



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Revelation 2:12-17

"Worldly Compromise at Satan's Throne"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Returning to chapter 2 and reading verse 12 through verse 17 for our scripture reading. This is the message of Our Lord to the church in Pergamos. Probably Pergamum is a more accurate designation of the city to whom our Lord writes this letter but the Authorized Version has Pergamos and that is found in some of the ancient literature as well.

In verse 12 the apostle giving our Lord's message writes,
"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges, I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith" (that means incidentally the faith in me) "even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white

stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the ministry of the Word of God to our hearts, minds, and lives. We thank Thee for the way that thou hast unfolded the ministry of the Lord Jesus. We thank Thee for his incarnation. We thank Thee for his ministry before the cross. We give Thee a special thanks for the satisfaction that he offered in his sacrifice on the Cross at Calvary. We thank Thee that he bore the judgment that was ours and has made it possible for us to go free of judgment. We thank Thee for his death therefore and his resurrection and we rejoice that we are able to meet today on the Lord's Day, reminding ourselves of the fact that Jesus Christ lives as our great High Priest ever living to make intercession for us.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the confidence, and the hope, and the comfort, and consolation that that brings us. We thank Thee Lord for the presence of the Holy Spirit and for the way in which he guides and directs our lives, glorifies Christ to our minds and hearts, and enables us by his power to be pleasing to Thee and fruitful as Christians. We thank Thee for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, for all of its members. And we thank Thee that this entire body is of great significance and worth to Thee as a result of what Christ has done. And we pray, Lord, that Thy blessing may rest upon each member, upon each local assembly, and may by Thy grace Thy great purpose be fulfilled through the Church of Jesus Christ. We pray for this local body and we ask Thy blessing upon our elders, and deacons, and the members, and the friends, and the visitors who are here today for this service. We pray that in each case thou art strengthen under gird bless and use for the glory of Thy name.

We're grateful Lord for this land in which we live and we pray for our President and for others who are in the national government and in other governments as well,

under which we live. And Father, we pray for those who have requested our prayers, the sick, and the ill, minister to them. Bless the physicians who minister to them and their family, and friends. And O God, if it should please Thee give healing in accordance with Thy will.

We thank thee for this beautiful day. For the privilege of the ministry of the Word in it may Father in this hour Thy Will be done and may Thy word of God strengthen each of us and cause us to leave the auditorium with a sense of Thy greatness, with a sense of assurance that we have a father in Heaven, the Son of God, our savior, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. And may we leave, Lord, in a relationship that is more significant than the one that we have now. We commit our time to Thee and we give Thee thanks for the blessings of life through Christ in His name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today as we continue our exposition of the Apocalypse is Worldly Compromise at Satan's Throne. If we were to ask what is the central issue in the message of our Lord to the church at Pergamum, we might say that it is this, the church is not to tolerate those who lore the requirements of the standard of truth.

There is a general attitude among religious people that the things that the word of God sets forth as teachings are not quite as important as the things that are set forth that relate to a person's life. One of the reasons for this is that it requires a bit of study to understand the great doctrines of the Christian faith and there is a temptation for all of us to take the easy route. And the easy route is to reason as men. That is, it's not so much what we believe but it's the way we live. And if we live right then everything is going to be right.

Unfortunately according to the word of God we cannot know how we are to live right unless we read and study the word of God, for it's in the word of God that we learn what is right living before God. But it is the general opinion that if a man's creed is right,

his - or put it this way, if a man's conduct is right, his creed doesn't really matter too much. But I think it is not only a matter of creed but it is a matter of conduct as well. Occasionally this is uttered as doctrine and it goes something like this as Alexander Pope put it, "For creeds and forms let senseless bigots fight, His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

Now the message that the Lord gives to the church at Pergamum is just the opposite of that. He lays great stress on a person's conduct but at the same time the thing that he criticizes is the doctrine. He talks about the doctrine of Balaam. He talks about the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. And so for our Lord it's not the biblical way to say it doesn't really matter what we believe, it's how we live. Our Lord would be very much opposed to that. On the other hand, of course, it's possible for individuals who hold correct doctrine not to live accordingly. And it's important to stress that we are to have our conduct and our character in harmony with our creed. That is, what we believe.

