

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

Christ's Message to Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

Rev. Freddy Fritz

October 30, 2016

Christ's Message to Thyatira

Scripture

We are currently in a series of messages titled, "Christ's Message to the Seven Churches," that is based on the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

In Revelation 1 the resurrected and glorified Christ revealed himself to his Apostle John, and told him to write letters to seven churches in Asia. Today, we shall examine the fourth of those letters, and learn about Christ's message to his church in Thyatira.

Let's read Christ's message to Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29:

¹⁸ "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

¹⁹ " 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority

from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' ” (Revelation 2:18-29)

Introduction

The Westminster Confession of Faith says the following in Chapter 25, paragraph 5: “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will.”¹ Churches that do not deal with sin in its midst do not practice church discipline, and those churches eventually degenerate “as to become no churches of Christ.”

The Lord Jesus Christ called his church to deal with sin in its midst by practicing church discipline. He commanded his church to do so in Matthew 18:15–17:

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

John MacArthur makes the following insightful comment, “The practice of church discipline that Christ instituted to maintain the holiness of the church has a twofold purpose: to call sinning believers back to righteous behavior, and to purge from the church those who stubbornly cling to their sin. In either case, the purity of the church is maintained.”²

¹ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 139–140.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 94.

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

Christ's message to the seven churches illustrates his commitment to the purity of the church. And we see that yet again in his message to the church in Thyatira. John MacArthur notes,

The letter to this church is the longest of the seven, though addressed to the church in the smallest of the seven cities. It has an important message for the church today: false doctrine and sin are not to be allowed – even under the banner of love, toleration, and unity. There may be much that is commendable in a church. It may appear on the surface to have an effective ministry, be growing numerically, and even have cordial society. Yet immorality and false doctrine, if not confronted, will bring judgment from the Lord of the church.³

Lesson

The analysis of Christ's message to Thyatira as set forth in Revelation 2:18-29 teaches us that a church may be working but corrupt.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Address (2:18a)
2. The Description (2:18b-d)
3. The Commendation (2:19)
4. The Complaint (2:20-21)
5. The Warning (2:22-23)
6. The Command (2:24-25)
7. The Promise (2:26-28)
8. The Appeal (2:29)

I. The Address (2:18a)

First, let's look at the address.

Christ said in verse 18a, **“And to the angel of the church**

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 96.

in Thyatira write. . . .” The letter was addressed to **the angel**, which also means “messenger.” In context of the letters, I take it to mean that each letter was addressed to the pastor of the church.

Thyatira was a city that was a flourishing commercial center. It was noted for its numerous industries, such as wool and dyed goods, linen, garments, leather, pottery, baking, and so on. Each industry was organized into a kind of trade union, each with a patron god. Workers were required to participate in their trade union, and also participate in the regular festivals to their patron god.

The difficulty for Christians in Thyatira came from these labor unions. It was necessary to be a member of a labor union in order to hold a job or run a business. Christians therefore faced tremendous pressure to participate in these pagan festivals or face the possibility of losing their jobs. Apparently, many Christians in **the church in Thyatira** were participating in pagan festivals, and this is what caused Christ to send a message to the church in Thyatira.

II. The Description (2:18b-d)

Second, notice the description.

Christ began his description of himself by saying in verse 18b, **“The words of the Son of God. . . .”** This is the only place in the book of Revelation that Christ is identified as **the Son of God**.

Christ’s preferred title for himself in the Gospels is the “Son of Man.” That title emphasizes his humiliation and his ability to identify with the needs, trials, and difficulties of his church. However, the title **“Son of God”** emphasizes his deity. He wanted the church in Thyatira to know that he was not approaching them as their sympathetic High Priest, but rather as their divine Judge. “Not comfort,” says MacArthur, “but judgment is in store for the church at Thyatira when Christ’s divine power moves against this

adulterous assembly.”⁴

As the divine Judge, Christ, the Son of God, has **“eyes like a flame of fire”** (2:18c). Christ sees everything and nothing can be hidden from him. Furthermore, his **“feet are like burnished bronze”** (2:18d). Christ will trample out corruption from his church.

III. The Commendation (2:19)

Third, observe the commendation.

Christ said in verse 19, **“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.”**

Christ, the all-seeing divine Judge, noticed their **works**, and he commended them for it, in four specific areas.

First, Christ commended them for their love. Christians in the church in Thyatira loved God and loved one another.

Second, Christ commended them for their faith. Christians in the church in Thyatira trusted in God and demonstrated a faithful perseverance in the midst of opposition from non-Christians.

Third, Christ commended them for their service. Christians in the church in Thyatira were active in ministry to one another and to the community. There were no pew warmers; they were all active in ministry in the life of the church.

And fourth, Christ commended them for their patient endurance. Christians in the church in Thyatira persevered in the midst of opposition from non-Christians.

But that was not all. Christ continued to commend the church in Thyatira by saying **that their latter works exceeded the first.** Christ told the church in Ephesus that they were to do the works they did at first (2:5). The church in Ephesus started well and then declined. However, the church in Thyatira was growing

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 96.

and maturing because their **latter works exceeded the first**. They were growing in love and faith and service and patient endurance for the sake of Christ. That was high praise indeed, and for that they were rightly commended!

IV. The Complaint (2:20-21)

Fourth, look at the complaint.

