

Dear Church: The 7 Letters of Revelation

In March 1966, Dr. King gave a speech at Southern Methodist University on the topic of creative maladjustment. He was riffing on the common language about living a well-adjusted life, and he was a bit startled by that. He would suggest that we actually need to be maladjusted in quite a few different ways.

He was talking about the good and necessary work of not adjusting to the injustices of our time, and of having a creative resistance. He never intended, nor did he want us to succumb to the adjustment to that which is wrong in the world, to not grow comfortable with the status quo.

One of the things we talk about in Dr. King's life is that he lived in contrast to his time and, to some extent, still does in ours. The vision he had of the church, this beloved community, as he would call it, was one that would exist within the world and, by its existence, would almost prophetically call into question the broken world around it.

That is maladjustment. The fundamental temptation that he was speaking against in many of his works. I encourage you to read "I Have a Dream" and "Letter From Birmingham Jail," a prophetic word to the church that still resonates today. What so much of his work was speaking against was the fundamental temptation that we as followers of Jesus have, which is to not allow Jesus to shape every part of our lives. There's a tendency for us to want to sequester Jesus in one part of our lives. Primarily, what we're doing now, the Sunday morning aspect of our life. We'll let Jesus shape that, but will we allow Jesus to shape every other area of our lives?

G.K. Chesterton, in the first chapter of his biography of St. Thomas Aquinas, and also in his book, *Francis of Assisi*, talks about these two saints of the day who had contradicted their own particular times. Chesterton says this, "It is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most." For so many of us, we walk in our faith trying to just ease into our lives, to shy away from the distinctiveness of what it means to follow Jesus. But Chesterton's point is pretty salient. It's the reason we celebrate so many of these figures throughout history, like Dr. King. It was his life that contradicted his generation that ultimately brought about its conversion or at least moved the needle further down the road.

The way of Jesus has always been a contradiction, a paradox. The invitation is to live a life of quiet contrast to the world. It's in that contrast that we find our identity, that we live as the kingdom of God, right in the midst of this world that in some ways contradicts the world around us.

We're in the middle of a seven-week series entitled Dear Church. It's a series where we're looking at chapters 2 and 3 in the Book of Revelation. John the Revelator, the Apostle John, wrote this letter with the words of

Jesus, seven letters to seven different churches in their particular time. He is addressing the issues or challenges that they were facing to be faithful to the way of Jesus in their moment.

This morning, we are looking at the church in Pergamum. Will the Church of Pergamum allow Jesus to shape every aspect of their lives? In some ways, what we find from Pergamum is that you can confess the name of Jesus while still being deeply shaped by the way of the world. And Jesus has a strong critique against that church.

We've moved from last week, where we were talking about Smyrna, the persevering church, and we saw Jesus as quite pastoral and caring and had no critiques for a church that was suffering, that was just trying to endure. The tone shifts a bit in this letter. Jesus comes with a much sharper critique, a sharper judgment against the church in Pergamum that was compromising its allegiance. That was smudging its distinctiveness. They were allowing Jesus to shape one part of their lives, but not the whole.

Like most first-century cities, Pergamum was a thoroughly religious city. It was consumed with rival gods. They had temples to Athena, Asclepius, Isis, and Zeus. I mean, to walk down the streets of Pergamum would've been to walk down a gallery of temples to various gods. They would've been immersed in this religious time. On top of that, Pergamum, like Ephesus and Smyrna, was in a competition for who could be the most loyal to the Roman Empire, and so they, too, were a center for the Imperial Cult.

It was an influential city where political power resided. The temples were constructed to support the Imperial Court cult, the worship of Caesar, and there was a string of Caesars at the time. Whether it was Trajan, Domitian, or Augustus, or whoever it was, the Caesar of Rome would claim a "son of God" status.

They would institute laws that you must affirm that Caesar is Lord. It doesn't take much of our imagination to see the way that puts this early church in contrast to its particular time. And what we find in Pergamum is that the temptation for the church was to accommodate the empire, to worship Caesar or Athena or Zeus or any of these other gods and then enjoy everything that came with it.

Because if you proclaim Caesar as Lord, that came with a lot of benefits, with a lot of stability, a lot of wealth, and luxury. And it's to this church where the pull towards accommodation was around every corner. They were swimming in religious waters, and there was a pull to coalesce with the world around them. The way of Rome was always present,

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword" (Revelation 2:12). Jesus identifies

himself just like he does with every letter in a unique way that meets this church where they are at. This is a reference back to Revelation 1, which has this profound vision of Jesus. It will startle you. You need to understand the genre we're working with here. Jesus had swords coming out of his mouth and all sorts of gleaming light. Jesus chooses to bring the church in Pergamum back to this reference.

