

- **\*READ Matthew 23:23,24\*** Within this portion of Matthew's Gospel we are able to read of Jesus's final public confrontation with the Jewish leadership of His day. For three years, our Lord has patiently given effort to enlighten these men to the error of their ways in regards to their devotion and service to God. And yet, time and time again we find them continuing in their obstinance against the authoritative teachings of Jesus. Therefore, we find Jesus handing down His final rebukes and judgments against them here in **Matthew 23**.
  - ▶ Jesus begins by speaking against their arrogance and hypocrisy. These men sought to take the seat of authority and leadership where Moses sat (**23:2**), and they even loved receiving praise from men (**23:5-12**), and yet they were not willing to live up to their own teachings. *"Don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach. They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them."* (**23:3,4**)
  - ▶ Additionally, Jesus rebukes them for keeping shut the door of the kingdom of heaven by continually trying to lead the people away from Jesus and His teachings by trying to discredit and contradict Him in various ways. They would demand that people hold to their man-made traditions like the washing of hands while nullifying God's commandments. (**23:13-15**)
  - ▶ Further, they would directly contradict the commands of God by creating loopholes that would allow for people to get out of the oaths that they had made. This was based upon their own reasoning as to what was worthy of swearing upon and what was not. (**23:16-22**)
  - ▶ Finally, we find Jesus rebuking these men for behaving and portraying themselves as the holy and righteous leaders of the people while they were actually filled with the same hatred and contempt that was found within the hearts of their forefathers who had murdered the prophets of God in years & generations past. (**23:25-36**)
- Every rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees that is found within this text is very serious and worth considering lest we fall into the same temptations ourselves. We would do well to avoid all of these pitfalls. But for our considerations this morning, I would like for us to focus in on the rebuke that is handed down in **vv.23,24** concerning their failures in balancing the law with love. Unfortunately, this wasn't an issue that only plagued this group of people, but we can look elsewhere in the Scriptures and find others who failed in balancing these two key aspects of our faith before God.
- Let's turn our Bibles over to the book of the Revelation of John to look at two types of churches that each fall on one side or the other of this issue, and then we will look at the type of church that we ought to be striving to be that balances these two sides well. My friend Jordan Shouse recently did some excellent teaching on this subject, and I loved it so much and thought it so important to consider that I would like to share some of that with you this morning within these considerations.

## I. Church Type #1: All Love & No Law (Revelation 2)

### A. Pergamum — Held to teachings of Balaam & Nicolaitans. (2:14-16)

1. The church at Pergamum was known for being the religious center of Asian Minor. While we would hope that this would allow for Christianity to flourish, the reality is that it was the center of pagan emperor worship, hence the words of Jesus concerning them alive in the midst of Satan's thrown. Though they were in a difficult spot, Jesus commends them for holding onto His name without denying their faith even with one of their own, Antipas, being put to death for his faith.
2. However, there were a couple of things that were being held against them, and those things were concerning their willingness to allow those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans to remain among them. We don't know much about the specific teachings of these two groups outside what is written concerning meat sacrificed to idols & sexual immorality, but suffice it to say that the specifics beyond those things were against Christ & His desires for them.

### B. Thyatira — Tolerated the woman Jezebel. (2:20)

1. Thirty miles southeast of Pergamum was the much smaller city of Thyatira. Within this city there was much pressure put on the residents to participate in the worship of different gods and goddesses. These pressures would come at both a social and economic cost. And yet, these disciples are commended for their love, faithfulness, service, and endurance in such circumstances. They even seem to be excelling at the moment compared to where they had been at earlier times.

2. But our Lord had a serious issue against them, and that was their toleration of the woman He describes as Jezebel, *"who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrifices to idols."* (2:20) The Lord had given her time to repent of her wickedness which is the same as those who held to the teachings of Balaam in Pergamum, but she had refused to do so up to this point.

