

The Letters to the Seven Churches, Part IV- Love Without Discernment

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

Hymn #89- *Come, Thou Almighty King*

1st Scripture: 1 Kings 16:29-34

Hymn #80- *How Firm a Foundation*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 2:18-29

Hymn #129- *Fairest Lord Jesus*

Introduction:

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:25-27).

These were some of the final words, spoken by the Apostle Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus, when he realized that he would probably never see them again. And they ought to be the words that are bound to the chest of every true preacher and minister of the Gospel throughout all of history. You see, it is all too easy for us to embrace and emphasize particular portions of the counsel and will of God, at the expense of others. We tend to be one sided, and we tend to settle well within the land of extremes, because after all, it is often very difficult to “toe the line” of proper biblical balance when living the Christian life. And yet, brethren, as we consider these letters to the churches, one thing that is blatantly obvious about the concerns and rebukes that our Lord brings forth, is that the churches are failing to teach and apply the *whole counsel* of God. While they are commended for certain things pertaining to the Gospel light that they are to shine forth, they are severely rebuked for their lack of other critical Gospel qualities. And this significant problem is exactly what we ought to expect to find in the churches of our own day. And indeed, we do.

Have you ever followed a baking recipe, only to find out the hard way, upon tasting the finished product, that you have either left out or used the wrong measure of a particular ingredient? Next time you cook your pancakes, switch the salt measurement with the flour measurement or double the baking powder measurement and see what happens. The whole

batch is spoiled. You see, when you fail to mix in all of the right ingredients with their proper measurements, you wind up contaminating the whole batch, don't you? Well, likewise, when you fail to incorporate all of the proper biblical ingredients, and their proper measurements into the life of the local church, that has a way of contaminating the whole work, incurring the judgment of the Chief Shepherd (to whom the church belongs), if repentance and change does not soon take place.

Unlike the church at Ephesus, this church at Thyatira had the necessary virtue of Christian "love." But unlike the church at Ephesus, and like the church at Pergamos, they lacked biblical discernment, allowing ungodly influences to penetrate the church. And all three of these churches are sternly rebuked, under the threat of some form of severe judgment, because of that which they lacked. And we find this today, do we not, brethren? Some, with the "Beatles" would hitch their wagon on the slogan, "All you need is love," while failing to recognize the critical importance of "holiness" in a church that would properly represent Christ. And others would hitch their wagon on the post of doctrinal precision, expository preaching and purity of conduct, while lacking the type of biblical love and passion that would take interest in others and carry forth the Gospel to the ends of the earth. You could easily find a large selection of Biblical texts that support both extremes. It is, after all, important to maintain a healthy *inward* focus, concentrating on the churches personal holiness and purity. Improving our doctrinal depth, growing in our personal holiness and sanctification, and exercising biblical church discipline are extremely important to the spiritual life and welfare of the local church. We must protect what we have and improve upon it, and we can back this up with many Scriptures. But at the same time, that necessary ingredient of looking *outward* and considering the needs of others is equally important. Turning our attention on the lost and those who are presently hell bound, and concentrating on using our gifts to lovingly serve and build up the brethren is equally as important. We cannot sacrifice either of these important responsibilities. We need law and we need grace. Both ingredients are necessary in their proper sphere of usefulness.

This morning, we will consider the letter written to the church at Thyatira, a church that would have done well to learn from the church at Ephesus in some respects...and a church that would have done well to teach the church at Ephesus in other respects. And brethren, as we work through the remaining letters to the seven churches (we are breaching the half way point

this morning), let us all the more humble ourselves and ask, “What might we be able to learn from those who are perhaps not as doctrinally up to par as we are?” Can we learn anything from our Pentecostal or Arminian brethren?

