

A WORD TO THE CORRUPT

Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction

Begin with background – Thyatira – a city NE of Ephesus, SE of Pergamum, the one we looked at last week. It was smaller than Pergamum, but was an important city in the Roman Empire. It was founded by Seleucus I around 300 BC as a military outpost. It was an important point in the Roman road system, because it was on the road from Pergamum, a major administrative center in the Empire, to Laodicea, a major trading center.

It appears to have been an important industrial and commercial centre. Inscriptions have been found that mention wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers of fabric, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, bronze-smiths and others. In Acts 16, we find the account of Paul & Silas in Philippi, where they met Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman, a dealer of purple-dyed cloth, who was from Thyatira.

Because of its industry, the city was known for its trade guilds, or organized groups and associations for potters, tanners, dyers and bronze workers. These guilds created a tremendous problem for believers because it was extremely hard for a merchant to pursue his or her trade without belonging to one of these guilds. To belong to these guilds put a Christian in a compromising position because of the pressure from the guilds to participate in their pagan, idolatrous feasts. “Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries.” (Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*)

Beyond this, little is known about the ancient city of Thyatira. Even less is known about the church there. This makes some of the references in this letter difficult to understand or interpret. But we can be certain that it was a difficult place for Christians to live and work.

So what can we learn from this church? Well, we begin once again with...

I. Identification vv. 18

Go through this description – refer back to John’s description in 1:13-16. Walvoord writes: (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

In keeping with what follows, Christ is introduced as the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. This description of Christ is similar to that in 1:13-15, but here He is called the Son of God rather than the Son of Man. The situation required reaffirmation of His deity and His righteous indignation at their sins. The words “burnished bronze,” which describe His feet, translate a rare Greek word ... that is also used in 1:15. It seems to have been an alloy of a number of metals characterized by brilliance when polished. The reference to His eyes being “like blazing fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ.

In this description of His eyes and His feet we see the penetrating power of His knowledge along with the swiftness of His judgment. He was the all-seeing God that knew exactly what they were doing, and why they were doing it. The church in Thyatira was standing in a place of compromise and was allowing a false authority to supplant the authority of Christ.

II. The Good News v. 19

The first part of the message to this church is the good news, or commendation. Read v. 19 – This was a church that was growing – in love, in faith, in service. They were a persevering people. They lived in difficult circumstances, yet they persevered. Compare with the message to Ephesus – 2:3. They were not only keeping on and not growing weary, they were growing stronger. They were doing even more that at the beginning. There is progress in the life of this church. There is much for which they are to be commended. But, then comes...

III. The Bad News vv. 20-23

Read v. 20a – tolerate – that is an interesting word. *Discuss today’s emphasis on tolerance.*

Here this church is being criticized by the Lord for being too tolerant. So what is the problem?

The church was allowing a teacher to lead Christians into immorality. They were tolerating someone who was clearly detrimental to the spiritual health of the congregation of believers.

Who was this woman? Jezebel was probably not her real name, but it must have fit her character. Christ must have seen something in this woman's behavior that linked her to Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab, who was the seventh king of Israel. Jezebel is synonymous with evil. As the queen of Israel, she used deceit, slander, and even murder to get what she wanted, and to help her weak-willed husband to get what he wanted (1 Ki. 21).

Jezebel was the kind of person who even frightened a prophet of God. She troubled anyone who crossed her. Even the mighty prophet Elijah feared her when she threatened retaliation. When she threatened to take his life in the same way he had killed her prophets, Elijah ran all the way from Mount Carmel in central Israel to hide in a cave in Egypt.

David McCasland, in his booklet, *Life-Changing Messages from the Risen Lord* makes this application:

It's not a simple matter to confront evil people, even though we sense that others are being drawn into their web of deceit. Such persons are not bound by principles of decency. When attacked, they will, like Jezebel, turn with a vengeance on those who expose them. They have no fear of God to restrain them. They feed off the lust of their followers and on the blood and fears of their challengers. It was just such a Jezebel who had been leading Thyatiran Christians into sexual immorality and the worship of a false God.

God made it very clear that He would severely judge this evil woman and those who followed her (her children) – vv. 21-23. But fortunately the message doesn't end there. We go on to ...

IV. The Warning to the Faithful vv. 24-29

Read vv. 24-29. Some brief thoughts, much of which come from J. Hampton Keathley III.

Verse 24. This counsel is to those believers who will hear, repent and break off the compromise. "The deep things of Satan" in verse 24 most likely refers to the false doctrine being taught. They taught moral

evil and that its experience was necessary to truly appreciate good. Note the term, "so-called" or "what some call..." They were evidently teaching that believers have license to sin as a good thing and were bragging about the debts of their sin.

No other burden, that is, command is placed upon them—they were only to reject Jezebel, and avoid the immorality and idolatry that she was teaching and encouraging. They were then told to hold fast to what they had. This is not a minor warning.

Those words in verse 25, "Only hold fast what you have until I come," warn against the universal principle that things always tend to degenerate rather regenerate. It's much like the second law of thermodynamics which simply put says, life goes from order to disorder and not vice versa. Things naturally go downhill unless there is great effort against those forces that, like gravity, tend to pull us downward. The natural tendency for most believers is to lose ground rather than hold fast and move ahead. So there is always the need to cling to the Lord and hold tightly through a close walk with Him in the Word, regardless of the many blessing we possess in Christ and where we are in our spiritual journey, babe in Christ or mature.

V. The Message for Us

So, what can we learn from this message to the church at Thyatira, a church corrupted by immorality, in the name of religion and under the pressure of society?

The church of Thyatira was not willing to expose this woman, Jezebel. Some may have feared arousing her anger. Others may have lacked the moral conscience and strength necessary to confront the presence of evil. Still others may have bought into the argument that it is not so bad to enter into pleasures that were once thought wrong.

Times have changed, but not the moral and spiritual shadows that silently and slowly creep up on us. In a *U.S. News & World Report* editorial, Mortimer B. Zuckerman said:

"Three out of every four Americans think we are in moral and spiritual decline. Social dysfunction haunts the land: crime and drug abuse, the breakup of the family, the slump in academic performance, the disfigure-

ment of public places by druggies, thugs, and exhibitionists. Are we now ... 'defining deviancy down,' accepting as part of life what we once found repugnant?"

Do you know when that was written—it was in August of 1994, 20 years ago. How much farther down the slippery slope are we today? Are we in danger of becoming like the frog placed in a pan of cool water over a small flame? The same frog who would leap out of scalding water is quite content to be gradually boiled to death, never realizing that it needs to jump.

We need to realize that the corruption of a church, or a family, or an individual, seldom takes place overnight. No one sets out one day saying, I think I will destroy my faith and my life today. It begins with wrong thinking. It begins with letting down our guard, with becoming careless. And it proceeds from there.

The sexually deviant rapist or child molester did not begin that way. It usually begins with the viewing of sexually explicit materials which should never have been produced in the first place. And so it is with most any moral let-down.

There are some questions that David McCasland asks in his booklet that I believe are worth our consideration. He says, "What line of reasoning am I tolerating in my life that is just as sinister as the teaching of Balaam or the Jezebel of this passage? Am I allowing sexual immorality an open door by viewing sexually explicit materials or devaluing the reality of my present marriage in favor of an imagined future with another spouse? False teaching leads to destructive behavior, but the line of wrong thinking rarely begins as a clearly identifiable external threat.

As someone has said, "Moral failure is seldom caused by a blow-out. It is usually the result of a slow leak."

Closing Hymn # 365 – Close to Thee