

# War Of Words

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Preacher: Dylan Marais

[ 0 : 00 ] Compromise. Compromise. The idea of compromise. An interesting concept. Depending on the situation, compromise can be good and required, or very bad, and can result in massive complexities and even death.

So I guess on the one hand it's important to be able to compromise, especially if you're married. Just to keep the wheels of your relationship working.

You can't always get your way all the time, although you try. In the modern world we've got to compromise in some ways because, well, we're not all the same.

We've got to give in and give and take. We can't always get what we want in the modern world. But on the other hand, if you're in a war situation, compromise is not only not wanted, it's actually treason and traitorous.

Because it's clearly defined who you are and who your enemy is. And so the little church in Pergamum is called to not compromise because they're surrounded by their enemy and their enemy wants them.

[ 1 : 23 ] And in fact, the enemy has infiltrated their ranks. And they've got to watch out because treason is now on their doorstep. It's in their company.

And so we're going to look at the letter to the church of Pergamum today. And, you know, they're surrounded by seemingly overpowering pagan realities.

Pergamum was an incredibly large city. It's north of Ephesus in the land of Turkey, modern-day Turkey. And it had one of the wonders of the ancient world.

It had this huge temple to the god Zeus that looked like this giant throne. It could be the reference to what John is talking about, about Satan having his throne where the church of Pergamum lives. But not only that, you know, in some towns, the temples are small. They're a little out of the way. They, you know, you'd go down to the stream and there were some trees.

[ 2 : 29 ] And that's where you used to go and do your, the pagans would meet and do whatever they did. But in Pergamum, in big cities like Pergamum, if you stood in Pergamum, you'd be surrounded, like surrounded with these huge, impressive architectures, all these temples to all the gods, primarily to Zeus.

But then there'd be one to the emperor. And as you're walking, doing your daily business, you're going to have to interact with all these different temples and gods.

And especially the one to the emperor was the most important because he held the power of the sword. He was the only one that said, if you don't bow to me, your life is forfeit.

Other gods were like, yeah, that's fine. You can have us as your gods. You don't have to have us. But the emperor wanted allegiance from everyone. And as we've seen in the past, the whole book of Revelation really is a battle manual.

There's a cosmic war going on. It was kicked off by Jesus arriving on the scene by his death and resurrection. And as we saw in our Isaiah reading, for the first time in history since Christ arrived, Satan's kingdom is being plundered.

[ 3 : 55 ] I don't know if you caught that in Isaiah reading. Let's go back there first before we dig into Revelation. So just turn with me to Isaiah 49. But this sets the scene for this massive cosmic battle and this little church in Pergamum is caught up into it.

They're part of this big story about Jesus saving the world. But he's saving him from someone. And that someone is evil. And that's Satan.

So Isaiah 49. Just the first few verses. Listen to me, you islands. Hear this, you dissonations. So it talks about this figure. Before I was born, the Lord called me.

From birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. In the shadow of his hand he hid me. He made me into a polished arrow. He concealed me in his quiver. There's this figure.

You're not quite sure who it is. Israel says it's them. But it's a figure of war. There's someone with a sword. And someone who's like an arrow. Those are the only things you use at wartime.

[ 4 : 59 ] So God is getting someone ready to start a war. This is back in Isaiah 49. Now of course that refers to Jesus. What is he going to do, this figure?

What's going to happen? Well God says in verse 5 and onwards. He says this, actually from verse 6.

He says, you know something? I'm going to start a war. But it's not just for my people Israel. They're too small. I'm going to start a worldwide war.

I'm going to fetch captives. And free captives from the whole world. Not just my people in Israel. So verse 6 he says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant.

Meaning Israel. To restore just, in inverted commas, the tribes of Jacob. And bring back only those of Israel that I have kept. That's too small.

[ 6 : 03 ] I've got bigger plans, says God. Yeah, I want them. But I also want the whole world. I will also make you, verse 6, in the verse 6, A light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

You see that this warrior that God has set up to free his people, and in Isaiah's time, they were just about to go off to captivity in Babylon. So they're waiting for someone to come free them. And he says, Yeah, I'm going to free you, but you're looking too small.

I'm going to free the world. So have a look down in verse 8. In the time of my favor, the Lord says, In the time of my favor, I will answer you.

In the day of my salvation, I'll help you. I'll keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land, okay? And then he's going to say this, verse 9, To the captives, come out, and those in darkness, be free.

And then God is going to provide for them. He'll feed them beside the road and find past on every barren hill. They won't go hungry. They won't go thirsty.

