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Revelation

Chapter 2 - Revealing the Secrets to Overcoming Darkness

Feign Not the Flame (vs. 12-17 - Part II)

Revelation 2:12-17: “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. ‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My

mouth. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

Well, we didn't finish this one last week, did we? And whose fault was that? Alright. Well, I'm not going to blame you this time. In a way, I like when I don't finish particular passages because it gives me more freedom to talk to you about exactly how this pertains to us. So, I'm going to enjoy this time together with you. As we've been going through the seven churches of Asia Minor, what we know is that God is displaying the churches as vessels for light. Obviously, the candlesticks that are surrounding Christ and then He holds the stars of the messengers in His right hand and wants them to shine. As we've oftentimes quoted the passage of Matthew, "Let your light so shine before men. You're a city set on a hill to be a light." So, God has called the church to be a light. The

question is, what is that light? What we know is that the light is the gospel of Christ, and it is the Gospel of God. It is the good news that God loves you so that the light is the love of God, and to proclaim the love of God is what the church has been called to do. The love of God being proclaimed does not necessarily mean that we compromise in righteousness, because of course, we know according to 1 Corinthians 13, that it's love that really rejoices in righteousness. So, true love cares about what is right and what is wrong. So, the church is bearing that light. The concern is, of course, as He comes to the churches, is that they're all struggling with something. In particular, as He's going through the individual churches, He says, "I know where you are and I know what you're struggling with, and this is what I want you to do. One of the problems, as Galatians 6 says, is that I think we have a tendency to deceive ourselves.

Scripture says,

(Galatians 6:7) "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

(Galatians 6:8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

But it's an interesting phrase that really states, “Don't be deceived.” Now, it's not talking as much about the fact that other people are deceiving us, but that we have a proclivity to be deceived, and we oftentimes use the phrase, “blind spot”. Of course, Matthew says it really is a log, not a spot, but we have these blind spots in our lives, and it is the graciousness of God that begins to reveal to us, “You need to do this in order to overcome.” It is in those weaknesses that really hold us back from victory, overcoming. As we know in 1 John 5, this is the victory, “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.” So, the whole problem is of course, you're not really putting your trust in God and believing that He's the power and that He's able and you're not coming to Him as the resource. Oftentimes, it doesn't take long before we figure, “I know what's going on.” So, we start winging it instead of going to the word of God and saying, “What does it say?” So,

faith always goes, "He knows better than I do. I'm going to listen to Him and I'm going to do what's right."

As we come to the church at Ephesus, what is clear with the church at Ephesus is that they know what the right thing to do is, and quite frankly, they're very zealous about it. Almost well, really, to the point of being oppressive towards other people. It doesn't take much for the church to become legalist. I mean, people rebel against God, and what do you do? Well, you've got to beat them up. I mean, that's the only way you get them to do the right thing, but before long, you find yourself falling out of the light and the light, of course, obviously being the love of God. It should be the love of God that constrains men, but it doesn't take much before you begin to think, "Well, I've got to fix this, and I've got to make it happen." So, He turns to the church at Ephesus and He says, "What you need to work on is this whole thing of love, because if you don't have love, there is no light." I mean, why would people change? Because you have a bigger stick? The thing that really changes the heart is the love of God. It's the cross that changes the

heart. If you throw that out, if you cease to function in that realm, then the light no longer exists; everybody's in darkness, even till now. So, He turns to the Church of Ephesus, and He goes, "The light has to be focused on." And as Paul will write to the church at Ephesus, as he writes to Timothy in the Book of Timothy, he'll tell Timothy, who is the pastor of the Church of Ephesus, "Remember, Timothy, the goal of our instruction is love." In other words, "Keep love the focus of the church. The love of God has to be the focus of the church. If you will, then you will overcome. If you don't, then there will be no light."