So we're going to see, I think, that the problem at Pergamum was worldly compromise. Pergamum, a city which our Lord twice says is a place where Satan dwells.

Now it would be, I think, helpful for us to just say a few words about Pergamum as a city of Asia Minor. As you know, these letters to the Seven Churches are all addressed to churches in Asia Minor, emphasis so familiar because of the ministry of the Apostle Paul there. And then Smyrna, thirty-five or forty miles north of the city of Ephesus. And now Pergamum, fifty-five miles north of Smyrna, so approximately, let us say, ninety miles north of the city of Ephesus.

Pergamum was a center of religion. And it had several claims to fame. Let me put them this way to simplify, historically it was the greatest city of Asia because it was the capital of Asia for four centuries. Culturally it was a university type of town, not a commercial type of town. It had a library of two hundred thousand volumes, which was a vast library in those days, second only to the great library in Alexandria in Egypt. Religiously it contained a host of temples. It also had the Great Altar of Zeus before

Athena's Temple eight hundred feet up on a conical hill. It also had the temple of Escalapius, also called Esculapius. But Escalapius was the god of healing. And the god of healing had, as you know perhaps, the symbol of a serpent. In fact, you find it on the back of our medical doctors because it's associated with our physicians. And you'll see the sign of the serpent which was the sign of Escalapius. R.H. Charles who wrote one of the most - one of the lengthiest and one of the best commentaries on the Book of Revelation because of the details found in his two volumes called this the Lourdes of the ancient world.

Escalapius, or *esculapius*, was also called *escalapius soter*, which you may know is the term for "savior". So *escalapius soter* meant *escalapius* the Savior. The emblem, as we said, the serpent. In verse 13 he says, "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is." And then at the conclusion of verse 13, this is mentioned again, "Where Satan dwelleth."

So the situation at Pergamum made it a very nice place for our Lord to address this letter since the things that were happening there were satanic, to put it in its most truthful form. Politically, Pergamum was the center of the worship of Caesar. The first temple in which Caesar was worshiped was built in Pergamum. And if you remember, it was the custom in order to unite the Roman Empire politically, it was a custom for an individual once a year to come burn a piece a little bit of incense in the temple and then say, "Caesar is Lord."

Now those who took that seriously were relatively few. It was designed by Rome not simply as a religious device but primarily as a political device. If you could get everybody to come and go through the same ritual it bound the people together politically. But obviously a Christian would have difficulty with that if he took those words seriously.

Now we have indications in ancient literature of individuals who say they didn't take it seriously and that people didn't take it seriously. But Christians are people who

take things a little more seriously, it seems, than others and so to take a piece of incense and burn it and then say, "Caesar is Lord," for an evangelical Christian is an impossible thing. We cannot do that. We cannot say, "Caesar is Lord." We cannot say, "Jim Wright is Lord," [laughter] on any circumstances. We have to be true to the word of God so we have to say, "Jesus is Lord." And therefore this posed a problem. Christians believe most sincerely and most fundamentally that you cannot take the Lord's name and give it Caesar. Nothing is more satanic than that. And this was practiced in Pergamum. So you can understand why our Lord should speak of Pergamum as a place where Satan's throne is. And also, in the end of 13th verse, "Where Satan dwells."

So we're going to do as we've done in the other letters, we're going to look at it looking at the addressees and the description that is given of our Lord in it, the commendation, the complaint that our Lord has against the church, his exhortation to them, and the threat of which he warns them, and finally the promises that he makes to them.

So we're looking now first at the address in verse 12 and he says, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write." Just one word about the term Pergamum or Pergamos. That is a word that comes from a Greek word that means marriage. *Gamos* in Greek means “marriage” and the *per* in front of it was a little enclitic Greek form that frequently added a bit of emphasis in the uses which it had in the Greek language, so that Pergamos would suggest marriage. And Pergamos would suggest thorough marriage.