The sword that Jesus holds is not for the purpose of killing his enemies. That would be counter and contrary to everything we know about the character of Jesus through all of the witnesses of the gospels. Jesus is not one who kills his enemies. He is the one who is killed for his enemies.

So what's happening here? Well, it's important to note that the sword is coming out of his mouth. This is an illusion that Jesus is the one who ultimately will be the carrier of judgment. Jesus is the one who will ultimately judge the world, church, and us. He is the one who holds this judgment, and that experience is similar to being on the other end of a double-edged sword. It is sharp, and it is specific.

Now it's important for us to understand that Jesus is the one who holds the ultimate judgment for two reasons. It's very easy in our day and age to succumb to the temptation of wanting to "judge" the world around us. Church, that is not our job. That is the job of Jesus. It is not our role to judge the world around us. Rather, we faithfully live as a contrast community, and somehow that sharpens what we understand about what it means to follow Jesus. It draws stronger lines that allow the world to know who the world is and who the church is.

But we must always know that Jesus is the one who will judge the world. He will judge the church, and he will judge us. And every time we try to take that role and usurp the authority of Jesus, we are stepping beyond our bounds. That is not the authority in which we hold. Our task is to live faithfully into the way of Jesus.

But secondly, it's important to know that Jesus is the one who judges the world, the church, and us. Some of us need to know that the judgment of others is also not on us. The people who may experience some of that judgment, it is not their role either. Rather, Jesus alone is the one who will judge, and we as the church get to rest secure in that we live into that reality. Let's continue,

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, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives. Revelation 2:13

Jesus is quite aware of the circumstances that Pergamum is facing. If you go back, Jesus says something to this effect in every letter. To Ephesus, he said, I know your works. I know your deeds. To Smyrna, he said, I know your affliction and your poverty. To this church, he says, I know where you live. And then he says, "Where Satan has his throne, where Satan lives." He names him twice. It's likely that this is just referring to the hold that all of these different cults had over the city, both the imperial cult and the worship of other gods.

John and Jesus are trying to get us and the church in Pergamum to realize that there are forces taking place within that city that we cannot see. There is something beneath the surface. This devil, this demon, the deceiver, the father of lies, that is at work within the city. Now, when I say that in 2026, some of you have already written me off. I'm guessing there are two responses to the idea of the world that is unseen. For some, we've been so shaped by rationalism and modern imperialism that we can't imagine anything beyond what we can see, touch, feel, smell, or taste. If it doesn't exist within our five senses, it must not exist.

To use a counterexample, how would you then defend love, which you can't quite see, taste, touch, or feel? You can't put it in a petri dish and experience it. There are, in fact, things in our world that are beyond the scope of what we've seen, and Jesus and John are saying that there is something going on in this city that cannot be seen.

There are also some of you, on the other end of the spectrum, who happen to see demons behind every single bush. On Friday, the power went out at my house, my alarm clock didn't go off, and all of that. Some of you might see the devil as owning the power supply or grid. It's like, well, maybe we just need to let PG&E figure it out. It'll be okay. It's those of you who, when the screens go out, are binding in the name of Jesus. We just need to plug them in. Some of us are on the other end of the spectrum, where we see demons behind every bush, but that isn't quite the right read either. What Jesus and John are trying to get us to see is that there are, in fact, some power sources, principalities and powers, as Paul would call them, that are operating within the unseen world and are shaping things.

Here's why it's important: if we fail to see this, the tendency will be to look at our neighbors as the enemy, and not at the principalities and powers that are unseen. That's why Paul says, in Ephesians, that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers. So what's happening here is Jesus is stating that they live in a contested place in which there are things counter to the way of Jesus that are operative, and he's asking the question of will you be more marked by the love of Jesus or the lust of the world, generosity or greed, contentment or gluttony, kindness or hatred, humility or pride.