He then turns the Church of Smyrna, and in many different ways we're going to demonstrate the love of God. So, He turns to the Church of Smyrna, and He says, "I know you're going into great tribulation. I know what's happening. I know what's going on. I know the tribulation that you're having to suffer. I'm very much acutely aware of what's going on in your life, but I can tell you this, that you have this opportunity to shine the light of God's love, and this is how you're going to do it. You're not going to

hesitate when it comes to suffering for doing what's right. You're not going to hesitate. You're going to go in there. You're not going to be afraid of it. You're going to go right in there.” And when you think about it, when the world sees Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego going into the fire, there is something that strikes the heart of man and says, “They must love God. There's no other reason why they would do something like this.” So, in some settings, the church has the opportunity to display the love of God by going willingly, without hesitation to the times of great tribulation, and saying, “I'm doing this for God.” Of course, Peter will reiterate this over and over again in 1 Peter, that “Look, you do this, you suffer for doing what is right, it's like Christ, the glory of God rests upon you.” And what a great picture of light when the glory of God is resting upon me. I mean, when was the light the brightest? When Jesus was on the cross suffering for your sins and for my sins. So, if you were to see Him on the cross and He goes, “I don't know if I really want to do this. Let Me think about it.” “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.” Right before they start with the nails or, “That really hurts guys.” I mean, there's 1,001 things He could have said

that would have sent us a signal that “I don't think He really wants to do it.” But Scripture says, “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” And as we've oftentimes quoted there from Hebrews, He thought nothing of the pain, of the shame that were to come because compared to the glory, it was nothing. It was nothing. So, what a wonderful way, what a wonderful opportunity. There are going to be times that you're going to be going through difficult circumstances and situations. Look, if you walk around going, “Ow!” all the time, then people are going, “Well, are you really doing this because you care, because you love God, because you trust Him?” You see? But if you're going around going, “I consider it all joy when I encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of my faith produces endurance” and you begin to glory in knowing that God is doing right, and people go, “Ok. The love of God, the light's on.” So, with Smyrna the light's on.

Well, the Church of Pergamum, it's an interesting combination and the combination is one of government and for lack of a better term, just loose living, and those

two things have kind of come in to infiltrate the church. And it is infiltrated in the sense that in the Pergamum in particular, the whole cult worship of the emperor was very, very strong and very powerful. But what makes it interesting, and what ties it all together was the example that he gives of Balaam as well as the Nicolaitans because you know he lists Balaam and then he lists the Nicolaitans, and you're going, "Ok, I'm not really sure where they tie together." And I know some of you are sitting there going, "I don't even know who they are." But as you're going through there, you begin to realize that there has to be a connection because of the way that He words it.

In fact, if you pick up with me in Revelation 2, where He starts off in verse 12,

(Revelation 2:12) "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:"

Now once again, just to reiterate, He is establishing His authority. Now, we know the great text in Hebrews, "The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword." It's

able to cut in, but the point of the sword is that God, Christ specifically, is in authority of the power that's there, the Roman power. As Romans 13 says, the government doesn't bear a sword for nothing. It's a symbol of the power and authority, and God says, "Who do you think is in control?" That's an interesting question to ask because here we are in this world and people are wielding their swords and their power, and we go, "Whoa, things are out of control." God says, "Who do you think is in control?"

So, He starts off,

"... The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

(Revelation 2:13) 'I know where you dwell...'"

Once again, all the way through, "I know your deeds," where He talks about the Church at Ephesus. "I know your tribulation" where He talks to the Church of Smyrna. In this particular text, "I know where you dwell." But in each case, He's letting us know that He's once again intimately acquainted with all of our ways.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...”

