

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 28:10:2003

Reading: Revelation 2:18-29

EXPLORING THE FUTURE

6. A DEVIL WITH A SKIRT ON

If there is a watchword that describes the Western mind-set today it is the word tolerance. Many folk in the Western world worship at the shrine of tolerance. In the shaping of public opinion and the forging of national policy, many esteem the broadmindedness which says any and all values, if sincerely held, are equally valid. There are no absolutes today. The only absolute is that there are not absolutes. Many people tolerate everything except intolerance. *Webster: defines the word tolerance like this: " the allowable deviation from a standard, sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing or conflicting with one's own."* That, in a nutshell is the Western world. An openness that embraces almost anything morally, politically or educationally. George Gallop, America's pollster, says that 67 percent of Americans today believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth. In other words, right and wrong varies from situation to situation. It may be wrong for me, but right for you. Translated, if homosexuality is right for you, that's fine. If it's not right for you, well that's fine, too. Whatever works for you is right for you. If it feels good, do it. The consequences are terrifying. In USA Newsweek in its December 7th 1992 issue, published an article entitled, ' *What Traditional Family ?* ' *The article referred to traditional values as a ' myth,' that never existed in American life. Interpreted, ' we're rewriting history in order to be politically correct.'* *In America and throughout Western Society, there is a growing and emerging belief that there is no absolute truth. No standard of right and wrong. The result is tolerance of any and every belief in our culture. "*

Like ancient Israel, we have become a people who have forgotten how to blush. Nothing shocks us anymore. Tragically we have become desensitised toward sin. In the name of tolerance, we have now opened the floodgates to embrace every form of wickedness. All people want is tolerance. An absolute standard of right and wrong is becoming a dusty page of ancient history. Who is to say which abnormal perversion will be accepted next ? Will it be polygamy ? What " *alternative lifestyle,*" will be next to be embraced ? As the church we are beginning to feel the tightening noose of the world around us. If we are not careful we'll soon be choked to death by public consensus. Paul warns us, " *Be not conformed to this world* " (Rom 12:2) Now this was the tightening squeeze that the church at Thyatira felt the crunch of remaining intolerant in a tolerant society. Sadly, the world was influencing this church more than they were influencing the world. The Risen Lord must forcibly address this church. He must tell them that He is intolerant of that which

they tolerate. There was a woman in their congregation, Jezebel, who was dressed to kill. She was ***A Devil with a skirt on.*** The church is still being confronted with devil's wearing skirts who seek to lure and seduce the church. But God's standard of truth never changes. " *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth but the Word of our God shall stand forever.*" (Is 40:8)

GEOGRAPHICALLY: Thyatira was located about 30 miles southeast of Pergamos. Of the seven cities this was the smallest. It was a small industrial centre between Pergamos and Laodicea. It was out of the way. The least known. The most obscure. Thyatira was a sentinel military town. It was originally settled to intercept any foreign armies approaching Pergamos. Before an invading foe could threaten the capital city, Pergamos it had to defeat Thyatira first.

COMMERCIALY: the city was prospering. In many ways, modern Thyatira, the Turkish city of Akhisar is much like it was in the days of the apostle John. Akhisar is still a busy commercial centre, and even in the 1990's its most important exports are essentially the same products that ancient Thyatira was known for its, cotton and wool cloth, fruits and dyes. It is was from Thyatira, that Lydia the seller of purple came. (Acts 16:14)

Thyatira was in a city in which trade unions were very important. There were for example associations for baker's: bronze-workers, cobblers, weavers, tanner's or dyers potters etc.; and if you wanted to prosper in business in Thyatira you had to be a " *card-carrying,*" member. This is where the real problem for the believer's came in. Each of these trade guilds had it's own pagan deity. After hour's the member's were expected to attend the guild festivals. These included a feast of eating food offered to their idol and plunging into the vilest sexual orgies. Could a Christian participate in all of this ? If you did then you ensured your material prosperity, if you refused you ensured your material poverty. What Jezebel was doing was this. She was using her powers of persuasion to encourage the fellowship to participate in pagan feasts and sexual promiscuity. No wonder our Risen Lord speaks to this fellowship in such a stern way.

