

Refocusing The Church - Part 6

Refocusing the Church

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Bible Text: Revelation 2:18-29

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I want to ask you, please, to turn to the book of Revelation chapter two. We read again beginning with verse 18 down to verse 29.

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”¹

Let's pray together.

Lord, thank you that we can gather together tonight as brothers and sisters and as your church. Thank you for the opportunity we have had to acknowledge your greatness and the greatness of our Savior in song, to acknowledge your kindness and mercy and grace to us and your lordship over us through our giving. And now, Lord, we turn our

¹ Revelation 2:18-29.

attention to your Word and we ask you to teach us, to deal with our hearts and to instruct our minds, Lord, to work in us so that we might grow and become more and more of what you would have us to be, what you have destined us to be. We thank you that you have taken hold of us and what you have ordained for us is that we would be conformed to the image of the one who has saved us. For this we are grateful and for this we will forever be grateful. Thank you for rescuing us, Lord. Thank you for saving us. And now, Lord, cleanse your Church. As your Word goes forth, show us our sin and bring us to the place of real repentance. Encourage your Church and strengthen it, Lord. You know our needs tonight and we ask for all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I couldn't help but think as I was listening to the choir sing and as I noted the joyful atmosphere of the music and all of us here together, which is, of course, is entirely appropriate as we think about the incarnation, as we think about the fact that 2000 years ago God stepped out of heaven and took to himself a sinless human nature in order to redeem us, to save us. Now that is not just worthy of joy. That is worthy of joy that cannot be fully expressed.

But I was thinking about that and I was thinking about just sort of the general joyful atmosphere around Christmas time throughout our entire culture. I think about all the commercials that come on television. I think about all the songs that you hear playing in the mall. I think about all of the many expressions of joy and sort of positive atmosphere as you go throughout our nation. And when I notice all that and think about all of that I cannot help but think to myself that there is this disconnect between the real Jesus and the Christmas Jesus, the real Jesus and the celebration of Christmas, because there are many people who are willing to sing songs and give gifts and have a joyful attitude around some vague idea of the birth of Jesus, but do they recognize him as Lord? But do they take the rest of the account, do they take the rest of the story? Do they embrace the true meaning of his life? Do they embrace the true meaning of his death? Do they embrace the meaning of his resurrection and have they actually come to the resurrected living Son of God as Lord and Savior? Do they love the one who has ascended on high and sits at the right hand of the majesty on high and who is coming again? And are they submitted to him in their lives each day and do they gather with his people in the church in order to serve him and to learn of him? I mean, do they really love the real Jesus?

Because what we do tonight is we move from sort of this joyful atmosphere to what we find in Revelation 2:18-29 which is a message of judgment. It is a message of judgment from the same Jesus that we have just sung about. It is a message from Jesus that insists upon the purity of his Church. Christ has said:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”²

And he would say to any one of us if we were not willing to do what he says: Why would you sing of me and why would you give gifts in my name and why would you have celebrations in honor of my birth if you are not willing to do what I say?

² Luke 6:46.

He comes to a church that had some positive qualities, but they had one glaring sin. And that sin was so serious that it threatened the very existence of the Church.

This morning in verse 18 we focused on the evaluator of the Church, we focused on the Lord of the Church. We saw Christ's self revelation. He is the Son of God. He has eyes like a flame of fire. His feet are like burnished bronze. He is the divine judge. He is the all knowing judge and he is the judge who rules with absolute purity and justice. And we asked the question this morning: Do we love that Jesus, the biblical Jesus? And now he comes with his assessment. The Church is about to hear read in their midst a letter through the great apostle John, but from the Lord Jesus Christ in which Christ reveals to this church what he is aware of in them. And before we look at this evaluation, I would just challenge us to sort of try to put ourselves back there, in our mind to try to imagine what it would have been like gathered with the believers in Thyatira and this letter is about to be read. And we are told that it is come from John the apostle, but that what we are about to hear is the assessment of Christ himself of our church. I wonder with what kind of anticipation we would have been listening. And I would just remind us that as we walk through these seven letters the church that gathers at Founders Baptist in Spring is also being examined in a different sort of way, of course. We are evaluating ourselves through the work of the Spirit in light of what God has revealed, but nonetheless, we are responsible for everything that has been revealed to these churches. We are discovering what pleases the Lord in his churches. We are discovering what displeases the Lord in his churches.