Now, once again, the adversary or the one who is against God is on the throne, and we talked about this last week, and I don't want to go too much in the history. I mean, it's just hard to pull the plug on it because there's so much that's involved that ties in with this. But at this time, Domitian is the emperor, and he has declared himself, “Lord god of the kingdom.” Now, that has been more declared by the satellite nations or the satellite people, than it has been the people in Rome, or even the Domitian himself. Why are they doing this? Why are they willing to do the whole emperor worship thing? It's very simple, economics, because if you kiss up to the big guy then he sends more money. They began to work in the realm of client/patron relationship. So, if you'll build a temple in your city as unto the emperor, and really embellish it and maybe sometimes he'll come, maybe sometimes some of his men will come and you go, “Oh, we worship you, O King. You’re the greatest. The most wonderful thing that ever happened to us.” They actually found some ancient documents about Augustus and how

they actually said, “Oh, Augustus has saved us. He's our savior. He's helped our economy and he's done this.” Well, there's nothing new under the sun, right? We've heard that before, but what it does is it puts you in a place in which you can now receive benefit. So, they actually called the satellite cities a client/patron relationship. By the way, we will end up getting there, but this is where we get the phrase “patron saints” because the amalgamation of the government into the church became, “Well, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, and I'll give you sainthood. So, we'll kind of deem you with money and funds and everybody's happy. It works for everybody.” It's basically fundamentally a quid pro quo relationship. So, what you have going on is a power that is infiltrating the city at Pergamum, but it's a power that is against God. Thus the words, “Satan is on the throne.” It's against God, because why? Because the worship is to Satan. It's saying, “All hail to the emperor, who is our savior.” Now, once again, we know that historically, the city of Pergamum had worshipped their kings some 300 years before Christ even came on the scene as saviors. They actually used the word as a title of

their kings, the Greek kings, before the Roman government came in, as “*sótér*” which is where we would actually get the word “savior”. So, they called them that. So, they already have a history of that. As we also know, and we talked about within this particular city, not only is there emperor worship, but there's another temple that's very prominent and that's of Asclepius, which of course, obviously, as we talked about last week, was the God of healing. It is his staff that the physicians wear on their coats with the serpent around it, because the snake whispered into his ear and brought him some sort of help and aid. So, he began to worship it. So, it was his staff that he declares as god, and even today the physicians use that staff, and now it may have been that the Greeks actually pulled that from all the way back in Numbers, the Scripture. However, they've made it a god and that's what our system has tied into. The point of the passage is that there's an interesting amalgamation of savior mentality and “ruler god” that is tied into this whole city.

Now, keep reading, because we're going to see it all come together as we go in the passage.

So, He says,

(Revelation 2:13) “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

Which it seems to convey that there are certain things that he wouldn't do. Now, what it seems to convey specifically is that he probably wouldn't do an emperor worship thing. Would it be necessarily Domitian that would have them killed? Not necessarily, and this is the interesting point. This is all based on historical documents. What would happen is that the patrons would kill somebody that wouldn't bow down to the Caesar because they knew that if he wouldn't bow down to Caesar worship, then they wouldn't have the upper hand in the financial realm. It's not unlike in Ephesus. Why are they wanting to kill Paul? Because he's messing with the money. They don't mind if you mess with their relatives, whatever, but you mess with the money and they're going to come after you. So, the same thing is

happening within this passage, and somebody has died because they were not willing to play the game, so to speak, and this is my point. There's a game that's being played. If I can just stop here, just a moment and remind you of a passage that goes all the way back to Psalm.

If you go back with me in Psalm 81, I would say to keep your finger in Revelation, but you know it's the last book so it's not necessary for you to do that. In Psalm chapter 81 there's an interesting phrase that is given, and clearly there are other passages that we could turn to in this.

One of His points is that “My people are stubborn; they're not listening to Me.” And God is longing for His people to love Him because they love Him, not because they have to, not because they're made to. There's another Psalm that says, “Because of my great power, my enemies feign worship.” I mean, you have a heavy enough hand, people will do whatever you tell them to, obviously.

But He goes on, and He says,

(Psalm 81:13) “Oh that My people would listen to Me...”

You can hear the cry of the heart.

“... That Israel would walk in My ways!

(Psalm 81:14) “I would quickly subdue their enemies
And turn My hand against their adversaries.

(Psalm 81:15) “Those who hate the LORD would pretend
obedience...”

