Fight a Good Fight with the Sword of the Spirit

Revelation 2:12-29

Key Verse:12:16 “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Last week we studied Christ’s message to the two first churches out of the seven, Ephesus and Smyrna. Christ commanded them to be faithful to the point of death so that they could receive life as their victor’s crown. (2:10) It is not too much to emphasize the importance of faithfulness in our Christian life. Our God is faithful. The faithful God is faithful to those who are faithful to him. However, it is not easy to be faithful always, not to mention, to the point of death. Even Abraham, known as a father of faith, made mistakes before God. Being faithful is not just maintaining our faith, but improving our faith. Our faith cannot grow by itself, but through discipline. So, Apostle Paul said in 1 Tim 4:7 &15, “*Train yourself to be godly…and show your progress*.” Faith is like a mina in the Parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19. In this parable Jesus gave minas to his servants according to their ability. Those who received ten minas worked hard and made ten more. Those who received five minas worked hard and made five more. Their master was pleased with their obedience and faithfulness. He commended them saying, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness*.” (Mt 25:21, Lk 19:17) But the one who received one mina did not put the money to work, but dug into the ground and hid it. He thought that the mina could grow by itself. He didn’t work. Later, he was severely rebuked by his master who said, “*You wicked, lazy servant*!... (Mt 25:26) Like the mina, faith cannot grow by itself. As the servants put the minas to work, so we must struggle to be faithful and train ourselves to be godly. According to the law of nature, nothing remains intact as time passes by, but deteriorated. Even though the Israelites came out of Egypt and became free people, it took a long time for them become a covenant people. God disciplined them, for how long? ‘forty years’ to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Today’s passage covers Christ’s message to two other churches in Asia, the Church of Pergamum and the Church of Thyatira. These two churches had common problems to be resolved: idolatry and sexual immorality. Christ Jesus teaches them how to overcome these problems and to be faithful. Christ’s message also teaches us today how to struggle against this unbelieving and perverse generation and become faithful Christians.

The city of Pergamum was located 65 miles north from Smyrna. Pergamum was a beautiful and wealthy city. So, the Roman government made it as an administrative capital, like the city of Columbia, Missouri. Pergamum was the center of worshiping pagan gods. The first temple for the Roman Emperor was established in 29 AD in Pergamum. Dionysius, the god of the royal king, and Asclepius, the god of healing, were the main gods in the city. People built the image of bulls and snakes for these pagan gods. So, Jesus called the city of Pergamum in verse 13, “***where Satan has his throne***”, and ‘***where Satan lives***.” Indeed, the power of darkness and the evil spirits were dominant in this city.

Jesus commended the Christians in Pergamum for their perseverance and faith in the midst of the government’s persecution and Satan’s deception. They kept their faith even when Antipas, the first martyr in Pergamum, was killed. Still, Jesus warned them against the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which was labeled the teaching of Balaam. (14) The teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans had the similarity of misleading the believers. Balak was the king of Moab, who wanted to destroy the people of God, the Israelites. So, he hired Balaam, a prophet, to curse on the Israelites. But, Balaam blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them because he feared the God of Israel. Later Balak deceived Balaam to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. (Nu 25:1-3) The teaching of Balaam was the symbol of deception and misleading God’s people to sin, the sin of idolatry and sexual immorality.

The Nicolaitans were the short-lasted heretic group who mixed Christian faith with idolatry, especially emperor worship, and prostitution. According to Bible scholars the Nicolaitans urged Christians to burn incense before the image of the Emperor. It must have been hard for the Christians in the city to resist the deception of the Nicolaitans. In verses 15-16, Jesus still rebukes those who holds to the teaching of the Nicolaitans and urges them to repent. Look at verses 15-16. “***Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth***.” Jesus rebuked them and asked them to repent. Jesus encouraged the previous two churches, the church of Ephesus and the church of Smyrna, to be faithful. Now, he encourages the church of Pergamum to fight. They have to fight against the throne of Satan. They have to fight against the false teachings. They have to fight against the power of darkness and the spirit of evilness.

Today Jesus urges us also to fight against false teachings. As Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, and against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil. Our real enemy is Satan, who deceives us and misleads us to commit sin. Satan is deceptive and destructive. So, we must put on the full armor of God to win the battle against Satan. (Eph 6:13) The world where we live now is not much different from the day of John. False teachings are prevailing over the country and deceiving Christians even in church. They teach gospel plus prosperity. Money replaces God. People follow money more than God and become slaves to money. It is like eating food sacrificed to idols as Christian. Sexual immorality made the conscience of Christians numb and even seared. Many Christians are confused about gender issues, and their attitude toward those issues is withdrawn. We are not surprised to see the practice of the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans today in our generation.

