

Revelation 2: 24-29; "Hold fast What You Have till I Come", Sermon # 21 in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 25th, 2006, in the Afternoon Worship Service, and again on March 4th, 2012.

We find here in the church of Thyatira a church which was under siege from Satan and in imminent danger of the chastising judgments of our Lord Himself. The state of any church at any point in her history is under the constant scrutiny and evaluation of our Lord. He is the great shepherd of the sheep, the One who is presently ruling in righteousness, the One who is coming again to judge the world. "The Lord will judge his people," it says in Hebrews 10: 30. This judging of them will not only be his evaluation of them at the last day when He returns to judge the world, but there is an on-going evaluation of them while they are alive and here upon the earth in order that He might help them on to a closer walk with Him. At any given time or point, He is able to discern and to distinguish whether that church is holding fast the truth of His word or not. He is able to see clearly and piercingly and penetratingly into the hearts and the minds of each person in the church and will give to each one according to their works it says in verse 23 of our text. The last time that I preached to you from this section we looked at the subject of time in relation to our obedience. We saw that the Lord Jesus evaluates the progress of our obedience over time and He evaluates our progress in repentance over time. Time is of the essence, in the holy mind of the Lord Jesus. And He wants us to understand this truth as well. We do not think of the passing of time in the way that we should. Sometimes we think that if we are "in Christ", if we have believed in Him for salvation, that it is enough and so we sort of drift through our Christian lives without taking the kind of holy initiative that we should in regard to repentance and obedience. This is something that the Lord Jesus confronts in each believer over time so that we will become more like Him, more conformed to His blessed image. He looks closely and carefully at our hearts and minds and the things that we do, to see if we are making progress in righteousness, progress in loving Him and others, progress in faith and service and patient endurance when things do not go the way that we would want them to. He gives us time to see these good things develop and whether we will apply ourselves diligently to "add to our faith" in this way that he commands. Well, the church of Thyatira had one side of her progressive sanctification right. The Lord Jesus saw that many in the church had these good virtuous qualities in their lives that they had been developing and increasing over time, and this was pleasing to Him. He says, "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience." These are the main things that the Lord looks for to develop in any true Christian's life. If those are not developing and increasing in us as the Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 1: 9,

then we are "shortsighted even to blindness, and we have forgotten that we were cleansed from our old sins."

But the Lord Jesus also saw something that He did not like, and it related to what the pastors of the church and the church itself allowed. They had come to tolerate the teaching and false doctrine of a woman in their midst whose name is mentioned by the Lord Jesus in a symbolic way, "that woman Jezebel." This was the name of the infamous woman who lived back in the Old Testament times who was the wife of the wicked king of Israel Ahab. She urged and pleaded and seduced her husband, and the whole nation spiritually, to worship the false god Baal and the goddess Asherah. In this kind of false worship there was much compromise with immorality and things that were sacrificed and eaten at their feasts that were being offered to idols or demons.(1 Corinthians 9: 21) So in a similar manner, it is apparent that this woman in the church of Thyatira who claimed to be a prophetess was actually "teaching and seducing" the servants of Christ to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. She claimed to be a prophetess, but it was her false teaching that was leading some in the church of Thyatira to do these sinful things. The way that she persuaded people was to tell them that the way to be strong as a Christian was to be able to experience and know what the deep things of Satan were, so that in having experienced it they would be qualified to be able to say what was really bad and what was really good.

Listen to Lenski on this verse. "The adherents of this woman spoke of the 'deep things of Satan' and said that one must know them, realize what they are by experience and experiment." "This justified their fornication, adultery, and eating at idol feasts." They looked down upon the innocent Christians who refused to experiment and refrained from these things." "These superior heretics claimed that they killed the flesh by indulging the flesh, claimed to plunge into filth to prove that it could not harm them, that innocent Christians were only weak and afraid when they refuse to do the same." (end of quote) This was the sinful and erroneous teaching that was coming from the lips of this woman. This is why the Lord Jesus calls her "that woman Jezebel." She fit the description. And the Lord saw the church in great danger from her teaching. This is our subject this afternoon. It is of extreme importance to the Lord Jesus that all true Christians would not compromise the truth of the gospel or their pursuit of holiness, but hold them fast until He come, and that they evidence their love for their Savior by keeping His works. What does it mean for the true Christian to hold fast what he has until Christ comes? I think that it means that he or she will faithfully seek to do the following things.

1st- He will faithfully seek to avoid delving into the deep things of Satan.

There is something in the heart and mind of some Christians that leads them to be too curious about things that not good for their soul. Sometimes it is a false

view of freedom. And sometimes it is because they do not realize where temptation will lead them. Let's think of sexual immorality. A true Christian may think, "I am free in Christ, all things are lawful to me, so I believe that I have the liberty to watch and view things of sex and violence and the occult on television and in the movies." But they may not want to admit that they are walking in Satan's ground and that what they are doing excites the motions of sin within their soul. "It is only a movie and I am strong enough in Christ to see these things." They forget the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6: 12 that come after his saying that "all things are lawful." He says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable or helpful." "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them." "Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Sometimes we forget what it says further on in 1 Corinthians 6, in verse 17 and following. "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." You are taking the Lord with you into every place that your mind, your eyes, and ears go. You are one spirit with Him. You must think to yourself, "My Lord is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." "He will not look upon it so why should I look upon it?" "Why should I engage in thoughts and acts of uncleanness? Verse 18 says, "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" "But you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are Gods." How can I do this if I have often in the past thought excitedly about gratifying this sin in some secret way? My mind must be renewed. I must come to realize that it is not good to delve into the deep things of Satan.

