

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY SIX

The Church That Compromised the Truth

Revelation 2:12–17

Doctrinal compromise—it'll ruin you every time. Moral compromise—it'll always take you down. Now's the time to repent. I point you to Christ. There's no one else who can help you. No other one can make things right. No other one is able to forgive you and give you a whole new story—a whole new beginning.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE art of compromise. It's a necessary skill. Compromise is essential, for example, in marriage. Spouses will naturally disagree with one another: on which home to purchase, on where to celebrate the holidays, on how to spend money.

Yet any spouse who thinks his or her own personal opinions are always divinely inspired is doomed to have a miserable marriage. Any thriving relationship requires mutual, willing sacrifice—each individual setting aside personal desires for the sake of the other. That is *healthy* compromise.

Not all compromise is healthy, though. Spouses can compromise on what to share for dinner, but no spouse should *ever* compromise with whom to share a bed. That's why compromise is an *art*. What's true and right should take precedence over opinion, preference, and taste. The Christian life requires the same kind of discerning dance.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks to the ancient church in Smyrna that had gradually lost its footing and slipped into a state of unhealthy compromise. Their example and Jesus' call offer just what we need today for cultivating discernment, avoiding similar stumbles, and living faithfully as the beautiful bride of Christ.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Spending time with God is a *must* for all of us—like breathing air, drinking water, and eating food. Long to-do lists and packed schedules threaten to keep us from this vital time and distract us when we do make time for it. Quiet your heart and still your mind as you offer this prayer before you explore God’s Word.

Father, I know You will never make compromises on the love, grace, and compassion You have for me. Help me understand the depths of Your character as I study Your Word today, so I can reflect to the world what You’re really like. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When Jesus transitioned from addressing the second to the third of the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#), His tone changed from tender and soft to terse and severe. According to [Revelation 2:12](#), which church did Jesus address *third*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Pergamum was a religious epicenter for the Roman Empire. People came from all over to pay homage to the statues of the gods and the Caesars and to offer sacrifices to them at the many ornate temples. If you want to explore these details further, you can read about [Pergamum](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at biblegateway.com.

Jesus called Pergamum “the city where Satan has his throne” ([Revelation 2:13](#)). Why might Christians living in this satanic city have been tempted to compromise their commitment to Jesus?

If a spotless white lamb rolls around in the mud, it’s going to get dirty. So in [2:13–17](#), Jesus offered a strong word of warning to His beloved church in Pergamum to help them stay clean of its moral and spiritual pollution.

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Observation: The Church in Pergamum

Jesus knows each of us intimately. Like a loving parent, He celebrates what we do well, and He corrects us in our areas of struggle. In the letters of [Revelation 2–3](#), Jesus lovingly addressed gatherings of believers in seven separate cities in Asia Minor to offer commendation, concern, and correction. Look for each of these elements as you observe [2:13–17](#).¹

Commendation—Revelation 2:13

According to [Revelation 2:13a](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Pergamum?

What word of affirmation did Jesus offer in [2:13b](#)? What were these believers doing well despite their challenging circumstances?

Concern—Revelation 2:14–15

Jesus then altered His tone with the transition word *but*. According to [Revelation 2:14–15](#), what were Jesus’ “complaints against” this church? (If some of what Jesus said here is unclear, don’t worry! We’ll explore these verses further in correlation.)

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Correction—Revelation 2:16–17

According to [Revelation 2:16](#), what correction did Jesus offer? What did He say would happen if the church didn't heed His words?

According to [2:17](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

In matters of character, there's no wobble room. There's no option to compromise. Every time you compromise in character or in your principles, you lose. And there are real consequences that follow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Dangers of Compromise

The essential problem with the church in Pergamum was their willingness to compromise their Christian convictions. Look up the term [compromise](#) in a dictionary. What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy compromise? In what ways did the Christians in Pergamum demonstrate *unhealthy* compromise in their commitment to Jesus?

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Jesus' promise of victory in [Revelation 2:17](#) contains three symbols. What do the “manna that has been hidden away in heaven,” the “white stone,” and the “new name” represent. Why should each of these be considered a worthwhile reward? To help you interpret the meaning of these expressions, reference Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² For a free resource, visit [Constable's Notes](#) available at [netbible.org](#).

Each of these seven letters is a literary masterpiece, with each component carefully fitting together to create a beautiful mosaic. How does Jesus' self-identification as “the one with the sharp two-edged sword” in [2:12](#) help us better understand His message in this letter as a whole? [See 1:16 and 2:16](#).

Filter everything you hear through the Scriptures. Don't let the suave presentation of our times dull your edge. Don't be afraid to think alone and to be the only one in the group that doesn't buy it. The Lord admires that.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Compromise in the Community of Israel

In [Revelation 2:14](#), Jesus explained that the church in Pergamum was guilty of similar sins as the community of Israel in the days following the exodus from Egypt. As the Israelites moved closer to the region of Moab, the Moabite king Balak called upon the prophet Balaam for help. According to [Numbers 22:5–6](#), what request did the king make?

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Despite Balaam's awareness of the greatness of the God of Israel, he still gave Balak advice on how to lead "the people of Israel to rebel against the LORD" (*Numbers 31:15*). According to *25:1–3*, how did Balak ultimately nudge the people of Israel into joining in Baal worship? How did God respond to these events in *25:4*?

How does this context help you better understand Jesus' strong words to the church in Pergamum?

In the Old Testament, idolatry and adultery are close acquaintances. By worshiping false gods, the Israelites essentially were cheating on their faithful God. Likewise, the same stark analogy applies to those in the church today who compromise their faith in Christ. Thankfully, Christ's strong and loving call to return never quiets.



Application: Realities Regarding Compromise

The key to avoiding compromise is to understand its nature. Pastor Chuck identified four realities regarding compromise:

1. Compromise never occurs quickly.
2. Compromise always lowers the original standard.
3. Compromise is seldom offensive.
4. Compromise is often the first step toward disobedience.

God's central desire for His people is, "You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (*Leviticus 19:2*). To be holy means to be set apart—to be separate, unique, distinct. Why is God's holiness so central to His character? Why must we model this behavior (see *Genesis 1:26*)? What does it look like practically for you in this season of life to reflect His holiness?

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How would you describe the context in which you live? How is it similar to Pergamum? How does this examination of your context help you guard against unhealthy compromise?

Has an area of unhealthy compromise in your own life come to your attention in this study? If so, what would it look like for you to return to obedience in Jesus? Consider how you might be making compromises in the way you spend your time and money, in the kinds of entertainment you consume, in the way you treat others, or in the way you view Scripture.

Have you ever heard these messages? “This sin isn’t as bad as some others.” “If it feels good, do it!” “It’s not wrong if you aren’t hurting anyone.” When these seemingly harmless ideas take seed in the soul, then the weeds of compromise spread and choke out your healthy and growing relationship with Christ. Fertilize your soul with Jesus’ truth. Kill those weeds with consistent repentance. And watch your spiritual life flourish!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, as a member of Your church, I want to remain faithful to You no matter what. I don’t want to make any compromises. Help me guard against unhealthy compromise and keep me pure. I can only do this through Your wisdom, strength, and grace. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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