

## ECF 29<sup>th</sup> January 2012 Pergamum: Don't Compromise Any Longer Revelation 2:12-17

Steve Irwin was known for jumping into dangerous situations with enthusiasm. He was nicknamed the Crocodile Hunter and the TV programs that made him famous usually involved him surviving near misses with some of the world's most dangerous animals.

In 2006 he was in the Great Barrier Reef to film a documentary on the ocean's deadliest creatures. Filming had been halted because of bad weather and Steve was just swimming with his cameraman when he came across a stingray. They are often called the "pussycats of the sea" because of their docile nature and are sometimes even hand-fed by tourists on excursions from cruise-liners.

So when Steve started swimming behind it, it was hardly a dangerous situation. But it seems he got a little too close to it and it thrust its poisonous, barbed tail upward. The barb went into Steve's chest and pierced his heart. He was only the 17<sup>th</sup> person in the entire world known to be killed by a stingray.

It is ironic that he had survived snake bites, being pulled into the water by massive crocodiles and many other life-threatening situations – only to be killed by something that in comparison looked harmless!

And yet, something similar often happens in our Christian lives. It is not always the big temptations or the direct and fierce attacks that are most dangerous to our life with Christ. Sometimes it is the small, everyday compromises that lead us into sin or a denial of their faith.

This is what happened to the church in Pergamum. Revelation 2:12-17: <sup>12</sup>“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

<sup>13</sup>These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. <sup>13</sup>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.

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

<sup>17</sup>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.

### 1. Jesus understands Our Situation

In 5 of his letters, Jesus said to the churches, “I know your deeds.” v2. But here he said

“I know where you live.” v13 Of course he didn't just mean that he knew their address. It was that he understood their situation. He knew the pressure they faced.

#### a) Satan is Dominating

The church in Pergamum was living “where Satan has his throne.” v13 Some people have suggested that Jesus is referring to the giant altar of Zeus which was 36 by 34 metres in size and situated on the granite acropolis which towered over the city.

Others think it was a reference to the Temple of Asclepius who was a pagan god of healing. As a result Pergamum had become one of the most famous healing centres in the ancient world. Asclepius was represented by a serpent entwined on a staff and Satan is often called a serpent in the Bible: “That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” Revelation 12:9. .

However, perhaps this is most likely a reference to the fact that Pergamum was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia. In 29 BC, a temple was built to Rome and the Emperor – and since then it also was the centre of Emperor worship.

Whatever Jesus was referring to, he was showing that he understood that the “the prince of this world” John 14:30 was dominating the city of Pergamum.

I pray that we will be a community that really shares with each other the challenges we are facing in our lives. I believe that is what we're called to be. But I also know that all of us face struggles that nobody else here knows about – maybe our family situation, battles at work, relationships that are under strain, even the private struggles with temptation. But there is someone who knows where we live. He knows the trials we have face, he understands the pressure we're under, he knows the struggle we face.

#### b) Yet Jesus is in Control

Satan had his throne in Pergamum, but he was not the one who was really in control. Jesus introduced himself as: “him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.” v12 The proconsul or governor ruled the Roman province of Asia from Pergamum. He used the sword as the symbol of his power.

But in the end, his power is no match for the sword that comes from the mouth of Christ. It is Jesus Christ who reigns and who holds the two-edged sword of ultimate authority.

Jesus not only understands our struggles – he also has the power and grace to help us: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive

mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:15–16 Whatever you are facing this morning, Jesus gets it. He knows what it like. He sympathises with us and he invites us to come to him for the mercy and grace to help us to overcome!

## 2. Jesus Values our Faithfulness

### a) Being Willing to Die for Christ

Jesus also knew the faithfulness of this church. He knew about “Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city.” v13 We don’t know the circumstances of this man’s death. All we know is that he was executed because of his testimony to Christ. And we know that his courage and commitment did not go unnoticed. Jesus saw it. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Psalm 116:15

And on that day, Jesus welcomed Antipas into his presence. He was “away from the body and at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:8

### b) Being Willing to Stand for Christ

But Jesus did not just see the faithfulness of Antipas. He also saw the faithfulness of the whole church community at this incredibly difficult time. “You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas.” v13

Even the brutal death of their brother in Christ did not shake their commitment to Christ. Under this pressure, their faith did not crumble. They were willing to stand like Antipas, for Christ, no matter what the cost!