To hold fast to the truth of the gospel and to pursue holiness means that you cannot experiment with error and evil in order to see if grace is stronger. To hold fast the truth means that you cannot serve 2 masters, you cannot love the world and Jesus too, and that it should be your constant study to be holy in all your behavior. To be holy means that you are separating yourself from sin, in a righteous way; having righteous attitudes towards people around you. I do not mean that you should try to be "holier than thou"; comparing yourself with other people to see if you are holier than other people. I mean that you would pursue holiness in terms of the purity of your own mind and heart so that you approve of the things that are excellent and not the things that will cater to your pride or your selfish sensual nature. You will want to pursue after the right things. It will begin with what you pray for and it will continue with what you fill your mind with on a regular basis, what you turn your attention to. Turn with me to Philippians 1: 8-11. "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are

excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." What a person loves he will pursue in his mind and heart. And he will learn to pray in relation to these things that are running through his mind and heart. And he will pray for others around him in the church so that they too would have good discernment and approve the things that are excellent so that all together as a church we would be sincere and without offense because we are being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.

Then turn over with me to Philippians 4: 8 with me. Here we find out what things we should pursue in our heart and mind and thought life in our communion with God and with each other. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things." And we can be a good example to others in this even as Paul was to those at Philippi. He says in verse 9, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." You see how God so abundantly blesses the soul that does not delve into the deep things of Satan.

2ndly- To hold fast the truth means that the true Christian will seek to overcome by keeping Christ's words and works. (Verses 25 and 26)

We find this in verses 25 and 26 where it says, "But hold fast what you have till I come." "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." All the works that we have been commanded to do are given to us in Christ's word; they are defined for us there. They are given to us in an overview form in verse 19 which we studied last week; love, service faith, and patience". To be able to "keep Christ's works until the end," we have to hold fast to his Word by living in accordance with what Christ has commanded both in regard to doctrine and our practice of that doctrine. We cannot let it go; we cannot let it be taken from us. To "hold fast Christ's works" of faith and love we must do what Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 1: 13. "Hold fast the pattern of sound words" which you have heard from the Lord Jesus and his apostles "in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus". The ability to be a person of faith and love comes from Christ Himself and holding sweet communion with Him in your soul, meditating upon the Scriptures, letting them speak to you, and gaining your spiritual strength and life from thinking and praying upon the doctrines and truths which are contained in them. Let me ask you whether you are doing this? Do you read the Scriptures to "hold fast their words and doctrines?" Psalm 119 is particularly helpful in this regard. "Verse 9 - "How can a young man cleanse his way?" "By taking heed to Your word." "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh let me not wander from Your commandments!" "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." "Blessed are You, O Lord!" "With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth." "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as

much as in all riches.” “I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.” “I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.” How precious this is to both God and ourselves! The Christian cleanses his way by seeking God with his whole heart. He asks that God would not let him wander from His commandments. He is rejoicing in what He finds in the Scriptures and he meditates upon them and contemplates them in relation to his own ways. He is determined to delight himself in them, resolves by grace not to forget them. This is his holding the truth of God fast. To hold truth fast in keeping Christ's works we must lovingly but decidedly do what it says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 14-23. "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all." "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." "Do not quench the Spirit." "Do not despise prophecies." "Test all things; hold fast what is good." "Abstain from every form of evil." This is what it means to hold fast and to keep Christ's works.

And then 3rdly and finally- To hold fast means that the true Christian will be keeping in his mind's eye the rewards which Christ will give him.

(Verses 27-29)

The person who overcomes by living godly in Christ Jesus in this way of holiness holds fast in his mind the reward of what Christ will give him if he faithful. It will be to rule and reign with him in a coming day. The Lord says I will give to the one who overcomes, "power over the nations- He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels- as I also received from my Father." This is a direct reference to Psalm 2 and what the Father promises to the Lord Jesus for His faithfulness. Because the Lord had been faithful in living a righteous life and faithful in laying down His life for sinners like you and I, God the Father raised Him from the dead and He says in verse 7, "I will declare the decree; the Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'" "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession." "You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." He is saying here that the one who is faithful to hold fast what they have, will judge the world with Him when He returns. "Hold fast what you have until I come." Christ will fully reward the faithful believer when He comes again in His glory. When He does, the faithful believer shall rule and reign with Him. 1 Corinthians 6: 2 says, "Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world?" And verse 3 says, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" What an amazing thing to look forward to. If we hold fast we will be at Christ's right hand in that day and all the sinners who opposed the Person and kingdom of Christ will be shattered in their power and ability to do anything evil at all.

And then we find a further reward that should be kept in the mind's eye of the believer holding fast the gospel and pursuing holiness. Christ says that He will give him the "bright and morning star." The morning star is the bright star that comes out before the dawn breaks and shows us that the day is coming and its dawning is near. The darkness of the night is over and gone; a new day is coming. Christ comes to the faithful believer who is holding fast what he has been given in truth and improved upon by grace and says, "I will give you the bright and morning star." I will give you sure and certain hope of a better day that is coming, of New Heavens and New Earth in which dwells righteousness. The Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 1: 19 that we have the prophetic word confirmed in Christ Himself and in the Scriptures themselves and that we would "do well to heed it as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts." Christ Himself will give the believer this kind of hope in the midst of his difficulties in attempting to hold fast to the truth. He says in Revelation 22: 16 that He is the "root and the offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." He will reward us with Himself, more and more of his grace and mercy and peace in this life, and the reality of being raised from the dead in power and glory to be with Him forevermore and be rewarded according to what we have done and endured for His Name's sake. What a wonderful prospect for every faithful believer.