

The Seven Churches of Revelation
Revelation 2:18-29
"Thyatira: The Adulterous Church"

"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self control."
Proverbs 25:28

Introduction

Thyatira was an inland city located just forty miles east of Pergamum. It was built by the Greeks shortly after the time of Alexander The Great. The city had no natural defenses for it was located on a valley road, thereby leaving it exposed from every side. Thyatira had been intended to serve as a barrier of defense between those who would try to invade the city of Pergamum from the east. Because of its precarious placement on flat open ground, the city had been destroyed and rebuilt several times before The Apostle John had penned the Book of Revelation. During the days of The Roman Empire, however, it had been afforded the luxury of peace for a period of time. This caused the citizenry of Thyatira to be deeply devoted to Rome, and by extension the practice of Caesar worship was similar to that in Smyrna and Pergamum.

As to its pagan influences, an elaborate temple dedicated to the worship of Apollo had been constructed in Thyatira. Apollo, in Greek mythology, was the son of Zeus, who was considered the "most high god" by the Greeks. It is most likely for this reason that Christ introduces Himself to the Thyatirans as "The Son of God" (**vs.18**). This is the only time this title for Jesus is used in the Book of Revelation. To the Church at Smyrna, he was "The Son of Man", because He wished to identify with the suffering of the church. To Thyatira He comes as "The Son of God", because the adulterous church there was ripe for God's judgment. As we stated last week, Jesus always knows exactly what His church needs for He is Lord of the Church.

He also introduces Himself to Thyatira as The One having eyes of flame and feet of burnished bronze (**vs.18**). The eyes of Christ, as previously discussed, can pierce through all pretenses and look directly upon the heart of The Church. Nothing can be hidden from those eyes. Bronze in the Bible is always a reference of judgment. Jesus had seen the evil that had intruded upon His church there, and he was warning them that He would soon be coming to trample it out as one would trample grapes in a winepress (**Isaiah 63:3; Rev. 14:19-20**). This letter must have sent a chill down the spine of the pastor of Thyatira. Jesus had given them a warning to repent or face the soon coming consequence, for the time had come for "judgement to begin at the house of God" (**1 Peter 4:17**).

There were some good things going on at The Church of Tyatira, but what they had allowed to enter there in the name of tolerance and love would neither be tolerated, nor loved, by The Son of God. Jesus died to FREE us from sin, not so we could embrace it! Thyatira had lost sight of the fact that we must worship God in Spirit and in Truth. We live in a world where there are those who would constantly compromise "truth". This practice in our culture today even has a catchy title. It's called "spin". Politicians and the media can take the true facts of any situation and by the time it has been "spinned" its meaning has been completely changed. Those who have mastered this art today are actually quite proud of their ability to do so. But, sadly, the reality is when truth is distorted it is no longer truth. Truth is NOT an abstract thing. Truth is ABSOLUTE. Jesus IS the TRUTH. His teachings cannot be "spinned" into something that they are not. Oh, not that many false prophets haven't tried mind you, but when His judgement comes, the "spin" will stop. Only TRUTH will remain. Thyatira had a false teacher in their midst who was desperately trying to put her own spin on God's Truth. She even called herself a "prophetess", but she was about to have a really bad day. Jesus had seen enough with those eyes of flame. Her fountain of lies was about to be cut off at the source. Jesus was coming to JUDGE His candlestick in Thyatira. He COMMENDED their AGAPE LOVE. He CONDEMNED their ADULTEROUS LEADER, and He COMMANDED their ABIDING LOYALTY.

Commended Their Agape Love

Christ began His assessment of the church by saying, "I know your deeds, your love (Agape) and faith, your service and perseverance and that you are now doing more than you did at first" (**vs. 19**). There were some very positive things going on at the church in Thyatira. They had held on to their faith through trying times. They had Agape Love, the kind of love that can only come from God. They loved Christ, and they loved one another. This is a love that is commendable, and Christ did so. Unfortunately, when love becomes an excuse not to take a stand, it must be correctly balanced with truth. It is striking to note, that the problem at Thyatira was the exact opposite of that at Ephesus. At Ephesus, they were strictly religious and devoid of love, while Thyatira, in the name of love, had neglected sound doctrine. The church at Ephesus could spot a false teacher a mile away (**vs. 2:2**), but at Thyatira, they welcomed them with open arms! BOTH of these approaches to Christianity are wrong! We cannot get so wrapped up in truth that we do not love, and likewise, we cannot get so wrapped up in love that we no longer love truth! We always must "speak the TRUTH, IN LOVE" (**Ephesians 4:15**)! I've heard a great many people say that it is not possible to hate the sin but love the sinner, but I say to them, OF COURSE IT IS! We need to stop spinning the truth. I have two grown children that I would lay down my life for any day of the week. They were not perfect, and neither am I, for that matter. There were times that they did things that absolutely infuriated me, but I have never once stopped loving them. So, how did I reconcile the things they did that I hated with my undying love for them? When I saw them doing something wrong, I CORRECTED THEM! What a novel approach.

