

THE CHURCH THAT WAS RUN BY A WOMAN

Revelation 2:18-29

Christ saw His churches as they were and told them what was wrong and what they needed. He sees all other churches like them, then and now, and gives them valuable counsel in these messages; Christ moved in heaven among the golden candlesticks and saw from heaven what was going on in His churches on earth. He looked down from heaven on the church in Thyatira and saw its condition and gave it His message. He still walks in the midst of the candlesticks and watches His churches on earth.

I. The Christ. Rev. 2:18.

1. He Is Divine.

"These things saith the Son of God." The humanity of our Lord and His relation to the race are conveyed in the title, "Son of Man." The deity of the Lord and His relation to God are intimated in the title, "Son of God". Stress is here designedly put upon our Lord's deity. For the first time Christ speaks thus of Himself. It had been His custom to call Himself "Son of Man", but now that He had ascended, He called Himself by His divine name, "Son of God." This was an assertion of His power and authority.

The church at Thyatira needed to see Him as more than the "Son of Man", the Christ who had moved among men. It needed to see Him as the "Son of God", the crowned Christ of heaven. The church needed to hear Him not in His humanity but in His deity, not as man, but as God.

2. He Is Omniscient.

"Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire." The church at Thyatira needed to know that He had eyes that search and see, fiery eyes that bring to light the hidden things of darkness, flaming eyes that search the hurtful things of sin. This description denotes infinite knowledge and perfect observation. Christ is fully aware of guarded secrets, meditated schemes, and devised projects. When we read, "who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire," we are reminded of His intimate knowledge, His penetrating vision concerning the church, so that in the sentence, He is about to speak there can be no mistake, for His understanding of all the conditions is a perfect one. His is the eye of omniscience, searching all things including the deepest recesses and the most hidden corners of the human heart. His is the eye of the all-righteous Judge, its every glance searching the "reins and hearts," and "replete with wrathful fire" to consume the workers of iniquity.

While His title is one of solemn warning, it is no less full of encouragement and comfort. His eyes pierce through all disguises. They rest, like the sun, on the good and the evil alike. His eyes have the glance of severity. "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness". His eyes have the glance of loving approval.

3. He Is Omnipotent.

"And His feet are like fine brass". The church needed to know that, in addition to seeing perfectly and understanding accurately, He had feet that pursue and trample, feet that promised judgment, stern and strong and

true. Scofield tells us that, "brass speaks of divine judgment as in the brazen altar, and self-judgment as in the laver of brass." Despite the best-laid plans of men to conceal their corrupt doings, our Lord clearly sees evil, both in the church and in the world, and in due time, He will exercise judgment upon it. Righteous, pure, and final are all His judgments.

Our Lord thus presents Himself in the most striking three-fold majesty which asserts the divine dignity of His Person, His searching, piercing and holy scrutiny, and the irresistible character of His judgment.

II. The City. Revelation 2:18.

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write." Of these seven cities of Asia Minor, Thyatira was the smallest; nevertheless, it was quite a wealthy center. It was established by Alexander the Great. It was a military post and an industrial center. Because of its numerous factories, the city was full of labor unions and trade guilds. There seem to have been various guilds--bakers, potters, tanners, weavers, dyers, bronze-workers, and garment makers. Of the numerous trade guilds, that of dyeing was in all probability the most prominent and influential. Thyatira is still famous for its purple dyes. There is a probability that Lydia, the seller of purple, was connected with the guild of dyers.

III. The Church. Revelation 2:18.

Who brought Christianity to Thyatira? This is not known. It is of interest to note that Thyatira was the home town of Lydia, the first convert of the Apostle Paul in Europe (Acts 16:14). While we have no record of the planting of a church there, it may be that it was an indirect result of the influence of Lydia. Lydia whose business had brought her into Macedonia from her native city of Thyatira attended the prayer meeting on the banks of the river and heard Paul's message. The Lord opened her heart to receive the truth and to obey it. She believed and was baptized, and along with the other members of her household, was received into the fellowship of the church. In Philippi her house became the center of Christian influences. It is pleasant to conjecture that she may have returned home from Philippi for the express purpose of winning her loved ones and friends to Christ. She certainly would not have been less active and zealous there than she had been in the city of her casual or occasional residence. Also, it is quite probable that the Word of the Lord was sounded forth in Thyatira during Paul's ministry at Ephesus.