#### C. The Problems & Who Aligns Most With This Unbalanced Approach:

1. Though both of these churches were commended for their faith and service to Jesus, they were both in need of finding a better balance in the expression of that faith. For these two churches, they were very heavy on the side of patience and tolerance towards others, but they were failing in regards to their conviction and stance upon the truth. They were allowing for those who were standing against the truth to continue to stand without anyone challenging their false teaching and negative influence.
2. This type of church still remains very popular even in our day because it is extremely appealing! *"Come as you are!"* is the invitation, but there is the much quieter follower up which states, *"And you can stay that way..."* This type of church is all about showing love and acceptance towards anyone and everyone who comes through the door. *"No Judgment Here!"* is their motto and creed. I think we can see why this church is so popular and appealing.
3. Now, this type of church will seek to defend itself by leaning upon the love and compassion that Jesus showed throughout His ministry on earth, and we can't deny the love and compassion of Jesus. We can't hardly read an opening in our Bibles of the Gospel accounts and not find the love and compassion of Jesus present. One that comes to my mind right off the bat is found in **Matthew 9:35,36**, where it is recorded. *"Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd."* It is abundantly clear that Jesus didn't just feel love, but He was very willing to show it!
4. Their call would be for us to embrace this characteristic of Jesus's life by accepting all who come to us with open and loving arms no matter what. Love for our neighbor is the most important thing that we must show within this life. Love our neighbor as ourselves is #1 on the list of what God expects for us to do. You know who this appeals to the most? The younger crowd. Those about 40 and under in those generations really see this as something that is pivotal to faith in Jesus Christ because they have grown up in a world where they had seen such a societal push towards loving others, and they recognize it as a good thing to do. However, they see it as such a good thing to do that they have completely gone overboard to that side of the scale.

## II. Church Type #2: All Law & No Love (Revelation 2)

#### A. Ephesus — Abandoned the love they had at first. (2:4,5)

1. This church which was found in one of the largest and most powerful cities in all of the Roman empire had much to be commended for. Jesus was well aware of their works, labor, and endurance, and He commends them for not tolerating evil people. They were quick to test those came in claiming to be apostles, and called them out to be liars when they were found to be such. (2:3) They even hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. (2:6)
2. But Jesus had something against them concerning the fact that they had abandoned the love that they had at first. They were willing to stand very strongly against false teachings, but the passion and love for God, and by extension others, was sorely lacking.

#### B. The Problems & Who Aligns Most With This Unbalanced Approach:

1. It could be that they were simply going through the motions in their standing for the truth, and it could also be that they were a very cold church that didn't extent any patience or compassion towards those that were struggling in various way. This would mean that they were very quick and willing to *"contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all,"* (Jude 3) but they were not so quick and willing when it came to having *"mercy on those who waver."* (Jude 22,23) Like the first two churches, they thrived in one area while neglecting the other.

2. This type of church is set in direct opposition with the first type of church that we considered in the fact that this church is very quick to close its arms to those that might come in and are different in some way or another. If someone comes in and doesn't have the exact same type of belief or practices something in a different way then they are given the cold shoulder from the jump. This church also doesn't want to hear anything that is new or different. There is no patience, no listening, and no considering of things that are different than the norm to them, and this church also doesn't have much time for doubting, questioning, or struggling.
3. Can you guess which demographic tends to operate in this sort of way? Yeah...that would be our older crowd, but we must pause and consider why it is that this is their MO. Consider what the older crowd has experienced in their lives as Christians...specifically those who either went through or felt the repercussions of the issues that divided our brotherhood in the 1950s & 1960s. These generations grew up in an era where hard lines were drawn and no quarter was given. They grew conditioned to expecting hellfire and brimstone teachings. The expectation was to simply get in line where you were expected to be, and if you didn't then you could go ahead and get out and go somewhere else. To this type of church, the holding to truth and doctrine is of first importance above all else while the love, compassion, & patience is waning. Truth and doctrine are #1 above all else...even at the expense of love.

At this point, we can look at these two different types of churches on either extreme of the spectrum and see qualities about each that are good and desirable. It is good for us to have a deep love for our fellow man that leads to patience and compassion. It is also good for us to be fully committed to truth and standing strong on that which is in accordance with the Biblical pattern and teachings.

However, I think we can also see glaring areas where each type of church is completely missing the mark. The first type shows a great love for their neighbor, but they fail to show the same type of love for God's Word that the Psalmist describes in **Psalms 119:97 (ESV)**, *"O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day."* Yes, we must show love to our neighbor, but not at the expense of our love for God's will. In the same vein, the second type of church shows a great commitment to God's law, but they fail to have the proper compassion and love for their neighbor. Again, they fail to *"show mercy on those who waver."* (**Jude 22**)

So when it comes down to it...which church will we choose to be? In my estimation wanting to be a part of either one of these churches doesn't cut it because neither one is what God would have them to be. Both types of churches are condemned by Jesus. Therefore, I am thankful there is a 3rd type of church that balances and joins these two often opposing extremes together in a beautiful harmony that pleases God and benefits all who are involved with this church. That church type is the church that is committed to the law with a heart of love.

