

## Hold Fast – Revelation 2:18-29

### Read Rev 2:18-29 • Progression

1. The 7 Churches Jesus sent letters to in chs. 2&3, all lie on the main highway that serves this region in Western Asia Minor; the modern nation of Turkey.
2. That highway makes a circuit; an oval covering a couple hundred miles.
3. Ephesus, the first church, was THE major port & where all mail headed for that region would first arrive.
4. Then it would be taken by a postal carrier to each of the cities in the order given here.
5. So it makes sense Jesus dictated these letter in this order.
6. But for many years, careful Bible students have noticed that the message to the 7 churches, a specifically, their **order**, has an eerie resemblance to Church History.
7. Watch this . . .
  - a. The First Church is Ephesus.
    - 1) You remember Jesus **commended** them for being busy, faithful, pure, & doctrinally sound.
    - 2) But they'd left their first love; a passion for Jesus.
    - 3) That well describes the Church right after the Apostles.
    - 4) Persecution hadn't set in yet as the official policy of the Roman Empire.
    - 5) So the Church grew rapidly, but as it worked on getting organized, it lost the fire that fueled its first days.
  - b. Next was **Smyrna**, the persecuted church.
    - 1) Jesus warned them they'd have 10 days of trial.
    - 2) And indeed, there were 10 episodes of **official** persecution before it was lifted by the Emperor Constantine.
  - c. Third was the Church at Pergamos we looked at 2 weeks ago.
    - 1) While Jesus commended their past loyalty, He docks them for allowing false teachers to encourage compromise with the world.
    - 2) That well captures the essence of what happened WITH Constantine's acceptance of the Faith.
    - 3) The Church suddenly found itself not just **free** of persecution, but **favored** by those in power.
    - 4) And in a short time – the official religion of the Empire.
8. The progression is reflected in the **names** of these cities.
  - a. **Ephesus** = **Darling** – & fits Jesus' call for them to return to Him, their first love.
  - b. **Smyrna** comes from the word **myrrh**;
    - 1) A perfuming spice most often used in embalming.
    - 2) Fitting for a church getting hammered by persecution.
    - 3) Precious in the Lord's sight is the death of His saints. [Ps. 116:15]
  - c. Then **Pergamos** – which means "**thru marriage**"
    - 1) The false teachers advocated that very thing.
    - 2) That Christians should "go along to get along" & embrace the culture.
    - 3) Jesus reminds them they're betrothed to Him & cannot compromise with the world.
9. That brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> church – at **Thyatira**.
  - a. This is a church that **did not heed** the warning against compromise.
  - b. And that camel's nose allowed in the tent has turned into the whole flea-infested beast now inside.

V18

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, "These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, & His feet like fine brass:

1. The smallest & least important of the 7 cities gets the longest letter.
2. Thyatira was 40 miles SE of Pergamos along that circular highway that ran thru Western Asia Minor.
3. Because it lay on an important route that saw a lot of traffic, Thyatira did well as a center of manufacturing.
4. Archaeology of the site reveals it was an industrial center.
  - a. It had a lot of bakers, shoe-makers, tanners, weavers, & potters.
  - b. It's chief industry was **brass**. They made a **special kind** of brass there that was light in color & almost looked like silver; it was called **fine**-brass.
  - c. Thyatira was also famous for a purple dye much sought after in the ancient world.
    - 1) In Acts 16 while in Philippi, Paul led a woman named **Lydia** to faith in Christ.

- 2) She was a dye-merchant from Thyatira on a business trip in Philippi.
- 3) It's likely when she returned to her hometown, she carried the Gospel with her and helped to start the church there.
5. It's Thyatira's **economy** that presented the biggest challenge to the Church.
  - a. Remember the guilds we talked about 2 weeks ago in Pergamos
  - b. Archaeology tells us they DOMINATED life in Thyatira.
  - c. They were a kind of ancient labor union that controlled who worked.
    - 1) Each guild had its own patron god or goddess.
    - 2) Their meetings, held a couple times a year, were conducted in a pagan temple where guild members ate a ceremonial meal in which the food had been dedicated to an idol –
    - 3) And they were entertained by ritual prostitutes; both male and female.
  - d. It was this idolatry & immorality Christians couldn't participate in.
  - e. So they quit the guilds & lost their jobs.
6. Think of Thyatira as a **factory** town; an industrial center.  
Because of the guilds, it was also a **Union Town**.
7. Remember how in the earlier letters Jesus was so **personal** with them?
  - a. He **wanted** them to know, **He knows them & where** they live.
  - b. So He mentions specific details of their city & things that had happened in their church.
  - c. He does that here with the Church at Thyatira.
8. One of the major components of ancient industry was **fire**; same as today.
  - a. Fire was used to bake, to boil, melt, & purify.
  - b. As you walked around Thyatira, you saw **a lot** of fire.
9. So, Jesus describes Himself as the One's whose eyes are a flame of fire.
  - a. His vision pierces; He sees all, even what's in our hearts.
  - b. He not only sees WHAT'S done; He knows **WHY**.
  - c. "The dog ate my homework" won't fly when we stand before God's Judgment.
10. But if there was one thing Thyatira was KNOWN for; it was their unique brand of ultra-fine brass.
  - a. So, Jesus tells them, again drawing from the vision John had of Him in His glory in ch. 1, that His feet are made of fine-brass.
  - b. He's taken a stand and He's not budging!

