

The Corrupt Church

Revelation 2:18-29

INTRODUCTION

- A. We live in an immoral society.
 - 1. Chicago has a “sex credit card” whereby men can hire a prostitute’s services and pay later.
 - 2. Adult bookstores outnumber McDonald’s restaurants in the US. In 1996, 665 million adult videos were rented in the US.
 - 3. There is now a homosexual denomination — Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.
- B. We forget, too many times, that immorality was a problem in the first century as well.
 - 1. Rom. 1:24-32.
 - 2. 1 Cor. 6:9-11.
 - 3. Gal. 5:19-21.
- C. This immorality even infiltrated the early church.
 - 1. A man in the Corinthian church was living with his step-mother (1 Cor. 5:1).
 - 2. The Thessalonian church apparently struggled with sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3-8).
- D. Immorality infiltrated the church at Thyatira. Let’s examine what Jesus knew about this congregation:

JESUS KNEW THEIR GROWTH IN WORKS, v. 19

- A. Jesus knew their good works —
 - 1. He knew their love - this was probably directed at both God and their fellow man.
 - 2. He knew their service - their love was exhibited in their service to both God and their fellow man.
 - 3. He knew their faith - their love and service exhibited themselves in the church’s willingness to take God at his word and believe him.
 - 4. He knew their patience.
 - a. The best translations read something like “patient endurance.” That is the meaning here.
 - b. They persevered even in the face of adversity, persecution.
- B. Jesus knew their last works were more than the first.
 - 1. “More” could mean here “more in value” rather than “more in number.”
 - a. But, either way, what is meant here is that this congregation was growing in works.
 - b. Unfortunately, this is not the way most Christians work — they begin their Christian lives exited, ready to serve, but they do not grow; they remain babes in Christ.
 - 2. If our children were not growing, maturing, we would take them to the doctor quickly. But, when Christians do not grow, that’s what we expect.
 - 3. God, however, does expect Christians (and by extension, churches) to grow.
 - a. “Speaking the truth in love, may [we] grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ” (Eph. 4:15).
 - b. “And may the lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all” (1 Thess. 3:12).
 - c. “Leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection” (Heb. 6:1).
 - 4. We need to grow in our spiritual lives — in the knowledge of God and in good works, both as individuals and as congregations.
 - 5. Are you growing in your own spiritual life? Are you, therefore, helping this church to grow in works?

JESUS KNEW THEIR GROSS IMMORALITY, vv. 20-23

- A. The church in Thyatira permitted Jezebel to teach, v. 20.
1. Women are not permitted to teach publicly (1 Tim. 2:12), but even if she were not teaching publicly she should not be permitted to teach false doctrine (Tit. 1 :1 1).
 2. Jesus held it against the angel of the church — which I understand to be the eldership — that they allowed this false teaching to occur — apparently the elders weren't doing anything about this woman.
 3. She called herself a prophetess.
 - a. There were true prophetesses in that day, e.g., Philip's daughters (Acts 21 :9).
 - b. But, apparently, this woman took the title upon herself without any gift of prophecy, for she called herself a prophetess.
 4. This woman was teaching and beguiling Jesus' servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. She seems to have taught that Christians could worship pagan deities.
 - a. The name ascribed to this woman indicates her encouragement of idolatry.
 - 1) We cannot believe this was her real name, for surely no one would have named their daughter Jezebel.
 - 2) The historical Jezebel advocated the worship of pagan gods.
 - a) She influenced her husband Ahab to worship Canaanite deities.
 - b) She killed the prophets of God (1 Ki. 18:4).
 - c) She provided food for the prophets of Baal and for the prophets of Asherah (1 Ki. 18:19).
 - b. The woman in Thyatira encouraged sexual immorality. A double entendre is likely intended here:
 - 1) Physical sexual immorality is likely intended, because many temples had prostitutes and prostitution was a form of worship to these gods.
 - 2) But, spiritual fornication is probably also intended, for God often uses the analogy of fornication for unfaithfulness.
 - a) After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel "played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them" (Jud. 2: 17).
 - b) The half-tribe of Manasseh that dwelt in the east "were unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land" (1 Chr. 5:25).
 - c. The woman in Thyatira encouraged eating food sacrificed to idols.
 - 1) Paul told the Corinthian church that they could eat food sacrificed to idols as long as: their conscience was not violated and they did not cause someone else to violate his conscience (1 Cor. 8).
 - 2) Why then the condemnation of eating food sacrificed to idols here?
 - a) When food was sacrificed to idols, it was often then sold in the marketplace. As long as one understood he was not worshiping the idol, he could eat that food.
 - b) However, food was often sacrificed to idols and then eaten in worship of that deity. It seems that's why the prohibition is here given. These Christians were actually participating in the worship of the idol.
- B. Jesus gave her time to repent, but she refused to do so, v. 21.
1. Jesus' patience is here exhibited by giving this woman time to repent.
 - a. Our Lord is patient with people.
 - 1) Noah preached for 100 years before the flood came.
 - 2) God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).
 - b. God is giving you time to repent. Are you going to do so before it's too late?
 2. This woman did not repent.
 - a. The best translations read, "She does not want to repent of her sexual immorality."
 - b. This woman was so steeped in her paganism that she did not want to repent.

