

The Idolatrous Church Revelation 2:18-29

The longest of Christ's letters to the seven churches goes to the least significant, least known, and least remarkable of the seven cities. Thyatira was located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. It could best be described as a "blue-collar" town. Various trade guilds prospered in the areas of tanning, pottery, baking, weaving, and most of all dying. The Apostle Paul's first convert in Europe was a citizen from Thyatira named Lydia, who was "*a seller of purple*" (Acts 16:14). The purple dye that Thyatira was so well known for was made from a plant that grew in that area.

To the church in Thyatira Jesus gives both strong commendation and severe condemnation. On the surface the church at Thyatira was strong. If you would have visited this church you would be very impressed with the large crowds and religious activity. Not only would you have found their building full, but their Sunday bulletin as well. For all of this however, there was something terribly wrong with this church. There is a warning here. A church can be overflowing with people and busy as a bee hive doing good things and still miss the mark as far as the Lord is concerned.

Let's begin reading in verse 18. "*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: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first'*" (Rev. 2:18-19). Let's begin by considering...

1. The Commendation

First of all they were commended for being a good church. Jesus said, "*I know your works.*"

The bible speaks of many types of works. There are evil works. In 1 John 3:13, John asks the question, "*And why did Cain murder his brother Abel, because his works were evil and his brother's righteous*" (1 Jn. 3:12). There are also dead works. Hebrews 9:14 says, "*How much more shall the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" And then there are good works. Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matt 5:16). The Lord Jesus commended the believers in the church in Thyatira for their good works, for their righteous deeds.

Good works contribute nothing to our salvation. The Word of God says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*" (Eph 2:8-9). We are saved by grace alone though faith alone. However, saving faith is never alone. If we are genuinely saved we will demonstrate our faith by our good works in Christ.

What were the good works of the saints in Thyatira? First, there was love. Jesus said "*I know your love.*" The word love here is **agape**. They were filled love for God and the love of God, which ought to be characteristic of every church and every Christian. Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you*" (Jn. 13:34). Love is a divine imperative if you're a child of God. We are to love Lord above all, and one another.

Second, Jesus said *“I know your service.”* The word service here means ministry. The members of the church in Thyatira were faithfully serving God by lovingly ministering to one another. We are not all called to be pastors, or evangelists, or missionaries, but every one of us are called to be ministers in the service of our Savior.

Third, Jesus said *“I know your faith and patience.”* The believers in Thyatira were a people of faith. Even though there were some very serious problems in the church as we are going to see in a moment, they had remained steadfast in their faith *in* Christ and their faithfulness *to* Christ.

Not only were the believers in the church at Thyatira commended for being a good church, they were commended for being a growing church. Jesus said, *“As for your works, the last are more than the first”* (Rev. 2:19).

How were the believers in the church at Thyatira growing? They were growing in their love, and service, and faith, and patience. They were growing in good works.

Every Christian should be a growing Christian, and I don't mean in terms of our waist line. Whether we are a new Christian or we have been a believer for many years, all of us should be growing in good works; in our love for the Lord, in our faith in the Lord, and in our service to the Lord.

I have had Christians say to me, “Pastor Bob I have been serving the Lord and working in the church for many years. I just can't do the things I used to do. I feel like it's time for me to step aside and let others serve.”

There are seasons to our service. As the Word of God tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:1, *“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.”* We serve the Lord in different ways at different times in life, but we should never stop serving. There is no retirement plan for the saints of God. I've looked, and it's not in here. Beloved, as long as their breath in you there is something you can do. May it be said of all of us in regards to our good works in Christ, *“the last are more than the first.”*

2. The Condemnation

Look at verse 20. The Lord Jesus said *“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.”*

The name Jezebel is one the most infamous names in all of scripture. Her name ranks right up there with Judas. I think it's a wonderful thing when Christian parents give their children biblical names, but there are three names no loving parent would ever give their baby girl; Gomer, or Dorcas, or Jezebel.

Jezebel is the very symbol of immorality and idolatry. The original Jezebel of the Old Testament was a thoroughly vile individual. She was a ruthless liar and cold-blooded murderer as evidenced by the incident with Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Her most destructive act was to seduce God's chosen people Israel to commit idolatry by worshipping Baal.

In the church at Thyatira there was a “Jezebel like” woman who had sinned against the Lord in two very serious ways. First, she was guilty of claiming to be a “*prophetess*.” It was evident by her false teaching and immoral lifestyle however that she was a servant of Satan not a prophet of God. She is a prime example of Jesus warning concerning false teachers (and fake believers for that matter). Jesus said “*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:15-16). The fruit of this woman Jezebel was altogether rotten.

Second, she was teaching heresy in the church and like her name sake, was deliberately leading some of God’s children to commit acts of immorality and idolatry. This is the focus of Christ’s condemnation of the church at Thyatira.

Although many believers in Thyatira were growing in their love, and service, and faith, and patience; sadly at the same time nonetheless, they were tolerating sexual immorality and spiritual idolatry within the church. Jesus said, “*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.*”

Evidently this Jezebel like woman was teaching folks in the church at Thyatira that they could participate in the religious rites of the trade guilds, which frequently included fornication and offering sacrifices to idols, and still be a good Christian. Tragically, because of the influence of this false prophetess some in the church were willing to compromise their moral and spiritual convictions and worship pagan gods for the promise of pleasure, peace and prosperity. In so doing, they were guilty of both immorality and idolatry!