While there was much to commend the church in Thyatira, there was also a great concern about the church. Knowing that even “the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error,” Christ now voiced his complaint. The concern about the church in Thyatira, as John MacArthur said, “was not external persecution, but internal compromise; not vicious wolves from outside the flock, but perverse people from within.”⁵

Christ said in verse 20, **“But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”** Apparently, a large number in the church in Thyatira were led astray by corrupt teaching. The Old Testament **Jezebel** was the infamous wife of King Ahab. It was her wicked influence that made Baal worship widespread in Israel. So, Christ nicknamed the false teacher in Thyatira **“Jezebel”** to show that her influence was as wicked as the Old Testament **Jezebel** in leading people into false worship. John Stott said the following:

[The church in Thyatira] permitted one of its female members to teach outrageous license, and it apparently made no attempt to restrain her. In this too the church of Thyatira was the opposite of the church of Ephesus. Ephesus could bear evil, self-styled apostles, but had no love (Revelation 2:2, 4). Thyatira had

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 99–100.

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

love, but tolerated an evil, self-styled prophetess.⁶

Apparently, this false prophetess was teaching that it was okay for Christians to participate in festivals to pagan gods. These festivals included the **practice sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols**. She may have taught some kind of Greek dualism in which the spirit is good and the body is evil, and what people did with their bodies did not matter. Or, she may have taught that even if Christians sinned, especially in order to preserve one's livelihood, that God's grace would cover their sin. Or perhaps she encouraged Christians to participate in "the deep things of Satan" so that they could witness better to non-Christians. Whatever it was exactly that she was teaching, she led a large group in the church astray.

Christ went on to say in verse 21, **"I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality."**

V. The Warning (2:22-23)

Fifth, notice the warning.

Christ said in verses 22-23, **"Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."**

The prophetess in the church in Thyatira and all those who followed her teaching would be severely punished. One commentator said, "The language in verses 22–23 is clearly figurative, setting forth a punishment befitting the crime. **Those who commit adultery with her** are the same as **her children** – the entire group

⁶ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 68.

of her followers will be brought to an end, and **all the churches will know** by experience what they already know in theory, that the Lord **searches hearts and minds** and repays according to deeds.”⁷

VI. The Command (2:24-25)

Sixth, observe the command.

Christ said in verse 24, **“But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.”** Christ defined true Christians in Thyatira as those **who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan**. Jezebel and those who followed her false teaching claimed to plumb the depths of the things of Satan. But that teaching was exposed as false and heretical by Christ. And so Christ did not seek to **lay on** the true Christians in Thyatira **any other burden**. As John MacArthur said, “Bearing the burden of seeing blatant false teaching and immoral living rampant in their church, and having to resist the incessant solicitation and ridicule from the Jezebel party, was burden enough for them to bear.”⁸

Christ went on to say in verse 25, **“Only hold fast what you have until I come.”** That is, Christians were to stay the course of following hard after Christ. They were to continue in their love and faith and service and patient endurance for the sake of Christ.

VII. The Promise (2:26-28)

Seventh, look at the promise.

Christ said in verses 26-27, **“The one who conquers and**

⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1430.

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 104.

who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.” This promise came from Psalm 2:8-9, where Christ’s future sovereignty over the nations is predicted. “Ask of me,” God says to Christ, “and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Christ will share his sovereign reign over the nations with **the one who conquers**, that is, with all true Christians.

The second promise is given in verse 28 where Christ said, **“And I will give him the morning star.”** In Revelation 22:16 Christ described himself as the morning star, “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” So, Christ is promising to give himself to the one who conquers, to the true Christian.

VIII. The Appeal (2:29)

And eighth, notice the appeal.

Christ said in verse 29, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** Christ appealed to Christians to pay attention to what he said to them through the Spirit.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Christ’s message to Thyatira as set forth in Revelation 2:12-17, we should commit ourselves to grow in holiness.

There are several areas of application from Christ’s message to the church in Thyatira. First, let us grow in works – love and

faith and service and patient endurance. We live in a world that is not dissimilar to the world of the Thyatirans, and Christ commended them for the works. It would be wonderful if Christ said of us also, "Your latter works exceed the first."

Second, let us not tolerate sin. Sin is a corruption that works its wickedness into the fabric of our lives and our church. We must do everything necessary to eradicate sin in our lives. God will judge continued, unrepentant sin in our lives and in our church. Let us commit to being a church that disciplines sin.

Third, let us pay attention to what is being taught. The error of Thyatira is that false teaching was permitted and tolerated so that the church became corrupt. I have often reminded you of Acts 17:11, where we read these words, "Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." The Bereans were checking the teaching of the Apostle Paul! So, if they checked the apostle's teaching, how much more do you not need to check my teaching and every other teacher in this church?

And finally, let us make sure that we are in fact members of Christ's church. If you are not sure of your standing before God, put your trust in Jesus Christ. Believe that he is the Son of God and that he is the divine Judge who will punish all those who do not believe in him and have not repented of their sin. I urge you to do so today. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Christ's message to the church in Thyatira.

The church in Thyatira was a church that was working but corrupt. There were Christians in that church who were committed to love and faith and service and patient endurance, and whose latter works exceeded their former works.

And yet, there were many in that church who had embraced false teaching and who were led astray by it.

O God, help us as individuals and as a church to commit ourselves to grow in holiness, and to discipline false teaching and sin.

If there is anyone here today who is not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, will you grant that person faith in Jesus and repentance of sin?

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!