V19

"I know your works, love, service, faith, & your patience; & as for your works, the last are more than the first.

1. Like Ephesus, they busy, faithful & patient.
2. **Unlike** Ephesus, they'd **maintained their love**.
3. What makes Jesus' commendation of the church at Thyatira **stand out** is their **growth** in these things. He says their **recent** works are **more** than before.
  - a. They didn't just get off to a good start, then fizzle – as so many do.
  - b. They'd ramped it up over time so that when Jesus sent this, they were doing more than ever.
4. Their glory days weren't in their past; They were **in** them; **living** them.
5. Christian: If Jesus wrote you a letter, what would He **commend**?
  - a. Would He give kudos for How it **USED** to be?
    - 1) How your love for Him meant pouring over His Word w/journal next to it; jotting down insights He gave.
    - 2) Sharing the Gospel with people you met.
    - 3) Wishing there were MORE services at church you could go to, instead of finding reasons why you CAN'T make it.
  - b. Are the Glory Days of your walk with Jesus in the review mirror or are you IN them now?
  - c. By God's grace THESE **can** be; **ought to be** the BEST days; the most blessed days of your life.
  - d. Not EASIEST- But certainly Best.
  - e. Because as time goes by, our knowledge & experience of Jesus ought to grow, enlarge, expand.
  - f. And **All that** combines to make us more effective in the hand & purposes of God.
6. Though the Church at Thyatira comes in for this wonderful commendation, it doesn't apply to everyone.
  - a. There are those who are part of the visible church, who aren't part of the Body of Christ.

- b. They are members of the Church but not Jesus.

Vs20-23

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

<sup>21</sup> And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. <sup>22</sup> Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

1. Here's the sitch . . .

a. There was a false teacher in the Church at Thyatira who'd been given a prominent role in the work there.

b. She ***promoted*** the very things Jesus ***condemned*** in the Church at Pergamos.

2. Look at v14 –

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

a. The problem in Pergamos was that there were people in the Church who ***held*** these goofy ideas & the pastor & people hadn't confronted them; calling them to ***repent or leave***.

b. Now in Thyatira, there weren't just people who ***held*** these beliefs,

c. One of the leaders TAUGHT them from a position of some authority.

d. We see that in the words of v20 when Jesus says

... you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants

e. That word "allow" means = To give over to; Tolerate; Give permission.

3. There was a woman of influence who'd ***been given*** a position of authority that set policy for the fellowship.

a. She claimed to be a prophetess & that what she taught was the Word & Will of God.

b. The false teaching ***troubling*** Pergamos has become ***policy*** at Thyatira.

5. This is what ALWAYS happens when we ***allow*** moral compromise.

a. The compromis-ING become the compromis-ED

6. Jesus' evaluation of this woman is harsh. He calls her "***Jezebel***."

a. A name dripping with connotations of evil.

b. This would be like calling someone Hitler or Stalin.

7. Jezebel was the daughter of the King of Sidon. She married Israel's King Ahab.

a. She brought with her the worship of Baal, the main Phoenician god.

b. Not content to just ***add*** Baal to the worship of the God of Israel, she set out to wipe out the Faith.

c. Her contest with the Prophet Elijah are some of the most dramatic in all the Bible.

8. Jesus dips back into history and picks a figure this woman in the Church at Thyatira was like.

a. SHE claimed to be a prophetess and a bunch of people believed it.

b. Jesus says, "She may be a prophetess, but NOT MINE! She doesn't speak for Me."

c. "In fact, WHAT she's teaching I reject!"

9. Then in vs. 21-23, Jesus says He's already convicted her & urged her to repent.

a. She's chosen instead to be intransigent.

b. She dug in her heels and doubled-down on her heresy – KNOWING it was wrong!

10. So, Jesus says He's going to bring a season of sickness on her.

a. And all those who bought her lies, & refuse to repent, will perish.

b. But hope is held out for those who come to their senses and turn from their error

<sup>22</sup> Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.

11. In the midst of all this judgment, Jesus' mercy holds open the door to forgiveness:

If people will just repent.

12. The point of correction for the Church was that ***they'd given*** this false teacher a platform.

13. How could the pastor have allowed this?

14. We can only speculate; but it's good to do so, because any one of these speculations is a warning for us to be on the lookout for.

a. It's possible the pastor ***didn't recognize*** what she taught as error.

Remedy: Pastors need to be men of God's Word because they are to ***feed*** God's flock.

b. Maybe he lacked ***courage***.

Remedy: Pastors need spine. They're called to ***protect*** the flock of God.

c. This woman may have been a powerful person of influence w/a ***large following*** & many supporters.

Remedy: Pastors are also called to ***lead*** w/confidence & certainty & not let others rip off those God entrusts to their care.