Now the interesting thing about it, of course, is that Pergamum, or thoroughly married, is something that would speak of the relationship of a Christian to Christ. We are married to him. In fact, the Apostle Paul uses that very figure in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 when he says that he has espoused the church to our Lord as to one husband. And so one expects in just such a situation as that that there should be corresponding, ethical action. Paul said, "I'm jealous over you with a godly, just jealousy for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." So we are as a

body of believing people, the church of Christ. We have been married to the Lord and the aim of this marriage to the Lord is that we might be presented as a holy virgin to our Lord for the marriage that lasts throughout eternity.

So here is a church thoroughly married, but married not to Christ. It's very obvious they're married to the world. They're married to the life around them. So in one sense the problem at Pergamum is simply bigamy and that's the way in which our Lord goes about talking to the church at Pergamum.

Now the description that is given of our Lord is also given in that 12th verse, "And Jesus said through John, "These things saith he which have the sharp sword with two edges."

Now remember that the things that are said about our Lord in the letters to the seven churches are generally things taken from the vision of him recorded by John in chapter 1. So here it is stated that our Lord is the one who has the sharp sword with two edges and we turn back to chapter 1 in verse 16 where we have the vision of our Lord and the text reads, "And he had in his right hand seven stars and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." So this piercing sword expresses very plainly the piercing nature of the word of God. The sword, you may remember Hebrews chapter 4 in verse 12 where the writer of that great epistle says,

"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and the marrow, and is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

So the piercing word is suggested by the two-edged sword that comes of one's mouth.

Incidentally, the kind of sword that the Greek term expresses was a sword that has some resemblance to a human tongue. But what this is intended to set forth plainly is that the Lord Jesus has the use *gladae* or "the power of the sword." Paul talks about the

ministers about us, that is; the men in public office, as having the power of the sword. And so the one who has the real power of the sword is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I made reference to the fact when we first came to the letters to the seven churches that there has been an interpretation of these letters to the churches that could be called historical and chronological. Now it's suggested that it's likely that that is not true. What we have tried to show is that these are seven historical churches that existed in the day in which the revelation was written and that they represent seven different kinds of churches that we may find in the Christian church all over the world. Their churches like Pergamum. I hope Believers Chapel is not a church like Pergamum. But we have that temptation because Pergamum was a church that was closely associated with the world. And we have worldliness about us as one of the great temptations for all believers today in our affluent society and for churches as well.

But at any rate, there are interpreters in the past who have taken these seven churches as being reflective of the entire church period. That is, Ephesus represents the early stage of the church, Smyrna the next stage, Pergamum the next, and so on to Laodicea, which specifically reminds one of the apostasy of the last days. It's a very suggestive way to look at the letters to the seven churches, but it's very difficult to prove that view historically. It works in some cases but it does not work, it seems, in others and so I think it's best to forget that as something that really was intended by our Lord or the apostle in giving us the letters to the seven churches. But if it were so then the letter to the church at Pergamum would represent events of the early 4th Century or the 4th Century of the Christian church.

Now in that earlier part of the 4th Century of the Christian church, the monarch of the Roman Empire died and that left open the question of succession. There was a dispute over it. On the one hand in the West, Constantine stood out as one who had perhaps the power to become the emperor, and then in the East there was Maxentius who led the forces of the East, and these two were going to settle this by a war. They

met near a little river in Northern Italy, and you may perhaps have heard of the place as the place of the Milvian Bridge.

Constantine had had some contact with Christianity, mind you this is the earlier part of the 4th Century and therefore Christianity had spread over the Roman Empire. The Western General, Constantine, had some minor contact with Christianity and so that night he made a vow. And his vow was a vow to the Lord as he understood it. It probably was a vow to Satan in reality, but never the less it was a vow, and his vow was that if he won this battle he would become a Christian. Well if also, and this is part of the fable that has arisen around this, he is supposed to have seen a vision in the sky and in the vision in the sky he saw the words *In hoc signo vinces*, which in Latin means, "By this sign," or, "In this sign you shall conquer."

