

“Thyatira: The Church of the Tolerant”

Revelation 2:18-29

Two Sundays Ago: The Study of Pergamum, the Church of Compromise

Today: The Study of Thyatira, the Church of the Tolerant

Five Parts to Each of These Seven Letters:

- Description: Christ’s self-description; to understand the commendation/rebuke (2:18)
- Commendation: What the church is doing right (2:19)
- Rebuke: What the church is doing wrong (2:20-24a)
- Exhortation: Urging the church to take action (2:24b-25)
- Promise: If you overcome, you will receive this reward (2:26-28)

Thyatira, the City:

- Smallest of the seven cities (Population ~25,000)
- Had a military fort, which helped to guard Pergamum
- Famous for its production of wool, leather, bronze, and most of all purple
- Issue: Trade guilds (labor unions), each with its own god and obligations: “Come dine with us at the festival of Apollo.” (S. Lewis Johnson)

Thyatira, the Church:

- Opposite of Ephesus; Thyatira is doing much ministry, but doctrinally weak.
- Tolerated idolatry/immorality, but not from false religion, but business and culture.
- Church tolerated sin, had a wicked prophetess, and members following her (3 groups).
- ***Historicist:*** the church time period of papal triumph and persecution (7th c. -1517).
This fits the Middle Ages’ characteristics of worship of Mary (“Queen of Heaven”). The phrase “killing her children” may refer to the plague of Black Death, begun in 1347.

2:18/ “The words of the Son of God...” This title (“the Son of God”) is only used one time in Revelation. This is a description of Christ’s authority, deity, and full right to judge.

2:19/ “I know your works...”

- Acts 10:38, “He (Jesus) went about doing good...”
- Titus 3:8, Believers should be “careful to devote themselves to good works...”

2:20/ “You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess...”

Prophets and Prophetesses were common in the early church (Acts). Two meanings:

1. Foretell the future
2. Forthtell the Word of God (special revelation, but it must line up with the Word of God)

2:20 “She is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (Trade Guilds)

- William Hendriksen, “Jezebel pretended to know the real solution to the problem, the way out of the difficulty. She apparently urged thus: in order to conquer Satan, you must know him. You will never be able to conquer sin unless you have become thoroughly acquainted with it by experience. In brief, a Christian should learn to know ‘the deep things of Satan.’ By all means attend the guild-feasts and commit fornication...and still remain a Christian; nay rather, become a better Christian!”
- Tertullian, *On Idolatry*. Believers were saying, “This is my living, and I must live.” Tertullian’s response? “Must you live? There are no ‘musts’ where faith is concerned.”

The church did not follow this Jezebel, BUT tolerated her sin and did not discipline her. Warren Wiersbe, “The Ephesian church on one hand was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers. While the people in Thyatira were growing in their love, yet too tolerant of false doctrine. BOTH extremes must be avoided in the church: unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise—both are hateful to God.”

Church Discipline

Mt. 18:15-17, “¹⁵If your brother sins against you, **1)** go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, **2)** take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, **3)** tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, **4)** let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

What kind of sins qualify for church discipline? (Jonathan Leeman)

Three attributes:

1. Significant: The examples of sin include adultery, false teaching, divisiveness, etc.
2. Outward: The sin is not hiding; it manifests itself.
3. Unrepentant: The sinning brother has been confronted multiple times.

Whatever Happened to Thyatira, the Church of the Tolerant?