So much of our lives are about how we cooperate or partner with these unseen world forces that are shaping us. And Jesus says, I know where you live. But then he has this commendation, "Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me." Apparently, Pergamum had not given up on the name of Jesus. Amongst all the pressure they experienced. They still held to it. They never renounced Jesus' name. And Jesus says that is beautiful. He says, even in the days of Antipas, who is one of the early martyrs in the church world, even though they witnessed that, and they recognized it may cost everything, they remained true to his name. Which means the inverse is possible. It means that there is then a way in which one can try to follow Jesus, and also renounce his name, that somehow that's the tension, and he affirms them for not doing that.

It reminds me of the words in Matthew 7, when Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven,

but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Meaning there is a way in which you can confess the name of Jesus as Lord and yet still be far from him. It’s possible to be Christian in name only. Jesus has harsh words for that. There’s a long history that demonstrates that possibility.

For nearly 300 years in church history, from the year AD 1000 to AD 1300, there was a series of military campaigns that were sanctioned and sent by the church called the Crusades. They used force and violence in the name of Christ to try to advance the kingdom, something so far from the way of Jesus. You can be Christian in name only.

On a weekend like this weekend, we’re reminded that the so-called Christian nation that America likes to claim at times has a history and a legacy that is anything but the way of Jesus. It has a history of slavery that is some of the worst the world has ever seen. There’s even more close to home. Just in the past few weeks, we saw another Christian leader and author confess to an affair that has gone on for years, and that’s just one of a litany of examples of moral failings within Christian leaders.

There is a way in which you can confess the name of Jesus and be far from him. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me for the ways in which my life is not fully surrendered to the way of Jesus. Because it is quite possible for every single one of us to be Christian, but to do so in name only. Jesus looks at this church in Pergamum and said, “You have not renounced my name.” This is the point where it would be nice if the letter ended with positivity. But unfortunately, there’s this transition word in verse 14—nevertheless.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. vv. 14-15

The typical structure goes from commendation to critique. That’s what we find here. And Jesus looks at this church and says that although they have not renounced his name, he still holds this against them. And he names two teachings, the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitan.

This is the second reference to Nicolaitans, by the way. For our purposes today, it’s easy enough to see that the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are two sides of the same coin. One is an Old Testament reference, and one is a New Testament reference. We’re going to function as if they’re the same because they operate with the same critiques, namely, eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. So let’s look at the teachings of Balaam.

This is the story that Jesus is referencing from Numbers 20-25. He is saying that they are a bit like that. Balaam was this world-renowned sorcerer. He was in touch with the spiritual realm in some way. He was a prophet against the people of God. He was known for having a connection to this unseen world. And so near the end of the 40 years of

Israel wandering through the wilderness, the Israelite people came to the plains of Moab in this journey. They’re traveling to the Promised Land, and it was there in the plains of Moab that they were almost able to look into that promised land. When they landed there as a large nation, there was a king of Moab named Balak, who was terrified by the threat that the Israelite people posed.

So he has this idea to hire Balaam to curse the people of God, to prevent them from taking over the area. Balaam cooperates with Balak and tries to curse them, but that didn’t work. So they get back together, Balak and Balaam, trying to figure out how to draft a different plan. They essentially said, “We can’t defeat the people head-on by cursing them, but what we can do is entice them and slowly get them to embrace the way of the Moabites.” Because of their failure to curse them directly, that’s exactly what Balaam and Balak did. They enticed them both by alluring them into a different way of being, predominantly through their religious festivals and parading Moabite women in front of them to lure them with sexual immorality.

Slowly but surely, the Israelites slipped into Moabite culture. They were lured away from the way of Jesus. And here’s what’s important. It was slow and methodical. It was likely something they wouldn’t have noticed at first.

What is Jesus’ point here? Why is he using this as the critique? He’s referencing those in that moment and saying, “Pergamum, you are just like that.” You’re living in this wildly religious culture in which the drift is slowly chipping away at your allegiance to Jesus. You wouldn’t renounce me. You’ll still name that you follow Jesus. Yet, slowly, the idolatry and sexual morality of the world around them were chipping away at their faithfulness. They confessed Jesus, but they were rooted in all sorts of different teachings.

In a word, I would call the problem in Pergamum syncretism, and by syncretism, I mean a DIY faith in which you mix Jesus and Sabbath and contemplative prayer and scripture, all the things we love, but you toss in a progressive sexual ethic or conservative nationalism, modern materialism, or you insert your vice of choice.