15. Want to share a little story.

a. Several years ago, a guy planned to move into our area & start a church.

b. He's charismatic & has a lot of devoted supporters.

c. But he also has a well-earned rep as a womanizer.

d. He left where he was because of ***scandal*** & want to move here to get away from it.

e. But there was no repentance – only denial.

f. I was asked to join a small group of local pastors to evaluate all the evidence & decide what to do.

g. We met w/him & he refused to repent, though it was obvious he was a serial adulterer.

h. So we informed him if he started a church, we'd make a public statement of our opposition.

i. He decided to pull the plug on his plans.

j. But, & here's the hard part > Several of his local fan-club went ballistic!

1) I mean; they were maaaaad ! Just furious.

2) They called me names & accused me of some really nasty stuff.

k. They knew what he'd done, but didn't care because they liked him & the goofy things he taught.

l. His teaching gave them permission to do what ***they*** wanted to do—all in the Name of God.

16. Who doesn't want to be liked? I do.

a. But I'm not here to build a fan-club.

b. I have a holy assignment as a pastor:

To Lead, Feed, & Protect this Flock God's assigned to me & me to.

c. I pray every day for the Knowledge, Wisdom, Courage & Skill to do that.

17. You need to know there will be times when I have to warn you about some Jezebel who's written a book, has a TV or radio program, is holding mass rallies with thousands of enthusiastic supporters claiming she's the greatest thing since Al Gore invented the interwebs.

18. And that may, just might, tick some of you off because you like her & realize neither the root nor result of the error she's spewing.

19. Please remember this moment & Jesus' message to the Church at Thyatira.

20. I ache to see you safely through the Gate of Heaven.

21. Not cast into great tribulation, nor slain by the error of heresy.

Vs24-25

"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

1. That phrase, "depths of satan" tips us off to what this false prophetess taught.

2. For time's sake, we need to cover this quickly . . .

a. This was something a pseudo-Christian cult called the ***Gnostics*** said.

b. In a nutshell – they said the body was doomed to sin & could not be holy.

c. The spirit, on the other hand, was holy & could not be stained by sin.

d. So; they concluded: God is only concerned about the spirit, so go ahead & do whatever you wanted with your body.

1) Eat idol-dedicated meat. Engage in whatever sex you want.

2) In fact: Immerse your BODY in sin, plunge it into the depths of satan,

3) So in the midst of it, you can realize how your spiritual is still holy.

3. Hey: It's all about God's glory, right?

a. Well, we glorify God because He gives us grace.

- b. And where sin abounds, grace super-abounds.
- c. So when we sin more, God gets more glory.
- d. In Rom. 3, Paul says false teachers actually accused him of teaching this.
- 4. Here Jesus dispatches all such silliness by commending those who reject it.
- 5. You & I are called to holiness as we follow Jesus.
- 6. The message to Pergamos is repeated and emphasized here.
- 7. Don't **start** down the path of moral compromise.
  - a. Remember: The compromising become the compromised & corrupt.
  - b. Don't ask what you can do & still be a Christian; still make it to heaven.
  - c. Chose instead to walk faithfully with Jesus and be holy.
  - d. Steer clear of sin; don't play chicken with it.

<sup>25</sup> But hold fast what you have till I come.

8. Hold on to Jesus!

Vs26-28

<sup>26</sup> And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—<sup>27</sup> *'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'*—as I also have received from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star.

- 1. Jezebel's message had traction in Thyatira because of the guilds that controlled life there.
- 2. You gotta' go along to get along.
- 3. The faithful had chosen **not** to go along with the world & suffered for it.
- 4. Jesus calls them to hold fast to Him, because a great reversal is coming.
- 5. Those who've been despised & persecuted will be greatly honored & abundantly rewarded.
- 6. The Meek shall inherit the Earth. / Those who mourn will be comforted.
- 7. Those who've suffered at the hands of an unjust system will rule in righteousness.
- 8. Jesus will give the morning star to those who hold on to Him.
  - a. Take all the gems & jewels in all the crowns & scepters; all the brooches, rings & necklaces worn by kings & queens, emperors & empresses thru all history.
  - b. They are worthless baubles compared to the treasure Jesus has for us = Himself.
  - c. He **IS** the Morning Star [Rev. 22:16]

V29

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Progression Reprise . . .

- 1. We began by noting the interesting similarity between the churches of Revelation and Church History.
- 2. Ephesus looks like the Early Church from just after the Apostles until persecution.
- 3. Smyrna well captures the persecuted church, & Pergamos the church that was tempted to buddy up to the World when Constantine lifted persecution.
- 4. Thyatira represents the next era of Church History; the **Holy Roman Empire**.
  - a. This was a time when the compromising**ing** church of Constantine's time became the Compromised**ed** & Corrupt church of the Middle Ages.
  - b. Idolatry & Immorality was rampant.
  - c. The name Thyatira means, "Ongoing Sacrifice" – & points to the **Mass**, the center of the Medieval Church's theology and practice.
- 5. Now, please don't jump to the conclusion I'm piling on the Roman Catholic Church.
- 6. We're just considering the parallels between these letters and history.
- 7. If Thyatira applies to the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, then the next church, Sardis, is the Protestant Church of the Reformation. Wait till we take a look at that next week. It's not what we might expect.