Recently I read the response of the apostles to their first experience of truly suffering for Christ. They were flogged and threatened never to speak of Jesus again. But Acts 5:41 records that: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

What a challenge! Are we willing to stand for Christ, even when it costs us? Are we willing to openly declare our commitment to Christ, whatever the consequences?

## 3. Jesus Longs for Holiness

This church had stood strong against the direct opposition of the Roman authorities. They had refused to deny Christ when they were openly attacked. But they had failed a more subtle attack. They had compromised with sin.

### a) No Compromise with Sin

“You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam.” v14 Balaam was a prophet of the Lord who was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the people of Israel. Balak was terrified of Israel when he saw them all coming out of Egypt. They were too powerful to defeat head-on and so he paid Balaam to prophesy their defeat.

But the Lord would not allow Balaam to curse his people. Instead, God turned the curses into a series of four blessings that you can read in Numbers 23-24.

But Balaam was a resourceful guy. He knew that there was more than one way to skin a cat. He “taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.” v14 He advised Balak to send women into the Israelite camp to seduce the men into sleeping with them. They then enticed these men to join in with their worship of the false god Baal. It was an: “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em!” kind of strategy.

As a result, thousands of the men of Israel compromised with sin, and in judgement against their immorality and idolatry, a plague killed 24,000 of them.

But the church in Pergamum hadn’t learned from their example. They had people in the church teaching that it was ok to compromise with immorality and idolatry: “You also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” v15 You might remember this group from the letter to the church in Ephesus. They were teaching a lifestyle that was incompatible with following Christ. This church should have tested them, recognised their lies and rejected them. Perhaps they thought that this little compromise was not big deal. After all they were still coming to church. They were still believing in Jesus!

### b) No Compromise with Immorality

But how we live matters to God. Yes, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8. The moment we put our faith in Christ we are fully and freely forgiven, we’re set free from guilt and the burden of trying to make ourselves right with God. Once and for all we’re declared righteous in God’s sight.

But this is not a licence to sin. As we come to Christ in faith for forgiveness and fellowship, we are called to follow him with our whole lives. We are called to live holy lives. “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;” 1 Peter 1:15 God’s goal is to make us more like Christ in his purity, holiness, grace and love.

So any compromise with immorality is putting our self-gratification before our commitment to Christ. It is saying what I want, what I desire is more important than what Christ wants. But as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.”

### c) No Compromise with Idolatry

And compromise with idolatry is likewise a rejection of God’s place in our lives. Some people today are tempted into what we might think of as traditional idolatry – praying

to a statue of a saint or angel or having a little Buddha for good luck. But many more are compromising on other forms of idolatry.

For many, technology is the idol of choice. A study in 2008 of 6,500 travelling executives reported that over 80% of them checked their Blackberry last thing before going to sleep, and was first thing they reached for when they woke up in the morning. Incredibly, 35% of them also admitted that if they were forced to choose, they would choose their Blackberry over their husband or wife.

In 2008 a tourist visiting New York, dropped his iPhone onto the subway tracks. Bijan Rezvani leapt onto the rails and retrieved his iPhone and managed to get back up onto the subway platform before either he or his iPhone were crushed. 4 years previously, a woman died attempting the same thing.

There are many other idols in our culture - celebrities, athletes, sport, food, family, sex, money, relationships, reputation, career, success – we can even idolize a position or ministry in church! Idolatry is allowing anything to take the place of God in our lives.

We're called to ["Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."](#) Matthew 22:37 God demands and deserves nothing but first place in our lives. Is this the place he has in our lives? Or have we compromised with this world?

