

Hold Fast

Revelation 2:18-29; March 24, 2019

So far we've received the following challenges from the first three churches:

- Ephesus: Get back to loving Jesus like you did at first.
- Smyrna: Be faithful until death and you will receive the crown of life.
- Pergamum: Don't compromise your commitment to Christ.

If revival is going to happen at RHC we need to keep praying, "Lord, help us to hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Today, we turn our attention to the church at Thyatira, the least known of the seven cities yet the longest of the seven letters.

Read Revelation 2:18-29

Context:

- Thyatira, along with Pergamum, tolerated falsehood and moral compromise similar to the church at Pergamum but here the problem had come to full bloom.

What do we know about this city?

- We find mention of it in reference to Lydia in Acts 16:12-15, who was a "seller of purple goods."
- It found its identity economically through a large number of trade guilds, an association of persons of the same trade similar to fraternal orders.
- The problem with these guilds is that they each had their own god or goddess (the primary one being Apollo) along with regular festivals to these gods which included illicit sexual practices and idolatry. While participation wasn't obligatory, most people participated because they were centers of social life and commerce.
- This cultural situation paved the way for falsehood and immorality inside the church at Thyatira.

Main Point: Hold fast to the truth and reject falsehood.

I. Hold fast captivated by a vision of Jesus (2:18, 23).

This letter begins just as the other three began, highlighting segments of the vision of Jesus that was shared in chapter 1.

1. Jesus is the Son of God.

- This title is only used here in Revelation (cf. 1:34; 3:18; 5:25) but was used for three main reasons:
 - Jesus is being contrasted with Apollo, the god that many of the trade guilds worshiped.

- It's an allusion to Psalm 2, which is quoted explicitly in 2:27, where a messianic figure is called, "my Son" by the Lord.
- IGiven the many allusions to Daniel in Revelation and in particular since the next two descriptors of Jesus come directly from the book of Daniel (10:6), there is an allusion here to Daniel 3, where Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace by one who appeared "like a son of the gods" (Dan. 3:25). As God protected them from persecution when they refused to give into idolatry (cf. Dan. 3:12), so will Christ do for those who are faithful in Thyatira.
- The church at Thyatira and RHC must give our exclusive devotion and worship to Jesus, since he is the true Son of God.

Transition: the next two descriptors are a verbatim repeat of Rev. 1:14-15, which allude to Daniel's vision of the coming messiah in Dan. 10:6.

2. His eyes are like a flame of fire.

- This refers to Jesus' penetrating insight and judgment.
- As 2:23 says, "And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works." Jesus' constant presence means that he always knows our spiritual condition. His knowledge pierces to our very core and he is the one who will grant either blessing or judgment (cf. Jer. 17:10 along with 17:3, 11; 11:10-17, 20).
- We may be able to hide what's going on in our minds and hearts from others, but nothing can be hidden from God's searching vision.
- Illustration: My parents came up to visit with us last week and to meet Calynn for the first time and my dad told me something funny that happened to him while going through security at the airport on his way here.
 - I'm grateful for TSA but as a dad of 5 kids, it's my least favorite part of traveling. I mean, one of our kid's bags almost always gets pulled to the side to get inspected and there's always this fear inside of me because there's no telling what TSA might find in my kid's book bags.
 - Anyways, they searched my dad's carryon and do you know what caused the search? A bag of grits.
 - The point: TSA isn't perfect and they don't catch everything, but nothing will be able to get past the sovereign and omniscient eyes of God. Don't wait to have yourself exposed at the final judgment, he already knows now. The beauty of the gospel is that we don't have to hide our sin because Jesus is our solution. He pays the penalty and offers forgiveness.

3. His feet are like burnished bronze.

- This phrase complements the truths that we've already explored.
- The picture here is one of strength. One commentator says it refers to Jesus as being the "true divine warrior" (Osborne).
- He is fully equipped and prepared to bring judgment and to give to each person according

to his/her works.

