

Pastor Kyle Mercer
The Worldly Church

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Series: What's Wrong With the Church?
Revelation 2:12-17

BIG IDEA – THE BIBLE NEEDS TO BE YOUR HIGHEST AUTHORITY

God doesn't care if you drink coffee. Okay? That is more than a story of the power of coffee and caffeine; it's a story of the power of Christ and his church. I hope you heard what TeriLyn said. She talked about the pressure. Have you ever felt the pressure? The pressure of religion and what religion makes you do, because it's all about the external. It's all about performing (putting on a show) and pretending (acting like everything is okay), and to perform and pretend you have to minimize.

You have to minimize your sinfulness. You have to minimize God's holiness, and it's overwhelming. So, here's the thing. The good news is what TeriLyn discovered and we hope, if you haven't discovered, you'll discover today. The gospel says you can't be good enough. The only thing you bring to your salvation is the sin that made it necessary.

Here's our hope here. Some of you need to come out of religion. You need to. It's like, "Wake up!" We'll talk about this. Come out of religion. Others of you need to come out of rebellion. Whenever you come out, you come in. You come into the church, the people of God.

Now, this weekend, yesterday (Saturday) and the day before (Friday), we had the first Weekender we've ever had in this building and also the largest Weekender we've had in the history of our church. We had over 200 people here. Isn't that incredible? I'm excited. I hope you're excited. I have some pictures. Listen. The Weekender encourages our staff. It strengthens our serving teams. It deepens our groups.

I'm so excited, because this is over 200 people taking their next step. Listen here. When we moved here... I'm always telling you this story because it's an important

story. I want you to understand. When we moved here, there were 100 of us, and that was a lot. Thirty moved and 70 met, and there was 100. That's the largest launch team in the history of any Summit Collaborative church plant in our church planting network, and there are 75 churches. So we had a massive launch team, 100 people.

We had 200-plus people here this weekend, twice the size of our launch team. I don't know what is about to happen, but get ready is what I'm trying to say. If you've been through a Weekender, you need to get in a group. That's how our church works. You come through the Weekender to get into a group.

Now here's the thing. Whether you went to this last Weekender or you went to any Weekender, we are having Group Connect today after every service, including this service. We're launching 16 new groups. If you are not in a group, you won't get out of this church all that you could.

Listen. Anytime a church gets bigger than 150 people in a worship center (and we've done that), this can no longer be... You're going to be disappointed if this is what you want. This room is a great room. I'm excited about it, but this room cannot be the point and place of connection, care, and community for you anymore. For us at our church it's going to be the Community Groups.

So, we hope you'll take your next step to get into a Community Group. There are options right after this service and every service this weekend. Let's pray, and then we have a lot to talk about, but no service afterward, so if I go a little bit long, it's not that big of a deal. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for our church. I love it. I love to laugh together. We love to celebrate life change. We love when people come out of religion and when they come out of rebellion. We love it when they don't just come out of but they come into the people of God. We thank you that the church is your called-out people who gather on purpose for a purpose.

We just pray that people would take their first step and next step in following Jesus and they would do that the rest of their lives. I thank you for all of the people who came to the Weekender and the way it strengthens our church. It makes us a deeper, wider, stronger church. We thank you for all that. In Jesus' name, amen.

I don't know if you guys like to read. I love to read. One of the books I've read twice in the last year or two is *this* book. It's *The Coddling of the American Mind*. By the way, every time I mention something doesn't mean I endorse everything about it. This is not written by Christians. It's written by two psychologists, and they want to ask the question that a lot of you are asking, especially if you're in your 50s or 60s.

You're like, "What's wrong with my kids?" Right? "What's wrong with this next generation?" They basically are trying to ask the question...*Why are 20-year-olds acting the way they're acting?* I read it twice. It was so fascinating. They basically said there are three major lies that young people believe, and maybe you believe them as well. Here they are. I'll just give them quickly. This isn't what the sermon is about, but this is where we're heading.

The first lie is something like this: "Whatever doesn't kill you will make you weaker." It's the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches and all of human history and wisdom have taught us for thousands and thousands of years. The truth is whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger, but we don't believe that today, so being offended is a virtue. That's where we live.

The second thing is "Everything I feel must be real." It's the emphasis and obsession of emotion over truth. The third lie (they unpack all of these in the book) is there are good people and there are bad people...and you're the good one. You wish life was that simple. I wish life was that simple. The truth is good and evil run right down your human heart and every human heart.