- 1) We can become so steeped in sin that we do not want to repent — the author of Hebrews said it was impossible to restore some to repentance (Heb. 6:4-6).
 - 2) These people don't want to repent because they are too comfortable in sin, their hearts have become too hard.
 - 3) We need to take caution that we do not get into that situation!
- C. Jesus would come in judgment upon her, those who commit adultery with her. and her children, vv. 22-23.
1. Jesus promises judgment — sickbed, tribulation, and death are all synonyms for judgment.
 - a. What form this judgment would actually take we are not told.
 - b. But, we know that it would be a visible judgment, because through this judgment the churches would know that Jesus “searches the minds and hearts” (v. 23).
 2. “Her children” likely refers to those who followed her doctrine.
 - a. Notice the text says that she was “teaching and seducing” people to follow her teaching (v. 20), but here we are told that Jesus will punish those who follow her doctrine.
 - b. This shows personal responsibility.
 - 1) Even though Jezebel had tricked some into believing her doctrine, they themselves were responsible for what they did.
 - 2) At the judgment, we will not be able to say, “Wait a minute! I was tricked into believing that or doing that!” We are responsible for what we ourselves do.
- D. Jesus would give to each one according to his deeds, v. 23.
1. Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that we shall be judged based upon our deeds.
 2. Here again that thought is expressed. What if you were to be judged by your deeds this very night?

JESUS KNEW THEIR GROUP OF THE FAITHFUL, vv. 24-25

- A. Not everyone in Thyatira held the error of Jezebel, v. 24.
1. Those who held this error apparently claimed to have special information from God.
 - a. Jesus refers to this as the “depth things of Satan” — Jesus apparently substitutes Satan for God to show where this doctrine really originated.
 - b. Many in this time period claimed to have special information from God that “ordinary” Christians did not have.
 2. This shows that even though some error was taught in this church not everyone participated in the error. The same can be true today.
 - a. There is error that causes everyone in the congregation to be guilty — e.g., false worship, false organization, etc.
 - b. But, it is possible for a congregation to believe error but for individual Christians not to believe it.
 - 1) Some congregations are premillennial, but perhaps everyone in the congregation doesn't believe it.
 - 2) Some congregations teach error on marriage/divorce/remarriage, but perhaps everyone doesn't believe it.
- B. To those who did not believe this error Jesus would lay upon them no other burden. v. 24.
1. Jesus was not going to load this congregation down with all sorts of regulations they had to follow.
 2. Jesus doesn't expect more from us than we can reasonably do — he's not going to come to the faithful and say, “I'm going to start expecting more from you.”
- C. He expected the faithful to hold fast to what they had until he came, v. 25.
1. He expected the faithful to remain faithful to him. The Lord has always expected the faithful to remain faithful.
 - a. When Barnabas came to Antioch and saw the grace of God, he encouraged the brethren that “they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

b. “My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15 :58).

D Jesus expects you to be faithful to him, to do your duty. Are you faithful to Christ?