So we can ignore all of this what someone has called this monkish accretion to the truth, but he had made, it seems, a bargain with some power, some supernatural power, to join the church organization if he won his battle. Now I guarantee you that if today such a thing were to happen everybody, let us put it this way, not everybody, but the vast majority of the Christian church would think that would be great. It would be great if the Roman Empire, if the Roman Emperor, should become a Christian that would be great. Just think of how many people would be influenced by it. Suppose today that Margaret Thatcher, I admire Miss Thatcher, I wish she were President of the United States. [Laughter] Isn't that terrible? But never the less, that's the way I feel. I wish she were President of the United States. But anyway, let's suppose that Margaret Thatcher and George Bush should get together and should announce that they had become Christians. The Christian church, the evangelical world, would rejoice over this. They would think that would be great. I'm not sure at all it would be great. Because look what happened in the Roman Empire when Constantine became a Christian.

Now Constantine was quote "converted". There is no evidence that he was born again. In fact, given, I must admit of course, he was a bitter foe of all true Christianity,

but in his great work he says these words, "The sublime theory of the gospel made a much fainter impression on his heart than on his understanding. As he gradually advanced in the knowledge of the truth he proportionately declined in the practice of virtue." And the same year of the reign in which he convened the council of Nice, one of the great councils of the Christian church, he was polluted by the execution, or rather murder, of his eldest son. "The gratitude of the church has exulted the virtues and excused the failings of a generous patron who seeded Christianity on the throne of the Roman world, and the Greeks who celebrate the festival of the imperial saint seldom mention the name of Constantine without adding the title Equal to the Apostles." But actually what happened was that the world became united with the church. The world came into the church and when the world comes into the church the church loses its power and authority. And that's what happened. That's one of the great dangers and perils of comportsing with the world.

"Look my Christian friend," Jesus said, "the world has hated me. They will hate you." Now, when our Lord says something like that he intends for us to understand that that is true. The world as such will never be friendly to the gospel. They may put on the façade of friendliness in order to gain something for themselves of a materialistic, unspiritual character but the world will never be friendly to the gospel. The gospel demands exactly what the world cannot give, an acknowledgement of its unworthiness, an acknowledgement of its sinfulness, an acknowledgement of its inability to do anything for our spiritual good. And an acknowledgment of our Lord, Jesus Christ as the only savior of the human soul. The world cannot accept anything like that.

So the priests of the pagan temples had been paid from the coffers of the Roman Empire. But now if the emperor has become a Christian what do you do if you're a priest of Mars, or a priest of Venus, or priest of one of those other ancient religions? What do you do? Well, you go immediately to the baptismal font and there you are baptized. You become a Christian too. And so in the United States of America we've passed through

that stage too, when people want to be baptized in order to be associated with some people who've already been baptized. It's a temptation that faces all Christians.

So that's what happened. And so the priests of Mars and the priests of Venus not having been born again became the reverends and the doctors of Christianity. And the church and the world became united. The description of our Lord is very fitting, I think. He is the one who has the sharp sword that comes out of his mouth. The word of God, that's the final judge of the human beings.

So truth, the word of God, the sufficiency of the word of God, for all of the affairs and all of the activities of our life is what our Lord teaches. Please remember that, my Christian friend. If you can just put it in that simple way, the sufficiency of the word of God for doctrine and life, you will have the message of the word of God.

Now the commendation is given in the 13th verse. Jesus says,
"I know where you dwell, even where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, or the faith in me, even in those days where in Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was among you, where Satan dwelleth."