Now, this is where the tie comes in, because really the problem is that this whole mentality that is in this world of Pergamum is a mentality of “you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. We don't really like you, but we'll worship you.” You understand? “So, we'll give you what you want; you give us what we want. We'll shake hands. We'll walk away. You're good. I'm good.” But nobody really likes each other. Nobody's really into this. In fact, it was interesting, the more documents I read, nobody really even believed that the emperor was God, but the whole worship thing once again was beneficial to everybody.

So, as you look in the passage, we have Satan on the throne. We have somebody that was not willing to play the game. This is the key point in the text. He wasn't willing to play the game, and because of that he was taken out. Once again, we believe historically that was

probably the pastor. One of the historical documents records that Antipas was the pastor of the Church of Pergamum.

If you go on, He says,

(Revelation 2:14) “But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam...”

Now, to sum up, the teaching of Balaam is basically, “My office can be bought.” He's a prophet, but he's a prophet for hire.

Peter makes mention of this, if you look with me in 2 Peter 2. It talks about that there are those that are coming into the body of Christ, of the church, and they're reveling in their deceptions. To tie it in with 2 Timothy 4, they're telling people what they want to hear; people are then accumulating from them teachers for themselves, teachers in accordance with their own desires. So, if you want a big audience, put your finger to the wind, find out what's going on, and then do it and you'll have a lot of people come. As long as you're fitting in with the crowds.

I'm even hearing now that they have actually “green” churches. Which our seats are green, so it’s fine.

If you look in 2 Peter 2 and you drop on down, it talks about those,

(2 Peter 2:14) “having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed...”

Ok, so what's the motivation? Money. It all keeps coming back to money.

It's interesting when Jesus is talking about the Pharisees and these are very religious people, right? I mean, they're walking religion. So, here they are, and you go, “Wow, they're really holy.” In fact, His disciples go, “If these guys can't get saved, who can get saved?” But Jesus says, “Well, let Me tell you something about the Pharisees. They love money.” In Luke, it literally says, “lovers of money”. So, it's the bane of so many things in the church. But if you think about it, once the church starts loving money, they cease to be able to love you because they already have something else they love, and they're always

going to love that more than you. They're always going to compromise you for the money.

(2 Peter 2:15) “forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

“I can't be had, but I can be bought.” So, he's willing to do whatever it takes. He knows that he's going against God, but going against God is not the issue with him. It's the promise of a dignified position, money, whatever.

As it goes on, it says in verse 16, he wouldn't even listen to a dumb donkey that was smarter than him. Now, the dumb donkey was smarter than Balaam. So, what does that make Balaam? I don't know, but not smarter than a dumb donkey. The point is that his love for these things clouded any sense or facsimile of logic or reason or righteousness or love, and the only thing you can think of is “You pay me enough money, I'll curse God's people.” And the unfortunate thing is that's infiltrated the churches down through the years. There's a lot I have to say about that, but I won't have time to say it all.

If you go back to Revelation 2, His statement is,

(Revelation 2:14) “... some who hold the teaching of Balaam...”

Which, just a reminder, in the Book of Jude, it makes reference specifically to him as well, and it literally says the blackest pit of hell is reserved for people like him. This is why James says, “Let not many of you become teachers.”

So, it says,

(Revelation 2:14) ““But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak...””

That is to say, the one that was trying to bribe him to curse God's people, from the Moabites.

“... to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”

Now, what he's talking about, of course, is that you're involving yourself in institutions that you know are causing stumbling blocks to other people. Now, I know you're saying, “It's just business.” I mean, the business

transactions were done in the temples. So, you're going in there, of course, they would have feast and festivals and times of drinking, and you've got to take them out to dinner to make the sale, right? So, you find yourself in places where you shouldn't. There's no real concern about how it's affecting anybody else; that people may be saying, "I didn't know he still worshipped Zeus," or Asclepius in this particular case, or was a follower of the great Caesar. "I didn't know that he was in that." But the guy would come out and he would go, "Look. Wait a minute. Here's the deal."

If you look at the passage, it goes on and says,

(Revelation 2:15) "So you also have some who in the same way..."