So, here's where we are, guys. The reason I'm talking about this today... If you'll type to or swipe to or scroll to or get there somehow (or if you have an old Bible, open it up), we're going to be in Revelation 2:12, the church at Pergamum. If you write in your Bible or you want to call this sermon something, you can write this down: *good deeds, bad doctrine*.

This church had good deeds (we'll see that in a few minutes) and they had bad doctrine. No church can exist for long with good deeds and bad doctrine because your doctrine will lead to your deeds. See, the reason they were asking, "What do these kids in college believe?" is because they could not believe how they were behaving.

If you want to change how you're behaving, you need to change what you're believing, obviously. If you want to change what you're believing, you need to change what you're going to for your authority. Okay. Let me explain this. Everybody has an ultimate authority from which they get their beliefs. I'll prove this to you. This is why every kid, until they're about 10, believes everything their parents believe.

In fact, they show you a developmental stage of being a kid is you wake up one day (I don't know what age this is...somewhere in middle school) and you have this thought: "Oh my goodness. Other people believe differently than my parents do." Then somewhere in middle school or high school you have *this* thought: "Wait a second. I believe differently than my parents do."

The problem with the church at Pergamum is they were leaving the authority of Scripture. The Bible needs to be our highest authority even though it's not our only authority. The Bible is not our only authority; it is our highest authority. But let me tell you where people today go for authority. There are really only a couple domains you can find to go to authority for.

Here's the first one. We don't do this. Hopefully we'll never do this here in America, but around the world, do you know the most common place to go for authority? The state. You have to understand that for almost all of human history and still most places around the world, the highest authority in the universe for that person or that place is the state.

Raise your hand if you want to live in North Korea. Okay. I didn't think so. You probably don't want to live in China. You don't want to live anywhere where the state is the primary authority. You do not want to live there. I don't even like watching documentaries about it. I'm like, "Get me away from that place."

This is why totalitarian governments... What's the root word of a totalitarian government? *Total*. They want to have total control. What do dictators do? They dictate. Okay. So, in all of human history, basically, the state was the highest authority, but not today. Not here in America. Today it's society.

What do beautiful, rich people believe? That's what a celebrity is: a beautiful, rich person. It's like, "What do they think?" It's like, "Who cares?" This is why politicians every two years, four years, six years... The same politician has a different platform. You're like, "What? You're the same person. Why do you believe different things? Oh, because popular opinion has changed."

You've heard this saying, right? "If you marry the spirit of the age, you'll be a widow in the next." But probably for you it's not the state. For you it's not society. For you it's probably what it is for almost every American. It's the self. It's your three-pound brain and your limited experience on earth.

Some 18-year-old kid shows up to college and is like, "I know what I believe." It's like, "Ten years ago you were 8. End of conversation. You do not know what you believe. You have limited experiences." "I don't know if I feel like that could be true." "Well, in my limited experience..." It's like, "Whatever." We need to recover the authority of Scripture.

00 BACKGROUND: THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM

I want us to go to chapter 2, verse 12, the church at Pergamum. We have to introduce this city. You have to understand the context. Imagine. "All right, guys. Jesus wrote us a letter. Let's read what it says." Here's what it says: ***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"*** I need to talk to you about Pergamum. Each city is different. I want to talk to you about what is unique about this city.

We could say what's unique about this city is that it's wealthy, but so is Laodicea. We're going to get there at the end. This city is wealthy because they created parchment. They were one of the first people to discover parchment. "Oh, you can write on animal skins." This made them very wealthy.

The second thing that's interesting about this city, but not that interesting, is that it was very smart. That happens. Right? As soon as you can write something down, you're going to be smarter than everybody else. They figured out how to write stuff down and store it, so they ended up having the biggest library in all of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)...200,000 books.

Guys, that's a lot of books today. That's an enormous amount of books before you have a printing press. But that's not that interesting. I want to tell you what I think is the most interesting. It affects a lot of what we're going to talk about today if we have time. Pergamum was the Washington, D.C., of Asia Minor. It was the political capital. That means it's where the seat of government sat. That means a lot of people there worked for the government.

Ronald Reagan told us the scariest words you'll ever hear. Right? "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help." It's like, "Get away." This is the first place, at least in the book of Revelation, where the tension between the church and the state is there. How should the church relate to the state? How should the state relate to the church?