(1) THE RISEN LORD PRAISES THEIR STRENGTHS

There are definite virtues for which Christ can praise them. This church had a lot going for it. Love, faith, service, and perseverance marked this congregation. These four virtues are actually two couplets. Their love led to their service and their faith produced perseverance.

(a) LOVE AND SERVICE:

Another translation reads, " *I know your works, namely your charity and service and*

faith and patient endurance and that your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones." (2:19) While love for Christ was decreasing in Ephesus, it was increasing in Thyatira. This church remained deeply in love

with Christ. In a day of callous indifference their devotion to Christ grew stronger and stronger.

Many years ago Thomas K. Beecher once substituted for his famous brother, Henry Ward Beecher, at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. Many curiosity-seekers had come to hear the renowned Henry Beecher. But when Thomas Beecher appeared in the pulpit instead, some people got up and started for the doors. They were sadly disappointed to miss the opportunity to hear the famed orator speak. Sensing their disappointment because he was substituting for his brother, Thomas raised his hand for silence. He then announced, "*All those who came here this morning to hear Henry Ward Beecher may withdraw from the church. All who came to worship God may remain.*" Love for Christ not for any man must always be central in the church. Their love for God produced service. Love must be our divine motivation to serve others. They were constantly reaching out to minister to the needs of others. They gave themselves tirelessly to one another. Dwight. L. Moody once said, "*The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many servants he serves.*" My are you a servant ? In what ministry do you consistently serve ? Whom do you sacrificially serve ?

(b) FAITH AND PATIENCE:

They trusted God to guide and provide. They relied upon Him to meet their needs. They were committed to following Christ. Their Faith produced Perseverance.

Perseverance

(*hupomone*) is a steadfast endurance that bears up under great stress and mounting pressures. Their faith kept them faithful to complete the task to which Christ had called them. What's more, their love, service, faith and perseverance were increasing. Christ noted, "*Your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones.*" They weren't stagnant, but growing in each of these areas. Is your Christian life like that ? Did you begin well ? How are you faring now ? Are you standing still, falling back, going forward ? Which ? Now what could possibly be wrong with a flock like this ? Isn't love all that you need ?

(2) THE RISEN LORD PERCEIVES THEIR SIN

When Oliver Cromwell sat for the official portrait that would portray his appearance to future generations, he instructed the artist to paint just as he was. He wanted no flattery. In Cromwell's words he instructed the artist to paint him, "*warts and all.*" As Christ paints the picture of this church, He does so warts and all. Shifting gears, the Lord says, "*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest*

that woman Jezebel " (2:20) They had a big problem in Thyatira and it could be summed up in one word Jezebel. Their sin is, they tolerate her false teaching in the church. This church had love but no sound doctrine. Ephesus was just the opposite. They had sound doctrine but no love. Now a church will usually be polarised in one or the other direction. Either they will have full heads and empty hearts, or full hearts and empty heads.

And either polarization is deadly. Balance is the key in the church. God demands both love and sound doctrine. We must " *speak the truth in love.*" (Eph 4:15)

The church at Thyatira had gotten out of balance. They had all love but no doctrine. The result was devastating. Their lack of sound doctrine made this fellowship easy prey for the false teaching of a woman in their congregation whom Christ calls Jezebel. Let's meet Jezebel and the sin she promoted.

(a) *THIS SIN IS ENUNCIATED:*

Christ is specific, " *that woman Jezebel,*" (2:20) Who was Jezebel ? Lets think about the:

(1) THE OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTER:

Her History: is brought before us in

(1 Kings 16:31) She was a foreigner. Her father Ethbaal was a priest of Ashtarothe the Phoenician equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Roman Venus. **Her**

Idolatry: is brought before us in (1 Kings 16:32) When she moved to Israel she brought her pagan idolatry with her. The worship of Baal, the pagan fertility god, included the grossest sexual immoralities imaginable. The temples of Baal were filled with temple prostitutes, both male and female, and the basest sexual practices.