Now you can see what kind of a place Pergamum was, it was a place where Antipas had lost his life for the Christian faith. And incidentally he's called the same thing that Jesus is called in chapter 1, the faithful witness. Its translated martyr here, but the word that is translated martyr and the word that is translated witness are the same word in the original text and only the context can tell us whether it's to have the sense of witness or martyr. And here "my faithful witness" would have made just as good sense but wouldn't it be nice to be called the same thing that our Lord is called, "the faithful witness". So Antipas.

I don't know the meaning of Antipas. It may be short for Antipatras, which means "instead of the father". But Antipas, as it is, means "against all". And the force of it may

be that here is a man who stood for the gospel against all. In that sense it would make, of course, very commendatory sense for a person to stand against all. But that's a doubtful sense and it may not be our Lord's sense. One thing we do know is that he was his faithful witness who was slain among you. He was one who stood up for the faith and against all.

Now the two points of commendation are very simple. They are first, "You hold fast My name." How? How does one hold fast the name of Christ? Well, when we hold fast his deity. No one can be a savior who's not God himself. No individual can be the savior of my soul who is a man like me. Such a person would need someone to die for him. And if we should pause it a sinless man he could only save himself, he could never save anyone else. We need a divine God-man. That's what Jesus is.

So when we hold fast his name we hold fast his deity. We hold fast his true humanity also, thus qualifying him to stand for men. We hold fast his royalty, that the time is coming when he will be King of kings and Lord of lords and we will have a world that is truly subject to him. I'm looking forward to that day.

The grandeur of the title the first and the last, given to him, is one way by which we hold fast his name. We acknowledge his saving power. We acknowledge other attributes that he possesses. The attribute of immutability so that when he makes a promise we know he will keep that promise. He does not change his mind. We can, as it were, holding fast his true name as the God-man and Savior. We can like Thomas put our finger into the print of the nails of his side, spiritually, and as we do we cry out, "My Lord and my God." In that sense we do confess his name. We hold it fast.

That's the New Testament from its beginning when he's announced as the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and the end of the New Testament the last verse of the New Testament in which he is called the Lord Jesus Christ. To honor his name, to hold fast his name, is to set him forth that way within our hearts. Who can touch the hymn of all the glories of the son of man and the son of God?

Now the second thing he says is, "Hast not denied My faith." "Let God be true, every man a liar." We do believe that everything that is said about Jesus Christ is true but when Scripture speaks of him it is true. When Scripture says this, it is true. When Scripture says that, it is true. We believe that. I don't know whether you do or not, I shouldn't say that. I believe that. I hope you believe that. I know that many of you do. I know that some of you believe it probably more deeply than I do. But that is the Christian attitude. We do not deny the faith in him. On any kind of circumstances we do not deny our faith in him. And Antipas is a lesson for us. He lost his life. So you can, in your work, among your friends, in your school, when the time comes that it's necessary for you to say something for Christ you can say, "My faith is in Jesus Christ," and become one of the faithful witnesses of the word of God.

Now he says, "Where Satan's throne is," now that tells me something about Satan. That tells me first of all that he's not omnipresent nor is he omniscient nor is he omnipotent. When he is here, he's not there. Satan is a magnificent created being, an angelic being magnificent in his beauty and glory, if we can believe scripture, when he was created. But he's a fallen being at the present time, he is a finite being. He's not here in Dallas, if he's in New York City. And if he's in London, he is not in New York City and so on. He is not omnipresent, he is not omniscient, he is not omnipotent. Of course I hope he's in London or Cairo or somewhere else, but nevertheless he is not omnipresent.

One of the striking things about the city of Pergamum is that Pergamum became the headquarters of the religion of the Babylonians, because the Mageans were driven out of Babylon and they found their way to Pergamum and there they set up shop. So in Pergamum was the great high priest of the Babylonian religion, that's a striking thing, isn't it? The high priest of the Babylonian religion was called Pontifex Maximus. That's striking itself, isn't it? Pontifex, as you know, comes from two Latin words, one being the word for a bridge, *pons*, and *fex* coming from *facio* which means "to make" or "to do".

So and Maximus is the superlative of the Latin adjective magnus, which means "great". So that the result in Pontifex Maximus means, "the great bridge builder."