I wonder how those who had been faithful would have heard this letter. I wonder how those who were engaging in this sin would have felt as this letter was read. Listen to the Lord's evaluation.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.'³

He begins with praise. He begins with commendation. It is a good lesson for us that even when there is something that is genuinely wrong in the life of a church, Christ has taken notice of what is right there, what is praiseworthy there. It is a good lesson for us when have to offer correction one to another that we don't fall prey to the idea that everything is wrong, that there is nothing that is right. It is because of the all knowing nature of our Savior, it is because of his justice and truthfulness that he is able to recognize what is right in a church even when there is something that is glaringly wrong in a church. And so what he praises them for is something that we want to emulate. What he praises them for is something that pleases him in the life of this church and would please him in the life of our church. In fact, this is the first church that is praised of their love.

Christ says, "I know you works." That is sort of the general statement of his knowledge of them. "I know your works." And then he begins to, from that, describe their works.

³ Revelation 2:18-19.

And you can either understand this as four things that he sees that define their works, four different aspects of their work or two pairs, one leading into the other. I will explain in a moment, but notice what he says.

“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance.”⁴

This was a church where the love of Christ was evident. There was still some experience of the love of God. This was a church that was characterized by faith. This was a church that was involved in service. And this was a church that there was evidence of patient endurance, that is, bearing up under trial and it was a church where this had all been increasing over time.

“... your latter works exceed the first.”⁵

There is another way you can understand these four things, though. The first two, faith and service... I am sorry, love and faith, feeding out into service and patient endurance, that is love is evident, it is made evident by service and faith is made evident in patient endurance. You know, when we really love one another we serve one another and where there is faith we continue, we bear up under trial. These are good things. And it is the love of Christ for his Church and the concern of Christ for his Church that now means he cannot stop there. It is the love of Christ for his Church that must identify what threatens his Church. And so in verse 20 he moves from commendation to correction.

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”⁶

There is a woman present in this congregation who is a seductive influence when it comes to the Lord’s servants, teaching and seducing my servant to practice sexual immorality.

Now first I just want us to think about the sin that he identifies in the life of the church. The sin, verse 20, is the sin of toleration. You tolerate her. Now the very idea that they are tolerating her means they are aware of her sin. If you are tolerating something you are aware of it. They were aware of her sin. It may well be, especially given what he says in the next verse, verse 21, when he says:

“I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent...”⁷

Not only is this church aware of her sin, but the church has in some way known about the confrontation of her sin, they know that this woman is aware of her sin. She has been

⁴ Revelation 2:19.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Revelation 2:20.

⁷ Revelation 2:21.

called to repentance. And they know of her stubbornness, her sinful stubbornness. She refuses to heed the call to repentance. She is continuing on in this same line of sin.

It may well be that there have been steps of discipline already taken with this woman, already engaged in with this woman and she has refused to give heed to it and the response of this church is now they have done nothing more. They have just left it alone. She continues on. They are tolerating her. And that is unacceptable to Christ.

We talked about it this morning, the need in the life of the Church to maintain its purity, to take its purity seriously. We looked at the many calls in the New Testament for Church discipline and how Christ confronts sin in the life of the Church. And, beloved, when we are called upon by the Word of God to confront sin and we do that faithfully and we go one on one and we go with two or more and then, even, we tell it to the church and when a person stubbornly persists in that course of sin, we cannot then turn a blind eye to it and a deaf ear to it and act like it hasn't happened. We can't tolerate that this would just continue on, go on in the life of our congregation. That displeases Christ.

