

DON'T COMPROMISE YOUR CHRISTIANITY

2 ¹²To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: This is what the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword says: ¹³I know where you live—[the place] where Satan's throne is [located]. Yet you remain true to my name and have not renounced your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my witness—my faithful one—who was put to death in your city, the place where Satan lives. ¹⁴Nevertheless, I hold a few things against you, because you have some people there who adhere to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the children of Israel [to sin] by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. ¹⁵Similar to that, you have some people who adhere to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶Therefore, repent; or else I will come to you swiftly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth. ¹⁷He 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 the one who receives it. (Rev. 2:12-17)

Introduction

Are you a Christian in your heart? If so, that is good.

Are you a Christian **only** in your heart? If so, that is bad. We must not make the wrong assumption that the Lord is accepting of anything less than wholehearted allegiance to Him in heart and in life.

A chameleon is a little lizard that has the unusual ability to change the color of its skin. Depending upon its current surroundings and its present need for self-preservation, the chameleon can choose from various shades of green to brown in an effort to conceal its identity.

As a Christian, do you, do I, ever find ourselves acting like a chameleon? When at church or in the company of fellow believers we openly express our faith in Christ. But when in the company of unbelievers at work or at school we immediately “internalize” our faith and blend in with the surrounding environment—like a spiritual chameleon.

An informal study was once done comparing the church in Korea with the church in Japan. The question was posed: “What accounts for the phenomenal growth of the Korean church in comparison to the miniscule growth of the Japanese church?” Many factors, no doubt, come into play; but, according to some Korean pastors, a major reason for the present day growth is the fact that the Korean church has consistently chosen the course of commitment rather than compromise. In contrast, it is well documented that the church in Japan succumbed to the pressure of the militaristic government and society during the years prior to World War II and compromised their faith at a crucial time in their nation's history. Consequently, at the end of World War II when the militaristic government collapsed and the Japanese people were spiritually open and seeking, they did not seriously consider

the Christian faith because the church had compromised its faith and therefore had lost its credibility (*China Prayer Letter*, February, 1983)

Consistent commitment to Christ, as opposed to the lifestyle of a spiritual chameleon that “internalizes” the faith and conceals its true identity from the world, is one key factor in church growth. But more than that, consistent commitment to Christ is the kind of Christian life our Lord expects of us, and it is the only Christian life that is worthy of His Name.

Are you a Christian in heart? If so, that is good!

Are you **only** a Christian in heart? If so, that is bad.

Because our Lord Jesus Christ requires of us wholehearted allegiance in heart and in life, let us not compromise our Christianity.

I. Don't Compromise Your Christianity, ...Even Under the Most Trying Circumstances

The Lord Jesus assures His church in Pergamum that He know where she dwells, namely, “*where Satan's throne is located*” (vs. 13.) Our Lord identifies the city of Pergamum as the seat of Satanic power, a focal point of Satanic presence and activity. This description is applied to that city first, because it was a center for various types of pagan cults and religions. People from all over the ancient world came to this city in the hope of being healed by the god Asclepius. Behind the city was a great hill that served as the site for a whole multitude of pagan temples of every description. But even more so, Jesus identifies Pergamum as the set of Satanic power because the city was an official center for the cult of emperor worship. The proclamation, “Caesar is lord,” was the Satanically-inspired counterpart and counterfeit of the Holy Spirit-inspired declaration, “Jesus is Lord!”

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus assures His church that He knows her faithfulness: “*you are remaining* [present tense] *true to my name*” (vs. 13.) The church at Pergamum was steadfastly continuing to hold onto its profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ despite the Satanic opposition of the world around them.

This congregation of the Lord's people was remaining faithful despite a recent outburst of persecution: “*you ... have not renounced your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my witness—my faithful one—who was put to death in your [city], the place where Satan lives*” (vs. 13b.) During this outbreak of persecution, one of their members, Antipas, was martyred for the sake of Christ. His public execution—he “*was put to death in your [city],*” (or, “*in your [presence]*”)—was no doubt an effort by the authorities to intimidate the church and cause the believers to renounce their faith in Christ. But relying upon the all-sufficient grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ, they remained faithful. On an earlier occasion, when the church in Jerusalem faced persecution, consider the grace the Lord Jesus gave to Stephen as he preached before the Jewish leaders:

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep [in death]. (Acts 7:54-60)

Notice that the Lord Jesus bestows special honor upon this Christian named Antipas. The Lord makes special mention of his name and makes note of his martyrdom. The Lord honors Antipas by bestowing on him His own title: in Revelation 1:5 Jesus Himself is called *“the Faithful Witness.”* Note that one who was especially singled out for trial, and who was especially faithful (the Greek text may be rendered, *“my extremely faithful witness,”*) is especially singled out for recognition and honor by the Lord. The Psalmist writes: *“Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints”* (Psl. 116:15.)

The Lord assures His church that He knows their present situation, He recognizes their faithfulness, and He will honor them for it—may we be like faithful Antipas.

Don't compromise your Christianity, even under the most trying circumstances. On the contrary, may we prove to be *“strong in the Lord and in his mighty strength”* (Eph. 6:10.)

II. Don't Compromise Your Christianity, ...By “Internalizing” Your Faith

The Lord Jesus acknowledges the church's faithfulness and expresses His appreciation, but He must go on to declare, *“Nevertheless, I hold a few things against you”* (vs. 14a.) What He has against them is the fact that they were tolerating those who adhered to *“the teaching of the Nicolaitans”* (vs. 15.)

