

Revelation 2:18-29

"Don't Stand Down, Stand Fast"

It's found in the first chapter: John falling on his face having heard the voice and having seen the vision of the glorified Christ. There He was in His High Priestly garb standing in the midst of 7 golden lampstands & holding 7 stars in His right hand.

We recall from the OT that one of the duties of the priesthood was to enter into the tabernacle & ensure that the golden lampstand was constantly/continually burning, constantly giving off optimum light in what would otherwise be a dark place. So the priests were continually ensuring that there was plenty of oil in the lamp, that the wicks were trimmed, that the soot was cleaned & cleared away. They would keep the lampstand under constant inspection, constant evaluation ensuring that anything that threatened to snuff out the light was dealt w/& out of the way.

We discover in the final Vs of the 1st chapter that the 7 golden lampstands were the 7 churches that Jesus would write to & the 7 stars were (as we understand it) the 7 pastors who would deliver the message to the church. The point being that even as the priests of the OT were constantly inspecting & attending to the golden lampstand w/in the tabernacle, even so our Great High Priest J.C. is constantly inspecting & evaluating His churches (His golden lampstands, the light of the world). He's looking for soot that needs cleaned up, oil that needs added, wicks that need trimmed, things that need dealt w/& put away if our light is to shine bright in this otherwise dark world.

So far Jesus has found plenty that's needed tending to & there's plenty more believe you me. There's been the reminder to return to our 1st love; to remain faithful unto death & to repent of compromise in our lives. To quit seeking to feed on (that is find satisfaction in) the things of this world; but rather we're to partake of the true bread from heaven, we're to feed *on* (find our satisfaction *in*) J.C. Jesus alone is able to satisfy the deepest hunger of all men; outside of Him we find ourselves coming up empty, unsatisfied & disillusioned w/life.

Next, from Pergamum we travel 40ish miles to the south & to the east to the city of Thyatira & the church represented in that place. Historically on the heels of the church state of Constantine it falls into what's known as the "Dark ages" (around 600 A.D. to around 1500 A.D) from which arose the Roman Catholic Church. (Which is obviously still around to this day as are the remainder of the churches written to from this point forward [perhaps not as a fellowship in that city, but it's represented presently on the earth]).

But this is the period in which indulgences were sold (remember the free sin pass we spoke of last week); the idea of purgatory came out of this time period, the worship of Mary; worshiping idols and previous “saints”; the doctrine of transubstantiation appeared in this time period. **Which is a fancy word that means that the bread & the cup of communion become the literal blood & body of Christ & speak of a continual sacrifice on His behalf. Obviously there are several problems w/that not the least of which is the idea of cannibalism, but also it flies in the face of what Jesus Himself declared upon the cross when He said, “It is finished”. The sacrifice was “once for all” not continual or perpetual (a subject Paul speaks to & deals with both in Romans Ch 6 & Hebrews 10).** (That’s why the priest ensure the bread is eaten & the wine is drank, rather than dump it down the drain [it’s the body & blood of Christ]).

Now I’m not trying to go on some sort of “Catholic bashing” spree here, simply stating a few of the unbiblical doctrines that are held to in the Catholic Church. It doesn’t mean that every Catholic adheres to such things; but the church as a whole is severely flawed w/several unbiblical, unscriptural issues.

That’s not to say that protestant churches don’t have their problems, (we just aren’t there yet, that’s next time). But this is where we’re at today.

Ok...Historically Thyatira was what historians refer to as an insignificant city, nothing really went on there regarding any significance *politically*, no record of harsh persecution toward *Christianity*; it was the least among the cities that Jesus wrote to. Having said that it also received the longest letter... The least among them (the smallest city) received the longest/largest letter.

Here’s the point; that which may seem insignificant to man is still extremely significant to God. Jesus will say to them, “I know your works”. Perhaps you feel as though you’re the least significant (the smallest) of Christians among us today; you’re not to Jesus. Jesus knows and is concerned for the details of your life & wants you to walk in holiness & in a manner that is befitting to His name.

