

**Reigniting the Flame: Sexuality**  
**Rev 2:12-17**

**I. Introduction**

No doubt, many of you have heard this classic joke...*One day little Johnny went up to his father and asked, "daddy, where did I come from?"*

*His father stammered a bit, but finally got his composure. He knew this day would come when they would need to have THEE conversation about the birds and the bees. He just didn't expect it to come soon. But since Johnny knew enough to ask, he must be ready, thought the dad.*

*So, they sat down, and the dad proceeded to tell his son about how the expression of love resulted in the beginning of life, how life developed in the womb, and finally how a child was born. Throughout the conversation little Johnny's eyes just got wider and wider.*

*When they were all done, the father asked, "Did that answer all your questions Johnny?" Johnny replied, "Not really dad. I just wanted to know where I came from because my friend Joey said that he came from Pennsylvania."*

When it comes to matters of our sexuality, our American culture can either talk way too much about it, or far too little. Christians in particular, for the most part, talk far too little about this touchy yet life-encompassing topic of sexuality.

Now, fear not, I don't intend to be like little Johnny's dad and say more about sexuality in this one sermon than what is needed or appropriate.

The main purpose of this sermon is just to provoke your thinking, to foster ongoing conversation about a Biblical view of sexuality, and to invite you to pursue healing and wholeness in your own sexuality.

*Let us pray...*

**II. Scripture**

Before we explore the topic of our personal sexuality, let's first explore how our Bible passage addresses this topic....

**Rev 2:12-17**

*12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:*

*These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live-where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-where Satan lives.*

*14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

*17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.*

### **III. Exploring the Letter to Pergamum**

This letter to the Christians in the city of Pergamum is one of the seven letters at the beginning of the Bible book called Revelation. We are exploring these seven letters in a sermon series. Our series topic is reigniting the flame in our relationship with God and others in 2010. God is calling us this year to make relational health our first priority.

The city of Pergamum was a wealthy city, but it was also a wicked and thoroughly pagan city. Pergamum was famous for its university with a library of about 200,000 volumes. There were pagan cults and temples for the worship of Athena, Dionysus, Zeus.

It was especially famous for its worship of the god of medicine and healing, Asclepius. The rod of Asclepius, is a snake-entwined staff, and still remains a symbol of medicine today. Worship of the Roman Emperors eventually trumped all other pagan gods.

All of this then is the background of Christ's words ... *"13 I know where you live-where Satan has his throne, and that their city was "where Satan lives."* Satan did not have a condo in Pergamum. Rather, Christ was labeling all such pagan and Emperor worship as really worship of Satan.

Christians were mocked and persecuted because they would only declare Christ as Lord, not Caesar. Instead of praising the profound wisdom contained in the city's great library, they declared only God's Scripture revealed ultimate truth.

Instead of worshipping at the great temples, they worshipped in homes, and declared that their bodies were temples of God. Instead of worshipping Asclepius and seeking his healing, they declared Christ was the Great Physician. They refused to attend the feast in honor of the pagan deities and emperor, and many refused to eat the meat at these feast that was dedicated to these pagan gods.

Even in the face of so much pressure to compromise with the culture's ungodly sexuality and entertainment, and idol worship, many Christ-followers stayed faithful, even to the point of martyrdom, of whom Antipas was an example. Christ was delighted over such faithfulness.

Such faithfulness is meant to serve as an example to us likewise to remain obedient to God's holy standards in the face of our ungodly world. As they were living, so should we, living such counter-cultural lives that it provokes mocking, persecution, and redemptive curiosity.

But evidently, many of the Christians there were also compromising with worldliness, and living by the ungodly sexual standards of their culture. And so to them Christ warned... *"14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans."*

Without going into all the background detail, the references here about the "teaching of Balaam," and the "Nicolaitans," represent all forms of sexual sin. The "eating meat sacrificed to idols," represents all forms of worldliness, of compromising Biblical standards for ungodly worldly standards and values.

