his authority as God to perform this judgment.
 - b) The next title is "eyes like blazing fire". It is a word picture that is saying Jesus "sees all, knows all and will judge fairly based on that knowledge". More on this in a moment.
 - c) The last title is "feet are like burnished bronze". Bronze can tolerate more heat than any other metal. Things are heated on bronze for purification. Other metals are heated over bronze in order to separate impurities.

- d) Combining the word picture of "fire and bronze" speaks of judgment. The idea is Jesus will judge perfectly and Jesus will judge "purely". Remember one has get used to the idea that Revelation speaks in such word pictures as opposed to just saying, "Jesus will perfectly judge". Our minds remember word-pictures better than facts and figures. This letter is heavy in judgment. The word picture of Jesus here helps us to remember that.
17. Verse 19: I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.
- a) Before the bad news, we get a verse of good news about Thyatira. That is Verse 19.
- b) Remember the background of Thyatira I stated earlier. There was tremendous pressure to worship the local gods in order to work in this town. Despite all of that, look at the positive attributes Jesus states about the Christians in Thyatira:
- i) Jesus compliments their "deeds", which is hard work. Remember the reputation and name of Thyatira has to do with self-sacrifice and hard work.
- ii) Jesus compliments their "love, faith and service". They still had love for Jesus as Lord. Then Jesus gives more compliments that all tie to self-sacrifice.
- c) The last part of "doing more than you did at first" is the idea of progression. It is to say the church is growing in these good deeds. I picture this church today as one that has a thick church bulletin every Sunday. It is full of activities and services this church does every week. People are really involved with this church and it has many ministries.
- d) Despite the problems that we'll read of in Verse 20, notice that Jesus does not ignore the good points. Jesus does not say all of these good things are a waste of time because of the bad things. The Lord of the Universe is sincerely complementing what is good here.
18. Verse 20: Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching, she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.
- a) OK, here comes the problem. One thing to catch about all seven churches is that each of them is clueless about something. What they are clues about is usually the key theme of each letter. In the case of Thyatira, there was a false prophet "Jezebel" that misleads Christians in Thyatira to sexual immorality and eating of food to idols.
- b) Jezebel may have been a real person, but most likely, it was a reference to another Old Testament character with a bad reputation. It would be like calling someone a "Judas" or a "Hitler". The idea is meant as an insult.
- c) A few pages back I spent a whole page on King Balak and the prophet Balaaam. I'll try to keep my Jezebel sermon much shorter. ☺
- i) During the history of Israel, there was a long period where it was split into two kingdoms, a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. The bible says the worst king of the northern kingdom was a king named Ahab. (See 1st Kings 16:30). If that wasn't bad enough, he married a non-Jewish woman named Jezebel. As bad as this king was, she was worse. They both encouraged idol worship all over the kingdom, especially "Baal worship". It is the equivalent of satanic worship. There are hints in 1st Kings that she was a leader in Baal worship.
- d) Back to Verse 20, there may have been a literal woman in their midst named Jezebel, or more likely, there may have been a prominent woman who was a false prophet.
- i) I should state here that there is nothing wrong with a woman being considered a prophet. A prophet is simply a person delivering a message from God. In the New Testament, there is a reference to Phillip the Evangelist who had four daughters who could prophesy (Ref.: Acts 21:8-9).
- e) The main fault with the church in Thyatira is that they allowed a false teacher to lead them. Remember what I taught in earlier lessons about false teachers. Such people don't wear badges that say, "Hello, I'm a false teacher and I'm here to help you". ☺ You have to judge teachers by what they say and compare it to Scripture itself.

