

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

EXPOSITORY SERMON

JULY 2016

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THYATIRA – THE PROBLEM OF TOLERANCE

Scripture Reading – Revelation 2:18-29.

Introduction

We have been looking at the evaluations that Jesus makes of his churches in Asia. It is accepted that it is His right to make these evaluations because it is His church. He shed His very life's blood for her to redeem, cleanse and purify her. It is important that we look at these assessments, because in them we discover what Jesus requires in and of His church. These requirements also apply to the modern church. It may mean that we have to adjust our perception of what the church should be, because His assessments and His requirements reveal His priorities. They are the guiding principles or beacons which light the way in order to guide and ensure that the character and structure of the church conforms and is molded to what the genuine church of the Lord Jesus Christ should be. At Ephesus the problem was that she had lost their first love. A church that has lost first love for the Lord Jesus Christ can no longer legitimately be considered to be His church, because the loss of love for Christ means the loss of a relationship with Him. The life and impact of the church depends on that relationship. The church at Smyrna, however, was commended for her faithfulness to Jesus and

the gospel in the midst of intense persecution and even to the point of death. Last week we looked at the church at Pergamum who remained faithful and true to Jesus, but allowed false teachers into the assembly. She herself did not subscribe to this false teaching, but she was playing a dangerous game and Christ held it against her. He issued a strong call to repentance. Today we look at Christ's evaluation of the church at Thyatira. The letter to Thyatira is longest addressed to the seven churches in the smallest and least important of the seven cities. Thyatira had no political significance, but its particular distinction was that it was a prosperous commercial center. Bible scholars have pointed out that this city boasted of numerous trade guilds. There were for example associations for bakers, and bronze workers, for clothiers and cobblers, for weavers, tanners, dyers and potters. (Stott p.69.) It was famous for its purple dye. One of Phillip's notable converts, Lydia, was taken from Thyatira. You recall that Luke describes her as a "seller of purple goods." (Acts 16:14.) It is said that the "sun god" Apollo TYRIMNAIOS was the guardian god of this prosperous city. Possibly it was with this in mind that John describes Christ of heaven whose "eyes were like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze....." (The Interpreters Bible p. 387) It was as though John was saying "You pagans may have a sun god but the glory of the Son of God far outshines any self made god you may have. Furthermore this is the one letter in which John uses the title "The Son of God." (v. 18) In fact it is the only place it is used in the Book of the Revelation and it is used in this letter to emphasize and confirm the deity of Jesus. It is true that He is the Son of Man which speaks of His humanity. His incarnation is an intrinsic part of who He is. He is truly God and truly man. It speaks of His identification with man apart from sin. But in this particular instance John refers to Him as the Son of God in His glory, majesty and sovereignty. The one whose eyes are like blazing fire. He alone has the authority to evaluate His church. He alone knows her character and conduct. This truth gives importance to the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze, and who says he that has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. I want us

to take a look at this church through the eyes of Jesus to see what He sees and to discover what His concerns and priorities are for the church. Here is first of all,

1. A WORD ABOUT PRAISE. Revelation 2:19.

"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance." Jesus takes note of this list of exceptional Christian qualities. Dr Stott observed that the "church at Thyatira had not only rivaled Ephesus in busy Christian service, but also had the love which Ephesus lacked; preserved the faith which was endangered at Pergamum and shared with Smyrna the virtue of patient endurance in tribulation" (Stott P. 69). Jesus is complimenting the church on two basic Christian qualities.

a. The Quality of her Christian Character. Revelation 2:19. "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance and that you are doing more than you did at first." It has said that these qualities go in pairs. Love which is agape love, a Godlike, selfless, self-giving love which gives birth to service in the Kingdom of God. Service in the kingdom of God is the birth child of agape love. It is active and involved service for the Lord Jesus Christ. It easier to find fault and give advice to the one who is serving than to become actively involved in service. Christian service is born in, nurtured by, and driven by love without regard to difficult circumstances and without expecting a reward. Paul said it is the "love of Christ that compels me." What is also clear in the words of John is that service is the result of personal salvation, not the foundation of it. Service is not a condition to receiving salvation. It does not precede salvation it is the fruit of salvation. It is not one of the steps into salvation. Service does not qualify us to receive eternal life, but when salvation is personally received by faith, it is evidence that we have received it. James tells us that "faith without works is dead." Dr W. Barclay wrote "it is as if the Risen Lord was saying, 'If you claim to have Christian love in your heart, you can only prove it by showing that you have Christian service in your life.'" When the Lordship of Christ is acknowledged in our hearts and lives, there will flow from within our inner being the desire to serve Him. The fountain of that desire is agape love. Genuine Christian service is born

in love, nurtured in love and compelled by love. Love and service are sterling qualities of Christian character.