Which immediately takes it and ties it together. So, he's taking those that thought and were working in the realm of Balaam, who says, "I can be bought" and it's somehow tied to the Nicolaitans. Now, we know that we talked earlier that the Nicolaitans are basically antinominalists, which means that they're against the law or "You can't tell me what to do. I'm free to do anything I want to do."

So, we know that's how they think and it kind of infiltrated the Church of Rome as well, because Paul will say, "There are some among you that basically say, 'Look, why can't we just do everything that we want to do? Grace abounds.'" So, it's kind of like a license to do evil under the garb of grace and the Nicolaitans were coming in. Why and how does that tie in? Well, what you have are people doing things for personal gain, and they've learned to play the game. They've learned to play the government game. They know how it works. "Look, if you have to be at Caesar's feet, be at Caesar's feet, it'll fill your pockets. Whatever it takes, you become a patron, and once you're a patron, then you have all the privileges and all the things that are necessary for this. So, let's go for it." And somebody says to you, "Well, gee, isn't that wrong?" And the Nicolaitans go, "You can do anything you want to do. We're under grace. You can go ahead, eat, drink and be merry. For tomorrow we die." It sounds like the Epicureans, but it was kind of the Nicolaitans as well.

If you look in the passage, it goes on to say,

(Revelation 2:16) “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”

In other words, “You're afraid of the Caesar, of him pulling his sword out? You should be afraid of what I say against you because you're not being loyal to Me. You should be afraid of Me.” The problem is man's afraid of everybody, but who they should be.

(Revelation 2:17) “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna...”

Now, why does He make reference to this? It's a very interesting point because once again, you have to understand the context. What's the context? “If I take a stand, I lose my job. So, who's going to put the bread on the table?” What does God say? “I'll take care of you. You won't even know where it's coming (from). I'm taking care of you.” You'll go, “Where did it come from?” Heaven, I guess. That's the only thing I can think of.

“... to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone...”

We'll stop here a second. They had a system there in Pergamum. They had white stones and black stones, and if in fact they gave you a black stone, it actually would be a stone of condemnation. So, you could die, and you could have the sword. If you're given the white stone, you were accepted into the club and they put your name on it, and then you put it in a place that it was recognized, it would be engraved, and you go, "Now, I'm somebody." So, what do you want? The black stone or the white stone? God goes, "If you'll stop worrying about them giving you a white stone and be concerned about Me giving you the white stone, I'm going to give you a name. It's going to be like forever. Here's the deal, you'll be recognized by Me as somebody important." It's interesting because He knows how they think. So, He's put it in the context of where they are, so they might comprehend His involvement in their life and see that "I get what's important to you, but let Me tell you, all these things you have no idea there are things that are far greater of importance than that."

When you go through history, during the Apostolic Age, basically 100, maybe up to 200 AD, you realize that the church was basically meeting in homes. There were no exorbitant buildings. So, in stark contrast, you go into these cities with these massive temples that were made, some to gods, some to the emperors, and you go, “Wow, we're nobody.” Right? Just to kind of show you how this stuff infiltrates, these unfortunate things happened, I'm kind of pulling a number that's pretty close, around 314 AD. In fact, one theologian says the worst thing that ever happened to the church was that the church actually became united with the state. That was the worst thing that ever happened it. So, at around 314, that actually begins to happen. There's a guy, he's not a Christian, but he's very into the histories of, interestingly enough, emperor worship, as well as the things that were happening in Asia Minor at this particular time; as well as many of the things that we've been talking about. He makes mention of some things, and I just want to quote some things to you, and then I'm going to try to explain myself in this. He writes about the College of Priests, which was made-up of local VIP's. Now, let me just say

