

REVELATION – SERMON 12

THE TOLERANT CHURCH

Revelation 2:18-20

INTRODUCTION

- If there is one word that describes the philosophy of our modern, degenerate society, it is “tolerance”.
- We are told that we must tolerate every belief system, every lifestyle choice, every perversion.
- The greatest sin that one can commit today is the sin of *intolerance*.
- This cancer of *tolerance* that has permeated society, has crept into contemporary churches.
- One of the most quoted and misused verses today is Matthew 7:1 – “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”
- Fornication is accepted amongst many professing Christians in Australia.
- Today we are looking at a first century church that would fit in perfectly with the churches of the twenty-first century; a church whose chief flaw was their toleration of error and sin in their midst.
- These seven messages are arranged in a chiasm structure, centring around Thyatira’s, so there is particular significance and importance to this message, which has broader relevance to all the churches.
 - ✓ It contains all seven of the common elements of the seven letters.
 - ✓ Its themes of a deceiver who seduces and deceives others into idolatry foreshadows other similar deceivers later in Revelation: the dragon, the false prophet and Babylon (12:9; 13:14; 18:23)
 - ✓ The central verse (v.23) extends Christ’s warning beyond Thyatira to “all the churches”
- Thyatira is thought to have been founded by Alexander the Great.
- It was captured by the Romans along with Pergamos in 133BC.
- The name Thyatira means *perpetual sacrifice*
- Thyatira was largely defenceless and relied upon Pergamos for military protection
- Emperor worship was observed in this city, where Caesar was worshipped as Apollo incarnate.

- The principal deity of Thyatira was Tyrimnos, who was worshipped as the sun-god.
- Thyatira also housed the shrine of an Oriental sibyl (female oracle) called the Sambathe
- But the pagan worship in Thyatira was not as significant as Ephesus, Smyrna or Pergamos
- It was most famous for its commerce, being located on a major trade route
- The trade guilds of the city were very powerful and influential.
- The guild feasts involved meat offered to idols, drunkenness and fornication; Christians who refused to be involved would be in danger of losing their jobs and livelihood.
- Lydia, Paul's first European convert was from that city (Acts 16:12-15,40)
 - ✓ She was a worshipper of God (proselyte to the Jews' religion)
 - ✓ She was a woman of prayer
 - ✓ She was attentive to the gospel
 - ✓ She was saved by God's grace
 - ✓ She publicly confessed her allegiance to Christ in baptism
 - ✓ She was hospitable, using her wealth to support the brethren
- The message to Thyatira has clear allusions to the messianic 2nd psalm (cf. 2:18 with Psalm 2:7,12 and 2:27 with Psalm 2:9)
- The church at Thyatira was in many respects a model church, yet its toleration of sin marred its testimony and aroused the censure of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. CHRIST'S IDENTIFICATION (18)

A. His title – the Son of God

1. This is the first time that a *name* is used, rather than an *attribute*
2. Son of man (cf. 1:13;14:14) highlights Christ's humanity, while Son of God highlights His deity
3. This is a declaration of His divine authority and right to judge (Matthew 28:18)

B. His eyes of fire (cf. 1:14)

1. This indicates omniscience and omnipresence – nothing escapes his eye (2 Chronicles 16:9; Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13)
2. His burning eyes penetrate beyond the outward actions to the very heart of man
3. He searcheth the reins and hearts (v.23)

- a. He does not simply observe, but “searcheth” meticulously so that nothing is missed.
 - b. The “reins” (literally *kidneys*) are the seat of the desires; the “heart” that of the thoughts (cf. Psalm 7:9; 26:2; 73:21; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; 20:12)
- C. His feet as brass (cf. 1:15)
- 1. Brass in Scripture often represents judgment (Exodus 27:2)
 - 2. Christ describes His judgment on the Jezebelites in vv.22-23
 - 3. This aspect of Christ is often neglected in a world and Christendom that prefers a “meek and mild” Christ, or a helpless infant Christ in a manger

II. CHRIST’S COMMENDATION (19)

A. Charity - *agape*

- 1. This is the divine grace of love toward God and man
- 2. This is the chief of the Christian graces (1 Corinthians 13:13)
- 3. Without charity there is no true religion (1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 2 Peter 1:5-7)

B. Service – *diakonian*

- 1. Charity will manifest itself in service and ministry
- 2. Our first and *reasonable* service is to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God (Romans 12:1)
- 3. This service seeks to minister to the needs of others (Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 16:15)

C. Faith – *pistin*

- 1. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)
- 2. This “faith” most likely refers to faithfulness/fidelity to God which results from saving faith

D. Patience – *hupomonen*

- 1. This indicates endurance, constancy and perseverance, particularly in trials

E. Works – *ergon*

- 1. These “works” may summarise those qualities just listed
- 2. Their latter deeds were greater than their former

3. This contrasts with the Ephesians who had declined from their first love and were required to return to their first works (2:4-5)
4. This progression and growth in love and service should be found in every believer

III. THE CHURCH'S TOLERATION (20)

- A. Within the church was false teaching that led to immoral behaviour
 1. Despite their exemplary growth in service, their toleration of sin and error brought great shame upon them
 2. Jezebel, an influential woman in the church and self proclaimed prophetess had convinced others in the church that it was permissible to participate in the guild feasts and their accompanying idolatry and fornication
 3. The heresies of the Balaamites/Nicolaitans that plagued Pergamos were essentially the same as those of the Jezebelites at Thyatira – antinomianism
 4. The church generally and the pastor of the church are not charged with participation in this wickedness, but of tolerating it (cf. Revelation 2:2,6)
 5. One does not need to actively teach or promote error to come under Christ's displeasure, but simply tolerate in our midst those who do
 6. *"Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin."* (C H Spurgeon)
 7. When professing believers indulge themselves with the corruptions of the world, they lose their testimony for the Lord and any influence for good.

CONCLUSION

1. Despite all their praiseworthy attributes, the church at Thyatira had incurred Christ's displeasure by tolerating sin in their midst
2. God Himself is intolerant of sin and error, and so must His people be also
3. We must endeavour to live each moment with the knowledge that the Judge is observing our every thought and action
4. It will drive the lost to seek to be reconciled to the Judge through faith in Christ's blood
5. It will guard the Christian against sin
6. It will move us to live not for the praise of men, but the praise of God (Matt 6:4,6,18)
7. When you look back at your life, can you truly say with the Thyatirans that your last works are more than the first, or are you like the Ephesians, needing to repent and do the first works?
8. Either we are daily becoming more like Christ, or daily becoming less so.