Now the reason for that term "the great bridge builder" is that it was the claim of the Babylonian high priests that they stood between God and Hell as effective leaders and directors of men. The title, as you know, has been attached now to the pope, Pontifex Maximus, that's the means by which it came to the Roman Church. From Babylon, through Pergamum, ultimately to Rome, and now is used of the pope.

That's one of the things that we need to keep in mind here. There are two implications that one should remember when we see something like this. It's very popular among people to think of Satan as the Prince of Hell. But Satan has never been in Hell. He's not the Prince of Hell, that's John Milton's kind of language. He's not in Hell yet; he will be, but I doubt that he'll even be a prince there. One thing we can see is that the church's troubles are related to the dwelling place that they're in and thus there was great temptation in Pergamum to depart from the word. Our Lord has a plate against them and he sets it forth in verse 14, he says,

"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

He also says, "He has there those that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes." We'll hold that off because there is an inference concerning them in one of the later messages. But let me say something about the doctrine of Balaam.

You may remember that when the children of Israel came toward the land, on the borders of the land, Balac was king of Moab, was very much concerned about them, and he wanted someone to curse them. He heard about Balaam as false prophet, as a prophet, he contacted Balaam with some things that might help this prophet to prophecy

properly, that is money in hand. And I think in our century we've seen good reason to think that it might be possible for men who are in religious work to be influenced by some cash. And so he offered Balaam some cash if he would curse the children of Israel. You know the story, what happened was God said that after the dealings that Balaam had with Balac God said that alright Balaam, go ahead and go over there where Balac is and prophecy but mind you, you cannot say anything evil against Israel. And so what happened was the false prophet uttered true prophecies, by the sovereign providential power of God.

Now he was unable to do what Balac wanted him to do so Balac was very disappointed but Balaam figured out a way by which he could do what Balac wanted and also probably what he wanted. And so he suggested to Balac and to the Moabites that the way to entice the children of Israel into activity that would be central and corruptive is to have your beautiful young ladies walk down in their midst. And so the beautiful young ladies walked down in their midst and what happened, happened just as Balaam expected. What happened was that those young men became involved with the beautiful young women and they began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab and Israel joined himself therefore to their God. They were not supposed to marry any of the strange or foreign women but they did.

So in other words, when he couldn't prophecy he found a way by which to tempt them and to corrupt them. And it was fleshly. That's why our Lord says, "He taught Balak, to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit to fornication." Later on in the Book of Numbers in chapter 31 it is stated with reference to Balaam, Balaam was slain with a sword. That's interesting, isn't it? Because here we have the sword, the two-edged sword out of our Lord's mouth and the threat, and Balaam was killed with a sword. But in the 16th verse of Numbers 31 it states,

"Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, the God, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD."

So our Lord has a complaint against them. The doctrine of Balaam is the doctrine of fleshly corruption. Fleshly influence and fleshly corruption, or as we would put it, involvement with the world and the materialism and the sexualism that characterizes society. Jesus exhorts the church, he says, "Repent." Now the only way the church could repent is to exclude from the assembly those who had the doctrine of Balaam or the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. That's the way you repent. You exclude those unbelieving elements from the Lord's table if they should be Christians, but if they are not exclude them from the body. Put them away. The threat follows, "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

Now, I know there are people who think that it's terrible to think about being put out of the church, or being put under discipline. "I will come under thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth," that's how Jesus feels about those who are in the assembly and disturbing the assembly when they are not believing individuals. So he thinks of coming quickly and fighting against them with that sword out of his mouth.

So he will remove what the church refuses to remove. Campbell Morgan made a very interesting statement once. He said, "There are men in the borders of our churches to whom we are doing incalculable harm by allowing them to remain there." Why is it wrong for us to leave such individuals who are contrary in their lives, contrary to the truth of God, untouched by divine discipline if they are believers, if they are professing believers, or leave them in the assembly if they have never been born again? Why is it that we do incalculable harm to them?