“The teaching of the Nicolaitans” is compared to the teaching of the Old Testament false prophet, Balaam. Balaam had taught Balak, the king of Moab, to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual immorality:

While Israel encamped at Shittim, the people began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women; ²because they had invited the people to

offer sacrifices to their gods, and the people ate with them and bowed down to their gods. (Num. 25:1-2)

They [i.e.; Israel's enemies] were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from Jehovah. (Num. 31:16)

In a similar way, the Nicolaitans were teaching the church that it was permissible for Christians to offer the required sacrifice to the emperor, (and maybe even to engage in sexual immorality.)

Who were the Nicolaitans and how did they seduce the church to compromise her faith? They appear to have been a cult that proved troublesome to the Christian church in the latter part of the first century. They apparently sought to import Greek ideas into the church and by means of that mixture of doctrine, were corrupting the purity of the church's thought and life.

What specifically did the Nicolaitans teach? There was a branch of Greek thought that considered the physical body to be insignificant, only the soul, or, spirit, was of supreme importance. The body was viewed as a prison house from which the soul finally escaped at death. It appears that the cult known as "the Nicolaitans," incorporated this kind of thinking into their teaching. Based on this non-biblical concept of the body, it is not difficult to draw some very non-biblical conclusions: If the body and its activities are inconsequential, there can be little harm in merely going through the motions of emperor worship to placate the authorities, just so long as in your heart you confess that Jesus is the true and only Lord. A Christian could thus submit to the demands of the imperial Roman cult merely as an act of patriotism and thereby avoid causing any "unnecessary" disturbance—such was the course advocated by the Japanese church in the World War II era when Christians were required by law to bow before the Shinto shrines. Along with a compromise of allegiance, there may also have come a compromise of morals, which follows from a faulty, non-biblical view of the significance of the body. Ironically, the Nicolaitans minimized the significance of the body and its activities in order to save the body from persecution—even though it meant a compromise and even a denial of Christian truth.

But what does the Word of God teach about the relation of the body to the soul with regard to living the Christian life and expressing our allegiance to Christ? The body (and our bodily conduct) becomes the means by which we express our Christian convictions and live out our Christian life before the world. Consider how Daniel expressed the Christian convictions of his heart by means of his conduct:

Now Daniel resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food, nor with the wine he was given to drink; therefore, he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself. (Dan. 1:8)

The Apostle Paul exhorts the church at Rome, a congregation of Christ's people living at the very center of the pagan Roman Empire in these terms:

*... if you **confess with your mouth**, "Jesus is Lord," **and believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (Rom. 10:9)

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship.* (Rom. 12:1)

The Lord Jesus commends the church at Pergamum because they remained true to His name, literally, they were "*holding fast to his name*" (vs. 13.) But He rebukes them for tolerating those who adhered to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, literally, those who were "*holding fast to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*" (vs. 15.)

Don't compromise your Christianity, by "internalizing" your faith. On the contrary, the Christian is commanded to "*glorify God with your body*" (1 Cor. 6:19-20.)

III. Don't Compromise Your Christianity, ...Because Our Lord, though Sympathetic, is Not Tolerant

At every age of church history there are those within the church who would advocate a policy of accommodation: sacrifice the commandments of Scripture in order to live at peace with the world; make a false distinction between internal conviction and every day external practice. But what does our Lord say concerning such accommodation and compromise? He calls upon His people to "*repent; or else I will come to you swiftly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth*" (vs. 16.)

Though our Lord is compassionate and sympathetic—"I know where you live"—He is by no means tolerant. He proved Himself to be faithful to His Father, with ourselves being the beneficiaries of that faithfulness. His faithfulness to His Father and to us demands a corresponding faithfulness on our part: "*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*" (Heb. 12:3.)

We have our Lord's warning to those who advocate and accept a course of compromise: "*repent; or else I will come to you swiftly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth.*" The language in verse 16 is that of a king declaring war against his enemies. There is a spiritual warfare between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world; there is no neutrality. Despite your convictions, if by your actions you indicate you are siding with the world, Christ will view you as being aligned with the world and treat you accordingly:

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. (Matt. 10: 32-33)

The warning our Lord issues is counterbalanced with a word of promise He makes to those who are found faithful (in heart and in life):

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 the one who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)

Here is the promise of unspeakable reward—*“known only to the one who receives it”*—reserved for those who are faithful. Note: From the context, *“To him who overcomes, I will give ... a white stone,”* it appears that the *“white stone”* may be identified as a *tessera*, which was a little tablet made of wood, metal or stone, and that generally served as an admission or exemption token in the ancient Roman world. Among other usages, a *tessera* was awarded to gladiators who had won the admiration of the public as a token of exemption from further combat (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Wm. Eerdmans Pub. Co. Grand Rapids MI, pp. 99-100.) If such is the meaning of the *“white stone,”* it is then a reference to the commendation and peace bestowed by Christ upon the one who remains faithful to Him in the face of adversity and trial.

Don't compromise your Christianity, because our Lord, though sympathetic, is not tolerant. We must not complacently accept the false assumption that our Lord is accepting of anything that is less than whole-hearted allegiance to Him in heart and in life.

Conclusion

We dare not tamper with the Word of God, shaping it so as to make it conformable to our lives and thereby allow us to live comfortably in this ungodly world (as did the Nicolaitians.) On the contrary, we must allow our lives to be shaped by the Word of God and brought into conformity with it.

By the grace of God, we must live out the Christian life before the world, rather than conceal that life from the world; as the Apostle Paul exhorts the Philippian Christians:

Live your life only in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, ... standing firm in one spirit, and with one soul ... [be found] contending for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and ... in no way being intimidated by those who oppose you. (Phil. 1:27-28a)

Because our Lord Jesus Christ requires of us whole-hearted allegiance in heart and in life, let us never compromise our Christianity.