According to one source Jezebel

means pure and chaste but she contradicted her name by her nature.

Her Ministry:

Was TO CONTAMINATE: (2 Kings 9:22) Like Balaam before her she sought to contaminate Israel and her hen pecked husband Ahab, lacked the courage to withstand her.

TO DOMINATE: She was manipulatively dominant. She had Naboth killed. (1 Kings 21) And although Ahab was the king, Jezebel ran the country through her husband. She was the puppeteer behind the scenes, pulling the strings and setting the agenda in Israel. In truth, she was a devil with a skirt on. Her Ministry was to Contaminate to Dominate and also:

TO ERADICATE: (1 Kings 18:4) Ruthless. Godless. Calculating. Scheming. Power-mad. A seducer of people. Ahab was the figurehead, she was the sovereign head. But

back to Thyatira. Come from this Old Testament Character:

(2) THE NEW TESTAMENT COUNTERPART:

There was a woman in this church just like Jezebel. **Her History:** is brought before us, "*that woman Jezebel.*" (2:20) Some render the phrase, "*thy woman Jezebel,*" or "*thy wife*

Jezebel." Now if that's correct the inference is this is that this woman is the wife of the pastor or teacher or presiding elder. That's too convicting lets on quickly. Others have said that Jezebel was Lydia. What we can say is this, Jezebel was a real woman in this church fellowship who claimed to have the gift of prophecy.

Her Idolatry: is brought before us "*to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. idols.*" (2:20) Trade unions were very active in Thyatira. The men would work together all day, and then party all night. They would bring out their little pagan gods and start their idolatry. Prostitutes were involved as well. What were these believers to do ? Obviously, it was wrong to participate in this wickedness and yet because of the economic pressures, they would be out of work if they didn't.

Did you notice **Her Ministry** ? This is brought before us in (2:20) "*to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.*" What was Jezebels ministry in this church ?

TO CONTAMINATE: "*To teach my servants to commit fornication.*" (2:20) Jezebel was teaching them to join the unions. She said, "*An idol is nothing. Go ahead and get involved in the guild. Participating in an meal won't hurt. God will overlook it. Business is business.*"

TO DOMINATE: The Risen Lord says, "*Thou sufferest that woman to teach*" (2:20) They had allowed her to occupy a teaching role.

TO ERADICATE: To root out the doctrine of separation and advocate compromise with the world for financial success. This false prophetess was actually teaching "*the deep things of Satan.*"

(2:24) She taught that you can't overcome evil until you all know all about it and even try it. Unfortunately many were buying into this and were being led astray. My is the voice of Jezebel still not heard in our churches today ? She says, "*the best to conquer the world is to become like the world. Go where your friends go, dress like your friends dress, listen to the music, eat the food, drink the wine, I mean how will you ever get them to listen to the gospel ?*" You can be a Christian, but meet the world half-way, sing and drink in the clubs as long as you end with "*I'd rather have Jesus.*" Do you ever that language ? Yet God's unchanging requirement is "*Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.*"

(2 Cor 6:17)

(b) THIS SIN IS TOLERATED:

The Risen Lord says, "*thou sufferest that woman to teach.*" (2:20) The church at Thyatira believed in peaceful coexistence. "*Don't rock the boat, don't say anything that would hurt her feelings.*" They were more concerned in pleasing her than pleasing the Lord. And Christ says, "*I have a few things against thee.*" (2:20) What had the Risen Lord against them ? This, they tolerated a woman to reach and unscriptural position and teach an unscriptural doctrine. The New Testament is clear on this. Paul says, "*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence.*" (1 Tim 2:12-14

1 Cor 14:34) Now is this not up to date ? I mean one of the issues where Rome differs from the Anglicans is over the question of women's ordination. I wonder how long it will be before it raises its head with the Baptist's ? My are we tolerating the things that Christ hates !