I. An Historical Background

William Hendriksen states, “This place was situated in a valley connecting two other valleys. Lacking natural fortifications and being wide open to attack and invasion, a garrison was generally stationed here in order not only to defend the town but also to obstruct the path of the enemy to Pergamum, the capital. Being a center of communication, with many people passing through it, Thyatira became a trading city. Here were to be found the trade-guilds: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters...etc. These trade-guilds were associated with the worship of tutelary deities: each guild had its guardian god. The situation, therefore, was somewhat as follows: if you wish to get ahead in this world, you must belong to a guild; if you belong to a guild, your very membership implies that you worship its god. You will be expected to attend the guild-festivals and to eat food part of which is offered to the tutelary deity and which you receive on your table as a gift from the god. And then, when the feast ends, and the real—grossly immoral—fun begins, you must not walk out unless you desire to become the object of ridicule and persecution! In this difficult situation what must a Christian do? If he quits the union, he loses his position and standing in society. He may have to suffer want, hunger, persecution. On the other hand, if he remains in the guild and attends the immoral feasts, eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornications, he denies his Lord. In this difficult situation the prophetess Jezebel pretended to know the real solution of the problem, the way out of the difficulty. She, apparently, argued thus: in order to conquer satan, you must know him. You will never be able to conquer sin unless you have become thoroughly acquainted with it by experience. In brief, a Christian should learn to know ‘the deep things of satan.’ By all means attend the guild-feasts and commit fornication...and still remain a Christian; nay rather, become a better Christian!”

It is with this background in mind, that we come now to begin to understand and appreciate our Lord’s self-designation, given to this church.

II. Christ's Self-Designation

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass...’” (vs. 18).

Here we find three important “judgment” aspects, which make up Christ’s self-designation, two of which point back to the glorious vision of the exalted Christ in chapter 1:

1) He speaks of Himself as having “eyes like a flame of fire” (18b). And again, we find that our Lord here depicts Himself as One having the ability to see beyond the outward profession and into the very motives of the heart with His soul penetrating vision. In a church that was allowing its members to compromise with the world, in accordance with the false teachings of a false prophetess, it was important for them to realize that our Lord knew all too well what their real motives and intentions were in their compromise. Those who seek to keep one foot in the world while maintaining their Christian “label” will be exposed for their true hypocrisy, in their unwillingness to suffer hardship and to endure persecution and/or ostracism for the sake of the Gospel. Christianity is not cheap. It entails self-sacrifice, bearing reproach and carrying a cross for the sake of Christ, and those who avoid these things (by way of compromise), when we are called to them, cannot hide their true motives under the guise of poor influences. Notice, our Lord clarifies this self-designation further when he states in verse 23b, “...and all the churches shall know that I am He *who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*” Christ sees all, Christ knows all, and He will repay all accordingly.

2) Our Lord speaks of Himself as having, “*feet like fine brass*” (vs. 18c). And again, here our Lord desires to convey the fact that He not only sees the heart, but furthermore, He will righteously judge what He finds there. He will bring out that which is hidden in the heart, and judge each one according to his works. Our Lord having “brass feet” is meant to picture the idea of His trampling upon and crushing His enemies and all hypocrites, who would seek to use grace as a means of licentiousness. Those who toy with idolatry, sexual immorality and unrepentant sinful patterns, seeking to justify or condone their actions by the twisting of biblical doctrines such as grace and mercy, will find themselves crushed in judgment, when Christ calls them to

account. Their excuses and their defenses will fall right to the ground, and their hearts will be exposed for all of the sinful, lustful desires that are housed there.

3) Lastly, it is interesting to note that this is the only place in the entire Book of Revelation that our Lord *expressly* refers to Himself as the “Son of God.” Clearly, there is a special reason for this emphasis here. And we will find, when we come to address verse 27, that, in an effort to motivate this church to properly respond to His Word of exhortation and rebuke, our Lord would compel His readers to fix their attention on Psalm 2, especially understanding that He is indeed the “Son of God” there spoken of, who will bring judgment upon the nations of the world. This reminder would be critical for a city that was under great and constant threat from governmental rulers and trade-guild leaders. We will talk more about this shortly.

III. Christ’s Commendations

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first...” (vs. 19).

Here our Lord commends this church for many notable qualities:

1) They had *works*. Again, the church at Thyatira was actively involved in various forms of ministries. Their commitment to serving Christ was genuine and thriving. Notice, our Lord even says that their last works were *more than the first*. In other words, they were increasing, improving and progressing in their Gospel commitment. As time went on, they weren’t growing cold in their labors; rather, they were increasing all the more.

2) They had *love*. That precious, core quality, which was missing at Ephesus, was here found and recognized at Thyatira. They had a passion for the glory of Christ that spilled over in their love for one another and in their evangelistic zeal for the lost. They were not plastic and robotic in their labors. No, they had a legitimate and sincere interest in others.