Vs 18-29

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write,” though insignificant from a political perspective what the archaeologist spade *has* discovered about Thyatira is that it was a military city w/a major presence of business and trade. **There were more trade guilds in Thyatira than any other w/regard to its size & population. A trade guild was basically a labor union that maintained a standard of quality and safeguarded the people from “fly by night” type businesses that could be shady or untrustworthy.**

If you weren't part of the trade guild, you didn't do business in Thyatira. There was a goldsmith guild, a weaver's guild, a potter's guild, a sculptor's guild, a tanner's guild, robe-maker's & dyer's guild (you get the idea).

If Thyatira rings a bell in your biblical mind it may be because Paul the apostle's 1st European convert was a lady by the name of Lydia (a seller of purple) who was from Thyatira (Acts 16; Paul met her in Philippi).

Some believe that she may've been the one to take the gospel back to Thyatira & that the church there was planted as the result of her faithfulness to share the good news. So it's plausible that a woman was responsible for the *founding* of this church. Having said that it's also a woman who's responsible for the *floundering* of this church.

But getting back to our guilds; the problem w/the guilds is that wherever guilds were found; idolatry & immorality would almost always be found there as well. The city itself boasted a special temple to Apollo, the "sun god" which may be one reason Jesus called Himself "the Son of God" (the only time the title is used in all of Rev). "You may have the "sun god" I'm the "Son of God". But each guild would also have it's own patron "god" as well. For instance the goldsmith's guild may pay homage to Zeus, the potter's guild may have Mars or Jupiter as it's god while the tanner's guild may worship Athena (you get the idea).

These guilds would hold periodic mandatory meetings & they would hold these meetings at the various temples & would almost always include a meal (from meat sacrificed to the patron god) & often times the worship of the god (through immorality) would take place via the temple prostitutes.

Now I don't have to state the obvious; that Christians were confronted w/a real problem. On the one hand I know it's wrong for me to honor these false gods & engage in immorality or adultery in the "worship" of them; on the other hand if I'm not apart of the guild I can't make a living in my trade, I can't provide for my family. My family will literally starve to death because I can't work outside of the guild.

But before we consider the bad, take a look at the good.

Vs 18-19

When Jesus identifies Himself as He who has "eyes like a flame of fire, & feet like fine brass" it tells us a couple of things. 1st of all judgment is coming; right? The eyes of fire; that penetrating gaze of J.C. into the deep recess of who we are; what we do, why we do it. 2^{ndly} the feet like fine brass. Brass also being a picture of judgment in the scriptures; now some see the feet of fine brass as a good thing; meaning Jesus bore our judgment.

He's been refined as through the fire of God's wrath as God judged our sin (Jesus bearing our sin) upon the Cross. Other's see this as a picture of Jesus standing in judgment; bringing to light the sin present in the church. I'm ok either way you want to see it because both are true.

But in many ways as we read Vs 19 Thyatira stands out as a model church. Jesus says, "I know your works" what are those works? Even love; service, faith, & patience; & unlike Ephesus whose love had left the building; Thyatira's love was more now than it was to begin with!

Wouldn't it be great if when Jesus look *at* you & made an evaluation *of* you He could say this? "You have more love, greater service; more faith & patience *now* than you did in the beginning." **But for many of us I fear Jesus would say, "Your love has cooled off a bit from when we 1st met; you don't serve Me like you used to; your patience w/others or your patience in trials runs thinner than it once did."** That's not the case in Thyatira. **These things are on the upswing & increase.**

Which (btw) is how it should be! Works, Love, faith, ministry & patience in an increasing kind of way are virtues that are produced in the life of the believer through the power & Person of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Vs 20

Now we've run into this fateful word "Nevertheless" before back in Vs 4. It's not the word you want to hear after all the good things about you are listed; it's a word you want to hear after all the bad things about you are listed. Because in essence it pushes everything mentioned before it to the wayside in the light of what's to be spoken next. If you hear, "This is wrong, that's wrong, this shouldn't be happening; nevertheless" then you know something good is about to follow. However if you hear; "This is good, I commend you for that, you've done well here; nevertheless" then you know something bad is about to be spoken.

Jesus says (following the "nevertheless") "you have a false prophetess in your midst & you give heed to her as though she speaks the oracles of God yet she's seducing My servants to commit idolatry & immorality" (my guess would be in connection w/the trade guilds).

