

THE CHURCH THAT WAS RUN BY A WOMAN

Revelation 2:18-29

Christ saw His churches in Asia Minor and informed them as to what He wanted them to do. Among these churches which He saw when He looked down from heaven was that of Thyatira. Now, as then, Christ sees all other churches on earth, and through His message to that early church He gives them valuable counsel.

I. The Christ. Revelation 2:18.

1. He Is Divine.

"These things saith the Son of God." This is the first time that our Lord described Himself thus. He had previously called Himself "the Son of man," a title which conveyed the idea of His humanity and His relation to the human race. Now that He had ascended, Christ used the divine name when referring to Himself. The deity of our Lord and His relationship to the Father are intimated in the title, "Son of God." This was an assertion of His power and authority.

The members of the church at Thyatira needed to see Christ as more than "the Son of man" who had moved among men, and so do we. They needed to see Him as "the Son of God" and to hear Him in His deity, and so do we.

2. He Is Omniscient.

"Who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire." Christ has eyes that search and see. He has intimate and perfect knowledge of all our hearts. He knows the most profound secrets among us. He is fully aware of all meditated schemes and devised projects. Nothing is hidden from Him. His piercing eyes detect everything which is not right. His understanding of every situation is perfect.

3. He Is Omnipotent.

"And his feet are like fine brass." He wanted all readers of this letter to know that, in addition to His seeing perfectly and understanding accurately, His feet would pursue them in their wrongdoings and in due time He will exercise judgment upon them. All of His judgments will be righteous and final. For some conditions there is no solution except judgment. Yet how lightly many treat this matter of judgment.

II. The City. Revelation 2:18.

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write." It is an odd fact that the longest of the letters to the seven churches was written to the church in the smallest and least important of the seven cities. Thyatira was not a center of special religious significance. Its temples to some of the heathen gods were not especially famous. The church in Thyatira was not faced by the danger of the splendor of heathen religion or by the menace of the threat of Caesar worship. Neither did the city have any political distinction.

Thyatira was a great commercial center. It was noted for its trade in wool and its dyeing industry. That made it a place of commercial prosperity and great wealth. It was from there that Lydia, the seller of purple dye, came. The city was noted for its trade guilds. Each trade had a guild. The danger which threatened the church at Thyatira was the direct result of the existence of these numerous and powerful

trade guilds. The social activities of these guilds were intimately bound up with the worship of the heathen gods. The feasts which were observed by these guilds frequently degenerated into carousals, at which drunkenness and immorality were the order of the day. No faithful Christian could afford to compromise his testimony by participating in a feast where drunkenness and fornication were the accepted things.

III. The Church. Revelation 2:18.

We do not know who first carried the gospel of Christ to Thyatira. It may be that it arrived there as an indirect result of the influence of one of the natives, Lydia. While attending a prayer meeting on the bank of the river, she heard Paul's message and became the first convert under the preaching of Paul in Europe. The Lord opened her heart to receive the truth. She believed and was saved. She was baptized and, along with the other members of her household, she was received into the fellowship of the church. In Philippi her house became the center of Christian influences. Doubtless she was even more active and zealous in service for her Lord when she returned to her loved ones and friends back home.

IV. The Commendation. Revelation 2:19.

Our Lord began His message to this church with commendation as He did in the one to Ephesus. He always recognizes and appreciates the things that are excellent, which are done in His name and out of love for Him. Here are some of the warmest words of commendation which He spoke to any of the churches. He spoke graciously and tenderly. It seems that His appreciation deepened with the darkness. It was as if He was searching for every action that could call forth His approval. What were the things which our Lord commended in the lives of the members of the church at Thyatira?

1. Their works.

Christ did not name their works or tabulate them, but He did declare His acquaintance with them saying, "I know thy works." The fact that they were not idle pleased the Lord. There is no excuse for laziness or idleness on the part of Christians. Their church was not a social club, a mutual admiration society, or a hospital for religious invalids, but it was an active, energetic, aggressive organization of the saints.

2. Their love.

They had a real love for Christ. Their works grew out of love for Him. In the service of the Lord there is no substitute for love for Him. He wants us to work for Him because we love Him. He wants us to prove our love for Him by our works. Do you love the Lord?

3. Their service.

Their love expressed itself in outward ministrations and zealous service for Christ. It was no mere drudgery of duty, but rather a labor of love. If anybody professes to love Christ, but apparently does not have any desire to serve Him, the profession cannot be genuine.