[ 7 : 12 ] The son isn't going to hurt them. And the one who saved them is going to have compassion and lead them beside springs of water. Do you remember Psalm 23?

We'll pick up this echo in Jesus' words later on. And they're going to come from far away. And this is why people are going to be singing God's praises.

Now, this Isaiah 49 has actually come true in our little congregation today. We were literally singing God's praises for saving us.

And thanking him for the person that he sent, this person with a two-edged sword and an arrow, this mighty warrior that's pilfered us from the dominion of Satan and caused us to be his people.

But of course, Satan doesn't like that. He's going to kick back. He's going to fight back. He wants his possessions. And he wants them for himself. And this little church in Pergamum is facing the full weight of Satan.

[ 8 : 15 ] It seems to be a really bad place where they're staying. So let's go back to Revelation 2. All of that was just to put us in the context of this mighty cosmic battle that this little church finds himself caught up in.

And Satan doesn't... He wants them back as he does all his possessions. Now imagine a big armed tussle between Jesus and Satan and who's going to win that particular battle.

But he's still going to try and fight. And he's got two tricks that he's going to try here in our letter to the church in Pergamum. He says this.

Verse 14. Revelation 2, verse 14. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you. You have people there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food, sacrifice to idols, and by committing sexual immorality.

Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. So the one thing that Satan is going to do is he's going to fight the church almost from within the church with words, with really bad teaching.

[ 9 : 42 ] Now the other thing he's going to do is it's a kind of blunt trauma weapon. He's just going to try and kill as many people as he can. And so, for example, in verse 13, he says, listen, Jesus tells the church, I know where you live, where Satan has his throne, but you've remained true, so the

church is doing well.

You haven't renounced your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful servant who was put to death in your city, where Satan lives. So what's going to happen is there's going to be a two-sided war.

On the one hand, Satan is going to try and kill as many people as he can, and on the other hand, he's going to try and get them, he's going to subvert them. If that's not going to work, like any war situation, if a full frontal attack doesn't work, you try a little sneaky side attack, and Satan's sneaky side attack is going to come with words, with bad teachings and bad teachers trying to get us to compromise our loyalty to Christ and compromise with the world around us.

So that's the first point we're looking at today, that this war that the church is stuck in is, because it's a cosmic war, remember Ephesians says our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil, so this war is going to go on with words.

There's going to be a propaganda war going on. So in war, they say, the first casualty is truth. And the same goes for warfare in the spiritual realm.

[11:16] The battle of evil starts with words. Do you remember? Way back in the Garden of Eden? Satan didn't try and kill Adam and Eve, he could have done that, I guess. And he said, no, what did God say?

Did he say this? Well, I've got something better for you to listen to. Not to believe the words of God, but to believe in his words. Not to believe in reality, but to believe in lies.

And so it's no surprise that Satan is still using that tactic in our church in the letter back then in Pergamum as well as today. And the big question facing the church at Pergamum is the same question we face today.

Whose words are we going to listen to? Whose words are we going to hold on to? Here, they had two groups of people coming in to the church and saying, ah, you've listened to John's words, the apostle John, you know, he had nice words to say.

Maybe you've listened to Paul's words, you know, Paul was in that area for a number of years, yeah, he's had nice words to say, but you really want to listen to our words because our words are going to help you like nothing you can't believe.

[12:23] So they were teaching this teaching of Balaam and Balak, the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Now we don't know what the Nicolaitans were teaching, but it seems like there's more than one group, so you've got more than one group popping up trying to divide and conquer essentially.

So the church of Pergamum couldn't have been much bigger than our church today. Maybe, but not much bigger. And so you would have had one little group over here sitting in the front, another little group over there sitting at the back, and then the group that was holding onto John's teaching somewhere in the middle, now, which way are they supposed to go?

But Jesus is warning his church not to compromise their faithfulness to him for anything or any reason.

The compromise here in Pergamum is to succumb to pagan culture, and that's the story of Balaam and Balak. It's in Numbers, you can find it in Numbers, it's this famous story of Balaam and his talking donkey.

We don't have time to go into that, but the interesting thing about that story is that Balaam starts off, well, he's a bad guy, he's a wizard, okay, he's a diviner for hire, but God speaks to him and says, no, I want you to go, but you're only allowed to tell them the words that I tell you.

[13:39] Don't go and make up your own words. And so instead of cursing the Israelites, he was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, Israel had to pass through Moab on their way to the promised land, called by this guy, by the king Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Israelites, and he didn't.