Ok. Few things here. # 1 Where it says "that woman" it could also be rendered "your wife". Meaning: A,) she's the pastor's wife, or B) she's a woman that holds such a prominent place of influence in the fellowship it's as though they're married to her; she has a real stronghold on them (I lean toward the latter).

There was a false prophetess in their midst wielding the same destructive influence over the church of Thyatira as did Jezebel over King Ahab back in 1st Kings (18-22.) She was the single most wicked woman noted in all of the OT (whose violent death came in 2 Kings 9) who seduced the northern kingdom of Israel into Idolatry/immorality (she wasn't Jewish, she was Sidonian [1 Kings 16:31]).

So when Jesus refers here to "Jezebel" it's probably not a proper name because no one would name their child Jezebel, it would be like naming your child "Judas"; it carries way too many negative connotations. More than likely it's a title Jesus gives her to make the association w/the reality of who she is & what she's doing in that church.

She's "seducing" the Lord's servants; meaning leading them in a fundamental departure from the truth. You know; the Christians are wondering what to do, seeking the Lord as to whether or not they should do what it takes to provide for their family, or should forfeit their place in the guild & be faced w/plausible demise. **But this so called "prophetess" is giving them a "Thus says the Lord" kind of message encouraging them to carry on in their guilds; that providing for their family was the primary priority therefore God would overlook or be gracious regarding the pagan rituals they would have to partake in.**

Now the problem wasn't so much that there was a false prophetess among them (Jesus said those kinds of things would happen). The problem was that they were allowing it, they were heeding her, not subjecting her word to the scrutiny of the scriptures. In the words of the apostle John, **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."**¹

Don't dismiss your brain just because someone claims to deliver to you the word of God. Whether it come from this pulpit or anywhere else, subject what's shared w/you, what's taught to you to the word of God. If it doesn't line up; reject it; don't accept it.

Ephesus had a zero tolerance for false teachers yet lacked in love, Thyatira had ever increasing love yet tolerated false teachers, both are to be avoided; the balance is that of speaking the *truth in love*.

Vs 21-23

So the Lord is laying down the gauntlet; repent or receive the repercussions of your sin. We see in this section both the grace & the judgment of Jesus. Grace in that He's allowed a time to repent. I'm so glad that the Lord is patient w/us.

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Jn 4:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I'm glad that His grace in waiting on me to repent extends so often beyond my grace in waiting for others to repent. What if God was as gracious & patient w/you or me as we are w/others? Not many of us would make it. But God is gracious, "I gave her time to repent, she did not." She chose to ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit w/in her heart.

Perhaps God has been dealing w/you concerning some sin in your life, don't interpret the fact that God is being gracious to you to mean that God is ok w/sin in your life; He's not. Should you choose not to repent, there will be repercussions. For her it's too late, "I gave her time to repent, she did not, I will cast her into a sickbed."

She's been seducing people into a bed of sin, she will now be forced to lie in a bed of sickness & affliction. As for those who've strayed w/her or followed after her (be it through idolatry or immorality) there's still time, but they will receive the same penalty "unless they repent" (Vs 22).

Jesus says, "Turn from your sin, it doesn't have to be this way, you have a choice."

Where it says, "I will kill her children w/death" the idea there is that those who have begun to follow her will be dealt w/as well. Killed w/death may carry the connotation of the 2nd death, but regardless it's above & beyond a simple, common kind of thing.

One thing is for certain, whatever is meant, it would be so severe, so dramatic that everyone would know it was God's doing & that even though things may look good outwardly, Jesus knows exactly what's happening inwardly (in the heart & in the mind) & that His judgment would be reflected accordingly.

Here's the application: heed the warnings that God gives you. When a doctor warns you of impending death or disease unless you change this, or do that; we generally heed the warning & take it seriously. Our diet changes, we get exercise, avoid caffeine, you quit drinking or smoking or whatever. Listen, if we're willing to take the warnings of physical health & well being seriously, how much more should we take the warnings of spiritual health & well being seriously? God doesn't warn us for no reason, & He never bluffs; take the warnings of the word of God seriously.

Now real quick, notice the reference in Vs 22 of remnants of this church being cast into "great tribulation" unless they repent. We believe in the rapture of the church, however, as for the "church" that will go through the great tribulation; it's the non-repentant, immoral, idol worshiping church that will.