This is exactly the same approach that Christ requires us to use in the church. And, quite frankly, our country could use a little of it too, don't you agree? We live in a world where no one believes ANYONE should offer them correction. "Love" these days supposedly means to tolerate everything, no matter how evil. I absolutely despise those stupid "COEXIST" bumperstickers that flaming liberals plaster on their hybrid cars. You know the ones I'm talking about, the ones that have all the worlds religious symbols used in making the letters of the word "coexist". The problem with that garbage is that according to THE Son Of God, HE is the only way to Heaven (**John 14:6**). As someone who has been given the responsibility of spreading this absolute truth, this message of the Gospel, I am not supposed to just sit around a campfire singing songs about tolerance and peace. I am rather, REQUIRED to warn those in error of the judgement that is to come. If I truly believe that there is only one way to God, then I cannot possibly LOVE someone without warning them about this truth! Love is never an excuse for withholding TRUTH. The people at Thyatira were becoming so afraid that they would be perceived as unloving, that they not only tolerated false doctrine, they actually allowed it to be taught IN THEIR CHURCH!! And Christ was not happy about that... AT ALL.

Condemned Their Adulterous Leader

Jesus called her "Jezebel". This was most definitely NOT the false teachers name, who had been granted access to the hearts and minds of those who attended the church at Thyatira. But, she did have much in common with the infamous wife of king Ahab in **1 Kings 18**. Jezebel was a princess of Sidon who introduced Baal worship to the nation of Israel, when she married King Ahab. She had ordered the systematic slaughter of the Prophets of The LORD (**1 Kings 18:4**), and God had punished the nation by sending no rain for their crops for nearly three years (**1 Kings 17:1; 18:1**). Ultimately, this wickedness introduced by Jezebel came to a showdown upon Mount Carmel, between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. God answered by sending fire upon his altar to consume the sacrifice offered by Elijah. It is one of the most dramatic stories in all of scripture (**1 Kings 18:16-46**). Even after God had proven in the sight of the people that He was truly GOD and Baal was nothing, Jezebel refused to repent. Instead, she vowed to kill Elijah! God sent judgement upon the house of Ahab, and the old king was killed in battle (**1 Kings 22:29-37**), and Jezebel was later thrown from palace wall and devoured by dogs (**2 Kings 9:30-37**). God takes idolatry among His people very seriously indeed.

Many have speculated as to the identity of the "Jezebel" at Thyatira. Some have suggested that for a woman to have been given such a platform of leadership within the church, she would have most definitely been the pastor's wife. I suppose that this is possible, for I have seen in my time many pastors whose ministry has either been hindered or blessed by the activity of his wife. There are not many better assets for a church than a Godly pastor's wife and conversely not many things can hinder a church more

than an ungodly one! The jezebel at Thyatira may well indeed have been married to the pastor there, this would explain why she was given such authority. However, this is only speculation. We know not the reason she was there, we only know what she did as a result. This false teacher who had given herself the title of “prophetess” was enticing the church to commit wickedness including sexual immorality. She was teaching a practice that the people were calling “Satan’s deep secrets” (**vs. 24**), and Christ was about to put a stop to it.

More than likely, the false doctrine being taught in Thyatira was none other than gnosticism (which comes from the Greek word “to know”). Gnostics taught that human beings were duality in nature, with their flesh (body) being of the world and the spirit being from above. The Gnostics believed that a person should be encouraged, even obligated, to engage in all of the pornographic lewdness that this world could offer, because the flesh is completely separate from the spirit. They believed that to engage in all the immoral delights that Satan could offer would actually enhance their spiritual awareness of true goodness and grace. It would be akin to an alcoholic saying that he must experience utter drunkenness in order to fully appreciate sobriety! In short, it gave people a license to sin with impunity all the while claiming that it was improving their spirituality. This ridiculous false teaching would have found itself quite palatable to those in Thyatira’s lucrative textile industry. For to take part in the city’s most profitable trade of making scarlet dyed wool cloth one needed to be a member of the trade guilds.

