

Jan 31 10 Church Series 4 Rev. 2:18-29

## THYATIRA- THE CORRUPTED CHURCH

Corruption! We see it all around us. We use that word in lots of ways. We think some of our politicians are corrupt...in fact some have proven to be corrupt. Looking at the ads for some of those wanting to be our governor for the next 4 years you find so much smear stuff that you just wonder how corrupt people are. Corruption! Once again I look to my computer thesaurus for some help. They say to be ‘corrupt’ is to be dishonest, crooked, shady, fraudulent, sleazy.’ Or it can mean ‘alter, damage, distort, harm.’ For our purpose this morning considering the church at Thyatira and our study, those last ones perhaps seem to fit best. So for our study we will understand the corrupt church at Thyatira is one where its beliefs were ‘altered, or damaged, distorted, and lots of harm took place.’ So much harm that this church caught the “blazing eyes of God.”

When we looked at the first 3 churches we were challenged with the Careless church, the Crowned Church, the Compromising Church, and now we turn to the church in Thyatira, the Corrupt Church.

Thyatira, another prominent city where a church was planted amongst the Gentile people who worshipped idols and immorality was acceptable, especially when worshipping other so called gods. It effected not only the

town, but it found its way into the church. God wasn't too happy with the people called by his name for they became corrupt in their thinking and were bad witnesses in the community of what it meant to be Christian. It wasn't just their accepting and worshipping idols but immorality had crept into the church as well. Lots of things became acceptable. He said, "*(Jezebel) by her teaching misleads my servants into sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols....she is unwilling to repent.*" Evil had crept into the church. Some could put their Sunday bonnets on for church but the rest of the week they were like the people who had no faith, who did stuff God's people weren't suppose to do.

This morning may we ask God to teach us his ways. May we hear what God wants us to know as the people of God as we examine the life of this church and our own walk with God whose "*eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.*" Remember this; our God is full of love, grace, hope and forgiveness.

### **READ 2:18-29**

Carole recently had a few x-rays and an MRI to see what was causing the pain she has in her back. Though the doctors couldn't really see anything outwardly, a deeper search through those x-rays and MRI revealed the

problem...a bulging disc pinching on the nerve. The penetrating power of that dye from the MRI found the culprit that is causing her pain.....And some of you thought it was me... Therefore they can now treat it.

Through this morning's Scripture we see God's blazing eyes penetrating right to the heart of the problem in the church in Thyatira. When I was in Seminary in the cafeteria there was a huge picture of Jesus' face hanging on one of the walls and when you were in there you had to go by it. It wasn't the hugeness that got your attention. It was his eyes and a slight smile on his lips. You see no matter where you went in that cafeteria his eyes followed you. It reminded me of a movie where they had a picture and someone was behind it looking through the eye slits watching the people. That painting was amazing. You could walk right by and those eyes seemed to follow you. You couldn't get away from those penetrating eyes and slight smile. It felt like those eyes were like a laser beam cutting right to the heart of the matter. As you sat with friends or studying his eyes just watched you. It was if he was looking and saying, "I know what is deep within. I know the hurts you feel. I know your fears, your doubts. I know all about you. You can't hide things from me. I know what stuff needs to be still dealt with. I can read your heart."

Imagine God's penetrating eyes looking into your soul seeing what is there. What would he find? We should know this, you can fool others with the way you are, but you can't fool God. Are you or we hypocrites like some who aren't Christian want to say the church is? Do we act one way while in church but differently when we are outside? Do we ignore others while seeking our own little clichés? Here is a message we all need to learn. You can hide your ways from others but you can't hide them from.

I think His penetrating eyes searched the church at Thyatira and what he found did not make him very happy.

Let's look at the message to this church. **First there was the good.** The Message translation says, "I see everything you're doing for me. Impressive! The love and the faith, the service and persistence. Yes, very impressive! You get better at it every day." Boy you talk about a great church; this certainly seems to be one of them. Put up a sign outside the door of the church that all people are welcome to the church that God is impressed with. Come and feel the love, the faith, the service. Our doors are open to welcome you. See the church that has put a sparkle in God's eyes. Right! That was before evil invaded.

When you read about these churches we see they all started out in the right direction. I mean this church was really showing God's love to the people, they were doing great deeds. Over the years they weathered storm after storm... not storms caused by weather, but storms caused by problems in the church. You know the kind...bad mouthing the preacher...not getting your own way...not liking the worship style...church is going to long. I don't like what we are doing... They held to the line for a time....but... as we know somewhere along the way things began to change. They began to change what they believed. It wasn't as if it happened overnight. It happened gradually and was very subtle.

It's like the story of the frog that was put in a boiling pot of water. Well, he didn't stay there long. It was too hot so he hopped right out of that water and got away. But there was another frog or two who were put in nice cool water. They were so comfortable they croaked their approval of their new surroundings to each other. They became comfortable and content. However, little by little the heat was turned up and with each increase of the temperature the frogs got used to it until the heat was turned up enough that well, let's just say there were plates ready for them and their buddies. It all happened gradually.