I don't have a whole sermon to give on this, but it was simple in the Old Testament because everything was a theocracy. It gets a little confusing. There are different domains. We'll hopefully get there if we have time at the end to talk some about this, but let's see how Jesus shows up at Pergamum.

01 AUTHORITY: JESUS, HIS SWORD, & THE WORD OF GOD

Could you imagine, guys? "Hey, Jesus is here." ***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"*** It's like,

"Why does my Savior have a sword?" This is the shortest description of Jesus to any of the churches in Revelation.

Last week, if you were listening, he was like, "I am the first and the last. I died and I came to life." You're like, "Well, that's super encouraging. Thanks for telling me." This is the shortest and only negative statement about Jesus, his revelation to them, in the seven letters of Revelation. It's like, "Okay. Why does Jesus have a sword?"

Now could you imagine? I don't know. Let's pick on your uncle. Your uncle comes to your house. You know your uncle loves you, right? So, he rings the doorbell, and you have that app, the Alexa app or whatever, and you open it up. You're like, "I wonder who's at the door." You're like, "It's my uncle, and he has a sword." Are you opening the door? No. Probably not. You're like, "He has gone crazy. I don't know why he has a sword."

When somebody shows up with a sword, it should not make us feel that good. In Romans 13, Paul says the government has a sword. What is a sword? Why does it say the government has a sword? Well, this isn't a civics class, but it basically means the ability to use force. That's what the sword means.

Jesus shows up, and he's dressed as an executioner and judge. He's basically saying there are two purposes for the sword. One is judgment. The other is... You can almost think of it like a knife. Like, if you have to go in for surgery, you have to be cut. Sometimes the Word of God, which is the sword, is used to cut in order to heal. By the way, it says the sword is coming out of his mouth. We know this is the Word of God from Hebrews 4 and other places.

Jesus shows up and basically wants to let them know, "Hey, at your church right now there's a war on truth. What are you going to believe? Are you going to remain having good deeds and bad doctrine or are you going to return to Scripture as the highest authority?"

02 COMMEND: WHERE YOU LIVE IT IS HARD TO BE A CHRISTIAN

We'll get there, but Jesus wants to say one good thing. I told you he always says good things, so let's look at what he says. Verse 13: ***"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is."*** Here's what he's saying: "I know it's hard to be a Christian where you live." Did you know that? Did you know certain places...?

Winston, believe it or not (you probably know this), is not a very hard place to be a Christian. Maybe one day. I think I've told you this before, but until 2000, Christianity was viewed as a positive good. Then for a while it was viewed as neutral. "I'm not sure if it's good or bad." Now it's viewed as negative for most people.

What he's saying is "I know where you live. You are in D.C. It's hard to be a Christian there." That's what he's saying. Here's what we know. As soon as I say this, you can think of places. Ready? Watch this. We'll play a game. It's harder to be a Christian the closer you get to three things.

First, a college campus. You can go to a place. You're like, "As soon as I get near the campus, I can't really tell anyone what I believe anymore." Yep. It's harder to be a Christian near a college campus. It's harder to be a Christian near a major city. Well, that makes sense. Some of you are like, "Yeah, it would be pretty hard to be a Christian in downtown San Francisco right now."

It's harder to be a Christian the closer you get to a coast. A *coast*, a *city*, and a *college campus*. Jesus says, "I know it's very, very hard," and he says, "Here's the reason it's hard: Satan's headquarters are there." Now let's think about this. I didn't plan on talking about Satan this much, but he keeps coming up.

Last week we talked about how you have a personal, intelligent, and spiritual enemy. This time we get something else. Theology is important. Here's what we know about Satan. Satan has a headquarters. Did you see that? Where's his throne? That's his headquarters. Where's his base of operations? Now think about this with me for a second. Why does Satan need a base of operations? Because he's not omnipresent.

Every once in a while someone is like, "I think Satan is after me." I'm like, "I'm 100 percent sure he's not. He has bigger fish to fry than you. He may have sent a little demon after you, but he's not after you. Okay?" Think about this with me for a second. I don't know what this means, but this is interesting. This is the only place where Jesus says Satan has his throne. Satan has his headquarters here.

Where is it? In the political capital. Is it possible that Satan's headquarters today might be in the political capital of the most powerful nation on earth, Washington, D.C.? As soon as I say that, some of you go, "It would explain a lot." I know it would. It's interesting that Satan has to decide, "Where could I live to influence policy, to influence politicians, to influence a lot of people?"