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel.”⁸

Now what do we know about this woman? Well, first of all, we know about her character. She is called by the name Jezebel. And it is highly unlikely that that was actually her name. Just as the false teachers in Pergamum were identified with Baalim in a symbolic way, it is most likely that this woman is identified with Jezebel in a symbolic way. You know about Jezebel, 1 Kings chapter 16. She was the wife of Ahab and this was one of Ahab's great sins that he married this Phoenician woman this Sidonian and she led him about and encouraged him in the worship of Baal. And, as a result, the whole nation was affected 1 Kings 16:30:

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him.⁹

Ahab married a foreign woman. The result was she influenced him to a devotion to Baal worship. The fact that this woman would be identified as Jezebel, the fact that Christ would say she entices or seduces my servants into this behavior distinguishes this woman from his servants, distinguishes this woman from his Church. She is present in the church. She might be operating in the name of Christ, but the very way she is described is like Jezebel of old. She is an outsider who now has a presence among the people of God and is having an idolatrous influence in the life of the church.

⁸ Revelation 2:20.

⁹ 1 Kings 16:30-31.

What does she claim for herself? Well, verse 20, she calls herself a prophetess. She claims to have revelation from God. And it is her teaching that is having an influence. She is teaching, verse 20 and seducing my servants. And down in verse 24 notice it says:

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching...”¹⁰

Her main influence is the influence of her teaching. If her teaching was of a public nature, if somehow the Church had given her an authoritative teaching position of some sort, well, then they are sinning in more than one way. Not only are they listening to her false doctrine, but they have allowed her a public influence that is contrary to Scripture.

1 Timothy 2:12:

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”¹¹

This church would have violated that, if that is the case. But whether her teaching is more of a private sort of thing, you know, she sort of won the hearing of people. They think she is a prophetess or whether it is a public sort of thing, either way her teaching represents seduction.

It is interesting. The word seducing there is a form of the Greek word *πλαναω* (plan-ah'-o). It means to lead astray, cause to wander, deceive, seduce.

In 1 Timothy 4:1 it says this.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”¹²

And the adjective there translated deceitful is the word *πλανος* (plan'-os). You can hear the similarity. The point that I am making is the seduction of this woman is the seduction of demonic doctrine. She is seducing the Lord's servants. How? With her teaching. And perhaps and probably also with her example.

What is she telling the servants of God? She is somehow convincing them that they can participate in feasts in honor of false gods and she is convincing them that they can take part in sexual immorality. As we talked about this morning, it may well have been tied to these trade guilds, each one having a patron god and with all that pagan religion there was idolatry and there was immorality. And we don't know for certain what the argument would have been or how she might have been convincing. Maybe she argued to believers, hey, this is the only way you can make a living. It is ok to participate in these things. The Lord understands. This is the way you are going to survive. Or maybe even in some way it was tied to the income of the church. I mean, after all, this is going to

¹⁰ Revelation 2:24.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 2:12.

¹² 1 Timothy 4:1.

allow you to earn a living and in that way the Lord's work can be financed. I don't know what her argument was. It might have taken the form of Antinomianism which is God's grace sets you free. This is not a matter of, you know, obedience or disobedience. It is a matter of liberty. You can engage in this maybe with some sort of Antinomian argument or maybe it was some sort of philosophical dualism which is pre Gnostic, the idea that the body, you know, is not really what is important, but it is the Spirit. And so what is really important is what is going on in your inner man, not what you do with your body. I don't know what the argument was, but I know this. She was a seductress. And she was leading the Lord's servants into behavior and into thinking that he hated.

This same sort of immorality and idolatry characterized the Nicolaitans and Christ has already said that he hated that doctrine.

By the way, just as a side note, I would ask you tonight. Is there any sin in your life right now or any sin in the life of someone you love that you are just sort of reasoning it away, excusing it, justifying it, maybe in the name of God's grace, maybe in the life of some lofty philosophy, maybe in the name of just being realistic. You know, we live in this world. We have to get along. Are you justifying some sin like that in your life, something that Christ hates but you are not hating it? He hates it, but you are to dealing with it obediently?

