

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Seven Churches of Revelation: Revelation 2:18-29 - Thyatira

He cares for you

In these studies on Revelation 2 and 3 we have looked at the way in which the churches on earth were being seen by One called "the Son of Man" of Revelation 1:13. What a glorious Person He is! Let us note again, as He looks down with those piercing eyes - seeing everything that is going on - and with His feet "like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace" - what purity with Him! So we realise again what we are about to discuss, and in fact everything about the lives of everyone in this world, the Lord knows and sees, and it is He who cares. This must challenge us and also encourage us as we live in this world. We read in 1 Peter 5:7, "... He careth for you" or "It matters to Him about you!" Yes, the Lord Jesus does care for every church, for every individual for whom He died.

The structure of the seven messages

We have already noticed the church at Ephesus, those who had abandoned their first love for Christ. Then there was Smyrna, where there were great and repeated persecutions of believers. Pergamos was where we have seen Satan's flattering power and seduction away from the Lord and the truth. Now we come to the fourth church, that of Thyatira.

In the structure of these messages to the seven churches we will begin to notice a difference coming into the message to this church. To all the churches there is this ringing call going out - "He that hath an ear, let him hear..." (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). There is also a promise to the overcomer - the one who listens. In the first three, the call to hear goes before the promise to the overcomer. In the last three, the promise is given first, followed by that call to hear. This is an indication of the change which takes place. In the first three, there is no promise that the church circumstances will continue. But in the last three, there are clear indications that the circumstances will continue to the end of this present period of time. In the structure of this message, Thyatira stands between these two groups of three. There is no hint of revival, thus linking it to the first three churches, but there is the plea, "hold fast till I come" (Revelation 2:25), thus linking this message to the last three as indicated in the structure. The times and experiences of which this message speak continue right on until He comes. I indicate these things so that a fuller study of these messages to the churches can be followed with an appreciation of the Godly order they show.

Whenever we read of an address to a "church" here, we understand by the word "church" a religious company, claiming allegiance to God. But many such groups will include those professing to believe as well as those who are true believers. The further we go on with these seven messages, the more we will see the decline in the quality of true discipleship, as the Lord sees it, of true followers of Christ.

The Son of God

Now let us see what the message is to this church of Thyatira in particular. To emphasise the importance of the words about to be spoken, the message begins by announcing the person of the true speaker. It is not just Jesus, the lowly Man of this world; nor the Lord, to whom all should offer allegiance. It is "the Son of God" (Revelation 2:18). No one must mistake the divine power for blessing of this title. The Bible reminds us that this One is the Giver of Life. John 5:25 tells us, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". He alone is the Giver of life! But also we read in John 8:36 of the Giver of Liberty. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." It is through Him alone we have gained both life and liberty from the cause and consequence of sin. But now, we hear, for the first time in these letters, His assertion of His power and authority. What He has to say is infallible and to His words we must pay attention!

Once more, Revelation 2:18 draws us back to that Revelation 1. We must appreciate those piercing eyes and the absolute purity of His Person who comes in judgement. No other can know, or speak with the authority with which He speaks. When John first saw the vision, he beheld "One like unto the Son of man" (Revelation 1:13). Revelation 2:18 reminds us that, in fact, He is the "Son of God", the title of supreme authority. Well might we appreciate the One who sees us also. These words are intended to be so appealing to the listener that he will heed what is to be said. So let us listen!

Commendation

Now there are three stages of this message. The first is of commendation. Let us hear those words, "I know" in all the intimate knowledge which the "Son of God" has. But Revelation 2:19 says, "I know thy works..." Here is the active statement. These works are not defined but they are works of which the Lord Himself approves. Behind these works are the qualities which are at work; love, service, faith, and patience. The works can really only be done for God with these qualities in the hearts of the believers.

"I know thy ... love" says the divine Watcher. All else must spring from this. The law had declared in all formality and necessity, in the words of the Lord Jesus, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). Man could not, and cannot, keep this himself. Now a change has come in. Love has become a characteristic of a dependent believer, not human love, but the love of God, flowing through and abiding in us (John 15:9-10). This wonderful display of love is seen in these works which the Lord Himself approves.

"I know thy ... service" or "ministry". The Son of God Himself was conscious of the special activities which characterised this church and its members. Perhaps they were the special kindnesses or acts of tender care one towards another. How valuable these are in encouraging fellowship between believers. He knew what was going on! How vital it is that "work" for the Lord is not only shown in official ways but in practical, tender care one toward another.

"I know thy ... faith". These works were based, not so much on the principle of faith which was in them, but the attitude of trust that has grown out of that principle. This leads to a constancy which encourages the believer to go forward.

"I know thy ... patience" or endurance. Here was a second church displaying an inner peace under pressure. It is that peace which brings its approval and fragrance to the Lord Himself.

Now there has been a progression in these believers for the Lord says: "...and the last to be more than the first". (Revelation 2:19) What had started out well had increased with the passing of time. It is beautiful to notice how the Lord recognises this progress in the life of this church. The Lord always commends first, wherever He can find commendation to give. Would that we could follow that example!