Jesus also commends them on their,

b. Quality of Christian Commitment. Revelation 2:19. Jesus accentuates two qualities which are at the heart of Christian commitment. Faith and perseverance caught the attention of the Lord and He regards them as vital. One wrote well that if “you claim to have Christian faith in your soul can only prove it by living a life which triumphantly overcomes the world.” Paul wrote that “this is the victory which overcomes the world even our faith.” There is an inseparable link between faith and perseverance. Someone put it this way when he wrote that “the possession of a virtue can only be proved and guaranteed by a life that fits it.” Jesus said “I know your deeds your faith and perseverance.” James supports this truth when he wrote in his letter chapter 2:14-17. “What good is it my brother, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go I wish you well keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical need, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action it is dead.” Works are one clear indication that faith is alive and active. Genuine faith will give evidence of its reality in the deeds it does. The Lord Jesus Christ makes quite clear that He is aware that in the church in Thyatira these qualities are part of its life. “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance.” Now Jesus brings to their attention something else for He adds these words “I know your deeds “that you are doing more than you did at first.” While the church at Ephesus had lost her first love and had fallen from a great height, the church at Thyatira had moved forward in significant growth. The Christ who searches the heart and knows all things portrays this church or these Christians as those who are making progress and showing growth. Jesus speaks of their growth and this growth “is in the dimensions of faith and love, in knowledge and holiness.” The Apostle Paul rejoices in this when he wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica. His words are

significant and revealing. "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other in increasing." Jesus said of the church at Thyatira "I know your deeds.....you are now doing more than you did at first." Jesus gave a word of praise to the church at Thyatira. Then He spoke

2. A WORD ABOUT PERVERSITY. Revelation 2:20-21.

Jesus said "nevertheless I have this against you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of foods sacrificed to idols." Jesus clearly defines the problem. It is the perversity of the tolerance of immorality. Tolerance has become politically correct to point of eliminating any kind of judgment on issues in our society. Josh McDowell said "our country has embraced a new value called tolerance." Philosophers have always recognized tolerance as important virtue, but it should not always have precedence over values. David Gergen wrote that "Some things are just plain wrong, and we should condemn them.....Tolerance of truth must be defended but tolerance of sin must not." Jesus said that the church tolerated Jezebel who called herself a prophetess. She was misleading God's servants into immorality. The Jezebel mindset was tolerated in the church. The reference to Jezebel is probably because of the similarity and life style of King Ahab's wife in the Old Testament. Jezebel was the daughter of the King of Sidon and Ahab had taken her to be his wife. Sidon was a commercial city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, known for its idolatry and vice. Her sin was that she brought with her into Israel her own gods and goddesses. She corrupted her husband and the nation of Israel by promoting pagan worship. She also erected a sanctuary to the idol Baal. Jesus pointed out that it was a Jezebel self-styled prophetess who had infiltrated the church at Thyatira. This Jezebel was seducing and enticing the Christian church to commit fornication. As one has rightly written that "just as Jezebel had corrupted the faith of Israel, so this new Jezebel was corrupting the faith of the

Christians of Thyatira." How was she doing this? Note that her evil influence precipitated a,

a. The Force of a Danger Within. Revelation 2:20. Her teaching was misleading the Christians into sexual immorality and eating of foods sacrificed to idols. This false teaching and seduction to evil was taking place within the precincts of church which is the temple of a Holy God. It was a powerful force with which to be reckoned. History and experience has taught us that most subtle danger to the church is not from without but from within. The enemy of the church of God, Satan, is ever seeking to seduce individual Christian believers into sin and to inject evil into the blood stream of church life. And John Stott observed that where the "devil cannot muzzle the church's witness from without; he resorts to the subtle assault of pollution from within. If he cannot crush their faith he will destroy their morality. If he cannot disturb their devotion, he will seek to destroy their integrity. If he cannot overpower the church from without, he will mislead it from within. If the church cannot be scattered from without, he will scatter her from within." At Thyatira the attack was from within and that is the most insidious danger of all. It is a force that seeks to demolish the church from within. Note what the,

