

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 26:9:2010

Reading: Revelation 2:18-29

5. THE FALSE CHURCH THYATIRA

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. We are living in a most tolerant age. Everyone must be allowed to do "*his own thing*." This is the age of relativism in morals and syncretism in religion. 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.

Yet Paul warns us, "*Be not conformed to this world*" (Rom 12:2) Or "*Don't let the world around squeeze you into its mould.*" Sadly, this was exactly what was happening at Thyatira. The world was

influencing this church more than they were influencing the world. So the Risen Lord must forcibly address them. 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.

Commercially: 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 today its most important exports are essentially the same products that ancient Thyatira was known for its, cotton and wool cloth, fruits and dyes. Do you recall that it was from Thyatira, that Lydia the seller of purple came ? (Acts 16:14) Thyatira was in a city in which trade guilds or unions were very important. There were for example associations for baker's, bronze-workers, cobblers, weavers, tanners or dyers and potters. 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 its own pagan deity. After hours 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 believer 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. Yet He begins by praising their virtues, before confronting their sins. Look at,

(1) THE INITIAL PICTURE OF THIS CHURCH

This church had a lot going for it. Love, faith, service, and perseverance marked this congregation. They seemed to be doing everything right. You see, before the Lord confronted her weaknesses, He affirmed her strengths. He realised that the believers needed in this church needed His encouragement as well, as His rebuke. *Do you know someone believer who has become demoralised and discouraged ?* Perhaps they are wrestling with a difficult problem, or they feel unappreciated. Do you pick up the phone, drop them a line, pay them a visit ? Do you give them some positive strokes rather than negative jabs ? And if you must confront wrong, do you preface your rebuke with words of encouragement ? Do you realise that “ *a word*

spoken in season how good is it ?” (Prov 15:23) Now what was so encouraging about this assembly ? Well, look, at,

(a) THE GRACES WHICH WERE MANIFOLD:

Do you see what the Lord says ? (2:19) 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) The church in Thyatira was a like a beautiful garden in which the fairest Christian graces blossomed. On the one hand there was a humble ministry, and on the other hand that trinity that is so often mentioned by Paul, “ *faith, hope, love.*”

(1 Cor 13:13) Faith and love are mentioned by name here, and what is perseverance but the fruit of hope ? Do you recall how Paul commended the church at Thessalonica ? “ *Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love and patience of hope.*”

(1 Thes 1:3) Is this triad of Christian graces evident in your life ? Do you possess the three vital elements of the Christian life ? (a)

(b) THE GROWTH WHICH WAS MANIFEST:

“ *And the last to be more than the first,*” (2:19) That is, their recent works were more numerous and greater than their first ones. They were not only a going church, a glowing church, they were a growing church. While the church of Ephesus had left its first love, the

church of Thyatira was exceeding the works it did at first. This was not a church that was standing still. It was not backing up. It was moving forward. Is this not what ought to be said of every church, every believer ? I sign on a church marquee once said, “ *Most Christians never grow up they just grow older.* ” Is this not tragic ? I mean is the Christian life not meant to be a life of growth, development and progress ? (Heb 5:12-14) Would you not like to be doing more for the Lord now, than you were five years ago ? When it comes to witnessing, praying, giving, preaching, caring, and working we ought to have only one word in our vocabulary, and that is the word **more**.

*More about Jesus would I know
More of His love to others show
More of His saving fullness see
More of His love who died for me*

Is this you ? Not stagnant. Not standing still but going forward. Now what could possibly be wrong with a flock like this ? Isn't love all that you need ? (1)

(2) THE CRITICAL PROBLEM IN THIS CHURCH

You see, they had a big problem in Thyatira and it could be summed up in one word Jezebel. Look if you will at
(2:20) In this fair garden a poisonous weed was being allowed to grow, in this body a malignant cancer had begun to form, an enemy was being harboured in the