So, the first thing he says is, "I know it's hard where you live." He says, "But even though it's hard..." Verse 13: ***"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."

He's saying, "If it's hard where you're living, hold fast." What does *hold fast* imply? That you're trying to be pulled away by circumstances and people and perspectives and worldviews and other beliefs. He says, "Here's what you do." Basically, this is what a Christian does. A Christian holds fast to the name of Jesus. Do you know it's not God in general that's offensive; it's Jesus Christ?

We're living in a time right now... I think it's a response to the bankruptcy and hollowness of secularism. I can't go anywhere and have somebody not mention God nowadays. Some of you will text me or send me something through Instagram. You're like, "Did you see Joe Rogan mention God on his podcast? Did you see Andrew Huberman? He teaches at Stanford. He's talking about God."

I guess I'm kind of encouraged, but God is not offensive, at least not right now, not in America...to talk in generalities about God. What's offensive is to talk about Jesus. I mean, take the baby step you need to take. If at work it's a big deal for you to even mention God, go ahead, but I'm guessing if you make it general and generic enough it'll be fine.

Have you ever done this before? You're just talking to somebody, and you're not being weird. You're not being eccentric. You're not being super spiritual. You just mention Jesus. Is anyone else like, "Did it get hot in here as soon as I said his name?" Because Jesus is a clear picture of who God is.

How do you hold fast to his name? Well, you walk with him, yes, but you worship and you witness. See, he says there's this guy named Antipas who lost his life. Here's what's interesting. As I read the commentaries this week, everyone was like, "We don't know who this guy is."

There is no mention of Antipas, basically, in church history. There are some legends, but we don't really have anything written down about Antipas. There's no mention of Antipas anywhere else in the New Testament. There's no mention of him at the end of the book of Revelation. Maybe it means something like this: Jesus doesn't forget the people everybody else forgets. Jesus knows about the people nobody else knows about.

He says, "There was this faithful guy. He held fast to my name, and he died." By the way, do you know that still...? It's hard to estimate all of these things, but from the research I did this week, even in 2023 there were somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 martyrs for the Christian faith. Just last year in 2023.

I don't know how they figure this out, but I was looking at some reputable things this week. From what we can tell, .08 percent of all Christians who have ever lived died for their faith. That's one in a thousand people. That means three people in our church would have died for their faith if we represent human history and what has happened.

03 CONFRONT: GOOD DEEDS & BAD DOCTRINE (WORLDLINESS)

So, he says, "You were faithful. You held fast to my name." I need to show you this. He always does this. He commends, and then he corrects. Look at what he says here. Verse 14: ***"But I have a few things against you..."*** Remember, to the church at Ephesus he said, "Guys, I've got just one thing. Just let me be really quick. I've got one thing." To the church at Smyrna he said, "I've got nothing." To the church here at Pergamum he says, "I've got a few things."

I don't know what Jesus would say to you. Is it one thing? Sometimes it's one thing and you know what the thing is. You're like, "I know the thing." Sometimes it's two or three things. By the way (this is usually true), they're usually connected. There's a root issue. Jesus is going to come, and he's going to say, "And, by the way, I have these things against you." In other words, sin is personal. You're not sinning against a principle; you're sinning against a person.

Let me show you what he says. Watch this. ***"...you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam..."*** Who is that? Well, I'll try to explain it. The word *teaching* there is literally the word *doctrine*, which means a comprehensive body of teaching. *Teaching* is going to be repeated. I'll show you this.

"...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. So also you have some who hold..." Here's that word *doctrine* again. ***"...the teaching of the Nicolaitans."***

He's worried that the church is on its way to worldliness, and it's on its way to worldliness because it's allowing some false teaching. It has bad doctrine but good deeds, but it will not keep its good deeds with its bad doctrine. I want to talk to you a little bit about what worldliness is. When was the last time you heard a sermon on worldliness? It sounds a little strange to talk about in 2024. *Worldliness*.

Do we even have that as a category anymore? I mean, would you be offended if another Christian brother or sister walked up to you and said...? I don't know if

anyone would even use this language anymore. "You know what? I feel like you're worldly." That should be a huge heart check if someone said that, because we're supposed to love the people of the world but not love the value system of the world.