Vs 24-25

Isn't it encouraging to see that Jesus realizes that sometimes life can be burdensome, that certain situations can be difficult to bear? Not everyone in this church was down w/what was going on; they were striving & straining to honor the Lord in the midst of corruption. Jesus says, "I'm not going to add to that, you recognize what's going on as being *not* from the *Holy Spirit*, but a satanic spirit & you're resisting it & rejecting it; keep up the good work."

He says, "Hold fast; hang on to & keep growing *in* love, service, faith & patience." How long? "Till I come." Jesus *will come for His church*; that's when you get to stand down (soldier), until then stand fast. Hold fast, don't relax or let down your guard, honor the Lord w/all that you are.

While we can (& should) update and stay current w/our methods; the message must never change, hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Don't become distracted or discouraged due to the corruption that may be present in others; *you* hold fast.

Vs 26-29

Notice the exhortation to keep the Lord's works "until the end." Again there may be a "Jezebel", one who influences others regarding immorality or idolatry among believers; it was happening then, it happens today. But God's work will continue to carry on through His overcomers, make sure you're in that #. The faithful, who believe *in* Jesus, focus *on* submit *to* Jesus.

To the overcomer Jesus promises power over the nations; a place of power in His millennial kingdom whereby we will reign w/Him.

It's interesting, the word "rule" in Vs 27 means literally to "shepherd". Our share in the kingdom won't be limited to executing judgment; but also administering mercy, directing, correcting & protecting the sheep of our Lord's hand as well.

But it's a time that righteousness will be mandatory & the one who refuses to fall in line will be dealt w/swiftly & severely; dashed to pieces like a crow bar against a clay pot.

"And I will give him the morning star." Now I wouldn't get dogmatic on this point but this could be an allusion to the rapture. He's already mentioned casting the unrepentant into great tribulation, but to the overcomer "The morning star."

Hear me on this & then we're done. In the book of Malachi we read a prophecy.

It's a prophecy regarding the end of the tribulation when Jesus comes back & it says, "*But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings;*"² It's a word of comfort & encouragement to those who'll be saved during the time of the Great tribulation, that it won't always go on but that Jesus will return for them at His 2nd coming in power & glory. He'll be like the sun appearing out of the darkness of this world's night.

But as you may know, before the sun rises, in the east you can see the morning star. Who do we discover (in Rev 22:16) bears the title of the Bright & Morning Star? Jesus Himself. The idea being that before He comes in power & glory, visible to the world, that He will appear for His own (as the morning star), to receive them to Himself.

It could also be that Jesus is saying, "I Myself will be your reward." Either way (as I've said before) I want in on it.

Vs 29

That's you & me. If you're one who has a tendency to influence others toward sin, this applies to you; repent. It applies to you if you're one who has a tendency to follow others into sin, turn from sin & honor your Savior. If you're one who turns a blind eye & allows unrepentant sin; it applies; cut out the compromise.

It applies to those who remaining faithful in the midst of corruption; don't stand down, stand fast; stay faithful unto Jesus until the end, until He comes & great will be your reward...

Prayer Points:

Lord, You are the One who searches the minds, who searches the heart & render to each of us according to our works. Deliver us from corruption, from compromise; we don't want to be polluted, we want to be pure before You. We want to be overcomers through faith in You for the glory of You; the glory of Your name. Give us hearts eager to turn from sin; hungry to draw near to You.

Only Jesus satisfies, everything else is a temporary fix to a permanent problem. If you've lived very long at all in this world you've found what I'm saying to be true. Nothing in this life satisfies. Not ultimately, & certainly not eternally. What we need is forgiveness of sin & wholeness of heart through faith in J.C. we need a relationship w/our Creator, to be restored to that place of intimacy w/Him for which we were created. Jesus laid down His life, shed His blood upon the cross so that we might be forgiven of our sin; restored through repentance, through faith in Him to a right relationship w/God. If the Lord is speaking to you, dealing w/you; respond to Him, put your faith in Him & so find forgiveness of sin & wholeness of heart.

² The New King James Version. 1982 (Mal 4:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.