Lydia, who was one of the founding members of the church at Thyatira (**Acts 16:14**), was a merchant who sold this luxurious cloth made in Thyatira. She had most likely had an encounter with the Apostle Paul in Philippi when she came there to sell her wares. The “dye guild” in Thyatira was strong, and since so much of the cities economy was tied to it, many there would want to work in the industry that produced the cloth. As we have discussed prior, to join a guild meant to pledge allegiance to the Greek god that was the “patron” of the guild. To do so, one would be forced to take part in the sexually immoral rites that accompanied the worship of such gods. A Gnostic could easily excuse this immoral practice by saying it was merely a way to help appreciate the purity of the spirit. The devil knows just what buttons to push to get the people to come over to his way of thinking, does he not? The Jezebel of Thyatira had found for herself a captive audience within the church. She gave the weaker believers an excuse to compromise their holiness. This adulterous woman was the perfect tool for Satan to use to destroy Christ’s church. She had to be stopped.

The scripture always likens idolatry with adultery. To engage in idol worship is to “cheat” on God with your affections. This is why Jesus threatens to throw this Jezebel into a bed of suffering. To Him, she was nothing more than a prostitute writhing upon her bed of sexual immorality. He would throw her into another bed for her wickedness. This new bed would be her grave! She had been warned and had refused to repent (**vs. 21**). Perhaps the Apostle John himself had sent her a warning to repent of her immoral deeds, but she had not heeded, and now it was too late. She had committed sin unto death (**1 John 5:16**). Jesus warns her followers within the church that they too will suffer tremendous persecution, if they do not repent. Sadly, Jezebel’s time was up, but for them there would be one final appeal for repentance and restoration. And if their time of tribulation did not produced the desired repentance, then they, like her, would also perish (**vs. 23**). If the Church will not be cleansed of its sin by repentance, then God will cleanse it in the fires of judgement. Choose repentance, when The Spirit brings conviction upon your life. For it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of The Living God (**Hebrews 10:31**). We must never allow our love for people to hinder us from preaching the truth about His holiness, for the consequences are catastrophic.

Commanded Their Abiding Loyalty

Ordinarily, when falsehood and wickedness are allowed to creep into the church, the church leaders are required to enact discipline within the body (**Matthew 8:15-17**), but apparently, this Jezebel had become so entrenched within the powers-that-be within the church, that Christ does not compel them to cast her out. He merely tells those who have not partaken in her sinful teachings of “Satan’s deep secrets” to remain faithful. Jesus Himself promises to handle the church discipline portion of the problem. This suggests that the leadership of the church was corrupt, which comes as no great surprise, or this woman would not have arisen to such prominence. Christ was about to do some “house cleaning” and

He encouraged the righteous remnant to remain faithful, and they would one day rule with Him (**vs. 26-27**).

I actually find some comfort in those verses. Allow me to explain. Have you ever been surrounded by such filth that you didn't really know how to handle it? I truly believe that those who were trying to live a holy life at Thyatira must have felt powerless to remedy the problem. I love that Jesus tells them not to worry and that He will take care of it. Although they had been made to feel powerless, He promised to one day make them rulers! Some things in this wicked world can only be fixed by prayer. I try to preach the truth of God's Word every single week, and so do a lot of other disciple makers out there. But sadly, from where I sit, the world continues to get progressively more wicked with every passing day. Sometimes, I feel absolutely powerless. But, then I remember God's promises. He WILL come back someday and clean up this mess. When that day comes, we, like the Church at Thyatira, will rule and have The Morning Star, which is none other than Christ The Lord, to illuminate every inch of this fallen world. The Bible tells us that when he returns, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that HE IS LORD (**Philippians 2:10**)! And not only that, but that the earth will be covered with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea (**Isaiah 11:9; Habakuk 2:14**). Don't you just LOVE those verses? Imagine a day when false teaching and sexual immorality will not be able to stand in the light of The Morning Star! Only His Truth will remain.

Some days, I feel just as helpless as those Believers in Thyatira must have felt as they watched wickedness celebrated in their midst. How distressed they must have been living there each and every day, not only despised by the world, but feeling out of place even in their own church. But Jesus heard their prayers. He commanded them to abide in their loyalty, and that He would take care of the rest. Sometimes, all you can do is hang on, but never fear, help is on the way. **"I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help. My help comes from The LORD, maker of heaven and earth."** (**Psalms 121:1-2**).

Even so, Come LORD Jesus! (**Revelation 22:20**)!!!

And ALL of GOD'S people said... TRUTH!!!