So, what is worldliness? The church in general has been trying to figure this out for a long time. We've had some silly examples of worldliness. The indie fundie church (independent fundamentalism, which put the *fun* in *fundamentalism*)... You know those churches because those churches are all about what you don't do. You don't smoke, drink, chew, or hang with girls who do. Something like that.

Anyway, *those* churches, which we love, and they've done a lot of good things, also usually have very shallow, surface-level things of what worldliness is. One back in the day was "You don't dance." For a while it was "You don't play cards." Part of it is we don't know what to do when new things come, and we think new things are always bad. "Don't do that."

When the movie theater came out, going to the movie... I'm serious. This was a big deal. Going to the movie theater was worldly. Now, watching certain types of shows and movies *can* be worldly. I'm not saying any of those three things I mentioned couldn't have elements of worldliness at the heart level, depending on how you're doing them and what you're doing anyway.

Let me give you two definitions of *worldliness* that I think are really helpful that get at the heart of it for all of us, I think. First, *worldliness* is anything that makes sin look normal and holiness look strange. Now you're like, "That's every Netflix show I've ever seen in my entire life." You can feel this. Let me give you an example of when sin looks normal and holiness looks strange.

We live in a time right now where the hookup/shack-up/breakup culture... To use a biblical word no one uses anymore...*fornication*, *sexual promiscuity*...all of those words. That's normal. That's expected. If you've ever tried to say, "You know what? I'm going to date..." I don't know. Maybe you're in your late teens or early 20s or 30s, and you're dating somebody.

I don't even know how this would come up, but maybe you're talking to somebody else. Maybe you're talking to another Christian. Maybe you're talking to somebody at work, and you say out loud, "You know what? We're just trying to keep ourselves pure for marriage." As soon as you say it, you're like, "I feel Amish even saying it. I don't want to say it again. I don't want anyone to ask me about it. It's awkward to talk like this."

We live in a time where sin looks normal and holiness looks strange. It's normal to be greedy; it's strange to be content. It's normal to divorce; it's strange to stay married. If we were like, "This couple has been married for 40 years," you'd all be like, "So strange, but good for you." We don't know what to do.

A second thing is *worldliness* is anywhere the temporal is valued over the eternal in the final analysis. What we're trying to pass on to our kids is a vision of God and values of Scripture, and it's very, very hard. Think about your New Year's resolutions, which you've already quit. Remember those? Okay. Yes. You're like, "Kyle, why did you bring it up?"

For most of us, all of our New Year's resolutions were about the body and not the soul. We love the body. We need to take care of the body...all that. But the obsession with the body and the forgetting of the soul is a sign of the value of the temporal. The obsession with this life and no thought of the next life is showing that we value the temporal over the eternal.

It's hard with our kids. What are we really valuing? Things are important, and temporal things are important, but they shouldn't be as important as eternal things. Right? I mean, I hate to break it to me and to the rest of you, but none of your kids (maybe one of you, but probably not) are going to play professional sports. You can all gasp. "But I thought if I spent \$50,000 every year for the next..." No. They're not.

But every one of your kids will stand before God at the end of their life. So you wrestle with that as you think about club sports. We're not religious over this. I'm just saying. Our value system can't be amusements, activities, athletics, and academics and we completely forget the eternal.

So, the first thing he says is, "I'm worried this church is going to be worldly," but then he mentions this teaching. Look at this. This is very interesting. ***"...you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam..."*** Okay. Here's part of our problem. I want you to notice this. The Bible references itself and assumes you know what it's talking about.

Let me say it another way. Jesus is talking to the church at Pergamum, which is a brand-new church with a lot of young Christians with none of them Jewish. This is not a messianic Jewish church. This is a church with Gentile converts, and he assumes they know the story of Balaam and Balak, which is a story from the Old Testament.

Here's part of why a lot of us are not doing well spiritually: we're better at quoting *The Office* than the Old Testament. If it said, "Remember when Michael Scott said to Dwight..." you'd be like, "Oh, this is so good. Was that episode 7?" You know what I

mean? But with Balak and Balaam, you're like, "I'm glad he said those names, because I had no idea how to say those names."

Let me tell you what happened. There was this guy named Balak. Remember who he's writing to. He's writing to a group of people who are feeling the pressure of the state and it intermingling with the church. He says, "This reminds me of a guy named Balak."