3) They had *service*. Their love drove them to serve Christ and others with fervency. There was a genuine outward focus that led them to consider the needs of all, and they sought to

meet those needs accordingly. Their joyful enslavement to Christ, led them to be mutual servants of one another.

4) They had *faith*. That is, their love and service toward one another were rooted in a genuine confidence in the power and faithfulness of their invisible God. Their works proved the validity of their ongoing God-confidence, and this has increased and grown stronger in the passing of time.

5) They had *patience (or perseverance)*. Their faithfulness did not come without any opposition, conflict or trial. To be sure, they did have to contend with resistance, and yet, they persevered in spite of this, and continued on with their faithful labors in the Gospel (In fact, again, they even increased, in spite of trials).

And so, brethren, there was much to be commended in this church. There was an obvious, proven, sincere and genuine desire to see the kingdom of God prosper. Mutual love, evangelistic outreach, Christian ministry and service, were all flourishing and increasing in the life of this church. Their labors were many, their patience was strong, and yet, our Lord did have a few serious things against them.

IV. Christ's Word of Rebuke

“Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (vs. 20-23).

Similar to the sin of the church in Pergamos, the church in Thyatira failed to properly deal with an ungodly influence that had made its way into their church. Only, here in Thyatira,

apparently, the *poisonous* influence was around for a much longer time and had brought about a great infection in the church. Our Lord had graciously given “this influence” time to repent, but she continued on in her wicked ways, and the fruit of her unchecked teachings ultimately began to defile several within the church.

Apparently, a self-proclaimed “prophetess,” whom our Lord labels as “Jezebel” had offered the church a way of avoiding being ostracized or persecuted by the society at large, and that, all in the name of actually being more “spiritual.” Even as Jezebel had incited King Ahab and all Israel to pursue baal worship, and to mesh the worship of Jehovah with the idolatrous worship of baal, this prophetess had seduced several in the church of Thyatira to partake in the idolatrous and immoral acts that were common in the city of Thyatira. This would enable the brethren at Thyatira to maintain their respected status among the trade-guilds, while avoiding persecution and rejection. After all, according to this prophetess, partaking in the pagan festivals, which involved eating foods offered to idols and sexually immoral acts, would strengthen their spirituality, as they came to better understand and master, the so-called “deep things of satan.” Sadly, some had been altogether duped by this teaching, becoming all out followers of this prophetess, and others were in the process of experimenting with her teaching.

And the Lord had patiently and graciously given even this “Jezebel” time to repent of her sexually immoral acts and her idolatrous teachings, but she had continued on disseminating her poison and increasing the infection of defilement in the church. But now, her destruction was imminent. She would soon be cast into a sickbed; she would be afflicted with some form of serious illness, and her disciples; her followers and those who toyed with her teachings would experience some form of great tribulation, if they refused to repent of their deeds. And this judgment would be so great and pronounced, that our Lord would use it as a means of setting an example for all of the other churches; so that they would know that the Lord Jesus is “He who searches the minds and hearts. And [He] will give to each one according to [their] works.” Unrepentant sin will not go unpunished. Yes, indeed the Lord is patient, but all the more, those who take His patience for granted, ultimately heap up a greater judgment upon themselves, when our Lord returns to crush them under the “fine brass feet” of His judgment!

And so, brethren, the rebuke here is two-fold. It is directed both toward the church as a whole, for failing to properly deal with this false prophetess and her evil teachings (again,

evidencing a lack of church discipline and accountability, like the church at Pergamos) and also toward those who have embraced or begun to toy with the evil teachings of this Jezebel.

V. Christ's Solution

Christ's solution to the problem is two-fold:

1) First, those who had embraced the teachings of the false prophetess must repent. They must recognize that her ways are evil, and that they have defiled themselves greatly by partaking in her immoral, idolatrous, compromising ways. And they must turn away from her ways, being willing to suffer any persecution or ostracism (from society at large) that was necessary for the sake of the Gospel. They must expose and contend with the evil ways of Jezebel, lest they be judged with her.

2) And to those who were presently undefiled by the teachings of Jezebel, our Lord states in verses 24-25, "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come."

