

Lent, Day 5
Monday, March 11, 2019

Revelation 2:12–17

The Christians in Pergamum, another imperial city, are struggling with the question of how to live out their faith. By holding to a strict code they have received persecution leading to death for one of them, Antipas. But, this has led some to try to take the flexibility of Christianity and live like their pagan nations. This has expressed itself particularly in the realm of sexual morality. This is an ancient issue; Balaam when he couldn't curse Israel (in their wilderness journeys) directly counselled using foreign women to entice Israel to foreign gods. History is repeating itself. Rome may wield the sword, but Jesus has the two edge sword and he will overcome by it.

Things haven't changed much. We are still asking questions about how we should be relating to the culture. We are still tempted to live so we do not draw the criticism of the surrounding culture. Sexual morality is still a central issue and there are some asking us to reflect the culture in this regard. However, the book of Revelation, as well as Scripture as a whole, holds our sexual morality with utmost importance. N. T. Wright summarizes why this is important:

The same tactic still works remarkably well today. Sexual morality isn't, as it is so often portrayed, a matter of a few ancient rules clung to by some rather conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on. It is, rather, a matter of the call of the creator God to faithful man-plus-woman marriage, reflecting the complementarity of heaven and earth themselves. That is the theme which finally emerges in the great scene at the end of the present book. Married love is a signpost to the faithfulness of the creator to his creation. The reason sexual immorality is so often coupled with idolatry, as here, is because such behaviour points to different gods—the gods of blood and soil, of race and power. It's a toxic mixture, and the Christian has no business getting involved with it, as Paul himself warned in 1 Corinthians 10.¹

To step into the wilderness of lent is a step away from the culture. It is an intentional reminder that we are the “called out ones” (*ekklesia*, church). At the same time, we cannot let down our guard. The wilderness is a place of temptation and testing. We must use this time apart to remember who we are, whose we are, and to whom we are called.

Prayer

Provider of sustenance in the wilderness, feed us on your body and blood that we might gain the strength we need to arrive faithfully in your new age. Help us to stand as an alternative to the culture. Not as a voice condemning, but as a voice crying out in the wilderness. Amen.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 21-22.