Do you know who Balak was? A political leader. He was the king of the Moabites, and they hated Israel. I'm going to summarize the story for you. It's found in Numbers 22. You have to read for, like, 10 chapters to get the whole story. I'm going to really simplify and summarize it, but here's what happens.

There's this guy named Balak. He's the king of the Moabites, and he's like, "I hate the Israelites." He's a political leader, so he goes, "How do I destroy God's people?" By the way, history doesn't repeat itself, but it often does rhyme. The Bible isn't what happened; it's what always happens. It's what keeps happening.

Here's what happened. Balak, a political leader, says, "How do I destroy God's people? I need to find a religious leader who will compromise." So he finds this guy named Balaam. Balaam is a false prophet. We have a lot of false prophets today. Sometimes they have podcasts. Sometimes they have YouTube channels. Sometimes they write *New York Times* best sellers.

He finds this false prophet Balaam. He goes to Balaam and says, "Balaam, listen, man. You don't make that much money being a prophet, do you?" "No, I don't make that much money." He says, "Would you like to make some more money?" "I'd like to make some more money." Isn't this interesting? A political leader has a way for a religious leader to make more money.

He says, "That would be great." He says, "Here's all I need you to do. I need you to go curse God's people." He wrestles with it a little bit, but he says, "How much money?" He says, "*This* much money." He says, "Okay. I'm cool with that." So then he goes up on this mountaintop and looks over the people of Israel, and he goes to do his Harry Potter curse. He gets ready for it.

This is so cool. It's a strange story. As he tries to curse the people of God, all that comes out of his mouth are blessings. Some of you go, "I wish this happened to me." You know, someone pulls in front of you in the car and you're like, "You, uh...Jesus loves you! Be blessed and filled." We wish that happened.

So, he goes to curse, and all that comes out is blessings. He's frustrated, and he goes back to Balak and is like, "Hey, Balak, I tried to curse, but only blessings came out." Balak is like, "Well, I'm not paying you for that." He's like, "All right. I've got another idea. Here's what we'll do." This comes from Balaam.

At first he's like, "I don't know if I want to do this," and then he finds out he can make a lot of money, and then he wants to do this. He says, "Here's what we need to do. I need you to find the most beautiful Moabite women among you. I want you to send them in among the Israelite men and have them be really nice to them.

Here's what we need to do. If the Israelite men intermarry with the Moabite women, we'll destroy them from within because their kids won't worship God anymore. We'll bring immorality into their church, which will bring idolatry into the church, and it'll be gone within one or two generations. Israel will be gone."

Balak thinks about it, and he goes, "Okay. We'll do the trojan horse. That's what we'll do. If we can't beat them, we'll join them." Here's what's interesting. He's saying one of the strategies of Satan to corrupt the church is interreligious marriage. Let me clarify. That is different than interracial marriage.

Sometimes people read this and are like, "Oh my goodness! Look at how primitive the Bible is. It says the Moabites and the Israelites shouldn't marry each other. That's racist!" Which is what everybody likes to call everything. No, no, no. God is for interracial marriage. That's great. God is against interreligious marriage.

Here's what often happens. I just need to talk to moms and dads for a second about their kids. There's no talking to people about their kids. Have you realized this? Have you ever tried to talk to someone about their kids? It is like the most awkward thing ever, because a kid is basically an extension of you, so to talk about your kid is to talk about you, and that's really hard to do. So I'll do it for all of us just for a few minutes.

Okay. There's no talking to people about their kids, so we have to do it when we're all together and everyone feels comfortable. Here's what happens. It tends to happen particularly with parents of young ladies as the ladies are getting a little bit older and the biological clock is ticking.

We live in a strange time right now where you have to teach your kids, "You marry somebody of the opposite sex." Then the second thing you have to tell them is, "You marry a believer." The third thing is, "If he's a doctor, that would be great." I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm kidding.

Here's what happens. A lot of times these people... I meet them all the time...people in their 50s and 60s who are brokenhearted over the situation in their family. They normally say something like, "Yeah, our daughter met a guy, and he's not a believer, but he's got a great job and he treats her really well. He's decent-looking as well."

I've been doing this long enough to know that all that happens is I'm talking to those same people six or seven years later, and they're like, "We don't understand why the grandkids don't want to come to church." It's like, "All right. You did the whole 'house divided' thing."

