

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

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“Truth and Consequences”

[Revelation 2:18-29](#)

They really did not know what to do. Everything they had tried failed. Their son was out of control. At first he had just been defiant. Then it was sneaking out of the house. That was followed by his drinking with friends and staggering home. Then it was shoplifting, stealing money from his parents' wallets, taking their credit cards and charging what he wanted. Then there were the drugs; pot, cocaine and more. The older he got the more difficult it became. They gave him consequences. They sent him to counseling and even a boot camp program. Nothing worked. Finally the day after his seventeenth birthday the phone call came. The police had picked him up for drug possession and he wanted his parents to come and bail him out. Jim and Tweenette talked about it and simply said, “No. You have made your choices and you will now need to live with them. We are done.” They were offering their son tough love...tough love that said he would have to take responsibility for his own life. I have found it interesting over the years how many people, like Jim and Tweenette's son believe that while others may have to live with the consequences of their actions, they do not. Just ask Tiger Woods and Governor Sanford to name just two who were much older before this idea dawned on them.

I raise this issue of consequences because ultimately that is what this morning's text is all about. It is about the fact that there are consequences in our lives that are the outcome of the choices we make about how we follow or do not follow Christ. The Spirit in its words to the church at Thyatira offers both positive and negative consequences. The letter begins with positive behavior. “I know your work – your love, faith, service and patient endurance.” The letter ends with the consequences of such positive behavior. “To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations.” In other words if we live our lives in accordance with Christ's commands to love one another and live out that love through service and compassion we will become servant leaders of the new creation with Christ. I know that the image here of ruling with a rod of iron and shattering clay pots may appear to be violent and not peaceful, but it is simply a coded way of saying that the powers of this world will ultimately be broken by the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ and a new world order of peace and justice will take its place. So we begin with positive consequences.

The second image offered is that of negative consequences. And the way I would like you to see this portion of the text is as God's tough love with those who are living self-destructive lives. I say this because when we read about fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols this is not merely about another result neutral, life-style choice. This is about leading lives which move people away from love, faith, service and perseverance and toward a life totally centered in selfishness and power. It is leading to the kind of life Jim and Tweenette's son was moving of death and not life. So God warns the people that there are negative consequences to

these choices while at the same time reminding them that God had given them time to change their minds. “I gave her time to repent.” God reminds them that there is still time to change their minds. “I am throwing her followers into great distress unless they repent of her doings.” See God is the loving parent who desires that all of God’s children find life and life abundant, but ultimately like a loving parent offers tough love and allows us to suffer the consequences of our choices. In other words God will never force us to love and serve, even while desiring us to do so.

I realize that many of us are uncomfortable with any image of God that is more than a benevolent parent who accepts anything and everything that we as God’s children do. The image of God as someone who holds us accountable for our choices is a bit unnerving. But what kind of parent does that? What kind of parent who loves his or her children simply says, “Sure you can go and play in the street”...”go ahead and take drugs and destroy your life.”? We don’t because we love those around us. We make every effort to guide them to life giving ways of being. And the same is true of God and there is not greater demonstration of that love than this table that is set before us this morning. For what this table represents is God’s willingness to lay down God’s own life in order to break the power of sin in the world so that we, God’s children, can find forgiveness when we have made poor choices and the power to make better choices in the future. God loved us so much that God would go to any lengths to make sure our life’s journeys could be ones that lead to life and death.

So this morning here is the challenge I lay before you, to ask yourself this question, “How are the choices I am making leading me toward or away from the life God offers?”