He actually blessed them. So you think to yourself, okay, well, if you read that story, you think, okay, well, why is Balaam in such trouble here? Why is this teaching of Balaam such a bad thing? Well, the thing that happens after he blesses the Israelites is he still wants that money, and he's not getting it because he didn't curse them.

So he comes up with a plan B, and it's recorded later in the scriptures that he got the Moabite woman to go and seduce all the Israelite men, to go sleep around with them, make themselves on trek, look, look them eight, hey man, hey, and then while they're busy with the Israelite woman, which they weren't, with the Moabite woman, which obviously is not allowed, the last time they did something like that was at the golden calf.

this is going to end even worse, the golden calf 3000 died, in this account Moses calls a big meeting, and in his sight, while the whole assembly is there, one of the Israelites grabs a Moabite woman and goes into the tent, and there's that famous story of Phineas who takes a spear and says, no, you guys are not doing this here, and spares them through.

What else they got, the other thing they got them to do was to indulge in pagan worship, it's called the Baal of Peor, and it's a famous shrine in the old, in those days, it doesn't exist anymore, but it was known even amongst the pagans, there was something very dark and weird about this place, very strange, very dark, and the fact that the Israelites were busy there meant, they actually called it the blasphemy of Peor, the pagans, by the pagan standards, there was some really bad stuff, dark stuff happening over there, and Balaam, by making, by paying for money, got them to compromise in their sexual, sexual morality, and spiritually with the Baal at this place, with that idol at this place, and so that's always been the kind of draw card for God's people throughout the Old Testament, to not stay faithful to God, but to waver, and easily waver, because at the time of, as I mentioned, all these temples, those temples were filled, pagan worship was filled with sexual immorality, it's like you would go to the temple, and pay for sexual relations with the people that were there, and it was, it was a total mix and match, you could do anything you wanted, and of course then you're going to eat a meal, which shows you've got fellowship with them, and so so the teachers in the church were saying things like it's permissible to participate in these idol feasts and to engage in sexual immorality, of course they wouldn't have called it that, they would have called it sexual liberation, you know, you're Christians, don't be so dogmatic, don't be so extreme, don't be so divisive, stop forcing people to take sides, don't be so judgmental towards our pagan culture, it's okay to do with your body whatever you want, love is love, we can all get along, you can have a bit of both, you can have Jesus and you can have our God,

[ 17 : 35 ] I mean in the pagan mindset it was the strangest thing, I can't tell you how strange it was for a new group of people to pitch up and say, well, guys, we know the true God of the universe, there's only one God and there's only one Savior and it's Jesus Christ and all these other gods, these myriads of gods that you guys have been worshipping for thousands of years, you need to stop that now, it's just like, why?

We're having so much fun, stop spoiling our fun, Jesus is a way, according to this teaching, but not the only way, they're trying to get the church to hold on to its exclusive truth claims of Jesus, to hold on to exclusive truth claims of Jesus on the one hand and to the lies of Satan on the other, so at the start of the letter, hey guys, you're doing really well, you're holding on, you've remained true to my name, Antipas, you've held on with both hands, tradition has it that he was martyred in what's called the brazen bull, so it's a, you know they worshipped like the idol, the calf, the golden calf, well bulls were prevalent all over the ancient world and they made these things with hot, it was hollow and there's a fire underneath and they take you, stick in the bull, put on fire and roast you alive, so tradition has it that's how Antipas saw his end, but he was steadfast, he didn't change, but these guys, these compromises are like well, you can have Jesus in the one hand and you can have all this other stuff that we offer, that the pagan world offers, that the world offers, you can have that as well, why can't you have both?

Well here's the problem with trying to hold on to two things at once, it's like when you, when you climb into a ship when you go sailing and it's moored to the, to the, to the mooring, to the land, the land is solid and you know what happens when you step onto the, onto the ship, it starts moving and now you, you grab onto the ship on the one hand and you grab onto land but slowly but surely the whole thing slips apart and you, you don't end up anyway, not on the ship, not on the land, you end up, end up in the water because you're trying to hold on to two things that, that don't want to be together, what is Jesus going to do about this situation with these people?