4. Their faith.

Their works for the Lord grew out of their faith in Him. Believing in the Lord, they rejoiced in the privilege of working for Him. Faith without works is dead. Works without faith do not bring any reward.

5. Their patience.

Patience is the spirit of peace under pressure. It is the capacity of being calm when others are tempest-tossed. It is that peace of mind and heart under the pressures of life which is beneficial to us, and seems to give our Lord great satisfaction and joy.

These people not only served the Lord, but when trials came, as they do to all Christians, they did not falter, but went steadily onward in patient endurance. They had their trials, but their faith and love held them steady amid them. They went right on with their labor of love and their work of faith. As time went by, they did not slacken their efforts for Christ, but actually increased them, so that the Lord could say of them: "Of late you have toiled harder than you did at first" (Weymouth). There is no time when a Christian appears so Christlike as when amid untoward circumstances he calmly awaits the good pleasure of God.

6. Their progress.

"I know thy works....and the last to be more than the first." Prompted by loving faith and pursued with patient steadfastness, they made continual progress in their works. Their church had an expanding program. Their works increased with the years, and so should ours. Time broadened and deepened their activities. Age did not dampen their ardor or diminish their efforts. Their church had spiritual stability, and a soul life that showed itself in making progress. Their enthusiasm never waned when conditions changed and became less favorable.

V. The Complaint. Revelation 2:20.

Not all was well with the church at Thyatira. In spite of all of her praiseworthy qualities the Lord had a serious complaint against her. What was wrong, as Christ saw it? "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Revelation 2:20). There was no other complaint against the church.

The members of the church permitted a prophetess by the name of Jezebel to flourish in their midst and to teach and lead God's people astray. The Christians allowed her, without protest on their part, to teach her wicked doctrines. She offered a persistent opposition to all that was good. She was directly and explicitly branded as the determined foe of Christ and His cause. Denying the exceeding sinfulness of sin, she stood for the lowering of moral standards and the grafting on to Christianity of the pagan philosophies. Under the pretense of superior sanctity, claiming the gifts of prophecy and of divine authority, she sought by word and deed to ensnare the Christians into the impurities of idolatry and immorality. She is a splendid illustration of the fact that a false doctrine leads to a corrupt life. Creed and conduct always have a vital connection with each other. Sad to say, she gained the attention and following of some of the servants of Christ.

Their sin about which Christ complained was that they did not raise any protest against this prominent and influential woman who promulgated such terrible doctrines with such disastrous results. Christ found fault with the church because she let Jezebel teach men and seduce men. Both idolatry and immorality resulted from her seduction. While only a minority in the church accepted the false teachings of this wicked woman, the rest were guilty of permitting this tragic evil. Christ censured the church for permitting her to do what she did.

VI. The Counsel. Revelation 2:21-29.

1. Christ gave the woman an opportunity for repentance.

He did not desire her destruction, but rather her salvation. Vile as she was, Christ considered her worth saving. Time for repentance is divinely allotted, certainly limited and may be wilfully neglected.

2. Christ warned that punishment would follow impenitence.

If repentance was not forthcoming, judgment was inevitable. His words of judgment were introduced with a declaration of His patience, "And I gave her time that she should repent." But, "she willeth not to repent." It was not a case of inability to repent, but rather one of unwillingness to do so.

3. Christ exhorted the faithful to hold fast until His return.

He said, "I cast upon you none other burden." That meant, Do not be led away by any new mysteries, or new perplexities or new revelations. I have laid upon you the burden of truth sufficient for the moment. Any new revelations that men claim as from Me, receive them not. Any new philosophy of life that fails to harmonize with what I have declared reject it. Hold fast to sound doctrine and holy living. When I come I will unlock the mysteries and I will reveal the profundities.

4. Christ promised to reward the faithful.

Their reward, which He promised, consisted of exemption from further burdens, the bestowal of power, and the possession of the Morning Star. This star is known for its splendor, and is connected with the departure of the night and the arrival of the day. It is the bright harbinger of a day whose skies shall have no cloud, whole atmosphere shall have no storm, and whose sun shall rise to set no more. Christ Himself is "The Morning Star." His light ushers in perpetual day.

And unsaved friends do not overlook the note of grace which is sounded here. "Except they repent of their deeds." There is yet time for the unsaved to repent of their sins and to exercise faith in Christ, and be saved by Him. But, let no one presume upon this respite of grace. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."