God has given her time to repent, Christ has, verse 21.

"I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality."¹³

So now Christ warns them, verse 22.

Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.¹⁴

Again, I would just ask: Is that Christmas Jesus? Is that the Jesus that the culture is comfortable with? Is that the Jesus that you are comfortable with? He is threatening serious judgment, isn't he? In fact, he mentions judgment in four realms. One, he is going to judge the woman.

"I will throw her onto a sickbed."¹⁵

By the way, that is no literally sick bed. The word just means a pallet. It can be translated bed. The reason why they translated it sick bed is it seems to be what he is doing is sort of idiomatic. It seems to be in contrast to her adulterous bed. He bed of adultery is, in

¹³ Revelation 2:21.

¹⁴ Revelation 2:22-23.

¹⁵ Revelation 2:22.

fact, a bed of severe illness. Some have even argued that it is a bier in view here. It is the sort of the platform that a dead body would be carried on and maybe what he is threatening here is death. I don't know for certain. I just know it is serious. I am going throw her onto a bed.

So he threatens judgment for her. He also promises judgment for those who are following her example and engaging in the sin with her

“...and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works.”¹⁶

You see, there is still a way out. There is still a way of escape. There is still a way to avoid the judgment of Christ. Isn't this amazing? Just as he offers these people now repentance. And this is Christ's desire that you would repent and not suffer his judgment in the same way he gave this woman time to repent, opportunity repent, appeal for her repentance. She refuses. That is why she is going to be judged. But he is saying to the Church: You still have opportunity not to follow in her works. You can avoid my judgment if you will repent, if you will acknowledge in your mind what is the truth, if you will view your sin from my truthful, accurate point of view, if you will change your mind about what you have been doing, if you will turn from your is to follow me and obey me. Then judgment can be averted, but if not, just as I throw her onto a bed, so I will throw you into great tribulation unless you repent.

And then a third statement of judgment, the woman those who are engaging in this sin with her... but then he mentions her children.

“I will strike her children dead.”¹⁷

And I take this to mean her spiritual children. There are those who are not only being influenced by this woman's demonic doctrine, they have adopted it and they are distributing it. They are her offspring. They follow her in a way that goes beyond being influenced by her. They propagate her ideas. And apart from repentance these children will die. Christ will not allow this influence to continue.

By the way, tradition tells us that this church did not repent. They followed the heresy later on of Montanus and this church was out of existence by the second century, somewhere in the second century, went out of existence. He is warning them here. He is warning them to turn from this false doctrine and this false teacher.

But then also he mentions the judgment of his memory. I mean even her... the memory of this woman is going to convey the thought of judgment.

“...and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know...”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Revelation 2:23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

When you think of this Jezebel, when you think of her off spring, all the churches will know:

“...that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.”¹⁹

She will forever be a reminder that the one who has the eyes as a flame of fire deals with people as they really deserve to be dealt with. Warning. This is loving. This gracious. This is kind.

By the way, it is interesting. What was she teaching, verse 24?

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan.”²⁰

We don't know exactly what she was saying, but it may have been that she was indicating that you could go into the very depths of Satan's activity and emerge from it unscathed because of your relationship to Christ and in this way set people free to engage in the idolatry and engage in the sexual immorality. We cannot be certain. Whatever it was, it was deadly. It was dangerous. It was false.

So now Christ moves to exhortation. There are faithful people in this church. And he says in verse 24:

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.”²¹

No additional burden, additional to what burden? The burden, I think of what they have already been doing, which is resisting this, standing against this, not giving into this.

See, folks, the danger for this church is not what was outside of it, but what was going on inside of it. And sometimes that is hardest place to stand. But there were faithful believers in this church who had not succumbed to it. They were... they had not received the teaching. They had not learned the teaching. And Christ says, “I won't lay anything more on you than that.” But this here... here is the qualifier, verse 25.