Our God is a jealous God. “*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God*” (Deut 4:24). Idolatry is serious business. It’s the worst kind of sin. Are you guilty of idolatry? You say, “Not me pastor. You won’t find any idols in my house.” What about your heart? Let me tell you what idolatry is. Idolatry is worshipping something or someone other than God. God said “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). Idolatry is also worshipping something or someone in addition to God. That was the sin the Israelites were guilty of in First Kings in the days of the original Jezebel. That was the sin that some in the church in Thyatira were guilty of. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the sin that I am afraid many of us are guilty of too.

3. The Command

They were commanded to repent. Look at verse 21. “*And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent*” (Rev. 2:21).

The Lord Jesus in His mercy had given this Jezebel like false prophetess the opportunity to repent, but she would not. God wants all men to repent. “*He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pet 3:9), but the opportunity to repent is limited. Only God knows just how many opportunities each of us will have in this life to repent of our sins and receive Christ as our Savior. All we can know for certain is this: “*Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time.*”

Christ commanded those in the church at Thyatira who were guilty of immorality and idolatry to repent. As we see in verse 22, He also promised swift and certain judgment if they refused.

Jesus said, *"Indeed I will cast her into a sick bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death."* (Rev. 2:22-23a) Jesus warned those who had foolishly followed *"that woman Jezebel"* that there would be a terrible price to pay for their sin if they did not repent!

There is always a price to pay for sin. The price of sin for those who have never repented and trusted Christ as their Savior is death and hell. The bible says *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). Some of you here this morning have never been saved. I don't doubt for a moment that you are a good person. The problem is, just being good isn't good enough. Listen, nobody is going to make it past the gates of glory because they were a good ole boy. Nobody is going to get to heaven because they tried really hard not to be too bad. And dear friend you need to know that religion can't save you either. Jesus didn't say you must be baptized and belong to the Baptist church if you want to be saved, He said *"you must be born again."* The only way to be born again, to be born of the Spirit and saved from your sins, is to repent and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The bible says that salvation comes from *"repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21).

Sin has its price for the unrepentant saint as well. Brothers and sisters let me tell what sin will cost you. Number one, it will ruin your witness to the lost. Here is a sobering truth. Every sin in your life and mine is a stumbling block to those who do not the Savior. Do you want to be the reason someone you know and love rejects Christ? Number two, sin will rob you of God's blessings in your life now and His rewards later. Let me tell you something else sin will cost you if you are a Christian. Beloved, if you refuse to repent of the sin in your life it will wreck your fellowship with the Lord. Praise God, sin cannot ruin our relationship with the Father, but it will most assuredly destroy our fellowship. The most miserable person in this world is not some poor lost soul who has never known the Lord; they don't know what their missing. It's a little bit like being a grandparent; you don't know what you have been missing until you become one. No, the most miserable creature on earth is the Christian who has personally experienced what the hymn writer meant when he wrote *"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own,"* but now feels as though the Lord is a million miles away because of some sin in his or her life. That is the price of sin. Thank the Lord, there is also the promise of forgiveness if we will honestly, humbly repent. I never get tired of repeating that precious promise the Lord has given us in 1 John 1:9.

Look again at verse 23. Jesus goes on to say, *"And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."* The Lord Jesus wanted every church and every Christian who read this letter in the first century, and every church and every Christian who would read this letter in the twenty-first century to know that just as He was going to judge the church at Thyatira He would judge them also. Christian, do you realize that you are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ some day? Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."* You and I are going to stand before the One who's *"eyes like a flame of fire"* is going to search our minds and hearts. Wouldn't you agree, that is a very, very good reason for us to "take time to be holy" as the old song says?

4. The Comfort

First, they were comforted with the promise of the return of Christ. Look at verse 24. *“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”* (Rev. 2:24-25).

What comfort it is to know that Jesus is coming again. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

When the future looks so fearful, what comfort it is to know that Jesus is coming again. When we watch the culture crumbling all around us, what comfort it is to know that Jesus is coming again. When we read the daily news and evil appears to have the upper hand, what comfort it is to know that Jesus is coming again. When life gets hard and we grow weary of the battle, what comfort it is to know that Jesus is coming again. When death claims those we love, what comfort; what strength; what hope it is to know – Jesus is coming again!

Finally, they were comforted with the promise of a reward for their faithfulness. Look at verse 26. *“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’ ”* (Rev. 2:26-29).

Here we have the promise of a two-fold reward. First, all who live faithfully for Christ will one day reign with Christ in His kingdom. The Word of God tells us Revelation 20:4 that we will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

But there is another promise here. Look again at verse 28. Jesus said, *“And I will give him the Morning Star”* (Rev. 2:28). Who or what is “the Morning Star”? Turn with me to 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.”* Here is the greatest reward of all. The reward for the faithful and obedient follower of Christ is Christ Himself.

Paul said, *“I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him”* (Phil 3:8-9a).

Do you have Christ in your heart? Is Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life? If Jesus is Lord there can be no other. There can be no compromise of our Christian convictions or our commitment to Christ.

Let me ask you something. Does Christ occupy first place in your life? Is He first in your adoration? Do you consider your relationship with Christ the thing of greatest value in your life? Is He first in your affection? Can you honestly say that you love Jesus with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Is He first in your allegiance? Are you more committed to Christ than anything else? Beloved, anything less is idolatry. That was the heart of the problem in the

church at Thyatira.