It’s about Jesus and these things. I want Jesus, but also, a little Buddha and mindfulness, a little whatever. I’m doing my own thing, plus Jesus. This is the great temptation for Pergamum, but may I suggest it’s quite literally the very temptation for you and me as well. There are multiple problems that flow from this but notice first what it does is place you at the center of your worldview. You are now the one who is constructing how you want to live. You are no longer viewing an external authority as the one who should speak into how you live, but rather it goes inward to the self and says, “This is how then I am to live.”

The Christian story teaches that the human soul was created and designed by God to live in orbit around God. For the human soul to flourish, it is not to be placed at the center of the universe, but rather it is to orbit around the teachings of Jesus, which is most commonly what we see through the gospels. The modern materialist, post-enlightenment, humanism of our day, teaches that the human is nothing more than evolved from a mammal, who flourishes most when it obeys

its own voice when it feels or hungers for something. It is not orbiting around God. It's orbiting around the sacred self, and that is where the modern world assumes the flourishing life is.

Syncretism was the temptation of Pergamum. But the temptation of our day is not God or, but it's God and. Do you see the difference? The temptation for us in here is not towards atheism. The temptation for us here is to mix, to DIY, to synchronize our faith with the world around us, to lose our distinction. Put simply, much of the church and the Christian world over, including myself, live in the tension of trying to have our cake and eat it too. We long for and desire to have a little bit of Jesus and a little bit of this or that, failing ever to say Jesus, "You are Lord."

I was reminded of an old blog post I saw years ago by a journalist named Ben Sixsmith. He's not a believer, but he was writing in response to a very popular, charismatic Christian leader who had a very public moral failing. And in that article, he talks about Christianity in the Christian culture, and from his perspective, a non-believer, where he says, it appears that it's like life with a twist of Christianity. He is speaking specifically about the conservative and the progressive side and how, from his vantage point, they both seem to not hold that distinction.

While different in beliefs, [conservatives and progressives] share patterns of thought; the former believe secular individualists mysteriously share God's wishes for what should be done with money, while the latter think that secular progressives mysteriously share God's wishes for what should be done with bodies. So, if Christianity is such an inessential add-on, why become a Christian? I am not religious, so it is not my place to dictate to Christians what they should and should not believe. Still, if someone has a faith worth following, I feel that their beliefs should make me feel uncomfortable for not doing so. If they share 90 percent of my lifestyle and values, then there is nothing especially inspiring about them. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like me." Sixsmith

The ideologies of our day are not new. The temptation to mix Jesus with the way of the world is quite ancient. It's been the temptation, and it continues to be the temptation, not toward atheism and a renunciation of God, but rather it's God and whatever the zeitgeist of the day is. That's always been the blend.

Do you know the story in Exodus when Moses is up on Mount Sinai receiving the ten commandments? And at the base of the mountain, do you know what the Israelites were doing? They were taking all of their gold and were melting it down to shape a golden calf to give themselves to idolatry. Now, that's bad enough. Do you know their justification, though? What they said of the calf was, "This is Yahweh," and then they worshiped the calf as if it were Jesus.

The problem with that is once you bring in and label things that are not God as God, you can justify just about anything. What the people of Israel were doing was taking that idolatry and saying that was Yahweh,

let's worship that. You can sanction and justify any action once you make that move. The temptation to syncretism has been around for a long time. Look at these two texts from Paul in 2 Corinthians. Much of the New Testament is written toward this issue, and I'm not unpacking all of these. But I just want you to see that these were the same issues Paul was facing in that church that we are facing today. Look at 2 Corinthians 11.

And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 2 Corinthians 11:12-15

Paul's looking at this church and saying, "Listen, there are people who are coming into this body claiming the name of Jesus, and yet preaching something utterly different." That's the insidious part of this. In our world, there will be many who claim the name of Jesus, who will assume a particular way of living, and yet their lives will be far from him. They masquerade as angels of light. Church, we must be discerning. We must come with a leading of the Spirit to understand and differentiate between those masquerading as apostles of Christ versus those false teachers. A little earlier in the letter, in 2 Corinthians 10, Paul says this,

By humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" toward you when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 2 Corinthians 10:1-2

The call of Jesus is against the "standards" of this world. One of the temptations we will have is to just blend our faith, life with a twist of Christianity. I want to name four things that lure us at this moment. This will hit a little close to home, so be gracious with me. I do think there are things that we believe in our world around us that we're lured to maybe more than others.

