

# Revelation 2:12–29

## *The Enemy Within: Pergamum & Thyatira*

*The Summit Church, Revelation*

*MPT: Jesus confronts the sins of compromise (Pergamum) and tolerance (Thyatira) and calls his church to unwavering faithfulness.*

*MPS: The greatest threat to your faith isn't the enemy around you ... it's the compromises and sin you tolerate within you.*

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### Revelation 2:12–29 (via bumper)

<sup>12</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

<sup>13</sup>“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. <sup>14</sup>But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup>So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup>Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war 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 the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

<sup>18</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

<sup>19</sup>“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup>But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup>Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup>and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup>But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup>Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup>and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup>And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Revelation 2 if you have your Bible. Hope you’ve been enjoying the series. *How can we make it really come alive and make them FEEL it?* Hot as hades ...

### INTRODUCTION: The Enemy Within

#### Where were you in 2001?

1. I was a Freshman in HS

- a. Linkin Park. Fast and Furious. Dale 3. Aaliyah.
2. 9/11
3. **ENRON**

Most of you probably remember Enron—at one point, one of the **biggest, fastest**-growing, most **innovative** companies in the world.

- #7 on Fortune 500 list
- Valued at \$70B
- Stock price of \$90/share in 2000

**But in 2001, it collapsed almost overnight.**

- In just four weeks, investors lost \$74B, 20k employees lost jobs, retirement, and billions in pension
- Stock price plummeted from \$90 to \$0.26

And here's the thing: It wasn't brought down by **competitors**, or by some **economic disaster** or **downturn**—we would quickly come to find out about Enron's shady accounting, hidden debt, fake partnerships, and culture of deception that leadership let slide for years.

- **Enron didn't collapse from pressure on the outside ... no, this "innovative, enviable" company imploded from **compromise** and **deception** on the inside.**

If you were to ask me **what the greatest threat to the church today is**, I'd argue that it's not Satan, demons, persecution, other world religions, or outside forces—I'd argue the greatest danger to the church isn't found *outside* the church but *inside*.

And that's the danger Revelation 2 is warning us about: not just the enemy *around* us, but the enemy *within* us. **The greatest threat to your walk with Jesus isn't *out there* ... it's the sin you tolerate *in here*.**

## **CONTEXT: Growth, Persecution, Temptation**

Today, we're gonna pick up where Pastor J.D. left off a couple weeks ago, and we're gonna look at the next two churches in Revelation 2: **Pergamum** and **Thyatira**. Both were facing massive pressure to compromise—to **sell out**, **fit in**, and **quiet down** just to find some **relief from persecution**.

Pick up in Revelation 2:12: <sup>12</sup>“And to the angel [pastor] of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. Now, don’t get the idea that Jesus has a literal sword coming out of his mouth; this is **symbolism**. The two-edged sword symbolizes the power of Jesus’ Word: It can **pierce, correct, convict**, and bring **judgment**.

Jesus says v13, “Pergamum, <sup>13</sup>‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. There was so much pagan worship in Pergamum that Jesus says it’s “where Satan’s throne is” (How’d you like that on your city’s welcome sign? “Welcome to the *City of Satan’s Throne*”).

- Pergamum was so steeped in **pagan religion** and **loyalty to Rome** that it demanding worship of the emperor as a god himself.
- The city was famous for its **massive idol temples**—especially to Zeus and Asclepius, its **god of medicine**.
- Fun fact, this is the **rod of Asclepius** ... still one of the **universal medical symbols** today. This symbolizes healing and medicine ... came from Pergamum.

Yet, Jesus says to this church at Pergamum, even while living in the City of Satan, you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Even with all this pagan worship around them, this church held fast to the name of Jesus and didn’t deny him ... not even “in the days of Antipas my faithful witness.” According to most accounts, Antipas was a well-known pastor who was burned alive in a brass bull.

- Even then, they didn’t deny Jesus!
- Jesus is commending them: “You didn’t deny my faith.”
- I mean, this is their **performance review from Jesus** and it’s going **GREAT!**

<sup>14</sup>But (Uh oh. Here comes the “growth opportunity” areas) I have a few things against you (Jesus is like, *I love you, but we need to talk*): you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

**BALAAM** is referring back to **Numbers 22–25**. Balaam was a **prophet-for-profit**. He was hired by the King of Moab to curse Israel.