Transition (repeat the first encouragement): Hold fast captivated by a vision of Jesus.

II. Hold fast continuing in good works (2:19).

Just like in the other letters, Jesus begins with, “I know.” He is present among his churches and aware not just of their failures and trials, but of their triumph as well. He praises Thyatira for her works.

- “Your works” serves as the general heading and then he lists 4 specific works: love, faith, service and patient endurance.
- “Love:” the primary characteristic of a follower of Jesus. Contrary to Ephesus, they are a loving church.
- “Faith:” they were walking in trust and faith in God’s faithful provision and care over their lives.
- “Service:” this is the only use of the word in Revelation. One commentator says this refers to “an active life of care and help, to charitable service and ministry others” (Osborne).
- “Patient endurance:” this is the same phrase used many times already (cf. 1:9; 2:2, 3). They were patiently persevering in the midst of temptation and persecution.

Finally, he says “your latter (=recent) works exceed those you did at first.” This is an intended contrast with Ephesus. Their spiritual vitality wasn’t decreasing, but was instead continuing to grow both quantitatively (more good works) and qualitatively (more impact).

- What word would describe your spiritual life right now?

Transition (repeat the second encouragement): Hold fast continuing in good works.

III. Hold fast rejecting falsehood and immorality (2:20-23).

As with the other churches, a strong contrastive occurs in this text as well: “But I have this against you...”

- The main problem in the church at Thyatira is that they had become lax in their theological vigilance and were *tolerating* falsehood and immoral behavior from within inside the church, the very heresy that Ephesus had rejected.
- This group of false teachers was given free rein to influence and lead astray God’s servants. At the very least, it sounds like there was an unwillingness to take a stand against this falsehood and behavior.
- The nature and practices of this heresy was wrapped up in a person called, “Jezebel.”

Who is Jezebel?

- Similar to the use of Balaam in the letter to the church of Pergamum, Jezebel is an OT figure being used symbolically to refer to someone, most likely a woman prophetess, in the church at Thyatira.

- We learn about the OT Jezebel beginning in 1 Kings 16. She was an evil and wicked queen of King Ahab and here is how their reign is described:

25 There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel. (1 Ki. 21:25-26 ESV)

- By calling herself a “prophetess,” she was claiming that her teaching had come from God (for prophetess in the NT see Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 11:5; 12:28; Acts 21:9).
- In conclusion, reference to Jezebel is used so that the church will see that this false teaching was as wicked and dangerous an influence in Thyatira as Jezebel’s had been to Israel (so Sam Storms). It was meant to shock them so that they would be compelled to take action against the heretical teachers.

What was she teaching?

- The word “seducing” in the ESV is the same Greek word that is often translated as “leads astray” (NAS) “misleads” (NIV) or “deceives.” This same word is used 7 other times in Revelation, all referring to either Satan (Rev. 12:9 ESV; cf. 20:3, 8, 10), the false prophet (Rev. 13:14; 19:20) or the harlot Babylon (Rev. 18:23).
- Grant Osborne paints the implications clearly: “Jezebel is seen as a satanic force claiming the Spirit’s authority (as a prophetess) but leading many of God’s ‘slaves’ astray into heresy.”
- The texts mentions specific things regarding her teaching: to not eat food sacrificed to idols or to practice sexual immorality. Both of these were rejected by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, but later Paul seems to acknowledge that eating food sacrificed to idols is ok (1 Cor. 8:4). So, what’s going on here?
 - They weren’t just buying meat in the marketplace that had been sacrificed to idols, they were participating in idolatrous worship through their trade guilds which included sexual immorality, and she was encouraging it all.
 - Her teaching gained such a following because it meant they weren’t economically ostracised through non-participation.
 - Another commentator notes, She “...offered prosperity at the price of compromise (Mounce quoting Blaiklock).

Who were her children?

- These are not her literal offspring but her followers, those who embraced her teaching and lifestyle.

What does this teach us about God?