b. The Focus of the Danger Within. Revelation 2:20. It was serious enough that they tolerated sin in their midst. But the seriousness of this is revealed by the nature of sin they sin tolerated and where the focus of the danger lay. Note that the focus of the danger lay in the sin of immorality. The church at Thyatira revealed love, faith service and endurance, but what was missing was one of the very main qualities of all; purity of life and holiness of character. That which should characterize the life of the church, the Christian is holiness. It should be "her watchword and song" Note that Jesus did not mention holiness as one of their qualities because He could not find it. He exposed their immorality. He was concerned about impurity in His church. Holiness of life or righteousness of character is the shining mark of the genuine church. The scripture makes clear that this is so for several reasons. **First**, Holiness is the will of God for His child.

"This is the will of God even your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication." 1 Thessalonians 4:3. **Second**, it is the purpose of God for man. Paul writes that, "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Ephesians 1:4. **Furthermore** it is purpose of the death of Jesus on the Cross "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing of the water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless." Ephesians 5:25-27. **It is also the call of God**, for "God has not called us to be impure, but to live a holy life." Therefore he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God who gives you His Holy Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 4"7-8. **It is the stated condition of seeing God one day.** "Without holiness no man will see the Lord." Satan's attack in the church at Thyatira was to destroy God's purpose for His people to be holy. If it was God's design for His church that she be holy, it is Satan's design to frustrate His purpose. To destroy holiness within the church is destroy its credibility as the authentic church of God. Its witness will be marred. Two theological students were walking along a street in the White Chapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. "What a fitting illustration all this makes!" said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window. A sign on it read "SLIGHTLY SOILED GREATLY REDUCED IN PRICE." Jezebel was soiling the church at Thyatira and the power and credibility of her witness was reduced in influence and credibility. The mind set of Jezebelism was strongly opposed to the holiness lifestyle expected in the scriptures. Holiness of life and purity of heart at Thyatira were not part of its statement her intent. Vance Havner declared that "Jezebel advocates a liberalism that leads to licentiousness. She would mix the altar of Baal with the worship of Jehovah, the mystery of iniquity with the mystery of Godliness." The Apostle Peter reminds us that God has written in His word that we must be Holy as He is holy. A soiled church is blight on its witness, but a soiled church is also a powerless church and brings shame on a Holy God. A soiled church looses the

value of its holy character and dulls the force of its sanctified witness. The focus of Jezebel's attack would be to destroy holiness in the church. She tried to seduce the church to the life of immorality. That was the focus her of attention within the church. Perversity was her goal. She had purposed to pollute the church with her wicked teaching. The final word that Jesus had for the church at Thyatira was

3. A WORD OF PROMISE. Revelation 2:20-29.

The statement of Jesus to the church has negative and positive aspects to it. It is a powerful statement because it is founded on Divine insight and the knowledge of what was happening in the body of believers in Thyatira. Jesus makes clear in verse 23 that "all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." Note what He says,

a. Negatively. Revelation 2:23. There is a tendency to forget that God knows who we are, what we are and what lies deep within our hearts and minds. There is nothing that is hidden from Him. So many have dumbed down God that there no longer a reverent fear of this knowledge. "He said ""I am He who searches hearts and minds." V.23. This means whether we are comfortable with it or not, our inner most beings are like an open book to God. Nothing is or can be hidden from Him. **He says "I am He who searches the hearts and minds..." What Jesus discovers in His church at Thyatira leads to His condemnation of their sin.** "I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely. I will cast her upon a bed of suffering. I will strike her children." The adultery of which Jesus speaks is more that more the physical adultery it is spiritual adultery. This truth needs to be understood, for while many would never entertain the thought of indulging in physical adultery and are quick to condemn it, they are involved in spiritual adultery and do not seem to realize the seriousness of it in the eyes of a Holy God. The statements of Jesus are clear and are an indication that Jesus will not tolerate sin within the church. While His assessments are startling, His treatment of them is radical. He brought judgment to the house of God. Jesus is not

concerned about political correctness: or soothing judgments: He is concerned about the seriousness of sin and its disastrous consequences in the lives of men and women. But what is so striking about the context in which these words are placed, is that His statements of judgment are tempered by grace. The holy justice of God demands punishment for sin. But grace expresses the hope that these people in the Thyatira will turn from their spiritual adultery to a renewed relationship with God. Note the words which are an indication of the grace of God. The first element of grace is;