this. That's the way it worked. You had your temples, right? But those temples were in some way tied together with the emperor worship and in some way, you tied yourself to those temples so that the monkey wouldn't be on your back and benefits would come to you and you were given a white stone. You were accepted and money flowed better. It was good for business. So, you're just making contacts. You don't really believe in it, but you're just making contacts. So, it says, "The College of Priests was made-up of local VIP's, who in this way came into contact with the central power. The occasional public cult festivals were cause for general joy and amusement." We're talking about like parades and stuff, "and would for a moment bring all the populace into almost personal contact with the distant government. With the adoption of Christianity, the building of temples had stopped, but in its stead, the empirically financed church construction period began on a similar scale. The close connection between the official sacred architecture and the emperor cult and earliest official church architecture has basically been the same." In fact, one of the things that they mention is that many of the Greek gods were brought

into the church as statues. They just renamed them.

“Well, that's David; that's not Zeus or whatever.” “Few will deny that the earliest legal church buildings were planned and executed under the auspices of the emperor. At the same time, the leaders of the Christian cults were given important posts in the administration, with the consequence that the local VIPs were soon found among the leaders of the Christian cult, and Christianity became a part of a career in the same fashion as the earlier emperor cult.” You understand what we're talking about here? What we're talking about, in fact, in Constantine's life and the next emperors after Constantine, the next 5, it says both the emperors and their wives were incorporated into the Christian throng of divine beings, in that they all became Saints, so that they might be worshipped in their new temples at fixed times of the year, so they might be invoked as being saviors.” Now, why am I telling you all this? Well, I mean, I can tell you a whole lot more. When you look at the early times of the popes and how they came into play and how it was just an amalgamation of the government as well as the church. I mean, the “rule of harlots” from 904 to 963 was

the way it was defined in the Papal office. It was actually called the “rule of harlots,” which means that during Pope John the 12th, they'd actually turned the office into a brothel. I don't know if you know this or not. I don't want to go into too much detail because it's just way too gross. In 934, The Pope murders another Pope and becomes the Pope. In 1012, Benedict begins selling the office and it's actually at that point called simony. “Simony,” where do we get that from? In Acts. So, he began selling the office, and one guy in particular wanted to be Pope. So, they sold the office to him, and they said, “Well, you're going to have to be a student.” So, one day he was a layman. One day he studied and the next day he was Pope. I mean, a 12-year-old's parents had enough money that they made a 12-year-old Pope. What we have is a history of placating to money; playing in with money. It's no wonder the selling of indulgences came in, and you say, “Well, that was that church.” No, it's not that church. We have churches where people are flying in Jets, signing book deals. I mean, it's not just in a particular religion. It has infiltrated the church, and the church is being sold, truth is being sold for money. People are saying, “Well, it's not

that bad. I'm supposed to be happy." Well, that's the Nicolaitans speaking to you, that's not Jesus talking to you. Jesus is saying, "Take up your cross and follow Me." And He turns to His disciples in Matthew 10, and He says, "Freely, you've been given, freely give." What is all this charging stuff? What are all these booksellings about? See, and this is the church taking in.

So, if you look with me in 2 Corinthians in particular, Paul deals with this as Christ is dealing with this in this particular passage in Revelation. In 2 Corinthians, if you look with me, we've oftentimes come to this passage, but to me it's such a meaningful passage because you realize at the very early stages of the church, money was infiltrating and coming in, and Paul had to make it clear we can't go this way. Now, we know the church has. We know that so many have, so that the people are going, "Where's the light?" And no wonder people are confused. They go, "It looks just like a business." In fact, quite frankly, some of the large churches are actually calling their pastors CEO's. So, it looks like business; it is business. There is no light because when you're pursuing

after money, you can't love people because you're always thinking, "Well, what do they want me to tell them?" And if you're always thinking, "What do they want me to tell them?" Then you're not telling the truth that will actually help them, but you're withholding things, and the only thing you're really concerned about is, "Am I going to be recognized by the people around me? Because I want them to give me a white stone." And the Scripture says, "No, you want your white stone from God." Now, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "Look, God always leads us in a triumph, right?"

(2 Corinthians 2:15) "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

(2 Corinthians 2:16) to the one an aroma from death to death..."