fellowship. *The leadership of the church had decided to tolerate a false prophetess by the name of Jezebel.* Now a good woman is the best thing on earth. Do you recall that women were last at the cross and first at the tomb ? The church owes a tremendous debt to godly women, and do we husbands not owe a debt to faithful wives and mothers ? (Prov 18:22) But an evil woman is the most dangerous thing on earth. *Is it not significant that many of the false cults have been founded or promoted by women ?* Now when the Risen Lord says of “ *that woman Jezebel,* ” He was not just speaking of her name but of her nature. She was a wicked woman that was the epitome of evil. I heard about a couple that pulled into a petrol station in U.S.A. The wife had trouble hearing. The gas attendant walked up and asked the husband, “ *Fill it up?* ” “ *Yes,* ” said the husband. The wife said, “ *What did he say ?* ” The husband answered, “ *He asked if I wanted to fill the car up with gas.* ” The gas attendant said, “ *I like your car. What kind is it ?* ” The wife asked, “ *What did he say ?* ” “ *He asked what kind of car we have,* ” answered the husband. The gas attendant asked, “ *Where you from ?* ” “ *Atlanta,* ” said the husband. “ *What did he say ?* ” asked the wife and the husband answered, “ *Honey, he asked where we were from.* ” “ *Atlanta,* ” said the gas attendant.

“ *I used to know a woman from Atlanta. She was without doubt the meanest, hardest, bitterest, coldest woman I have ever met in my life.* ” “ *What did he say ?* ” the wife asked once again. The husband replied, “ *Dear, he says he thinks he knows your mother.* ” My Jezebel was without doubt the meanest woman in

the Bible. Here at Thyatira she led the church into a lifestyle of immorality and idolatry. Here was an assembly that was shipwrecked over the preaching, precepts, and practices of a woman, her name Jezebel. What a problem. Now will you notice,

(a) THIS PROBLEM IS ENUNCIATED:

“ *That woman Jezebel,*” (2:20) Who was Jezebel ? Let’s think about the,

(1) THE OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTER:

Jezebel was a colourful character in more ways than one. John Philips says, “ *She was spend the first part of the day putting on her warpaint and the rest of the day on the warpath.*” Lets turn back to (1 Kings Ch 16) and notice, **Her History:** is brought before us in (1 Kings 16:31) She was a foreigner. Her father Ethbaal was a priest of Ashtaroth 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. Do you recall she had Naboth killed ? (1 Kings 21:13) 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 and 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.*” Could this woman have been the wife of the pastor or one of the elders ? 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.*” (2:20) Do you recall what I said about the trade unions in Thyatira ? I mean 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 Jezebel's 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 a meal won't hurt. God will overlook it. Business is business.*” To Dominate: For 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 ? Does she not sound so intellectual, so cultured, and so refined ?

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 PROBLEM 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 an 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) Brethren, do you believe that ? Why, then are you so reluctant to exercise your place of headship in the body of Christ ?

(c) THIS PROBLEM IS ANNIHILATED:

For if the church at Thyatira was not going to deal with this problem the Risen Lord was, for here He threatens the direst judgments. Did you notice that three times He peals out His sovereign “ *I will,*” in warning the church of His intentions ? “ *I will cast her into a bed,*” (2:22) “ *I will kill her children with death,*” (2:22) “ *I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*” (2:23) Notice from (2:21) that **God is Slow to Act:** He stays His hand that she might repent but the evil she was spreading went on unabated. Notice from (2:22) **God is Sure to Act:** He distinguishes between the women's children (followers) and her. They have time

to repent she does not, her judgment is sure. Judgment is not only *disciplinary*, it is *exemplary*. Christ says in (2:22)

“ *And I will her children with death and all the churches shall know*,” Christ wants other churches to know that He is serious about holiness in the church. (Acts 5:1 1 Cor 11:17) Apparently the Christians at Thyatira were not listening, for nothing remains of that church today. (a) (b) (c)

(d) THIS PROBLEM 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 says 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 Elijah's. 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 also, 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. (1) (2)

(3) THE SPECIAL PROMISE TO THIS CHURCH

For to the rank and file of the believers who stood aloof from this woman and her teaching Christ makes a promise in the closing verses of this letter. Notice,

(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) Bronze, in the Scripture is always a symbol of judgment. 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. I wonder, are you tolerating things which He hates ? Has worldliness and sin crept into your life ? Don’t be mistaken, He will deal with it.

(a)

(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:

1. The Lord Promises Power On Earth:

To the overcomer, that is to the one who walks in holiness and purity, Christ promises “ *authority over the nations,* ” when He returns to smash His foes and to set up His righteous kingdom on earth. (2: 26-28 Ps 2:8-9)

That’s our prospect then, but do you see our duty now ? If you stand for God, God, you will have power with men. (Gen 23:6) Real power to change lives is directly related to moral purity and personal holiness.

2. The Lord Promises Power in Heaven:

“ *And I will give him the morning star,* ” (2:28) The morning star is none other than the Lord Jesus. (22:16)

Possessing Him, we possess all. What way will Christ find you spiritually when He comes again ? 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.* ”