(c) THIS SIN IS REITERATED:

History repeats itself and when we look at this church prophetically (1:3) as representing a definite phase in history we come across some things that are most interesting. Thyatira represents that period from 590-1517 AD The name Thyatira means "*Continual Sacrifice,*" and may refer in general to the Roman Catholic Church. For not long after the reign of Constantine *Rome* became the centre of church affairs and the Dark Ages of Church History began. Just as Jezebel introduced the abominations of Baal worship into Israel so Rome incorporated Paganism into Christianity. Consider the Papacy.

Its History: The word Pope means *FATHER*. At first it was applied to all Western Bishops but about 500 AD it began to be restricted to the Bishop of Rome. Gregory the 1st (590-694) was the first real pope. Other evil popes during this time were Sergius the 3rd (904-911) he lived with a harlot, Marozia and they raised their illegitimate children to become popes and cardinals. Benedict the 9th (1033-1045) was made Pope as a boy of 12 years of age. He committed murders and adulteries in broad daylight and robbed graves. Finally the enraged people of Rome drove him out of the city.

Consider The Papacy. **Its Idolatry:** Idolatry is the worship of idols, strictly forbidden in the second commandment. (Exod 20:4-5) The Risen Lord identifies Himself to this church as "*the Son of God.*" (2:18) Why ? Because Rome has accustomed people to think of Him as "*the son of Mary,*" a position that robs Him of His essential Deity and thereby degrades Him. Roman Catholics say, "*I go to Mary and ask her to speak to Him on my behalf.*" The Bible says, "*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men the man*

Christ Jesus." (1 Tim 2:5) Consider The Papacy. **Its Ministry:** What is its Ministry ?

TO CONTAMINATE: The infidel historian Gibbon this about this period. " *The history of the church is the annals of hell.*" The church became the home of heathendom. Pagan feast days became Christian festivals. Pagan gods became Christian saints. Pagan priests became the ordained servants of the church.

TO DOMINATE: During this period God had his Elijahs. John Huss (1369-1415) was a fearless preacher who honoured the Bible above the church, he was burnt at the stake by the Pope. Rome has not changed Her Ministry, to Contaminate, to Dominate. And

To ERADICATE: Some foolish Protestants are now saying, " *Well, we never understood Rome, its a pity we had the Reformation at all.*" Have they forgotten the millions of lives that were sacrificed because they stood for the truth ? Have they forgot the cry of the Reformation, " *By Grace alone, Through faith alone, in Christ alone.*" Do you think if the Pope ever got into the saddle again that he would tolerate you ! Back to Thyatira.

(3) THE RISEN LORD PRONOUNCES THEIR SUFFERING

If the church at Thyatira was not going to deal with this sin the Risen Lord was for He threatens the direst judgments. There is an unbreakable law in God's moral universe of sowing and reaping. We always reap what we sow. If we sow sin we will surely reap suffering. Its the law of the harvest. Consequently, Christ promised, (2:21-23) Its evident from this that,

(a) THE LORD IS PATIENT IN JUDGMENT:

Jesus said, " *I gave her time to repent.*" (2:21) God had already rebuked her for this false teaching. But despite having ample time to repent she refused.. She did not want to repent of her immorality. She likes her sin. She will not give it up.

(b) THE LORD IS PRECISE IN JUDGMENT:

" *Behold I will kill her children with death.*"

(2:22-23) The Amplified New Testament say, " *I will throw her on a bed of anguish, or suffering.*" The suffering Christ refers to may be well be a reference to sexually transmitted diseases. Gonorrhoea and syphilis were common in the ancient world. Sow to the flesh, reap to the flesh. Sexual promiscuity has a payday someday. Every kick has a kickback. Solomon wrote, " *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned ?*" (Prov 6:27) Play with fire and you'll get fire. Christ promised, " *I will kill her children*

(*followers*) *with death.*" (2:23) Would God kill a believer ? Would God put to death one of His own children ? Yes. Christ is saying, " *If you won't discipline her and her followers, then I will. It will be a discipline unto death.*" A believer can go too far into sin and commit a sin unto death.

(Acts 5:1 1 Cor 11:17 1 John 5:16) Yes, there comes a time in the life of the Christian when God chooses to take that like. Christ tells us why He takes such action.