IV. The Commendation. Revelation 2:19.

Christ saw what was going on in the church at Thyatira and declared the condition in His message to the church. In His messages we ever discover Christ's recognition of excellent things. Christ is not just on the lookout for the bad, or for antagonism to Himself. He does not ignore the good there is among the people because of the evil that is there. Although He must correct evil, He recognizes and appreciates the good things which are done in His name and out of love for Him. He not only knows all the good that exists but delights to give it special notice and praise.

Here are some of the warmest words of commendation accorded any of the churches. How graciously and tenderly He speaks here. It seems that His appreciation deepened as the darkness did. It was as if He was searching for every action that could call forth His approval.

1. For Their Works.

"I know thy works." Christ did not name them or tabulate them, but declared His acquaintance with them. It was not an idle church and this pleased the Lord. Over and over in these messages to His churches, Christ commends works. There is no excuse for an idle church and a lazy church member. It was a working church. It was no social club, no mutual admiration society, no hospital for religious invalids; but it was an active, energetic, tireless, aggressive organization of the saints. Its motives were deeply religious.

2. For Their Love.

In this church as a whole there was a real love for Christ. This is an exceedingly important thing. Errors of judgment can be forgiven if the heart is right with Him.

Their works grew out of love. They loved the Lord and worked for Him. There is no substitute for love of Him in the work of the Lord. He wants us to show our love by our works. He wants us to work because we love. Love for the Saviour blooms in many a lonely nook and beautifies by its presence the heart of many a poor and obscure follower of the Lord. Do you love the Lord?

3. For Their Service.

Their inward love expressed itself in outward ministrations. It put its possessors to work. The love for Christ in the hearts of the Christians at Thyatira was manifested by their zealous service for Him. No mere drudgery of duty was their service for Christ, but rather a labor of love.

From love naturally flows service. If you love someone, you will want to serve that one. When a person professes to love the Saviour, but apparently has no desire to serve Him, one wonders if the profession is real.

4. For Their Faith.

The Christians in Thyatira not only loved the Saviour, but had real faith in Him as the only Redeemer. They had faith in God, in Christ, and in the possibility of the salvation and elevation of their fellowmen.

Their works grew out of faith. They worked for the Lord because they believed in Him. They worked with love for Him and faith in Him. Faith without works is dead. Works without faith do not bring any reward.

5. For Their Patience.

Patience is a great work; one upon which the Master placed great value. It is the spirit of peace under pressure. It is the capacity for being still when all around is tempest-tossed. It is that peace of heart under pressure of life which is so fair and fragrant a thing to us, and ever seems to give the heart of the Lord 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. For Their Progress.

"I know thy works, . . . and that thy last works are more than the first." Their works, prompted by loving faith and pursued with patient steadfastness, made continual progress. Theirs was a church with a great and growing program. There was much in the church to praise and Christ praised it. Their works increased with the years. Time broadened and deepened their activities. Age did not dampen their ardor or diminish their efforts. The remarkable statement about their works, "the last more than the first," is one that should be true of every church. This church had spiritual stability, and a soul life that showed itself in making progress. Their enthusiasm for Christ did not wane when conditions changed and became less favorable.

Thus it is evident that Christ highly appreciates the good there is in churches. He knew every excellence of the church at Thyatira and praised it. He praised that church because her members were fervent in love, faithful in service, constant in faith, genuine in patience, and progressive in excellencies.

V. The Complaint. Revelation 2:20.

But all was not well with this church. In spite of all her praiseworthy qualities, the Lord had a serious complaint against the church. "Notwithstanding I have this 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 to idols."

Thus, we see, a very dark shadow rested over the church. There was a woman in it who offered a persistent opposition to all that was good. She was directly and explicitly branded as the determined foe of Christ and His cause. She stood for the lowering of moral standards, the denial of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, 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 good illustration of the fact that a corrupt doctrine leads to a corrupt life. Creed and conduct have a vital connection with each other. And, sad to say, she gained the attention and credence of some of the servants of Christ.

What was the sin of the church that Christ complained about? It was the fact that the church did not raise any protest against this woman, Jezebel, who promulgated such terrible doctrines with such disastrous results. Christ found fault with the church because she let Jezebel do two things -- "teach" and "seduce". God's Word certainly prohibits a woman from teaching men and from usurping authority over them. No woman is to teach the men of a church. The church in Thyatira permitted an unscriptural thing in letting Jezebel teach. Christ also censured the church for letting Jezebel "seduce". Both idolatry and immorality resulted from her seduction. Perhaps only a small minority in the church had actually followed this woman in her evil teachings, but the rest were guilty of permitting

such an evil. So, Christ condemned the church for failing to exclude her. The church incurred a terrible responsibility by suffering 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, whose 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."