

## Revelation 2:12-17 | Truth and Consequences

In these letters, Jesus is looking to comfort, commend and console (and correct)

- With His sovereign knowledge (**I know...**)
- "I know your deeds..." (Ephesus)
- "I know your tribulation/pressure..." (Smyrna)
- "I know where you dwell..." (Pergamum)
  - Map 3 (No Harbor; Capital City; Great History; Imperial Cult)
  - **Satan's Throne** = authority and power and ???
  - He is calling them to live out **Christian truth** there... (tough place... **He knows**)

A concern for truth

- Tip = "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword..." (v. 12)
- Cf. "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands..." (Ephesus; left first love)
- Cf. "The first and the last who was dead, who was dead and has come to life..." (Smyrna; suffered)

Jesus is not only concerned that we **love Him first and most** and that we **endure suffering** for His name's sake faithfully... but also that we **cling securely to the truth** (**the sharp two-edged sword**)

There are two consequential truths that Jesus is concerned about in this passage:

- 1. The truth about Himself
- 2. The truth about holiness

### 1. The truth about Himself

- You hold fast **my Name** and did not deny **my faith...** (verse 13)
  - They are commended for this (did not)
- **Name** = identity; reputation; character; glory
- **Faith** = work; gospel
  - These are part of the essentials of the Christian faith
- Non-negotiable and not to be compromised
  - And they were not compromised in the church at Pergamum—but at great cost
  - "...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..." (v. 13)
  - We know nothing more about **Antipas**... but we can guess (did not)
  - Look what Jesus calls Him:
    - **My witness, My faithful one**
    - Cf. **Jesus Christ, the faithful witness** (1:5)
- We do not compromise on the unique identity and work of Jesus
- **For His name's sake: Reputation**
  - Jesus cares about His reputation—is there any way in which your life shows that you don't?
  - Situation with some in Pergamum

### 2. The truth about holiness

- **Verses 14-15**
- There are some who hold to the teaching **Balaam** (a type)
  - The story of Balaam (**Numbers 22-25**)
  - He suggested to Balak that Moabite girls should seduce the Israelites men, and invite them to take part in their idolatrous and immoral feasts
  - Provoking the anger and wrath of the Lord
- **Idea** = promoting; teaching ungodliness among God's people (**minimizing sin**)
- Cf. **Nicolaitans**
  - Imperial Cult (Emperor Worship)
  - **Idolatry** = misplaced longing for security
  - **Immorality** = misplaced longing for intimacy = love substitutes

## Knowledge about Christ's name and faith are to lead to worship & satisfaction that affect morality and idolatry

Jesus is serious about holiness—teaching it and practicing it

What he is telling us here is that it is not enough to cling to the truth about Jesus (though we must)

- But the **truth about Jesus must also form** how we think, feel and act about morality (sexuality)
- **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**
- **1 Corinthians 6:9-12 (-20)**

We read these things and think:

- *"Oh that is so old fashion... the Bible saying that may have made sense a long time ago, but culture and what is acceptable has changed. What used to be considered immoral is now considered normal. We cannot live by those old dictates."*
- But wait a minute... that is not true
  - First of all, you have a short sighted view of history—there has always been immorality that was considered normal and acceptable
    - **Sodom and Gomorrah**
    - The very culture Jesus is addressing here:
- **Cicero (contemporary of Julius Caser and Marc Antony):**

*"If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden the love of courtesans (upper class prostitutes), he is extremely severe. I am not able to deny the principle he states. But he is at variance, not only with the license of what our own age allows, but also with the customs and concessions of our ancestors. When indeed was this not done? When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was such permission denied? When was it that that which is now lawful was not lawful?"*<sup>1</sup>
- The false teachers (**Balaamites** and **Nicolaitans**) encouraged the believers in Pergamum to **conform** to the accepted standards of the world, and to stop being different
- They were very different (when obedient)
  - *It has been said that the one entirely new virtue that Christianity introduced to the ancient world was sexual purity*
    - This comes from God's word
    - Christians were not normal... therefore very much not accepted (**= the struggle there**)
  - Sexual purity is **endorsed** and (in this instance) about to be **enforced** by Jesus

## Verse 16

- He tells them to repent... or else...
- The **sharp two-edged sword; sword of His mouth** = God's Word
  - Sword like qualities:
    - Pricks the conscience
    - Wounds the proud
    - Cuts away our camouflage
    - Pierces our defenses
    - It exposes motives
    - Lays bare our need and sin
    - Destroys error and false doctrine
  - Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)
 

**For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.**

<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *Letter to the Seven Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 40.

- God's way of dealing with error is truth (offensive)
  - It is the only way:
  - "Falsehood will not be suppressed by the gruesome methods of the inquisition, or by the burning of heretics at the stake, or by restrictive legislation. Ideas will not be overcome by force. Only truth can defeat error. The false ideologies of the world can be overthrown by the superior ideology of Christ. We have no other weapon than this sword. We must use it fearlessly." –John Stott<sup>2</sup>
- There comes a time where this sword becomes the sword of judgment
  - **Verse 16**
    - Not to picture Jesus with a tongue shaped like a sword—rather we are to understand that this means that Jesus speaks decisive words of judgment
  - John 12:46-48 (NASB)
    - 46 I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.**
    - 47 If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.**
    - 48 He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.**
  - Christ's saving word turned judge for those who refuse to repent (= held accountable for what we know)

The sword of Rome was something to be feared (**Antipas**)

- But the sword of Christ is greater than that of Rome
- Matthew 10:28 (NASB)
  - Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**
- **Whose judgment do you fear?**
- The 2 are in conflict (God's word and the word of the world) (**cannot serve two masters**)
- Are you giving into the **sword of the spirit of the age** that is pushing you to indulge the flesh... or...

But we can repent!

- **The call to repent is always one of love!**
  - It is an attempt to keep us from judgment (because of love!)
  - And it offers an alternative (**1 John 1:9**)
  - Better promises—truer love

## Verse 17

2 precious gifts promised to the one who remains faithful to Jesus (**overcome**)

- **Hidden Manna**
- **White Stone with a new name**

These are promises of ultimate fulfillment in Christ

- **Idolatry** = desire for satisfaction and security (to have our needs met)
- **Sexual immorality** = desire for intimacy; to be known deeply; to experience nearness
  - **Manna** = God's provision
  - **Stone and secret name** = Exclusive knowledge, private interaction, that is the essence of intimacy
- **Jesus is arming us for the war on lust**
- Offering us heavenly joys that far outweigh the passing pleasures of sin on earth
  - To deny Christ (as they did not) is to say: Who Jesus is not better
  - To engage in idolatry and immorality is to say: What Jesus offers is not better
- **So, Christian, where are you with sexual purity? Are you like the world (idolatry) or are you different?**

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church* (London: Angus Hudson Ltd, 1990), 54.