Well he's going to come and judge them, he's not going to leave it, he hasn't saved these people for nothing, he hasn't died for nothing, he hasn't been prophesied since Isaiah's time for nothing, he hasn't been saving thousands of people that by that stage in the ancient world for nothing, he's going to fight and take them back, he's going to come with a, with some strong words, let's have a look in verse 16, he says, repent, repent boys, otherwise I will soon come to you and fight against them with the sword of my mouth, by holding on to compromise, you risk making yourself the enemy, the warlord of heaven your enemy, because Jesus is this mighty warrior with the sword that comes out of his mouth, but he doesn't come with death, the sword represents truth, it represents words because it's coming out of his mouth, he's going to speak through his church, to his church,

to those who want to compromise with worldly culture and he's going to pronounce judgment on all who compromise with the world in this way, and often that judgment is to give what they want, he says, okay, if you don't want to be salt and you don't want to be light, remember the first letter we saw was about being a lamp stand, it's okay,

I'll just snuff out your light and I'll take away your saltiness, remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, he says, you are the salt of the earth, but here's the warning, if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again, it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

[ 22 : 10 ] Those are not words that you want to hear from Jesus' mouth about compromise with the world. Well, there's two main lessons I want us to pick up from this war of words, this war of propaganda, this way of, the way that Satan gets people to leave Christ and follow him.

And the first is that there's no neutral ground in the world, there's no neutral ground in the world. This war that happened because Christ has come and saving people is a total war and there's no neutral ground.

One lie the devil often sells the church and the church often swallows is that culture, the stuff that happens out there in the public realm is neutral, it's not good, it's not bad, you can take your pick. And we kind of buy into that false or bad or wrong definition of religion and we say religion is only inward, it's only a matter of personal opinion and Jesus says no, no, no, this world is mine, the people in this world are mine, the stuff that happens in the world must be reformed according to my word.

You can't just continue doing what you like anymore with your bodies. It's not going to work that way anymore. So we're in a propaganda war with the devil, he's constantly sending out teachings and messages and ideas and strategies to keep the world in bondage to him.

[ 23 : 41 ] We're all being indoctrinated all the time with some form of teaching calling us to compromise faith in Christ and essentially being holy in Christ.

There's no neutrality in God's world. It's his world and he wants it back. Saying that there's neutral ground, the culture out there, is like saying there's an area of creation that's outside of God's claim to be God.

And the way he gets it back is by having his church, that's us, speak his truth into all areas of life, into the area of politics, into the area of economics, into social issues, issues of justice, and particularly how the number one communication tool in the world, the internet, should or shouldn't be used.

That's the number one propaganda tool that Satan has at his disposal and he's using it and he's got it. There's very few Christian operators out there. But this is what Paul writes in Corinthians. He says this, for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

[ 25 : 04 ] We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. So there's no area that we can think of where we're allowed to compromise and say that part of the world is neutral.

We tend to think of politics and the public sphere as neutral. It's not. It's under Satan's control and you can see it more and more as the Christian influence in the world, especially in the West, recedes.

It's chaos times out there now. It's going really bad. We've got to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. So just realize that there's no neutral ground in this war that's happening in the world around us.

And because Jesus says he is who he is and has got authority over every evil stronghold, the next point is important because the other thing that we can learn from this propaganda war, from Pergamum, how is this Pergamum church going to stay strong?

They're going to have to hold on to Jesus and nothing else. The compromises, the false teachers are always going to want you to hold on to Jesus plus something else. So any teaching that is going to attack, undermine, or oppose the uniqueness of the God of the Bible as the one true God, and Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation is by definition, a compromise, is by definition evil, is by definition false.

[ 26 : 47 ] And false teaching is often subtle. It's not totally letting go of Jesus, it's just doing that, holding him with one hand and then trying to hold on to the other things of this world with another

hand. It's the exclusivity of God and Jesus, that's the thing that gets up people's noses the most, even in the ancient world, but in the modern world as well.

But, you know, the Bible is clear, and we know this from our own experience, there's no other name that brings salvation like Jesus. He's the only one that can free you from sin.

He's the only one that can reconcile you to God. He's the one that gives us a spirit of new life and can give us new hope. No one else can do that. Just have a look at what John writes, I think I've got it on the screen there, in John chapter 1, about who this Jesus is and why he describes him as a word, as a message, as something to believe and to hold on to.

John 1, verse 1, we know the words well, but in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that is the light of all mankind. Jesus comes as this word, as this message, but a message of truth and wisdom.

[ 28 : 16 ] He kind of sums up the whole of life. He's summed up in him. In him was life, and he's giving that life to people. He's the one in whom is all meaning and all purpose.

In a world of chaos and meaninglessness and hopelessness, Jesus is the only one to hold on to. It makes any sense and can transform confusion into a solid walk, a solid way.

Confusion into meaning. He's the only one that can make us steady and determined, not just floating through life with no meaning and no goal. But if you let go of holding on to Jesus with both hands and try and get something else, you're devaluing what he offers.