The thought of many of our religious people, even in the Christian churches, bring them in and maybe they'll be converted by our preaching. Why do we do incalculable harm to them? For the simple reason that we say to them, "You are safe." You are safe, your views are acceptable, your life is acceptable. If we do not exercise discipline that's what we are saying. Your life is acceptable to us. Your doctrine, or your manner of life, whatever the issue may be.

You are acceptable to us. That's why the Bible is full of instruction concerning church discipline. You go through the New Testament, you will be astonished at how many chapters of the New Testament have to do with church discipline. So Jesus says, "Repent or I'll come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." He closes with the promise of verse 17, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." I'm going to sum this up for lack of time, but this is probably a reference to the kingdom blessings that belong to the true church of Jesus Christ, the body of the people of God and the future. And further he says, "I will give him a white stone."

The stones were used in a number of ways. They were used in court cases, the jury when they finally gave their verdict there was a little container and each one of the members would drop a white stone in for acquittal or a black stone in for guilty. Whether that is true here or not, it's difficult to say. The stones actually were used for admittance to the temple for festivals. Perhaps that's the sins. And if that is so then the white stone is of a similar nature to the figure of the hidden manna. You will have access to the kingdom of God in the future and the blessings of the enjoyment of that great festival, which lasts forever. And finally he states, "A new name written on the stone, which no man knows, saving he that receiveth it." The man that led me to the Lord used to illustrate this by saying, "One has no secretes with casual acquaintances. A secrete is the mark of intimacy. And the Lord is promised that there will be this deep fellowship that is indicated by the new name on the white stone.

Now you notice it says, "No man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." And my friend used to say, "I'm called doctor by those who don't know me very well. By those who know me a little better I'm called Pastor. By those who know me still more I'm called Father, or Daddy. And my mother called me Son. But in the most intimate of all human relationships the relationship of husband and wife there is a place for endearing names which refinement will not permit to be banded about in public." And incidentally that's not honey. [Laughter]

Now you know your name and you know the name that your husband or your wife uses to speak of you in the most endearing way. That's the kind of relationship that is set forth here. Our relationship with our Lord is not the relationship of a body of people, my Christian friend. It's the relationship of one person to another person. And every one of us is special to our Lord. And in the ages of eternity in the future we each shall have a very special place with him. After all, he's accomplished the miracle of making us all look different. Nobody looks the same. Even twins have a mark of difference. So also in our persons and our character we each have a special name.

So to sum it up because our time is long gone, the test of doctrine is the purity of our conduct and character. Both of these are essential. The seal of Christ, remember, has two sides. "The foundation of God standeth sure," Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2, in verse 19. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," that's one sign. The Lord knows those that are his and then the other side, "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

When Paul wrote to Titus, he used the expression in the 1st verse, "The truth which is according to godliness." I used to like to tell my theological students, "If you are looking for a definition of theology from the world of God itself, that's it. The truth, which is according to godliness." The doctrine and the practice, bound together in one phrase, "The truth that is according to godliness". That is what we hold in the Christian Church.

If you're here today and you've never believed in Christ, we remind you that he is offered the atoning sacrifice. The faith is a faith in him who loved sinners, gave himself for them. If you're a sinner, you are the object of the preaching of the word of God and the object of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're a sinner and you recognize that you are such the Gospel is for you. It's the good news. It's the message of deliverance so that you may know eternal life and all of the other blessings that go with it. That special relationship to the Lord that only you may have. I hope you realize the blood shed was shed for sinners' sins.

Come to Christ. Trust him. Believe in him. Make that decision now. Don't leave this auditorium or Believers Chapel without making that decision. Know that you belong to him. No one knows what tomorrow may bring forth. Let's stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father we give Thee thanks for these wonderful messages that our Lord gave to John to give to the churches. We recognize our assemblies so often in the message. Deliver us from ensnarement with the world. Deliver us from compromise. Help us to hold fast our Lord's name and to keep the faith in him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.