- But God wouldn’t allow Balaam to curse them, so Balaam found another way to weaken Israel—he advised the King of Moab **to seduce Israel through**:
  - **Intermarriage with Moabite women** (which would lead them to adopt the worship practices of Moabites of the time)
  - **Participation in feasts to idols**
  - **Sexual immorality tied to pagan worship**
- **Balaam seduces with COMPROMISE**: “*Hey, it’s okay to fit in. You can follow God AND blend in with the world.*” That’s Balaamism.

<sup>15</sup>So also you have some who hold the **teaching of the Nicolaitans**.

The **NICOLAITANS** were much like the Balaamites. They taught that *as long as you didn't really mean it*, it was fine to participate in Rome's pagan practices while claiming to follow Jesus.

- Balaam seduced the church with **compromise** ... then the Nicolaitans **normalized it**.
- What Balaam **seduced**, the Nicolaitans **systematized**.
- Balaam initially whispered, "*It's not a big deal.*" Now the Nicolaitans have made that the new standard.

See, both Balaam and the Nicolaitans were masters of distortion. They didn't come at the church with open rebellion, just **slight redefinitions, subtle shifts, and spiritual half-truths** that sounded like no big deal. Which is always how the best distortions work, right?

- I mean, nobody **clicks on an email** that says, "**THIS IS A SCAM!**"
- But if it *looks* like **Amazon** telling you they need address/payment confirmation, or the **NCDOT** telling you you have a past-due ticket, or your **bank** asking for additional information or you'll get locked out of your account—if it looks just real enough—some of you click. Don't you?
- **That's because the most dangerous lies are the ones dressed up like truth.**

**And this is how our Enemy works**; this is how he sets up his throne in our lives—not with **open rebellion**, but by seducing us with **small, seemingly insignificant compromises** that pile up over time.

- That's why **Jen Wilkin** says: **"Satan doesn't need to persecute the church if he can seduce it."**
  - **Balaam** didn't curse the people; he just coached them into compromise.
  - The **Nicolaitans** didn't attack the church; they infiltrated it and rebranded sin as freedom.

That's why Jesus says in v. 16, <sup>16</sup>**Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.**

- Jesus isn't casual about compromise, because he knows that it will kill you.

If **Pergamum** shows us what happens when compromise **sneaks** in,

**Thyatira** shows us what happens when compromise is **no longer subtle**, but it's **fully settled**; look at v. 18: <sup>18</sup>**"And to the angel [pastor] of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire' (This means Jesus sees everything—he sees through our games we play, masks we wear, and sin we try to hide), and whose feet are like burnished bronze** (This represents the strength, stability, and judgment of Jesus. Jesus stands firm, steady, and ready to stamp out sin that opposes his holiness). And his current gaze is set on **Thyatira** ... Thyatira was a small working-class city, but big on **business** and **industry**.

- To succeed, you had to join these **trade guilds/unions**. The problem was that those guilds required **participating in pagan rituals and immoral feasts**.
- If you refused, you'd be shunned. Basically, nobody would do business with you ... which means there was a real, tangible cost to staying faithful to Jesus and *not* participating in these things.
- (Interesting side note: In **Acts 16**, we meet a woman from Thyatira, **Lydia**, who is a *"dealer of purple cloth."* She gets saved under Paul's preaching and helps plant this very church we're looking at. **Lydia likely felt the hit to her business when she began following Jesus!**)

Jesus says to Thyatira: <sup>19</sup>*"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance* (That's a pretty awesome list of things for Jesus to say about you!), *and that your latter works exceed the first.*" This was a model church in so many ways!

<sup>20</sup>**But** (GROWTH OPPORTUNITY TIME!) *I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess* (I love Jesus's sarcasm here: He's like, *"Just so you know: God didn't call her a prophet ... the church didn't call her a prophet. Nope, **this is a self-proclaimed influencer** ... and her content is terrible, cuz she's)* *and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.*

Scholars are divided as to whether, here in Revelation 2, Jezebel is referring to an **actual person in this church** who's acting as Jezebel and causing division, or whether it's **the spirit of Jezebel** that's present ... but either way, **Jezebel WAS a real person at one time**: She was King Ahab's **idolatrous** and **wicked** queen ... a **greedy, murderous, evil** woman.