They were to maintain their faithful ground, not allowing the infection that has entered the church, to reach their own hearts. They were to continue on with their works, their love, their service, their faith and their patience, holding on to what they have, refusing to compromise with the world in any respect, even under the constant threat of economic/social ostracism and/or persecution. And furthermore, when he uses the words, "I will put on you no other burden," they were to recall to mind, that critical decision made by the counsel at Jerusalem in Acts 15:20, concerning the only Judaistic requirements that were to be placed on the gentiles, namely, that they were to "abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." Clearly, at least two of these requirements were here broken by those who followed the teachings of the prophetess Jezebel.

VI. Christ's Warning/Exhortation

Again, we read in verse 23b, "And I will give to each one of you according to your works" (see also Matt. 16:27). Though those who followed the teachings of Jezebel were enjoying some form of temporal peace and maintaining a sense of respect among the community, ultimately they would have to face Christ for their sinful compromises, should they fail to repent. Our Lord wanted them to think "long term" and "big picture"; He wanted them to count the ultimate costs of their rebellious actions.

And in a general sense, the warning here is quite simple and to the point, isn't it brethren? Though we may find comfort in following the crowd; though there is strength in numbers, in the end, when we face Christ, each of us, *individually*, will be held accountable for our actions and our works. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for our doings, and on that day, the motives of the heart, which drive our actions, will be brought to the foreground. Especially in our day and age of "political correctness," it is so easy to manipulate the Scriptures and to make them say what we want them to say in order to secure our lusts or to provide us with some sense of acceptance with the world. But in the end, such compromises will not stand the test of Christ's fiery, heart penetrating eyes nor will they stand the judgment of His righteous, "brass feet" trampling justice! [Example: the temptation to be "open and affirming," especially in a state that has now legalized homosexual marriage." How will we fare? Will we compromise in the name of so-called "love" or will we stand fast in the sanctity of Christ, and be willing to risk all manner of contention, oppression and perhaps legal persecution from those who govern over us?].

VII. Christ's Promises to those who Overcome

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations-- He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels"-- as I also have received 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." ' "

Here, we find two promises granted to those who stand fast and overcome by keeping Christ's works until the end:

1) Those who overcome will be given power over the nations.

Thyatira was a vulnerable city; probably the most unsecure out of all the cities of Asia Minor. From a military standpoint, they had very little advantage and were geographically exposed. And so, industry was their primary means of securing any level of importance and respect from other cities. However, to maintain an accepted status within a trade, one had to partake in idolatrous and immoral practices. Each trade had its own patron deity, and it was expected that all who partook in any particular trade would honor and respect the patron deity who was associated with that particular trade. This type of honor would include offering and eating sacrifices offered to that deity (at various appointed feasts), along with partaking in all manner of sexually immoral acts among those who share your common trade.

And so, clearly, the threat to compromise was strong. Hence, our Lord encourages those who overcome, taking a stand against such wicked acts, by telling them that they will ultimately reign with Him, as He rules over the nations. And He points them to Psalm 2, which is quoted in part, in verse 27, to remind them that He Himself is the fulfillment of this prophecy, having been resurrected from the dead and declared the Son of God with power, and ruler over all nations, including those who persecute His people. And furthermore, He who has been given this authority, by God the Father, promises to share that authority with them. In other words, the tides will most certainly change for those who are unjustly persecuted. Those Christians who are unjustly treated by government powers in this world, will, in the end, rule over those who have once ruled over them. They will reign with Christ, the Son of the living God, forever! This sovereignly decreed reality needed to motivate the temporarily weakened and shunned Christians to remain faithful; to never compromise, no matter what seems to be at the surface. In the end, those who strike the people of God, will themselves, be broken and shattered eternally!

2) They will be given the "morning star." This "morning star" includes all of the blessings that will come when Christ returns to consummate His Kingdom (and especially our completed sanctification and Christ-likeness), and it also includes Christ Himself. It includes all

of the benefits of the “New Day,” and the “New Age” that comes when all darkness is put away and we are with and like Christ forever!

In Numbers 24:17, Balaam prophecies of the reign of Christ in this regard, when he states, “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”

And again, Peter alludes to this when he states in 2 Peter 2:19, “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...”

And then, finally, our Lord states at the end of the Book of Revelation, in Revelation 22:16, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Ultimately, brethren, once again, we find that Christ is the exceedingly great reward of all who stand fast and overcome in His name! Is that indeed most precious to you? “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jeremiah 17:5-10

*Note: Before first Scripture reading, note the foreshadowing of the beast, the false prophet, and the whore of Babylon found in this letter...