i. Patience. Revelation 2:21. Jesus said "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." It is clear that Jesus was willing to offer forgiveness for her sin, but her unwillingness to repent brought about the sentence of judgment upon her. The patience of God ran out. We live in the day of grace but there are limitations to it. There will be a moment when it will run out. If there is an unwillingness to repent of our sin and to turn away from it, then the sentence of the judgment of Christ is inevitable. The second element of grace in these words is,

ii. Mercy. Revelation 2:22. Jesus said that judgment will be inevitably come upon them unless they repent of her ways." While judgment is pending, mercy is available. God is telling the church that Divine mercy is always available the very moment there is true repentance of personal sin. The third element is

iii. Justice. Revelation 2:23-24. The one who knows our deeds and the motives behind them; the one who searches the heart and mind will repay each one according to their deeds. Misjudgments and misunderstandings on the human level will be corrected by perfect understanding and an impeccable justice of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can be sure that the judgments of God are pure and just. They are absolute in their perfection. You can also be sure that God will judge the sinner. He will receive payment for his evil deeds for that conforms to the holy justice of God. But what is also made clear is that it is still in the day of grace, and so there is a way to escape the condemnation of God, if there is a willing humble and repentant heart. Salvation has been provided for, by the same

God who says He will repay each one for their deeds. The holy justice of God demands justice, but the holy love of God sought a way to provide mercy, grace and forgiveness. But what was Jesus saying,

b. Positively. Revelation 2:24-27. In verse 24, Jesus says "Now I say to you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so called deep secrets.....hold on to what you have until I come." In the context of these words, (v.26) Jesus makes two positive re-assuring promises. They are contained in two words. The first is

i. Power or authority. Revelation 2:26-27. To him that overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations just as I have authority." Note the words "I have received authority.....I will give authority." The words in verse 27 are quoted from Psalm 2:9. He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash to pieces like pottery. There are two basic thoughts that emerge from symbolism or imagery.

A. It is a description of the triumphant God's conquering Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. The word ruler denotes the idea of tending sheep. It literally means shepherd. (Morris p. 74) There are captured here two significant thoughts. There is the thought of tender care, kindness and concern. This is part of the shepherd assignment in which we will be involved. **Then there is also the idea of authority.** The power of the shepherd over the flock is absolute. He rules with strength and firmness. The promise is that those who conquer will share in Christ's reign and John Stott was right when he wrote "Exactly how the conqueror will be permitted to share in Christ's reign is beyond our present state of knowledge. It is enough to remind ourselves that scripture contains many indications that heaven will be for the believer a place not only for the privilege but of responsibility." (Stott p. 81) The New Testament writers confirm this truth. The gospel writer confirmed this when he wrote "the good and faithful servant" who has been faithful over a little will be set over much and will be allowed to enter into the joy of his master.

Matthew 25:21-23. Paul says to the Corinthians "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world." The second word is,

b. Presence. Revelation 2:28. "I will also give him the morning star. Who and what is the morning Star? Jesus describes Himself as the Morning Star. "The churches maybe lamp stands and the churches angels maybe described as stars, but Christ is the Bright and Morning Star from whom they derive their light. In pledging this star to the conqueror, Christ is pledging Himself. The faithful triumphant believer will receive the promise that he or she will live in His presence eternally.

Conclusion.

All of these privilege however are contingent upon the responsibilities we commit ourselves to in this life. Jesus sets them before us.

i. Hold on to what you have until I come. Revelation 2:25

ii. These rewards are for the over comers. Revelation 2:26

ii. They are for those who do the will of God until the end. Revelation 2:26. It to these that Jesus says "I will give authority over the nations." Rev. 2:26 and He will also give the morning star. The Christian life is not simply a single battle it is a life long campaign. The Christian is to stand firm in love and faith, service and perseverance. John would counsel us to "See that what you have learned from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us – even eternal life." I John 2:24. Paul confirms this 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "So then brothers stand firm and hold to the teaching we passed to you whether by word of mouth or by letter." The key words which come through to us with clarity are, "HOLD ON TO WHAT YOU HAVE!" "REMAIN IN THE SON AND IN THE FATHER!" "STAND FIRM AND HOLD TO THE TEACHING ."