#### 4. Jesus calls us to Repentance

This is a serious issue. Jesus again calls this church to repent: ["Repent therefore!"](#) v16 This situation must not be allowed any longer. This church must turn away from false teaching and compromised lifestyles. It must reject those who promote it – and it must come and bow before Christ as Lord of their whole lives again!

If in any area of our lives we have compromised with lies or with a lifestyle that is incompatible with Christ – then today is the day that he wants us to deal with it. Don't put it off any longer. Deal with it!

If we don't, then Christ will come and deal with sin in his church himself. ["Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."](#) v16

Pergamum was famous for its university with a library of over 200,000 volumes. It was also known for manufacturing parchment resulting in a paper called *pergamena*. But it was the word of Christ that would ultimately be decisive. Later in Revelation, John will describe Christ coming as the judge of this sinful world: ["Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations."](#) Revelation 19:15 He will one day defeat all who in arrogance and pride resist his rightful rule.

This is written as an encouragement to his people who are suffering the injustice of persecution. We should rejoice that Christ is coming to reign and once and for all defeat evil!

But it is also a warning to this world and to all who compromise with the world. If they do not repent, then Christ will come to them as judge. He will defeat evil. He will judge sin. Yes just now it looks like evil is triumphing; it looks like Satan is in control. But Christ is coming to reign!

#### 5. Jesus Promises his Provision

But for those who overcome and stay committed to Christ, Jesus gives a wonderful promise.

##### a) Food that Satisfies

["To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna."](#) v17. Manna was the food that God provided for the Israelites for 40 years in the desert. A sample of this was hidden in a jar and kept in the ark of the covenant as a reminder of God's miraculous provision.

But this manna also pointed to God's provision to come - ["The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."](#) John 6:33 Jesus came as the living bread from heaven to give himself for us so that we might experience eternal life - a life forever that would fully satisfy. He said, ["I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."](#) John 6:35.

So this promise is for those who would refuse to take part in the idol-meat banquets of the false gods. Instead they will receive the manna of life, they will experience true fellowship with Christ, and they will never go hungry!

We can reject this world of junk food of idolatry and immorality that people try to fill the emptiness of their souls – and instead we can receive Christ, the bread of life, the only one who can truly satisfy our hearts!

##### b) A Stone the Identifies

Jesus also promised, ["I will also give him a white stone."](#) v17 Jurors used to give a stone to a man at the end of his trial. White meant not guilty, black meant guilty! Was this a reminder to God's people that they have truly been declared righteous before God?

White stones were also used as admission tickets to public festivals. So was this a promise that Jesus will give the admission ticket to the manna feast for those who overcome?

Jesus said these stones are given “with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” v17 In the Bible a number of people’s names were changed by God: Aram and Sarai were changed to Abraham and Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter. The change marked a significant encounter with God, a promise from God or a new relationship with God.

This new and secret name means that we who have trusted in Christ have a new identity, purpose and promise. We are united with Christ – he has given us a new name to reflect the security and intimacy of our new relationship with him. The Lord says to us: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” Isaiah 43:1

This is the blessing of being set apart from this world. We belong to Christ. He has provided everything we need. Through his payment on the cross we’ve been declared not guilty before God. Through his grace he gives us access to God. Through his death he has given us new life.

### Conclusion

And so, yes, sometimes in our lives we will be called to stand against a direct and open challenge to our commitment to Christ. Like Antipas we must be willing to be a faithful witness in those big challenges.

But we also need to realise that the everyday decisions that we face are no less important. Everyday we face the choice between putting first either Christ or our desires. Everyday we need to choose to worship Christ or to bow before one of the many idols of this world. I pray that each one of us will be faithful and refuse to compromise with this sinful world.

Song: I’m giving you my heart

*[Please note that the above file is a copy of the notes used by Andrew for his preach at Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, Ireland on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2012 and have been published on [www.enniscorthychristianfellowship.ie](http://www.enniscorthychristianfellowship.ie) as part of our service to the community. Audio recordings of this, and other preaches, are also available at the above site and anyone wishing to ask questions concerning the above preach is invited to contact Andrew either directly or through the above site. Thank you]*