- f) What I suspect this "Jezebel" said was something like this, "Good Christians of Thyatira, God loves you very much. He wants you to be a good witness to this town. I know how hard it is for you to make a living here. God wants you to know its ok to go to the pagan god festivals because He knows in your heart you really love Him only."
- i) This leads me back to my opening theme of "compromise". The danger to the Christian is to think, "It's ok for me to participate in sinful events because my heart is not really in it, or I just want to be a witness to these people". This is a lie plain and simple. Throughout Christian history, this strategy has never worked.
 - ii) In other words, you can't play in the mud and not get dirty. Attempting to associate or participate in sinful activities "to win others" will always get the Christian to fall themselves as opposed to winning others.
 - iii) Most Christian adults have had to learn the hard way that in order to avoid sin, one has to truly avoid it. Sin in its highly developed state has to be crucified to a painful death. To have the strength against temptation starts by walking away. I'm not naïve that some addictions are much harder. Some require medical treatment and counseling. It starts with a decision that sin is wrong and one must turn from it. Getting back to the verse, the underlying point is this "Jezebel" was teaching that one can tolerate sinful activities and still be a good Christian.
- g) The specific sins being listed are the same ones (hint! hint!) as mentioned in the last letter to Pergamum: The sin of eating food dedicated to idols and sexual immorality.
- i) I stated earlier in this lesson how Paul says, "Eating food to idols is nothing". Here, Jesus is condemning it again! Here is the difference:
 - a) Paul was saying in 1st Corinthians that it is ok to buy such meat, as Christians are aware that these false gods are not really gods.
 - b) Jesus is condemning in this letter actually participating in pagan rituals where food is offered to idols.
 - c) Remember Paul said that if eating such food causes others to sin, it should be avoided. Christians should give up their "rights" to eat such food if it becomes a stumbling block for other Christians. That's in view here too.
 - ii) The second sin listed is sexual immorality. The worship of some of the pagan gods often involved prostitution. I bet that encouraged guys to show up at the local guild meetings! ☺ It was also what Jesus taught to avoid like the plague!
19. Verse 21: I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.
- a) Well, this does not sound good. ☺ To summarize, Jesus is saying that He will allow some time for this woman to repent. If she doesn't, she and those who sin with her will suffer intensely and Jesus will strike her children dead. Then it will become obvious to that church that this woman was a false prophet.
 - b) First of all, let's separate eternal judgment from "suffering" judgment. Salvation is an individual issue based on one's faith that Jesus is the Lord of one's life and one's faith that He died for your sins. Everything else is "fair game" for God's judgment. It is fearful and important to understand that God allows Christians who sin to suffer in order to be a witness to the church around them of their sinful deeds.
 - c) Remember God's goal is to make us all better Christians. Sometimes, He picks people to use as examples. There was a story of a sinning couple in Acts Chapter 5 that God struck dead. For all we know, they may be in heaven. The point is God caused (or allowed) the sudden death through judgment of that couple as a witness to the church.

- d) The point here is that God is giving time for this "Jezebel" to repent. If she doesn't she will suffer physical pain. There is also a "pun" in the term "bed of suffering". Just as sexual fornication usually involves some sort of bed, the suffering will also be in a bed.
 - e) The verse also says her "children" will suffer death. It is probably a word-picture of those people who follow her. It could be her literal children, but I doubt it. Again, salvation is a separate issue. This is a case where God is making an example of those who are harming those "sheep" who are members of his church.
 - f) So what's the lesson to us, over and above watching for Jezebel's in our church? The answer is when the you-know-what hits the fan, try not to be down wind! ☺ Be aware that God is going to judge false teachers. God won't tolerate false teaching then and now. It may not be as bad as this Jezebel, but at the least, it will make one's church ineffective.
 - g) If your church is allowing such teaching, confront it, fix it or leave it. Please note that I'm not talking about classical Christian debate issues. This is about blatant false teaching on compromise of one's belief in the basic truths of Christianity.
20. Verse 24: Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come.
- a) Notice what Jesus is saying to those who don't follow this Jezebel's teaching: "hold on".
 - b) Jesus is not calling us to burn Jezebel's at the stake. It is God himself who does the judgment. God does call for us to look for false teachers and avoid compromise. He asks us to get them away from the leadership of our church.
 - c) The main message being taught here is the way to avoid compromise and sinful activity in the church is (for the lack of a better term) to simply avoid it in the first place!
 - d) The text mentions "not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets". There was a false idea at that time that in order to combat Satan, one has to know his secrets. It is an expansion of the phrase "know thy enemy". While it is important and essential to understand Satan's tactics to get us to compromise, it is equally as important to not practice sinful deeds.
 - i) In other words, don't compromise one's belief in God in order to say 1) conform with the world around us or 2) try to be a witness to others. That is the idea being taught here: One has to avoid sinful practice. One cannot be a witness for Christ while participating in such activities.
 - e) I also stated one has to know Satan's tactic's. One of those tactics is to get us to compromise in the first place. Among the tactics is Satan knows we all desire to be liked by others and to want to conform to the world around us. That desire leads to the temptation to sin. Remember Satan's goal is to get us to be ineffective witnesses for Jesus. If he can't scare us through persecution, he can make us ineffective through compromise.
 - f) Satan only attempts to bring in false teachers to churches that are effective witnesses. If a church is already ineffective, it is a wasted resource to bring in such false teaching!
 - g) The last line says, "Hold fast". In other words, the way to avoid compromise is to "stick close to Jesus". The power to overcome temptation is the same power to overcome the persecution of the earlier letters. It is only through God that one has the power to overcome such temptations. Remember the expression, "Without God, we can't".
 - h) I can't leave this letter without a quick discussion of the "seven letters as church history" theory. Many commentators tie each letter to a different period in church history. This is a whole lecture all unto itself, and is not a focus of these lessons. Just know that this letter is often tied to the "dark ages" of the Roman Catholic Church. There was a long history in the Middle Ages where the church got very corrupt and bible reading was banned. It took the reformation of the 16th Century to bring it to an end. Many Protestants use this letter to "Catholic bash". One can find numerous examples of false teaching in the Protestant world as well. The main point for you and I is to avoid compromise within the church and watch out for false teaching that can lead us astray.