How can we fight against these works of deception? What would Jesus do? Jesus said in verse 16, “***I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.***” Jesus said he would fight with the sword of his mouth. He will fight with the word of God. As he fights with the word of God, we must fight also with the word of God. In verse 12 Jesus identified himself as he who has **the sharp, double-edged sword**. In the Bible the word of God is described in many ways, such as light, lamp (Ps 119:105), food, seed, pruning tools, and so on. Here, the word of God is called as weapon-the sharp, double-edged sword, which destroys our enemy Satan. Jesus called himself as the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword. Adam failed in Satan’s temptation because he did not obey the word of God. Jesus defeated Satan by obeying the word of God. Whenever Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus answered, “For it is written…It is also written…It is said…” (Mt 4:1-11, Lk 4:1-13) Jesus used his sharp double-edged sword to defeat Satan.

Since the pandemic crisis began, we confront paradigm shifts in all aspects of our lives. Because of social distancing people work at home, take classes at home, and even worship at home. We don’t have to go to restaurants or grocery stores, but we can order our food and shop online. Convenience and inconvenience co-exist today. This pandemic situation lasts longer than we expected. As this pandemic continues, we also have to struggle to overcome complacency. Because of the restrictions on social activity, we compromise with our limitation. Spiritually speaking, Satan works hard to keep us away from prayer life and from the word of God. Satan disarms us before we fight against him. Those who are lazy in prayer and in reading the Bible may lose the battle. David was tempted by lust and committed sin when he disarmed himself at his palace while his soldiers were fighting against their enemies. Adam and Eve lost in temptation when they were in the Garden of Eden, not when they were in the wilderness. When we ignore these basic spiritual training, we lose our spiritual insight and our discerning hearts become dull. We don’t tell false teachings from the sound doctrine. Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart.*” So, we must fight against Satan with this sharp double-edged sword, which is the living word of God. The word of God is also the weapon which the Holy Spirit uses. In Ephesian 6:17 Apostle Paul said that the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. When we study and teach the word of God, the Holy Spirit works. It proves the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit penetrates our soul and heart, exposes our sins, and convicts our conscience to repent. Finally, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, will lead us into the truth of God. (Jn 15:26, 16:8) Amen!

What is the reward to those who are victorious? Look at verse 17. “…***To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it***.” The hidden manna reminds us of the manna in the Ark of God. (Ex 16:33-34, Heb 9:4) Manna is the symbol of God’s grace to those who have been faithful to him. It is also the symbol of God’s reward to those who eat the bread of life in heaven. In ancient days people received a white stone with their names written as the invitation to a feast. So, a white stone and a new name are also related to the privilege of attending the heavenly banquet. Those who refused to eat at the banquet for the pagan gods will eat the bread of life in the heavenly banquet with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The city of Thyatira was located forty-five miles east from Pergamum. Thyatira flourished commercially because of wool, dyed fabrics, and bronze works. So, Jesus identified himself in verse18, “***the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze***.” Jesus commended the Christians in the church of Thyatira for their deeds, love, faith, service, and perseverance. (19) Still, Jesus warned them to stand against the teaching of a false prophetess, who was labeled “Jezebel.” Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, the king of Northern Israel, who persecuted Prophet Elijah and seduced his people to worship Baal. (1Ki 16) Jezebel was an evil woman. Like Jezebel, a false prophetess in Thyatira misled the believers to idolatry and sexual immorality. Jesus would punish her and her followers, and he warned the believers to fight against her sin. Look at verse 23. “***I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds***.” Here, Jesus identified himself as the one who searches hearts and minds. This means that he knows our deep thoughts and desire. He reads our heart and judges our motivation.

What is the reward for those who are victorious in the church of Thyatira? Jesus promised them with two things: first, authority over the nation; second, the morning star. Look at verses 26-27. “***To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’ just as I have received authority from my Father***.” Jesus will give authority over the nations to those who are victorious. This reminds us of Jesus’ promise to those who made ten minas in the Parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19:17, “*Well done, my good servant! His master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities*.” Jesus promised to give five cities to those who made five minas. Because Thyatira was a commercial city, the believers were well aware of how to put their money to work and how to make profits. Those who worked hard for God’s kingdom will be greatly rewarded with many blessings in the kingdom of God. But those who become lazy in their spiritual battle will be punished and condemned. (Mt 25:30, Lk 19:27)

The second reward for them is the morning star. Look at verses 28-29. “***I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches***.” The morning star represents the Messiah in the Bible. Jesus himself said of him in 22:16, *“…I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*” According to these words Jesus promised them to give himself as their reward.

In conclusion today Jesus encourages us to fight a good fight and become victorious in our spiritual battle. The truth of God is our weapon in this deceptive world. Jesus himself is the sharp double-edged sword. By meditating his words and obeying them we may overcome this pandemic. In Isaiah 49:1,2 Prophet Isaiah said, “*He (the Lord) made my mouth like a sharpened sword…he made me into a polished arrow*…” Like Isaiah, let us pray that God may make our mouth like a sharpened sword to preach and teach the truth of God in this unbelieving generation. Amen.