And this is where the ancient world of Pergamum intersects with our world today, and we discover the application of this letter to us. Clearly, you and I today face daily temptations to sexual sin, or to compromise with worldliness in order to fit in, or not be mocked, or just because the pleasures and power of this world are appealing.

Here's how we are going to explore these two areas. Both today's letter to Pergamum, and next week's letter to Thyatira address the same two areas of sexual sin, and worldly compromise. So we will focus on Biblical sexuality this week, and then address the dangers of worldliness next week.

#### **IV. Biblical Sexuality**

So serious does God look upon sexual sin that He warned the Christians in Pergamum... *16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."*

We live in a society that celebrates all forms of sinful sexuality. Tragically, all the studies reveal that American Christians show very little difference from non-Christians in their embracing of ungodly expressions of sexuality.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be! If we are to live fully into God's grand vision for GracePoint, we must move the topic of sexuality from being taboo to the table for open discussion. We must teach, preach, and most of all, role model God's standards for sexual expression. We must address the sexual sin in our own life. We must seek healing for our own sexual brokenness.

For those of you who don't personally struggle in this area, you can be guaranteed your children and grandchildren, do or will.

In the limited time we have left, I hope to just get you thinking more about three areas:

## V. The Devastating Impact of our Fallen Sexuality

We cannot separate out our sexual self, our spiritual self, and our social self. All three are intertwined to form our identity. We are born into this world as sexual beings, social beings, and spiritual beings, and we cannot separate these three parts of our identity. They all work together to make us human. We are also born into this world with sin, corruption, and fallenness in all three areas.

**Hear well this key point:** One cannot be whole, holy, and healthy unless he or she is pursuing healing and wholeness in all three areas. Pursuing Christlikeness requires us to seek healing and wholeness in our sexuality.

So many Christians ignore this foundational component of sanctification. This is why sexual sin has been through the ages and remains today to number one form of sin among Christians.

The first consequence of Adam and Eve's sin was that they recognized they were naked. Their whole and holy sexuality became corrupted, and from then on, human sexuality has been marked by shame, and lust, and manipulation, and vying for control and dominance.

Every time the people of Israel rebelled against God it included sexual sin. What caused great King David to fall...sexual sin. What caused even the wisest, richest, most powerful man that ever lived to fall, King Solomon...sexual sin.

What causes so many Christian leader to fall...sexual sin. In our time, sexual sin is no longer carried out with temple prostitutes as in Pergamum. Now is it lived out in sexual relations outside of marriage, and through pornography.

I very rarely quote statistics in sermons. But I'm just not convinced we share an equal understanding of the extent of sexual sin in our country, and among Christians.

Taken from... <http://www.blazinggrace.org/cms/bg/pornstats>  
<http://www.safefamilies.org/sfStats.php>

I know these statistics will be hard to hear, but let them be a wake up call to us...

### **Acceptance or Pornography:**

- There are well over 1.3 million pornographic websites
- The total porn industry is \$13.3 billion just in the United States; \$97 billion worldwide
- More than 70% of men from 18 to 34 visit a pornographic site in a typical month
- 38 percent of adults believe it is 'morally acceptable' to look at pictures of nudity or explicit sexual behavior
- 59 percent of adults believe it is 'morally acceptable' to have sexual thoughts or fantasies

And what was once primarily a men's issue, lust, our American culture has now successfully corrupted the sexuality of woman so that it is as much an issue with women as men. We are raising up sexually aggressive women who think it is normal to be luses and perverts and comment on men's bodies, and aggressively pursue men.

### **Women's Struggle With Porn**

- 28% those admitting to sexual addiction are women
- 34% of female readers of Today's Christian Woman's online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn
- 1 out of every 6 women, including Christians, struggles with pornography

### **And let us not dare pretend this is just an issue with non-Christians.**

- 50% of Christian men report being involved with pornography
- 37% of pastors report pornography is a current struggle
- 29% of born again adults in the U.S. feel it is morally acceptable to view movies with explicit sexual behavior

### **And look at what our sinful sexuality is doing to our children...**

- More than 20,000 images of child pornography posted online every week
- The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is 11 years old
- Largest consumer of Internet pornography: 12-17 year-old age group

I trust you parents are monitoring your children's and teens internet use very closely!