Sexuality

The first one comes straight from this text, and it is sexuality. It's what Jesus in this letter calls sexual immorality. Ever since the sexual revolution, there's been a shift in how we understand our sexuality. In the modern world, it's one that places the sacred self at the center, and that is a fundamentally different posture, not only of sexuality, but of how we understand the world as a whole.

It's the ethos of you, "Do you live your truth?" It is this modern myth that says, if you feel it, you should indulge it. If there is an appetite, it's meant to be satisfied. But the way of Jesus offers a different view of sexual expression, where the way of the world views sexuality through the lens of how do I find my own self-fulfillment, my own pleasure? The way

of Jesus offers something entirely different. It says that your sexuality, yes, is a gift placed within us to be enjoyed, but it is not about you at the center. Sexuality and marriage and relationships, all of that is about the practice of self-giving love to another in the covenant relationship between a husband and a wife. That's the gift that Jesus has offered.

Now, I recognize that it is challenging to do this because we live in a world with an onslaught that views love differently. But what is interesting about Jesus naming, in Revelation, the sexual immorality, and the persistence of this issue through our time is much more than the act. It is the posture of placing the sacred self at the center of your life in whatever capacity. It is a recipe for disaster. It's sexuality that is so intimate and so connected that it feels right. It's complicated and difficult, and sometimes we always want Jesus and a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and it turns the human soul into a consumer. This is the epidemic of pornography. That's saying other people exist for my consumption.

So to be a follower of Jesus is to resist that and say that sexuality is a beautiful gift that's been given to us, but we must submit it to the Lordship of Jesus to understand how it operates appropriately. The point is not to shame those who are different than us or wherever you're at in this topic, but it is the call to repentance that we have to invite Jesus to be Lord over every aspect of our lives. It's the issue that was faced in Pergamum, chipping away at a slow drift from the way of Jesus. But the kindness of the Lord will call you to repentance, and it's us as followers of Jesus who believe that it is the way of Jesus that offers a life that is flourishing.

Power

The second one is power. I believe in our age, we are all lured in our tumultuous time, our polarized time, to assume and take the posture of the world around us that says, power over others is the way to the good life. Decades ago, a pastor turned cultural commentator, Lesslie Newbigin, who was writing about the increasingly secularized West, said that it would not be that secularism would denounce God or that the divine would cease to exist. But it would be transferred onto what he called the political religions.

Here is where there's a word more for those on the right, who are in a season where the church is being caught up in what many call Christian Nationalism. It's a lie that seeks to assume power over others that is counter to the way of the cross, to assume that is how you advance the kingdom of God. And that is utterly false, Church. Coercive power is not the way of Jesus. Jesus, while on the cross, never took up the means of the political apparatus to bring about his kingdom.

Whatever it meant for the church to be the church, it did not mean you disengage. That's why this weekend with Dr. King is such a gift for us, if we listen to his prophetic words. It's a way where we exist as that alternative community. Not giving into the ideologies of the nationalism on the right or the expressive individualism of those on the left, and that's a binary. It's certainly more complicated than that. But in either of those, when we chase after that, we diminish the way of Jesus into something

less than Jesus' universal kingdom of God, understanding that it is not power over, but power under.

We have been called to be a foretaste of the peaceable kingdom of God. Therefore, we must maintain ourselves, never giving in to the violence and the power politics of our day, but resisting that and saying, "We are here to love and to serve the community around us." Even as in the days of Antipas, the faithful witness, it may cost us a lot, we must come to understand that this is the task of the church. The first task of the church is to be the church. And by being the church, we allow our witness to be stronger to the world around us.

Materialism

We are lured by materialism. We need to move from a thing-oriented world to a person-oriented world. More and more, we are being possessed by our possessions. It's one of the shadow sides of living in one of the richest countries the world has ever seen. The structures of the world around us conspire to set the individual at the center to then say, "My life is about what I can consume, so I should live and let live, earn the most money I can, and then turn that all inward." This is something that just seeps into our hearts and souls, but that is to dehumanize others. It's to turn them into things, not people.

The invitation to the way of Jesus is to live with open hands. And can I just pause and say it has been a joy to watch you all do this well? I have witnessed the way that you have, with your time, talents, and treasures, taken on the call of Jesus to live with that posture. It has been beautiful. I'm so proud to be a part of this community, and in many ways, you are leading me! Like sexuality, materialism is built on the assumption that the self is the center, the anchor point for which all of life revolves.