In other words, not everybody is going like what we say, but we're going to say the truth so as to rescue people.

"... to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"

Verse 17. What does he say? We are not like Balaam's; we don't think like Nicolaitans.

The text reads this way,

(2 Corinthians 2:17) “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God...”

We're not trying to make money off this stuff, but we speak from sincerity. Now, once, in fact, you make it a business, you can't be sincere anymore. It just sucks us the sincerity out. You're just making money. I mean, you're no different than the salesman that meet you on the car lot, and he goes, “I'm really glad to see you today.” He's not glad to see you. He's glad to see your pocketbook, and he's happy because you're going to spend money, and he'll be glad when you leave the money, and you leave. Because the only thing he cares about is your money.

“For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”

Jump to 2 Corinthians 4,

(2 Corinthians 4:1) “Therefore, since we have this ministry...”

It's a very unique ministry. We've been transformed into the image of Christ, as Chapter 3 says.

(2 Corinthians 4:2) “but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness...”

He's talking about the same thing that we saw in 2 Peter, right? People exploiting people out of greed. “If you pay me enough money, I'll get you to be forgiven by God. You give me enough money; I'll make you a patron saint. You buy books, and I'll send you a healing hanky.” Whatever it is, but it's not just one group. The church has been soiled by this, and people are going, “I don't see the light.” There is no light. That's the point. There is no light.

His statement is,

(2 Corinthians 4:2) “but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth...”

That's light, right?

“... commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

(2 Corinthians 4:4) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

How is he blinding? That's the question you have to ask yourself. It's the throne of Satan there. How is he blinding? I'm going to tell you how he's blinding. He's making it just business, and people can't see that. “I think somebody cares for me. I think this person would minister to me whether they had anything from me or they didn't have anything. I think this would be a place that I could go to that has nothing to do with money.”

I had a professor a number of years ago in a class, and he had written at this point, about 10 or 12 books and I never will forget. We walk in the first day into class, and he goes, “If you want to pass the course, you're going to have to read all my books. You're going to buy all my

books, and if you understand what I'm saying, then I'll pass you." And I'm going, "Is this a Bible class?" and I'm rechecking my thing. "I don't know if it's a Bible class. Why do I have to buy all your books?" Maybe somebody else could maybe have a different angle and wouldn't that be helpful to me, but you could hear, "I'm not necessarily concerned about you coming to a relationship with God or getting closer to God. I'm selling books." Do you understand what I'm saying? It infiltrates all the way around.

(2 Corinthians 4:3) "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

(2 Corinthians 4:4) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:5) For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord..."

Well, that's different than emperor worship, isn't it? The emperors didn't believe that they were gods. They would

tie themselves to a god that they might be worshipped, and that money would flow. It's the bottom line.

(2 Corinthians 4:4) “in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving....”

(2 Corinthians 4:5) “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.

(2 Corinthians 4:6) For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

What does the face of Christ look like? “I love you. I'll die for you.” So, Paul will actually say to the Corinthians, “When we came to you, we didn't come seeking what was yours. We came seeking you.” A business can't do that. A business can't say that. You take money and you put it aside, and now you can say it. “We came for you.” See, the light is being veiled and Satan's doing it and we're allowing the world to come into our world and delegate what the church is to look like. Once you start doing that, the light goes out.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today and our desire is to be the church that is a light set on a hill that would demonstrate the love of Christ unadulterated, clear, distinct; that the world may see that somebody actually loves them, not because they can receive something from them, but because they're loved. Lord, give us that heart.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I'm asking you to work together with me. As Paul will say to the Corinthians, "I'm working together with Christ," that we might demonstrate this message in the church. That the church might be the light that is not attached to any kind of remuneration, but is attached to the love of God. We believe that God is going to take care of us. We don't know where the food's going to come from. It's going to come down from heaven. We believe that God is the one that counts and that if my name is recorded, I want it record by Him. We just live differently. But I'm asking you to pray that God would cause you to live that difference;

that we would be at church that really is a church that is the light to this world.