- *That's why nobody today would dare name their daughter Jezebel. If someone calls you a "Jezebel," that's not a compliment.*

Balaam seduces with **compromise**.

Nicolaitans **normalize** it.

And now, Jezebel **sanctifies** it.

It's a progression: from **temptation** to **acceptance** to spiritual **justification**.

Because here's the thing about Jezebel: She never actually tried to convert people away from God. The spirit of Jezebel isn't trying to **pull you into atheism** ... it's just trying to convince you that **Jesus doesn't mind if you keep a little Baal on the side**. She whispers, *"Bro, you can serve God ... and still hold on to this."* It's the voice that says:

- *Overworking and idolizing your career while neglecting your family is fine ... after all, you've gotta provide, right? That's what God would want for your family most! Keep your God ... just add the idol of work.*

- *Look, nobody actually waits anymore. God knows your heart—what matters is you love each other. Keep Jesus ... just add a little “wordly wisdom” to how you date; it’s no big deal.*
- *It’s just a show. It’s just music. It’s not like you actually believe that stuff ... it’s just entertainment. Keep Jesus ... you’re free to binge whatever you want. It doesn’t really affect you, right?*
- *You can have Jesus ... and the hookup.*
- *You can have Jesus ... and the gossip.*
- *You can have Jesus ... and the excessive drinking.*

That’s the Jezebel spirit. She doesn’t scream, “Walk away from God!” ... just, “Add this idol to him ... it’s no big deal.”

But Jesus makes it clear: He’s not OK with that. So let’s talk about what compromise really does—and why Jesus takes it so seriously. So here’s what I wanna do—I wanna make this incredibly practical by giving you **five spiritual truths that every believer needs to know about compromise**. A few of these I take from a pastor named **Chuck Swindoll**; some others I’ve added myself. Here’s the first one (and the most serious one):

### 1. **Compromise puts you in opposition to God**

When tolerance or compromise means **refusing to call sin what it is**, we’ve crossed a line Jesus never asked us to cross. And when we cross that line, **we stoke the righteous wrath of God**. And if that’s a terrifying thought, *it should be*.

The danger of tolerance and compromise is that, over time, it **numbs us to conviction**. That’s what happened to Thyatira: <sup>21</sup>**I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.**

Unchecked tolerance and compromise doesn’t just soften convictions; it **puts you in opposition to God**. And when grace is rejected, judgment follows: <sup>22</sup>**Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed** (*You love an unclean bed? Alright then, I’ll give you one*), **and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation** (If you sow sin, you reap death ... for the wages of sin is death), **unless they repent of her works,** <sup>23</sup>**and I will strike her children dead** (assuming the children will follow in the way of her false teaching). **And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.**

Church, **the judgment of God is real . . . but so is his mercy**. Over and over again, Jesus offers mercy IF WE WILL REPENT.

- The gospel is this: Yes, compromise puts you in opposition to God, but repentance puts you back under his grace.

- **2 Peter 3:9:** “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
- If you find yourself in opposition to God today, I have one message for you: REPENT and CALL UPON THE LORD. And if you do, **Romans 10:13** says you will be saved.
- Even in your sin, your rebellion, your compromise, your sinful tolerance, **if you will repent, then** Jesus stands ready, arms open, sword drawn—not to destroy you, but to cut away what’s killing you as he welcomes you as a son/daughter!

Listen: You don’t fight compromise by trying harder. You fight it by repenting and turning back to Jesus, who already won the fight for you.

## 2. Compromise never occurs quickly (so you hardly notice)

Let me tell you how I eat cake.