(c) THE LORD IS PRACTICAL IN JUDGMENT:

He does this so *that " all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts."* (2:23) Christ wants other churches to know that He is serious about *Holiness* in the church. In other words Christ is saying, " *I've got to discipline Thyatira because Ephesus is watching I can't let this go unchecked because Smyrna is watching. I must deal with this sin because Pergamos is watching. If I don't judge Thyatira, then Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos will begin to live like this.*" My there are too many sinning saints who are going unchecked in churches to day. That's sending the wrong signal to other Christians that immorality is alright. Now do you notice how Christ concludes this letter ? He now speaks to the rest the faithful remnant who have not become entangled in this evil woman's teaching. And,

(4) THE RISEN LORD PROMISES THEIR SUCCESS

(a) THE PERSON OF THIS PROMISE:

Who is *He* ? He is the *Omniscient Lord*. He has

" *eyes like unto a flame of fire.*" (2:18) With omniscient gaze Christ is able to see into the secret place of our hearts. He sees what no one else can see. He evaluates our inner motivations. He weighs our driving ambitions. He observes our secret thoughts. Everything is laid bare before Him. Nothing is hidden from His glowing eyes. Nothing. (Heb 4:13) My do you realise that these burning eyes of holy love are ever on you ?

Who is *He* ? He is the *Omnipotent LORD*. " *His feet are like fine brass.*" (2:18) With blazing feet He stands strong in judgment over this church. If " *His eyes,*" are able to *Detect sin*, then " *His feet,*" are able to *Destroy sin*. Now why does Christ reveal Himself this way to this church ? Because they have become tolerant of sin. And Christ will not tolerate a church married to the world.

(b) THE PEOPLE OF THIS PROMISE:

" *But unto you I say, till I come,* " (2:24-25) Christ places no other burden on these believers ? But what burden does He give them ? The burden of having to bear with *Mrs. Jezebel* until something is done with her. In other words, " *Just deal with her. That's all I want you to do. Just deal with her.*" In the meantime, " *hold fast,*" to your

purity: to your fide fidelity: to your integrity." Don't let go of what is right. Flee temptation and leave no forwarding address.

(c) THE PROSPECT OF THIS PROMISE:

Christ here (2: 26-28) quotes from (Ps 2:8-9) That's a Messianic Psalm looking ahead to the Second Coming of Christ to destroy God's enemies. When Christ returns to this planet,

He will establish His earthly Kingdom and in that day we will rule and reign with Him. (1 Cor 6:2) The Risen Lord promises believers "*the morning star.*" (2:28) Today we know the morning star as the planet Venus, second planet from the sun and the brightest object in the night sky. Depending on where it is in its orbital path, the morning star can be seen to rise as much as three hours before the sun. In the last Book of the Old Testament there is a prophecy regarding the Return of Christ in power and glory, "*But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing*

in His wings." (Mal 4:2) When He returns visibly to the earth Christ will be like the noonday sun breaking through the gloom of the dark night of the world. But before the sun arises, the morning star will appear. Christ says later in this Book, "*I am the bright and morning star.*" (22:16) There will be two stages of the appearance of the Lord Jesus. First He will appear as the morning star, coming for His own. Then, at a later period He will appear as the shining sun, coming in all His power and glory visible to all the world. The prospect of the Morning Star is the prospect of the Rapture.

" *Our gathering together unto HIM.*" (2 Thes 2: 1) What an amazing prospect awaits us. Whether we have died or still live when He returns for us, He will gather us together to be with *Him.* "*Forever with the Lord.*"

What way will Christ find us spiritually ? Walking in Worldliness or walking in Holiness ? My God is serious about our **Holiness**. Indeed this is the purpose of the Father's Election: (Eph 1:4) the purpose of the Son's Death: (Titus 2:14) and the purpose of the Holy Spirit's Indwelling. Here then are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three persons of the one eternal Godhead, united in their purpose to make us holy. That's the message to Thyatira. Will you make Murray McCheyne prayer yours ? "*Lord make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be.*