Two great enemies of the church began to be accepted ....idolatry and immorality. While at first they fought them off, along the way they became more of a corrupt church. Remember our definition that we were going to use? They began to become a church that ‘altered’ what they believed. They became a church that ‘distorted’ the word of God, a church that ‘damaged’ what had been preached and taught and perhaps the reputation of some of its members, therefore it was ‘harming’ their Spiritual lives and maybe people stayed away..

**That was the bad.** This shift in what they believed opened the flood gates to accept not only false teachings, but immoral living.

Remember the Ten Commandments? What does God say at the very beginning? If you are going to be my people, and I am going to be your God these are the 10 rules to live by in order to be blessed. You will see why these are important rules to follow as you go into a new land among new people who don’t believe like you, who do not worship like you and who do immoral things like you used to do. And if you read Exodus at the time Moses came down from the mountain you will remember that the Hebrew people had already been indulging in stuff that was displeasing to God. Worshipping a golden calf and having a party that was way beyond God’s ways.

Last year I gave the Ten Commandments Country Style to the Confirmation class. On the wall at the Cross Trails Church in Gainesboro TN is this list of the Ten Commandments Country Style:

*1. Just one God; 2. Put nothin' before God; 3. Watch your mouth; 4. Git yourself to Sunday Meetin'; 5. Honor yer Ma and Pa; 6. No Killin'; 7. No foolin' around with another fellow's gal (or another gal's fellow); 8. Don't take what ain't yers; 9. No tellin tales or gossiping; 10. Don't be hankerin for yer buddy's stuff.* May sound funny to us and we might laugh about the southern thought but these are pretty plain and real simple rules.

So remember “Just one God, and put nothin' before God.” The Thyatira church had forgotten those two along with forgetting “No fooling around and don't take what ain't yours and don't be hankerin for others stuff.”

What idols do you worship? When Paul was starting churches in all those Gentile places the one thing that stood out was they were places where idol worship often happened. He had to help the new converts to throw away the old way and begin to follow the new. There were gods for everything and many had made money off of making figures of the idols and selling them. This was big business in many of these places. And for some of these people this was how they made their living. Being a Christian meant they had to find a new way to make a living.

Friends, what kind of ‘idols’ do you worship? Music Idols? Movie stars? Sports? Your job? Money? Your religion? One of my golf ‘idols’ has always been Arnold Palmer. When I began to play golf at the peak of Arnold’s career I would try and copy his putting style. Today a golf idol has been toppled. Tiger Woods may never be on top of his game, nor capture the hearts of many people. He fell from Grace, and until he turns his life around, that is repents, he will not be the idol he once was. Idols fall because they are human. So let’s remember it is in God we trust, for he is the one who sits on the throne in heaven and will never be toppled.

One of the things God says about that church was that it tolerated evil. Wiersbe says ‘the church was permitting false teachers and preachers to influence the people and lead them into compromise...while the people were growing in their love they were too tolerant of false doctrine.’ He also said, “not only was the church at Thyatira tolerant of evil but it was proud and unwilling to repent.’

You know there are churches like that today. People go to church to hear a feel good sermon because it makes them feel good and that’s okay. But don’t step on my toes! We all want to feel good. But they don’t want to hear sermons that come from God that tell them that some of the stuff they are doing is not right. Ouch! They don’t want to think about repenting, changing their ways. Ouch! Ouch! And Ouch!

Think about the Prodigal son who wanted to join others who had left their families and gone out to have fun and see the world. He wasted his inheritance on all the things others were doing and one day found that all this wining and dining and carousing around, drinking and all the immoral living he did to his heart's content led him to where he was this day....in a pig pen, among the most dreaded animals in the Hebrew tradition. He found himself eating stuff that was thrown to the pigs because he was hungry for when his money ran out, so did his friends. But while in this state God reached down to him and his mind returned to his father's home and he thought he would ask forgiveness for living such a lousy life these past few years and maybe his dad would allow him to have a job working his fields, taking care of the sheep and cattle let him live with the ranch hands. When he got up the courage he made the trip home to find his dad watching as he came up the walkway. When Dad realized it was his long lost son he ran to embrace him and welcome him home. He threw the greatest party of the century because the one who was lost was found, the one who was blind could now see. In other words the wayward son repented. He told his Dad he was sorry and he sought forgiveness.

**Hear now God's Grace** for the church as he says "I am he who searches hearts, and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds...to him who overcomes and does my will to the end I will give authority over the nations."

William Barclay wrote "Here is a warning. A church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy and a dynamo of activity is not necessarily a real Church. It is quite possible for a Church to be crowded, because its people come to it to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed and petted instead of to be challenged and confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation. A Church may be packed with many activities but in the abounding energy the centre may have been lost, and it may be a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation. The state of things in Thyatira is designed to give us something to think about (concerning our own church and our own lives.)"

Four churches down... the Careless church, the Crowned church, the Compromising church and now the Corrupt church. What have we learned about our church and about ourselves?

Once again the challenge is this....he who has ears, let him hear the voice of God through his Spirit.... And remember his call to repentance.....so shall it be.