“Only hold fast what you have until I come.”²²

Continue in that. You just continue to hold fast. And he says, “until I come.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Revelation 2:24.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Revelation 2:25.

Aren't you grateful that our Savior is returning and all the false doctrines and all the isms and all the systems and all the rest will be exposed for what they really are. And all the compromise and all the tolerance that takes place in the name of Christ and the visible Church and all that will be exposed for what it is. And those who hold fast against all that stuff and hold fast to his name and hold fast to the truth one day all of that will be shown to be right when Jesus comes again.

“Only hold fast what you have until I come.”²³

And Christ gives this promise, verse 26.

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.²⁴

I mentioned this morning it is an Old Testament promise that is fulfilled in Christ, Psalm two mentions this, Christ ruling the nations with a rod of iron, establishing his kingdom, destroying, putting out of existence all that would oppose him. And what he is saying is when he comes again his people, his people will share in his authority. His people will share in his rule. His people will share in his victory.

Christ says to us, “Don't be afraid. I have overcome the world.”

And one day that will be manifested on this earth. And then an additional promise. He says, verse 28:

“And I will give him the morning star.”²⁵

And there is a lot of debate about what that means. And the answer that I am going to give you many do not embrace or adopt or agree with, but I think when you have a description like this and it is explained in the same book it is a good place to begin. And in Revelation 22:16 we read this:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”²⁶

Who is the bright morning star in that statement? Jesus is. And those who would not adopt this would say, “How is that Jesus is speaking of something apart from himself?”

I think it is simple enough. It is just Christ symbolically saying, “You will have me. You endure to the end and you will have me.” Christ gives us himself.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Revelation 2:26-27.

²⁵ Revelation 2:28.

²⁶ Revelation 22:16.

And do you know what? For those who have been saved, we recognize that is enough, isn't it? I would rather have Jesus, right, than silver or gold or houses or lands or anything that any person could ever give me. I would rather have Jesus. And he says to the over comer, "You will have him." And then he ends by saying:

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."²⁷

So recognize Jesus for who he is. Recognize him as the Son of God. Recognize him as the one who is himself pure, perfect, holy and calls for his people to be holy. See him as the one who demands purity from his Church, who calls upon us as we saw in 2 Corinthians 7:1 this morning to put away sin in all of its forms. All the defilements of body and spirit and to complete holiness, to pursue holiness until we see him face to face. Recognize Jesus as the one who knows us perfectly and assesses us accurately and calls upon us to truly and really follow him, even as that means holding fast against those doctrines and behaviors and examples that represent seduction, that would seduce us away from him. Recognize our Savior for who he is and then recognize what sort of people he calls us to be. Recognize that a church can be loving. It can be full of faith. It can be characterized by service. It can even be characterized by patient endurance, but if it tolerates sin in its midst, if there has been sin confronted but then stubbornly persisted in, and the church takes no action, the leadership of the church takes no action and the result is people are influenced to the destruction of their soul, understand Christ hates that and brings judgment where a church does that.

What does the Lord want for us here at Founders Baptist church? He wants us to be a church that lovingly, graciously, submissively, humbly doesn't tolerate sin. If you can see that, would you say amen?

Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for every part of your Word. We thank you, Lord, that we are not trying to construct a church based upon what our ideas of the Church are to be, what the Church should be, but, rather, Lord, we are to take your Word as you have revealed it and you tell us what pleases you in the life of your Church, what displeases you. So strengthen us, Lord, to be faithful in these days. Lord, we are living in days where there are many Jezebels. We are living in days where there are many false teachers. We are living in days when you people are being confronted with thing that would seduce them and lead them astray. Help us to be a church, Lord, not without love, not without faith, not without patience, not with out service, but with all those things. At the same time help us to be a church that deals with sin whenever it appears in our midst. Help us to be a church that doesn't tolerate it. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

²⁷ Revelation 2:29.