

Faithfully Witnessing Despite Opposition

Revelation 2:8-17

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

To the Church in Pergamum

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

13 “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. 14 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. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 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.’

Discussion Questions

1. What are reasons that the church was persecuted in the first century? What are reasons that the church is persecuted today? How have you experienced oppression, slander, or mistreatment because of the Gospel?
2. How is the Gospel counter-cultural? In what ways will it upset the normal order of things in our society?
3. What does it take to witness effectively in a hostile culture—that is, a culture that is opposed to the core of the Gospel? What steps can we take to engage a hostile culture, rather than complain about it, in our witness?
4. How did Balaam lead the Israelites into compromise (Numbers 25:1-3, 31:16)? What are ways we are pressured to compromise by our society?

5. What are ways you have attempted to remove compromise from your own life? Which means were effective, and which were not so effective?

6. How can we work at gracefully (that is, in ways that are characterized by God's grace) removing compromise and sin from our body? What does it take to be able to address others from our Church body who have fallen into compromise?

7. What characteristic of Jesus is highlighted to the church of Smyrna (2:8)? What promise is given (2:11)? How does that affect those suffering for their faith?

8. What characteristic of Jesus is highlighted to the church of Pergamum (2:12)? What promise is given (2:17)? How does that shape those tempted to compromise?

Going Deeper

1. What could you do this week to engage your world with the testimony of the Gospel that might run the risk of opposition and harassment from the world?

2. How has compromise snuck into your midst recently, and what might you do to seek to remove it from your life this week?