21. Verse 26: To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-- ²⁷ 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father.
- OK, enough bad news, time for some good news. ☺ Jesus gives us the motivation to get past the Jezebel false-teachers of the world: Eternal salvation and effective witnesses.
 - Here we have references to Jesus Second Coming. In later chapters of Revelation, we will read of Jesus return to earth, and Christians will rule along side of Him. Who do we rule over? Some people do survive the "tribulation" described in most of Revelation. Chapter 20 coming up speaks of a 1,000-year rule by Christ. There is a lot of territory to rule over and somehow, someway, Christians are involved in the process.
 - Notice Verse 27 gives the impression that Christ rules "harshly". Read that line again. There is a bumper sticker that says, "Jesus is coming back and this time He's angry". There is some truth to that. For the non-Christian who survives the tribulation, Jesus will rule over the world by force. One has to accept Jesus as king whether they like it or not.
 - One can also read Verses 26-27 as reference to eternal judgment. Somehow, someway, Christians "assist" Jesus in that judgment. People will be sent to hell. That could be a correct interpretation of the word picture: "He will dash them to pieces like pottery". One has to remember millions of Christians have suffered horrible deaths for their faith. Jesus is reassuring those believers that those who harm Christians will suffer a much worse fate, and much longer fate than believers who have committed their life to Him.
22. Verse 28: I will also give him the morning star.
- Jesus says later in Revelation (22:16) that He is the morning star. A point is not only are we saved, but we are also saved to Jesus. He is our eternal reward.
 - Why "A morning star"? Picture a bright star right before sunrise. It is "bright spot" in a dark sky right before the new day begins. It is a picture of a new day beginning and a new hope for the believer.
23. Verse 29: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- Every single letter has this cliché about hearing and ears in that church.
 - This is the first time the reference is at the end of the letter as opposed to inside the letter. The remaining three letters also have this line as the final statement. There is lots of speculation as to why this "ear to hear" statement now at the end of the letter versus inside. I suspect the answer has something to do with the "letters as church history" theory. Remember that many people theorize how each church represents a period of church history. Some speculate that the last four "types" of the seven churches are somehow around when the Second Coming happens. Again, it is interesting speculation, but the exact reason is not known.
 - The purpose of this sentence is to remind all believers that the good and bad points of this letter apply to all of us. Again, notice the word "churches" is plural. This is Jesus way of saying for all Christians to study what Jesus says to these seven specific churches, as the same standards apply to you and me.
24. OK, wrap up time: This was a long lesson, but there is a lot more one can glean from this text. My theme of these lessons is to focus upon the modern day applications to Christians. The main theme that I wanted to emphasize in this lesson has to do with Christians and compromise. Both churches in focus in this lesson were becoming or became ineffective witnesses for Jesus because they allowed compromise to affect their faith in Jesus.
- The goal for all Christians is to be effective witnesses for Jesus. That starts with not compromising our faith in Jesus as Lord and Jesus for forgiveness of our sins.
 - Compromise comes when we start to conform more to the world around us than we do to God's standards for right and wrong.
 - Compromise comes when we make excuses to sin and try to justify bad behavior

- d) Compromise comes when we allow false teachers to actually lead in our church and let their doctrine take over church teaching.
 - e) How does one avoid compromise? Remember the best way to avoid what is counterfeit is to stick close to the genuine. Jesus said, "Narrow is the path that leads to eternal life". (Matthew 7:14). Compromise is when we stray off that course. When we do stray, and we all do at times, the secret is to get back on the right path as soon as one can. That is what these letters are warning us about. Lets start and end with a prayer on this topic.
25. Let's pray: Father, Thanks You for these lessons on compromising our faith. Help us to personalize the good and bad points Jesus is making and apply them to our lives as well to the Christian churches around us. Help us to stick close to you and let You rule over every aspect of our lives. Protect us from what is false, and continue to keep us close to Your truth. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.