- I never cut myself a big slice. That would feel ... excessive. So instead, I just take a bite.
- Then a few minutes later, another bite.
- Then I’m walking through the kitchen again—one more bite.
- And by the end of the night, I haven’t had a *piece* of cake ... I’ve had two whole rows. **Just one innocent bite at a time.**

**Compromise doesn’t begin with a whole slice ... it begins with a bite of something you tell yourself doesn’t count.**

- It’s subtle. It’s quiet. It feels harmless.
  - *Just one **glance at that girl** ... I mean, I’m not doing anything, just looking.*
  - *Just one **look at that website**. Who is it hurting?*
  - *Just one little white lie **to my parents** ... it’s not even that big a deal.*
  - *Just **skipping my tithe** this month ... it wasn’t a great financial month. God will understand.*
  - *Just **exaggerating my story** a little bit to make myself look better. Why’s that a big deal?*
  - *Just one **comment** ... one **look** ... one **taste** ... one **exception**. Just this once ...*
- But you realize, nobody wrecks their life in one decision. Nobody drifts from Jesus in one moment. It happens slowly ... secretly ... one bite at a time. Until one day, you look up and wonder, *How did I get here?*

Compromise is rarely an outright denial, but usually more of a drift. And that’s why Jesus sounds the alarm in Revelation 2—because **what you don’t confront now can destroy you later.**

### 3. Compromise always lowers the original standard

Compromise often begins with **good intentions**—trying to make God’s truth “more accessible,” trying to be “more relevant” or “more flexible.” But in doing so, we don’t elevate the truth; we end up watering it down and lowering his standard in the process.

C.S. Lewis said we need to think of **doctrines like maps** ... think about how you use a map (or GPS): **You don’t wait until you’re lost to check it ... you set the destination before you pull out of the driveway.**

- I’ll jump straight to the punchline: **If you don’t set the destination ahead of time, don’t be surprised when you end up somewhere you were never meant to go.**

The moment you start ignoring God’s maps (HIS WORD)—tweaking, adjusting, or deleting parts that feel inconvenient or that you don’t like—you’re not just taking a detour; you’ve lowered the standard.

That’s what compromise does: It trades **“This is what God has said”** for **“This is what feels easier, safer, or more acceptable to me.”**

- And the more you do it, the lower the bar gets ... until one day, your Christianity no longer looks anything like Christ.

*So how do you resist lowering the standard in your own life? How do you hold the line when the pressure to bend is constant?* You PRE-DECIDE. You **choose the destination before** the moment of pressure. You say, *“If God’s spoken, the standard’s already set. I don’t move the line ... I just walk in it.”* Here’s how that looks practically:

- **The first thing I do each day is spend time with God.** Non-negotiable. Not news or notifications, but starting each day with the words of LIFE in his Word.
- **Pre-decide what to do with your money:** First 10 percent goes to God, period. He gets our first and best, period. It’s not up for debate.
- **Pre-decide you don’t do gossip.** If it’s not mine to say or solve, I’m out.
- **Pre-decide that if you’re gonna be on social media,** you won’t be on it more than you’re in God’s Word or actual physical community.
- **Pre-decide you are going to reserve the gift of sex for marriage as God has designed.** Don’t wait until you’re alone, late at night on the sofa, “watching” Netflix ... if you wait until then to pray, you’re done.

Friends, the standard’s not ours to **set**; it’s ours to **submit** to—that’s why we call him LORD. Where God has set the standard, we don’t negotiate with it; we walk in it.



#### 4. Compromise is seldom offensive (cuz it's perceived as "loving")

One of the things that makes compromise so sneaky is cuz it doesn't always look like rebellion. Especially in relationships, one of the ways **compromise** loves to dress up is as **compassion**.

- It sounds like *"I just don't want to push them away,"* or *"Who am I to judge?"* But let's be honest, it's usually not **humility talking**; it's **fear** of being seen as "intolerant."

Now, hear me: **There's a kind of tolerance that's biblical**. A kind of tolerance that allows space for people to wrestle, grow, and even disagree on non-essentials ... the Bible calls that **compassion** and **patience**.

But that's not what's happening here with these two churches.

- This wasn't compassion for sinners; this was tolerance of sin.
- This was a church that had good **works**, real **love**, and growing **perseverance** ... but it had grown soft on truth.

See, this is what **compromise does: It blurs the lines.**

- We start confusing **loving someone** with **approving of their choices**.
- We stay silent to "keep the peace," but silence becomes **agreement disguised as kindness**.
- What starts as **empathy**, compromise turns into **endorsement**.

That's not **compassion** or **patience** ... that's **toxic empathy**. It's empathy that has lost its spine.