And that other stuff compared to Christ is useless and meaningless. It can't actually do anything for you. The only thing it can do is corrupt and hurt and maim.

we hold on to Jesus with both hands because there's no comparison when it comes to the blessings that can come from him.

[ 29 : 34 ] And that's the last point. Jesus plus nothing else, well, Jesus plus a bit of manna and a white stone and a new name. And you think, okay, now, where's he coming from here?

But this is the best reason for not compromising with culture but holding on to Christ. So why this hidden manna? What's that about? What's this white stone with a new name?

Well, these are the weapons that Jesus gives us to fight against compromise, to fight against looking at the world and thinking that, hey, if I just try that, it's going to be really nice for me to try that. Because when you say that, you're saying that everything that Jesus offers me is not enough. Yeah, I've got him, but I also want a little bit of that over there. And Jesus says, no, I'm enough. I've given you everything you need. You just need to trust me and hold on to me with both hands. So what's this hidden manna all about?

Well, you obviously remember the story from Exodus. It's really food from heaven that sustains God's people on the way to their destination, to the promised land.

[ 30 : 46 ] The imagery of manna reminds God's people that he will give them everything they need in order to make it through the desert to the promised land. You don't even have to look for anything.

God is going to give them exactly what they need. And the manna was yummy. It was delicious.

Like coriander, like wafer biscuits. It was really yummy. And there was an abundance of it.

God just said, I'll give you as much as you need. Whatever you need, take. Jesus does that for us. And interestingly, he uses eating language to describe what we must do with him.

So that we don't feed on ugly things. Pagan, the food at pagan temples, or sexual immorality, we don't feed those appetites anymore.

We've got a kind of a different appetite now. So John chapter 6, Jesus says, I'm the bread of life. The bread of life. This other stuff is going to kill you.

[ 31 : 52 ] It's going to make you sick. Leave it. Come feed on me to get life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is a bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

I'm the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I give for the life of the world. See how much life there is to be had.

If you feed on Christ, of course you've got to feed on him by faith. And just trust in his word and trust him when he says that he will feed you and give you everything you need. That the world tells you and certain Christian groups will tell you, no, we don't need that.

I just need Jesus. It's okay. You guys can eat on that. And then come see me when you're sick. Jesus gives us all we need to feed our souls and to live a life of happiness and meaning and freedom.

We don't have to eat the food that Satan offers. He makes us want to think we're missing out on life, but we're not. True life. True life. Real life. Life that is substantial and that can fix and heal is found in Christ.

[ 33 : 08 ] And then what about this white stone with a name? Well, stones were used for different things in those days. For voting, if you got a white stone, it was political votes, white stones, black stones.

If you were in court, the white stone meant you were free. If you wanted to get into a party, you would take a little white stone. So this is the entrance level. If Jesus gives you this white stone, you've got entrance into the kingdom of God.

But you've got a stone with a name on it. But it's a secret name. So Jesus knows. He says, okay, I've called you guys into this wall.

The enemy is strong. I need to protect you. I need to cover you. I need to make sure that he doesn't know who you are. You go into sort of like an undercover agent mode. To be given a new name is to be given a new identity.

And this is Jesus sort of anti-propaganda, anti-world propaganda, anti-Satan propaganda. Satan says, you belong to him. He says, you're covered in shame.

[ 34 : 16 ] He says, God can never love you. He says, you'll never be enough. Satan says, I'm too strong. Satan says, look at how nice and shiny this stuff is.

Come and eat. Satan says, I've won. Give up hope. Give into despair. Look how big and strong I am. And the church of Pergam looked at all those big temples.

But you get a new identity, a new name in Christ. You become a child of God. You get the name forgiven. You get the name freed. You get the name child of God.

Known by God. Loved by God. Protected by God. Given the spirit. Covered by the blood of the lamb. In other passages, he talks about his pleasure, his delight, and his reward.

So we don't have to give in to despair or give in to fear. Jesus is our reward, our identity, and it's totally new in him. If we stick with Jesus and don't compromise, no matter how tough it gets, no matter how appealing it is to compromise and to join the enemy, Jesus promises to give us the power to stay the course, protect, and provide.

[ 35 : 35 ] No one can snatch you out of his hand, and he'll help us overcome if we stay faithful to him. Let's pray for that. dear Lord Jesus, we are reminded to stay true and faithful to you and not to compromise with bad teaching, Lord.

Help us, Father, to trust in Christ, to hold on to Christ, to trust his word, and to live in our new identity that you've given us as a freed son of God, as someone who's got the bread of life whenever we need it, and to feast on Christ until our journey's end.

Amen.