As to the abortion issue... abortions are the direct or indirect result of some form of sexual sin. To reduce and eliminate abortion, we have to focus on healing the fallen sexuality in our culture, and educating teens, men, and women of just what is healthy, Biblical sexuality. This is why the counseling, advocacy, and education components of the Clarity Clinic are so essential, and deserve our full prayer and financial support.

**The bottom line for us is this:** We cannot possibly make any claims to personal or corporate discipleship if we are not directly addressing this area of fostering whole and holy sexuality.

## **VI. What does the Bible Clearly Say About Godly Sexual Expression**

Like the Christians in Pergamum, we live in a wicked and perverse society. We are bombarded daily with a worldly, ungodly view of sexuality. Sexuality is the primary marketing tool of our capitalistic system. We are provoked to live in a constant state of hyped up sexual desire in order to sell products. We are sexualizing our kids at an ever younger age.

Through tv, movies, music, books, even sex ed in schools, but mostly through the example set by adults, many of our children, teens, and young adults are growing up with an unbiblical understanding of sexuality.

While the Bible doesn't always give us black and white answers for every question, it does give us very clear commands on what are and what are not acceptable expressions of sexuality. Here is what is undeniably clear in Scripture regarding the boundaries of sexual expression:

- **The only non-sinful expression of sexual intimacy of any kind is between one man and one woman in a lifelong marriage!**

That is it folks! God's plan is really not complicated. **Please hear this well:** Any form of sexual intimacy including extended kissing, touching, and oral intimacy, outside of marriage are sinful. Any form of pornography, real or animated, and any form of sexual fantasy other than for your spouse is sinful.

And Christ stands with the two-edge sword in His mouth ready to rebuke and bring judgment upon any Christian who is living in disobedience to these holy standards.

## **VII. What are the First Steps Toward a Whole and Holy Sexuality**

Now, that is what is clear in the Bible. **But please hear this well as well:** Applying God's standards of holy sexuality in our current society, and inviting even Christians to understand and embrace that truth, and fostering healing to those who have broken that standard, is almost insurmountably complex.

One thing is for certain, standing outside of sexual sin, and either self-righteously condemning others, or even *just* compassionately inviting others to repentance is not the answer! Fostering sexual freedom and healing requires a commitment to journey with another extending Christ's inexhaustible grace over many years of intensive, relational discipleship.

It is not our role to judge or change others. It is up to the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and repentance! Our role is most of all to live the truth, and to speak the truth in love.

Of the many couples I've seen in premarital counseling over many years in ministry here and in Anchorage, and only three of them were not cohabitating. I never felt it my role to judge, condemn, or to not marry them because of that. I do present the facts and truth, but I leave it the Holy Spirit to convict and change.

Brothers and sisters, this is how we must live the truth as a congregation as well. We must be a place of grace that welcomes those struggling with sexual sin, even those who don't even know they are, to feel welcome and accepted. We must be so aware of our own sexual brokenness and sin that we dare not judge another.

**Please listen close:** We live the truth humbly and authentically, and we teach the truth with compassion and grace, and we trust the Holy Spirit to do His work in His way in His time.

It is imperative that we have a Biblical and complete understanding of the complexity of overcoming sexual sin. Because our sexuality is so intertwined with our identity, and our social and spiritual self, it is one of the hardest sins to overcome. Sexual sin and woundedness requires intensive discipleship over many years to pursue healing and freedom.

Let me address the difficult topic of male and female same sex sexuality.

