

The First Church of Perpetual Toleration
Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place
February 7, 2021

I. **The Church in Our American Context: The Compromise**

A. Good things

1. Movements against some of the elements of decline
 - a. Pro-life movement
 - b. Missions
2. Doctrinal commitments affirmed
 - a. Lausanne Covenant – 1974 (International Congress of World Evangelization)
 - b. Council on Biblical Inerrancy – Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)
 - c. Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals – Cambridge Declaration (1996)
 - d. Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration (1999)
3. The Church has not denied the faith

B. Problems

1. Lifestyle distinctions between professing believers v. non-believers
 - a. Divorce rates
 - b. Dysfunctional homes
 - c. Moral behavior, sexual practices, basic honesty
2. The way we do evangelism in America contributes to this
 - a. Are those who make professions of faith truly saved, born again, people?
 - b. Jesus said, “Repent and believe”
 - (1) We typically say, “Just believe”
 - (2) And then belief is no more than an intellectual assent to who Jesus is
 - (3) And even Satan could agree to that
 - c. Truly born again people, truly regenerate people, are changed people
3. Doctrinal problems
 - a. Christian TV
 - b. Forms of antinomianism in theology
 - (1) Unnecessary to live holy lives
 - c. Academic theology – process theology; openness of God movement
 - (1) Challenges fundamental doctrines of God by making absolute some of the more anthropomorphic statements at the expense of the clear declarations about God’s sovereignty, immutability

C. The Church is mixed

1. Many haven't given up the gospel, denied the faith
2. Others have sold out either in doctrine or lifestyle
3. Great pressures to be tolerant
 - a. Criticism of others who claim the name of Christian is seen always to be unloving
4. Result – compromised church
 - a. May not personally compromise
 - b. Certainly tolerate those who do
5. Missing link – church discipline
 - a. True church (Reformation)
 - (1) Preach the gospel
 - (2) Practice the sacraments (ordinances)
 - (3) Practice church discipline
 - b. Even the best churches will settle for 2 out of 3

II. The Message to Pergamum

A. Revelation 2:12–17 (NASB95) —

1. 12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:
2. 13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.
3. 14 ‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.
4. 15 ‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
5. 16 ‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.
6. 17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

B. The Context: Satan’s Throne

1. Revelation 2:13 (NASB95) — 13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...
2. Reference to the seat of Roman emperor worship
 - a. First city to openly practice emperor worship
 - b. First city to have a temple devoted to the practice
 - c. Result in Pergamum being declared the capital of Asia
3. Reference to pagan religion in general
 - a. Acropolis with many temples
 - (1) Zeus sitting on a throne
4. In the end, Satan doesn’t care what the false religion is
 - a. Any other religion is fine with him

5. Result of this religious center – **immorality**
 - a. Temple prostitution rampant
 - b. Sexual license expected, taken for granted
 - c. Tremendous pressure to satisfy the desires of the flesh
6. Pressure to participate in pagan religious festivals
 - a. Pagan feast, eating meat sacrificed to idols
7. Not easy to be a Christian in this place
8. Cf the American context
 - a. Maybe no temples
 - b. But sexual license, satisfying the desires of the flesh
 - c. Pressure to conform to the idolatry of the day

C. **The Compromise**

1. The good news: **Revelation 2:13** (NASB95) — 13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.
 - a. Have held fast the name of God
 - (1) Name of God – means by which His character and nature is made known
 - (2) Continued to maintain the orthodox doctrine of God
 - b. Have not denied **“My faith”**
 - (1) Faith = content of belief
 - (2) Maintained the gospel
 - (a) Holiness of God
 - (b) Sinfulness of humanity
 - (c) Need for a redeemer
 - (d) Coming of Christ in the flesh
 - (e) Substitutionary death
 - (f) Resurrection
 - (g) Necessity of faith for justification
 - c. Cf the American church in its declarations
2. The bad news
 - a. **Revelation 2:14–15** (NASB95) — 14 ‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 ‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
 - b. The World has infiltrated the church
 - (1) **Balaam** – not that there was a cult of Balaam – reference to wilderness wandering
 - (2) Balak (Moabite king) tried to get the prophet Balaam to curse Israel; refused; evidently counseled Balak regarding how to bring Israel down in other ways
 - (3) Teaching of Balaam