Complaint

Now we come on to the next section, the complaint of the All-seeing One. Here was the complaint in Revelation 2:20, "... thou sufferest that woman Jezebel ..." It is unclear whether or not there was in Thyatira a woman called Jezebel although, undoubtedly, there was someone who brought such a damaging influence into the church. The phrase highlights the characteristics of what was happening and the influence being exerted among those in Thyatira, by illustration from a character in the Old Testament. It has also been said that the word "woman" could equally be "wife". "Thou sufferest thy wife Jezebel ..." This suggests a relationship to the one who takes some leadership in the assembly at Thyatira. This is the one who, more than anyone else, has allowed the authority of the church to be affected! The fault of the church was that they allowed it to happen! Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon (1 Kings 16:31). She came into Israel through marriage to king Ahab (1 Kings 16:31). She clung to the teachings of her family as followers of the god Baal. They were worshippers of Nature. Ahab, the king, was the leader of God's people on earth. Now the record shows how much he abdicated that responsibility. 1 Kings 21:25-26 says, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And [Ahab] did very abominably in following idols ..." - and so on. How very sad to see these things taking place! This illustrates what was going on at Thyatira. This "Jezebel", quite wrongly, was being allowed to take a position which was totally destructive to the testimony to God.

Note, too, that Revelation 2:20 says, she "calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols". She claimed, as a prophetess, that she was an inspired teacher, bringing God's message. No specific matter is stated as to the teaching in Thyatira, however, in Revelation 2:24, the indication is that the teaching brings the followers to the "depths of Satan". There was an attempt to add to Christianity and to corrupt the church. It certainly turned the church from truly following God (Revelation 2:20). Then, they were encouraged to commit fornication, that is, to be unfaithful. What a picture of entering into the life of the world in a way which compromises the testimony to God. They were encouraged "to eat things sacrificed to idols." This is linked with the power of Satan. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:20, "... the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils". The sacrifice is to idols. Idolatry is putting aside Christ as the Head. We see how these things so easily find their way into the church. It brings down the standard of separation to Christ. It seduces to the level of Satan - and the church does nothing about it! The One "who hath eyes like unto a flame of fire" could say "I have a few things against thee" (Revelation 2:20). What is going on around us today? Do we see similar circumstances? The Lord does not excuse these things. Satan will use every

means of bringing into the church today whatever he can to create havoc, to reduce the church to the level of the world, to depose the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and, where possible, to destroy the testimony. Let us be aware of his “wiles” See (Ephesians 6:11) and take action where necessary.

Choice

The third thing to see in these verses is the choice. Let us see that the Lord, who knows all that is going on, says “I gave her space to repent ... she repented not” (Revelation 2:21). Oh, the grace of God! He who knows the end from the beginning still gave time, still gave opportunity, still gave understanding for repentance. But it went unheeded. There was nothing true about this person. She was there in the church of profession with no reality of life. “The woman” did not repent. The opportunity was also given for those caught up with those Satanic concerns with her, also to repent. God is a God of such grace. He gives ample opportunity to all to be faithful to Him.

But there is also judgement. We have already referred to the words in Revelation 2:21 - “she repented not”, that is, she does not “will” to repent. How does he know? “I am He that searcheth the reins and hearts,” He says in Revelation 2:23. The reins, like the heart, are symbolic of the affections too. He searches out the church and each individual so carefully. This is why He alone can issue a judgement. See the graphic language of the judgement against this woman, “I will cast her into a bed” (Revelation 2:22). She, who has seduced His servants, will meet her punishment in the midst of the very corruption which she has encouraged. Those who are “her children”, professing no more than lip service to true Christianity, refusing to give the Lord His place in the church, having also rejected repentance, find their judgement, too, at His hands. Let us understand that these are not, and never have been, true Christians. Their end is death, Revelation 2:23.

But what of the church? It had not clearly denounced nor prevented the wrong teaching. It could not differentiate between the Word of God, on which it was first built, and heretical teaching which would take away from Christ. Paul writes to Timothy that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The saddest thing was that, collectively, the church in Thyatira had let go the truth for what was a sham in Christian teaching and practice.

There is an alternative to all that judgement. There were those in the church in Thyatira who did not subscribe to all this wrong. Perhaps they were ignorant of it. The Son of God speaks to them, “I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have ... hold fast till I come.” (Revelation 2:24-25) What sweet consideration! In a world of difficulty, in all the problems of the church testimony, the Lord can say “that which ye have already hold fast ...” (Revelation 2:25). It is only in what we know and have of the truth of God that we can really rejoice! At the beginning of our study we referred to the fact that the Lord could say, “I know thy works”. Then we read in Revelation 2:22 of the judgement on those who need to repent of “their deeds” or, more correctly “her works”. Now He says, “he that overcometh and keepeth My works” (Revelation 2:26). What authority is promised to the people of God who “hold fast” the trust committed to them! He looks for faithfulness to Himself and activity in line with a trust in Him and His Word which He will honour in a coming day.

Then we read, “I will give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:28). The Lord Jesus says in Revelation 22:16, “I am ... the bright and morning star”. We are told that the darkest part of the night is just before the dawn. Then arises the morning star. He that waits for the dawn is glad to see that morning star. The Lord knows how dark is the way, even today, for each one of us. So He says, “I will give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:28). That star does not brighten the darkness for those who are asleep. My friend, are you looking for Him? He may come today! There can be no better expectation, in a world in such darkness today, than to wait, and look for that Morning Star. We await His shout, and “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Let us hold fast to all that the Lord has given us! Let us overcome and keep on with those works which He has encouraged in us! Let us keep looking up to that moment when we shall see that “morning star”. It will be worth it!

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