

Session 4

June 27, 2021

STRONG IN PURITY

Revelation 2:18-29

It's interesting that the longest letter to the seven churches is written to the smallest city. Thyatira was the northernmost of the seven cities of Revelation. Situated in a level plain, the city had no natural fortifications. As the gateway to Pergamos along the road to the southwest, Thyatira had been settled to hold off encroaching armies headed to the capital city of Pergamos. In other words, if an attack came, they were to hold off the enemy army long enough to warn Pergamos of the impending danger. There was a sizable fabric business in the city and their production of purple goods was well known. Unlike the other cities, there were no notable temples there for the major pagan gods, but strangely enough, the city was known for both its labor unions and the wild parties those labor unions threw!

As is often the pattern, the Lord begins with a *commendation*, follows it with a *condemnation*, and ends with a *correction*.

The commendation: spiritual maturity (vv. 18-19). We do not know for sure how or when this church was founded. We do know that one of the city's citizens was Lydia, the seller of purple fabric who came to Christ under Paul's ministry in Philippi (see Acts 16:14). It is certainly possible that Lydia or some of her family started the church in Thyatira or were even active members there when this letter was written. The characteristics listed are certainly commendable! The works mentioned (v. 19) are paired nicely. Their *love* toward God was demonstrated in their *faithfulness* to Him, and their *service* to God and each other was demonstrated by their continued *perseverance* in it. But the emphasis here is in the final statement. That their latest works were greater than their previous indicates obvious progress in their spiritual growth and maturity. For reflection: *What are the signs of spiritual growth and maturity in a congregation? Are works the only indication? How mature do you think your church is? Do you see progress in that area?*

The condemnation: sexual immorality (vv. 20-23). While the temptation is to make these verses metaphorical, the description is graphically literal. Apparently, the church tolerated sexual immorality centered around a particularly manipulative woman. The Lord referred to her as Jezebel, whom we recognize from 1 Kings as the wicked and manipulative wife of Ahab the king. The "Jezebel" of Thyatira was a self-labeled "prophetess," who seduced gullible church members with false teaching as well as sexual licentiousness (v. 20). Her refusal to repent would result in the suffering and death of those she seduced and those associated with her (vv. 21-22). The whole sordid situation was made even worse because the church knew about it...and did nothing to stop it. God's judgment would not only punish the guilty but would send a strong warning to the other churches (v. 23). For reflection: *What happens when an immoral situation simmers within a church body? How do you think it might affect the rest of the churches in your area? Why do you think some churches might be reluctant to "deal" with these types of issues?*

The correction: stay the course (vv. 24-26). Here, God's severe judgment of the guilty is countered by His mercy for the innocent. Those who had no knowledge of the immorality going on in their church and who had not fallen into the woman's sordid snare were freed from

responsibility and therefore freed from His judgment. They were however, challenged to “hold on” to the good they had and to continue their spiritual growth until His return. For reflection: *Is God required to spare the “innocent” from His judgment? If so, under what circumstances? If so, then why do so many innocent people still suffer?*