- (a) Idolatry
 - (b) Immorality
 - (c) Deception
 - (d) While Balaam kept his prophecies true, declining to curse Israel
- (4) People in Pergamum who were counseling the seduction of the church just like Balaam did
 - (5) Teaching of the **Nicolaitans**
 - (a) Not sure of the exact heresy
 - (b) Something similar leading to idolatry and immorality
- c. **Teaching:** not just aberrant lifestyles of a few
- (1) Now a system of doctrine
- d. The church has tolerated these positions

D. **The Correction**

1. **Revelation 2:16** (NASB95) — 16 ‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.
2. **Repentance**
 - a. Not directed at the false teachers
 - b. Directed at the church at large
 - c. Called to repent from their sin of toleration
3. Consequences
 - a. **War with the sword of His mouth**
4. False teaching is serious
 - a. Jude’s assessment of those who follow the error of Balaam
 - b. **Jude 12–16** (NASB95) — 12 These are the men who are **hidden reefs in your love feasts** when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; **clouds without water**, carried along by winds; **autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead**, uprooted; 13 **wild waves of the sea**, casting up their own shame like foam; **wandering stars**, for whom the **black darkness has been reserved** forever. 14 It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, 15 to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” 16 These are **grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts**; they **speak arrogantly**, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.
 - c. To tolerate false teaching is not to love the church, but to hate the church
5. If they wouldn’t repent and do something about it, Jesus would
 - a. With His sword of judgment
 - b. Implication is that, even though His judgment is against those false

teachers, it would tear the church apart

6. Especially important to leaders
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:24–26** (NASB95) — 24 The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.
 - b. I may not be guilty of their sin directly
 - (1) But I am responsible for their sin if I don’t correct them
7. Lack of church discipline is sin
 - a. When a church fails to discipline it becomes a corrupt church
 - (1) Ex: UCC pastor ordained by PCUS presbytery
 - (2) Contrasting Ex: Charleston, WV C&MA pastor who began to teach universalism – lost credentials
 - (a) Probably considers the C&MA unloving

E. **The Compensation**

1. **Revelation 2:17** (NASB95) — 17 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’
2. Overcoming here is church discipline
 - a. False teaching
 - b. Unholy lifestyles
3. **Hidden manna, white stone**
 - a. Manna – nourishing food from heaven
 - b. White stone – admission ticket to feast to end all feasts
4. Tempted to feast on the idolatry of the surrounding culture
 - a. Participate in pagan feasts
 - b. Participate in immorality
5. Christ has invited them to the greatest of all feasts
 - a. The marriage supper of the Lamb

III. **Our Correction**

A. **Repentance**

1. Willingness to hold one another accountable
2. Willingness to follow the Matthew 18 process
3. Willingness even to excommunicate professing Christians, church members, who are unrepentant

B. Repentance must be sought in a loving way

1. Ex: Corinthian church
 - a. 1 Corinthians: Incest – “has his father’s wife”; didn’t discipline
 - b. 2 Corinthians: urged to forgive the repentant sinner; lest he become discouraged

C. Repent with self-examination

1. Am I where I need to be spiritually in order to discipline another?
2. If not, repent of that sin
 - a. Take the board out of your own eye...
- D. Great pressure from the world to be tolerant
 1. Also pressure from within the church
 2. Some of the people you will discipline may be your friends
 3. Some of the people will be friends of your friends
 4. Some of the people will be family of your friends
- E. Formal discipline in this church (and in my prior church) was extremely rare
 1. But it has occurred
 - a. With great discretion
 - b. With great regard for the well-being of family
 - c. Involving substantial sacrifices in ministry
 2. But when that occurs, and when public acknowledgment must be made, there is always the danger of the ministry being accused of being unloving
- F. Do you have the courage to live with that kind of accusation?
 1. Not easy when it comes from outside the church
 2. Even more difficult when it comes from inside the church

IV. Summary

- A. Pergamum is the church of compromise
 1. First Church of Perpetual Toleration
 2. Tolerated sin in their midst
- B. Very much relevant to the American church