Every other sin has a legitimate holy and healthy alternative. So the path of freedom is a matter of replacing the ungodly or the unhealthy with godly and healthy. You struggle with porn, learn to find full satisfaction in a marriage. You struggle with alcohol or drugs, learn to find that same pleasure, release, and comfort in worship and healthy recreation.

But for the one who has deeply rooted same-sex attraction, for many who may never find healing, we are asking them to live a life of celibacy, which depending on their age is so much easier said than done.

And to say, "Well just get healed of your same sex attraction," displays an ignorance of just how deeply rooted this identity can be. For some it is just a known sinful choice that calls for total repentance. But for many, it is so deeply rooted in their identity it feels as if they were born that way. For many it may be a struggle they take to his or her grave.

**Make no mistake**, don't misunderstand by words, the Bible is clear that same-gender sexuality is outside of God's perfect design.

But we allow for a lot of sin to exist in our community that is also and equally outside of God's design. We don't judge and exclude from worship the porn user, the materialist, the gossip, the divorcee, or the ones who aren't doing anything to obey the Great Commission, yet all these actions are equally living outside of God's perfect design.

I personally believe that the Christian community has still not figured out God's plan for allowing those who struggle with same-sex sexuality to find grace. Somewhere between just acceptance of the sin and demands for simple repentance lies God's path of grace. I invite you to struggle with this question in honest, informed, complex, and Biblical ways.

Given the pervasiveness of sexual sin, it would be nigh impossible for no one in this congregation not to be struggling in this area. Please, come see me, or see someone. I know what it's like to struggle with addictions, and I promise you confidentiality, no judgment or shame, just the healing grace of Jesus Christ!

And since this is Sanctity of Life Sunday, let me offer the same compassionate and confidential counseling for those of you impacted by abortion, directly or indirectly.

The first steps in sexual healing and wholeness are the same for dealing with every deep wound and stronghold...honesty with yourself, with God, with a few trusted others, and pursuing the needed resources.

I meet with my spiritual friend on a regular basis, and we ask each other the questions...“How are you doing with lust, and how well are you loving your wife?” It is this relational accountability that keeps me from being overcome with sexual sin.

**Mark this well:** We will never experience the fullness of God’s power and blessings individually or collectively so long as we harbor secret sin and hidden pain. Let 2010 be the year you discover Christ’s grace, freedom, and healing.

### **VIII. Exchanging False Intimacy With Healing Intimacy**

Each of the eternal rewards revealed in each of the seven letters from Revelation we are discussing are directly related to the areas of praise and rebuke in that letter.

The Christians in Pergamum were being seduced to find satisfaction of their deep longing for intimacy through the false intimacy of ungodly sexuality. Christ instead offered them an inconceivable degree of intimacy with Himself.

In verse 17 we read, *“17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”*

The “White Stone” has been interpreted many ways. It could represent the white stone that was given to those who were acquitted of a crime. Or the white stone that was given to those who were victors in the early Olympic games, and this stone was their ticket into the victory banquet. It also alluded to the stones that the High Priest of Israel wore with the names of the 12 tribes written on them that he carried into the Holy of Holies.

I believe Christ meant it to allude to all the above, as all point to the same promise. Someday we will have such intimacy with God that all our deepest hunger will be fulfilled with the “manna” of heaven, and we will be given a secret name known only to you and Christ. That’s intimacy with God!

Just imagine, no matter where you are in the vast universe, when you hear your secret name being whispered in your heart, you’ll know it’s your Lord, and He calls it whenever He desires to spend time alone with you. As Children of God, we are offered a taste of that intimacy now.

The most powerful source of healing from all sexual sin and woundedness is the intimacy we can have now with Christ. What drives all sexual sin is a longing to fill a relational hole that only Christ can fill.

Freedom from lust, or pornography, or any form of coveting or habitual sin, *is not* discovered by killing that desire, but by transferring that desire onto something, really someone, greater and more fulfilling, namely Jesus Christ.

**Christ alone can satisfy the deepest relational longings of your heart!**