### **III. Church Type #3: Committed to the Law With A Heart Of Love**

#### **A. This approach imitates exactly who Jesus was and is.**

1. Either of these sides could latch onto Jesus as the standard for what they do. The all love church could point to the loving compassion that Jesus had for the multitudes, but the all law church could also point to Jesus's commitment to God's will and even His rebukes of Jewish leadership.
2. However, we must take a step back and zoom out from those two isolated instances and recognize that Jesus was fully committed to both types of behavior. In fact, the Gospel writer John states of Jesus in **John 1:14** concerning Jesus, *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* We must recognize that Jesus was more than just all love or all truth/law. He was all grace and truth/law. From this we must recognize that the two can live in harmony together within us because they first dwelt in harmony together in Jesus. This is what He expects to see from us!
3. We can know this because this is exactly what Jesus's Apostle Paul told the Ephesians that they needed to be doing. They were to allow God's design for the organization of the church to develop and lead them in such a way that they would be a people who were *"speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head — Christ."* (**Ephesians 4:15**) It is not only possible, but we are demanded to be a people who learn how to balance a strong stand for truth with a heart that is filled with love for our fellow man.

B. This approach will help guide us in the way the God would have to go in many different areas.

1. If we can learn to be individual people who hold to truth with love then we will be churches that are bettered and strengthened in so many different areas where contention can exist.
  - a) We will be churches that are able to worship according to not only the New Testament pattern, but we do so with hearts that are overflowing with passion and even truth driven expressions of emotion.
  - b) We will be churches that not only follow the New Testament pattern for the work of the church, but we will take advantage of the individuals liberties that we have to show our love for our fellow man.
  - c) We will be a part of churches that are fed a steady diet of both truth and love from the pulpit. There will not only be hard lessons of admonishment, but there will also be lessons that encourage and uplift the downtrodden. Preachers will follow the divine command to ***"Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching."*** (II Timothy 4:2)
  - d) We will have shepherds that not only lead the flock in the truth of God's word by guarding it against false teaching and sin, but they will also have great patience and compassion upon those who have been caught up in temptation or have questions about their faith.
  - e) We will have parents who seek to teach their children the ways of God while also entertaining their questions and bearing with them in their struggles.
2. Two other passages that I believe should help us to see that this balanced approach is what is expected of us are **I Thessalonians 5:14** and **II Timothy 2:24-26**. When we consider the balance of these passages and their outcomes, then we ought to recognize that this is the way that we ought to be in our approach to balancing law and love.
  - a) ***"And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all."*** (I Thessalonians 5:13,14)
  - b) ***"The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."*** (II Timothy 2:24-26)

C. This approach brings two often opposing sides together.

1. This is the end goal of our considerations for this morning. We ought to desire for those who often find themselves on opposite sides of issues to find the place where they can meet and work together. More often than not, that involves both sides giving up something and moving towards each other in the middle where balance can be achieved and maintained. We can do this only if we will be committed to fighting the natural urges that we might have to gravitate to one side or the other.
2. Yet, that doesn't mean that we must give up everything that comes natural to us. We, as the younger generation, don't have to entirely give up our desire to love and show compassion to our neighbors. In the same way, the older crowd doesn't have to give up their desire to be committed to truth. But what does have to happen is that either side has to take and learn something from the other side. For the younger crowd, it is probably going to be the case that we need to take that passion for people and learn how to do it in the appropriate manner according to the New Testament pattern. For the older crowd, you can encourage that youthful energy and desire. You can listen and weight the new or innovative ideas that can help for God's work to be accomplished. Both sides can come together and be the complete type of disciples and church that the Lord desires. After all, God gave us His word so that we might ***"be complete, equipped for every good work."*** (II Timothy 3:15,16)

There can be natural temptation for us as disciples and churches to simply rest upon what comes naturally to us or what makes us feel most comfortable, but it is truly my hope that these considerations this morning have moved us to think about whether or not our comfort is found on either extreme of the spectrum that we have looked at over the last few minutes. God's Word makes it clear that He desires for His people to be a people of not only law and not only love, but of law & love. May we therefore strive daily to grow in our ability to balance one with the other so the we might be the complete disciples and complete churches the are excelling at balancing law & love.