Contempt

The fourth one is contempt. As followers of Jesus, we are never to resort to violence. We are never to resort to contempt, which is something deeper than anger. In the Sermon on the Mount, we talked about that distinction. Contempt is the refusal to uphold the dignity of another's humanity, regardless of their actions. Contempt is the insidious refusal to maintain decency and respect for the other.

It generally manifests in anger, slander, and name calling—dismissive language. As many therapists and psychoanalysts are saying, "We live in the age of rage." It's a constant. It's a spirit that's consuming our time. A contempt towards the right people is not just socially accepted, but it's encouraged. A way of signaling our virtue is to "other hate," and it has become a currency. It is a way to make sure you are in the right crowd. It's fitting that Dr. King would speak so well against this. He said,

Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter...Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

He says that's what you'll reap if you give in to this age of rage. Church, do not let contempt for another take root in your heart. It's an insidious evil that will destroy you and will destroy others. I return to the quote we mentioned at the beginning. "It's the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most."

There are many, many more issues than the four I named. But I do believe that for us, as followers of Jesus, this is a pretty good start on how we can contradict these things of our generation, and may the Lord then use it. Salt, that example that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount, preserves beef for meat, not because it's like the beef, but because it's quite the opposite. That's the whole point of it. Our moment, I believe, is a moment of quiet faithfulness. I'm more convinced than ever that we are the generation that must just faithfully live out our way.

We need to learn how to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Our witness in our time must use fewer words, primarily because our words will not be taken seriously until we, as followers of Jesus, learn to take the words of Jesus seriously. We have failed in that, and the onlooking world says that if I have 90 percent of the virtues and values you have, why would I want to be a Christian? It seems to be the same. May we be the generation that faithfully lives in a quiet alternative community.

This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." It's the idea that we can live and take on the benefits of Jesus without ever preaching the forgiveness and repentance. It's baptism without church discipline, it's communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is trying to receive the love and grace of Jesus without the discipleship, grace, and the cross. How can it be possible that within the same life you can have naming and proclaiming the name of Jesus and yet not submit to the lordship of Jesus?

The answer to this is in verse 16. That's where Jesus leads this whole thing. He doesn't leave them without a solution. He says,

Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. vv. 16-17

See the antidote for Pergamum and for us is repentance. That rethinking of all that we understand about the world, in light of who Jesus is as Lord. The repentance for us and for Pergamum is to say, "We have been mixing this faith syncretized with the world around us." The rethinking that was necessary for them is to realize if they submit to Jesus as Lord, it means for every aspect of their lives. He calls us back to that repentance. Never forget that the kindness of God is what does that, because

his vision of life is where we find flourishing. Then he offers these two hopeful things.

He says to the one who is victorious, meaning the one who repents and returns to him, he will give you hidden manna and a new name written on a white stone. The manna from Exodus was the daily sustenance that the Lord provided to his people as they wandered the wilderness, trying to figure out what it meant to follow Yahweh. He is saying that he will sustain us day after day. Jesus knows where you live. He knows it's hard, and you haven't renounced his name, and as you walk the road of repentance, he will give you the hidden manna. He will sustain you in this journey. He will give you a new identity, a new name that only you will know, this intimate connection with God. He says the invitation is there. It's for all of us.

One of the most haunting lessons that we can learn from the church in Pergamum is the deception of the self. It doesn't say it explicitly here, but I wonder how many of those in Pergamum assumed that because they had never renounced Jesus, they were walking in the way. But when they heard the strong words, they thought, "I had no idea." The heart is bent towards self-deception. It's very easy for us to assume that we have it all figured out. It's why you need to slow down and reflect and listen to the voice of God, discerning where Jesus is leading. This will help you stay sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. That's the invitation back.

The beautiful thing is, although Pergamum had not renounced Jesus' name, the gospel also declares that Jesus will never renounce our name. He is always there, ready to bring us and welcome us back. He will not renounce your name. Week after week, he has the opportunity to, and he refuses to do so.

Now, I recognize, I've said some things today that may have offended you. My prayer leading up to this has been that if there was offense, it would not be to my bias and pride, which I know exists within me. I am a paradox of belief. But my prayer has been that whatever offense it was, it might be the voice of Jesus over myself. I pray over us as a community that we are being brought back into the presence of Jesus to say, "Lord, could we find a way to follow you in the world that we live?"

May we be the generation that contradicts the world around us, that espouses the way of Jesus in the midst of a world that seeks its opposite.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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