- We see both the grace of God and the justice of God at work here.
- Grace: God was patient with Jezebel in giving her time to repent and still in this letter is giving her followers an opportunity to repent.
- Justice: God will punish all sin.
 - The imagery of “sickbed” is used here metaphorically for a serious illness (so

Osborne). This is most likely referring to a present judgment rather than a final judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-29).

- Those who follow this teaching will face the same death and destruction as its leader (and Jezebel in the OT; 1 Kings 21:17-29; 2 Kings 9:30-37; 10:1-11) faces.

Sidebar: How do we test and discern false doctrine (by Tim Challies)?

- The test of origin: sound doctrine originates with God.
- The test of authority: sound doctrine grounds its authority within the Bible.
- The test of consistency: sound doctrine is consistent with the whole of Scripture.
- The test of spiritual growth: sound doctrine is beneficial for spiritual health.
- The test of godly living: sound doctrine has value for godly living.

IV. Hold fast looking to the reward to come (2:24-29).

Jesus now turns and addresses “the rest you.”

- It’s not clear whether this group was guilty of the charge of permitting this false teaching, but what is clear is that they had not yet been led astray.
- This group had not learned the “so-called deep things of Satan,” most likely a sarcastic reversal of their main slogan: Jezebel wasn’t teaching the “deep things of God” but rather the “deep things of Satan.”

The main command: hold fast

- Jesus doesn’t lay any other burden on these believers than to “hold fast until he returns.” In other words, they are to persevere in faithfulness and obedience to the gospel, standing firm in the truths of the faith, until Jesus returns.
- There is a strong contrast here between Jezebel’s works, the churches good works and “my works,” referring to Jesus’ works. Jesus’ work are the basis for our hope of victory.
 - Our works are not the grounds of our salvation but they are evidence of our salvation.

Two promises for those who are faithful:

- We will reign with Christ over the nations.
 - A quick look back at Psalm 2 will help us understand what’s going on here:

7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps. 2:7-9 ESV)

- Given the context of this passage, the “rod of iron” was most likely a reference to a shepherd’s club, “a large wooden club capped with iron for killing animals that endangered the sheep” (Osborne).
- The picture here is one of the nations being destroyed. It’s a picture of total destruction. The nations will be “shattered like vessels of pottery.” This pictures a

potter throwing his clay jar on the floor to break it and it shatters into countless pieces.

- Believers are granted a share in the messianic kingdom and will reign with Christ (cf. Ps. 149:5-9; Dan. 7:14; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Rev. 1:6; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:5).
- We will receive the morning star.
 - While numerous options have been given for the meaning of this phrase, there are two that seem to fit the context the best.
 - 1) Balaam prophecies about the future end-time ruler of Israel and describes him as a “star coming out of Jacob” and a “scepter” that will crush the nations (Num. 24:17; cf. Rev. 22:16).
 - This language is similar to that of Psalm 2 earlier and refers to the “dawning” messianic reign of Christ.
 - 2) The planet Venus was also referred to as the “morning star” and it was well known as a symbol of Roman sovereignty and might.
 - Osborne notes that “Roman legions carried the symbol of Venus on their banners to depict Roman invincibility. In this context Christ would be saying that the holy final sovereignty and power lay with himself and his victorious followers.”

Conclusion (invite the band up):

- Let us continue to be captivated by a vision of Jesus. He is the true Son of God and our allegiance, adoration and worship should be solely on him.
- Let us continue growing in good works. Reject complacency and strain forward to increasingly Christlikeness.
- Let us reject falsehood and immoral behavior. Repent today. Turn from immorality and find greater delight in Jesus.
- Let us repent of idolatrous desires for economic security. Turn from compromising your commitment to Jesus in order to enhance your profits or keep your job. Our jobs are opportunities to make much of Jesus.
- Let us not water down the gospel to make it more palatable for our culture.
- Let us hold fast to truth and reject falsehood.

Pray

Transition right into the Lord’s Supper