Real, Jesus-like empathy never prioritizes someone's **temporary comfort** over their **eternal condition**. Jesus never avoided hard conversations. Now, to be fair, he never **weaponized** truth (some of y'all need to hear that—you could use some **grace** with your **truth**) ... but he never **watered** it down either. Yes, we should share the truth *in love*, but we should still share the truth.

If we want to love people like Jesus, we don't just sit with them in the pit or in their sin—we **lovingly call them out of it**.

And when we compromise in this way, it leads straight into the last danger:

#### 5. Compromise causes us to lose our witness

When we compromise with the world, we may gain its **approval**, but we **lose our distinctiveness** and **dull our witness**.

The church's power isn't in being *perfect*; it's in being *different*.

- Jesus said we're to be the **light of the world**, a **city on a hill**.
- But you can't **call people out of darkness** while **dimming your own light** through compromise.
- You cannot win the world by becoming like it.
- **Charles H. Spurgeon**: *One reason the church has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.*
- *When the church starts to look like the world, it stops having anything the world actually needs.*
- When the church begins to **look, sound, think**, and **act** just like the world, we lose our credibility to speak to the world.
  - If we **chase success** like the world ... **redefine truth** like the world ... **tolerate sin** like the world ... why would the world listen to church?

When we choose to **compromise** and **excuse sin** under the banner of “freedom” or “tolerance” or “everybody’s doing it,” we’re preaching with our lives something that contradicts what we say with our lips.

If we lose what makes us **distinct**, we lose our ability to make a **difference**.

## CONCLUSION

<sup>24</sup>But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup>Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup>and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup>And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Netflix just dropped a documentary about one of the most infamous cruise disasters in recent history. It’s what is now known as (wait for it) **The Poop Cruise**.

Back in 2013, the Carnival Triumph left port like any normal cruise: blue skies, elated passengers, unlimited buffets, flowing drinks, giant slides and pools. From the outside, everything looked perfect.

But deep below deck, something no one could see caught fire in the engine room, burning through all of the power lines.

- And when the power went out, so did everything else ... including the plumbing ... for 4,500 people, on a boat, stuck in the middle of the ocean.

And what ensued over the next FOUR DAYS as they were stranded was absolutely disgusting: As toilets overflowed, sewage began backing up into cabins, pouring into hallways, sloshing down stairwells.

- With the air conditioning dead, the food rotting, and the bathrooms overflowing, people were sleeping on deck, building tents out of sheets just to survive the smell.

Here's what's wild: The ship was still afloat. If you saw it from a distance, it still looked like a cruise ship.

- But inside? It was broken, miserable, and toxic.
- *It didn't sink ... but everyone on board knew this isn't how a cruise is supposed to be! And it wasn't caused by a **storm** or an **iceberg** or **pirates** ... it was what was broken on the *inside*.*

Listen to me—that is exactly what Jesus is warning these churches about. And it's exactly what he's warning you and me about.

The greatest threat to your faith isn't the enemy around you—it's not **culture**, it's not what's *out there*; it's the compromise, the sin, it's what you tolerate *in here*.

You might be able to float like that for a while and look the part from a distance: You can still **show up to church, sing the songs, go through the motions**. But inside? The joy starts to drain ... the peace starts to rot ... the presence of God feels distant.

- And you start realizing it's because something has broken down in the engine room of your soul ... and the match that lit the flame was compromise.

This is why Jesus says, "*Repent. Hold fast. Overcome.*" Because he loves you too much to let you drift like that. He loves you too much to let compromise poison **what he died to redeem**.

And the good news? You don't have to stay stuck in the mess.

- There's still a Savior who restores.
- There's still a Savior who redeems.
- There's still a Savior who casts our sin as far as the east is from the west.

- He doesn't shame you for the sewage in your life ... he invites you to himself, where he promises to fix what's broken, clean out what's poisoning you, and welcomes you back to the life you were made for WITH HIM.

## OPEN ALTAR

**I wanna give you some time with the Spirit to process where you might be compromising or tolerating sin in your life.**

- The altar is open ... come pray; repent ...
- By yourself. With somebody. Maybe as a family or as spouses.

We'll put a verse on the screen to help you reflect, repent, and return your heart to Jesus.

- **Psalm 86:5:** "For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you."

You do business with God.

In a few minutes, our teams will come lead us.