So, he says the way to destroy the church is to allow believers to marry nonbelievers, no longer value the church, and raise the next generation to be unitarian universalists or something. I don't know. The second thing is even more interesting in some ways, if we have enough time to get into a little bit of this.

If you look here, he says, "***So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***" What is *that*? I'll try my best to explain it. We don't get a lot about the Nicolaitans except in Revelation, so this is obviously a movement that started a little bit later. We don't see this movement in the book of Acts.

All I can tell you is some tradition... What I'm about to give you isn't Scripture, but this is some traditional thinking on the Nicolaitans. One tradition says there was this... If you go back to Acts, chapter 6, there were the initial seven deacons. Remember this? There's that moment where they need to get all of these deacons.

One of the deacons was named Nicolaus. There was an early tradition that said, "Nicolaus deconstructed his faith." Have you ever heard of someone doing that? We'll talk about that in a few weeks. "He kind of said, 'I'm not doing this anymore,' and he took his own group and started the Nicolaitans." Maybe.

Here's what's interesting. What we do know is if you take the word *Nicolaitan* and break it in half... Let's talk about what the word means. We don't say *nico* in English; we say *Nike*...swoosh. That's what the word literally is. Do you know what *Nike* means? You've got it on your shirt and on your shoe. Do you know what *Nike* means? It means to conquer. *Nico-laitans*. What is *laitan*? You can kind of hear it...*laity*. To conquer the laity. To rule over the common person.

Another tradition says, "You know what this might be?" And who knows. Another tradition says, "I know what this is. This is the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church." Someone laughed. They thought that was funny. That's what they say. If you know my story, I'm a recovering Roman Catholic. If you're here visiting and you're Catholic, you can call me "Father Kyle" afterward. I'm fine with that.

Here's why they think that. It's an interesting thought. It's because in the Catholic church, if you understand the teaching, there is a big difference between the leadership and the laity, between the priest and the people, between the ministers and the members. There's a big gap, and you have to go through the priest to get to God. If you can't get to him, you go to the bishop, and then there's the pope. You know what I'm saying.

Here's the principle it definitely applies to. It's speaking of a ruling elite. One of the temptations in the church is for the leadership of the church, whether that's pastors or priests or popes or deacons or bishops... There are so many different ways the church has been or could be structured. It's when those people begin to rule over instead of sacrificially serve.

For some reason, this was uniquely felt in Pergamum. Some think it's because the state was trying to get in bed with the church to rule over the church. One of the things we... This isn't a whole sermon on this. I wish we had time. Maybe I will teach on this sometime. It would probably be good in an election year.

There are three domains God created, three institutions...the family, the church, and the government. They need to have their own spheres, they need to have their own authority, and they need to interact appropriately. This is the first time the state is trying to get involved with the church, it appears, to rule over the people.

04 WE ARE IN A WAR...WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Well, Jesus has a word. Let me show you what it says here. Look with me at verse 16. Here it is. This is not a new word. ***"Therefore repent."*** How many times can I teach on this? This is what Jesus keeps saying. "In light of everything I said, change." I've told you before whenever you read the Bible you have two options: edit the Bible or change your mind.

Jesus is like, "All right. Change." ***"Therefore repent."*** Then he adds something different that he didn't say last time he told people to repent. He says, ***"If not, I will come to you soon..."*** He's giving you the image again. ***"...and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."***

Whenever we hear God's Word, there are always only two options: repent or resist. Now, some of you are very kind and nice, so your resistance doesn't look like, "I'm not doing that." Here's what resistance looks like for most people instead of repenting.

Repenting is "I change my mind. I change my heart. I change the direction of my life."
Resisting often looks something like this.

Let me try to articulate what we've all probably said to ourselves at some point with some area we didn't want to change in our life. Have you ever thought this? "I think I might be the exception to the rule." It's such an arrogant thought. It's like, "I know where this goes for every other person, but not me. This path leads to *this* place for every person who has ever been on this path except for me."

In fact, a good thing to ask to kind of get at where you need to repent is...*If it wasn't you, what would you say to you?* Then you normally get the right answer. It's like, "Well, I'd say I should stop drinking that much. I'd say I should stop looking at that." Oh, okay.

The other thing is (it's kind of what I just said) we tend to think, for some reason, there will be no consequences for our sins. It is the oldest lie that the Serpent told our first parents. Remember that? "When you eat of the tree, you surely will not die." That is the oldest lie, which sin always whispers every time we do it.

"You're going to be able to do this, and no one is going to know. What you'll do is just delete your browsing history afterward. Just use the incognito browser. Just pay cash. Just don't do it in your city." Jesus lovingly says, "I want to tell you now there are consequences in this life, but especially in the life to come, for unrepentant sin."

Therefore, he says, the best thing for you to do is listen. He says, "Let him who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the churches." What does that mean, "Let him who has ears"? Let me ask it this way: What is the last thing God told you to do? One of the desires in our church is that every day each of you would go to the Word of God for a word from God.

That's how you have a daily and dynamic relationship with the Lord. I'm going to God's Word. Like I've told you before, I read it, and then when I'm done reading it I go, "God, what would you like me to do about this?" Then the thing I don't want to do is usually what God is telling me to do. That's how that works. Then I do that.

By the way, it's called the *dimmer principle*. The *dimmer principle* is that God will give you more light once you obey the light you already have. "God's Word is a lamp unto my feet." Guess what it doesn't say. "God's Word is a high beam." It's not a high beam; it's a lamp. It shows you your next few steps, and when you obey those next few steps you get more light.

So, that's the negative vision, but then Jesus gives us a positive vision to close, because he always does. Look here. ***"To the one who conquers..."*** That's one of his favorite phrases in Revelation. ***"...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."***

Jesus ends by giving us a vision of three gifts. The first is manna. Do you remember manna? It's from the book of Exodus. It came in the wilderness. It said it was basically like a flaky, sugary food that fell from heaven. Personally, I believe these are the first Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

The principle of the manna is it came daily, and that's the principle of God's grace. God is going to give you enough grace for today, and there will be more grace when you wake up tomorrow. Jesus is saying, "Things are going to be tough. I'm going to meet your needs daily."

The second is the white stone. That's interesting. What the white stone represented... Back in the day, when the verdict was held, the judge would get up and reach into his pocket, whether it was innocent or guilty, and if he was guilty he'd pull out a black stone, and if he was innocent he'd pull out a white stone. Jesus is using this image to say something like, "Though the world has condemned you and rejected you, I have accepted you."

Then he says, "I want to give you a new name." In the Bible, naming is a sign of authority. That's why Adam names the animals. That's why parents name their kids. That's why we couldn't name Jesus. Remember? He showed up. "His name will be Jesus."

"Thanks for letting me know."

"Yeah. You can't name him, because you don't have control over him."

To name something is to say, "I have authority over you." Also, to nickname somebody... We only nickname people we love. Some of you have some weird nicknames for some people you love. Jesus has a new name for you that you will get in heaven as part of his saying, "I've known you. I love you. I'm excited about you."

What's interesting is the whole beginning and end of this letter started with a sword. Do you remember the first mention of a sword in the Bible? Way back in Genesis, chapter 3, when our first parents sinned against God and God kicked them out of the garden, it says he put a flaming sword held by an angel in front of the Tree of Life. That's a scary image. That's the first time a sword is mentioned in the Bible.

One of the last places the sword is mentioned in the Bible is when Jesus is on the cross. It says that after he died they took a spear or a sword and pierced his side. Jesus went to the cross and died in our place so we would not have to go under the sword because he was pierced by the sword. He was rejected so you could be accepted. He experienced the wrath of God so you could experience the grace of God.

We're going to end today like we end every weekend. We need to grow in this. I just want us to respond. We're going to sing in a minute, and we're going to sing a song that is a declaration of who we are in following Christ and a declaration of who Christ is. We're going to say things like, "I won't listen to my feelings; I'm going to hold fast to what is true. I won't bow down to idols; I'll stand firm and worship you."

I just pray that you would sing this from your heart as part of your repentance today. When we sing these songs together, guys, these songs are just prayers we put to music so we can all say them together. So, let's take a moment. Let's listen to what God has said, and let's respond by singing and bringing. Let's pray.

Lord, we want to be a godly church, not a worldly church. We want to be in the world but not of the world. We want to love the people of the world but not love the value system of the world. We want to remain bright and salty in dark places. Lord, I pray for people all over this room right now where, Lord, you would say to them, "I know where you dwell, and I know it's hard. I know it's hard to be a Christian in your workplace. I know it's hard to be a Christian in your family."

Lord, I pray that people who are thinking of letting go would continue to hold fast. I pray that they would know that at Two Cities Church we are here with them to deepen our worship and expand our witness. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.