

4 – THYATIRA: “The Corrupt Church”

“¹⁸ And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” -- Revelation 2:18-29 (ESV)



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If the church of Pergamum is an example of the compromising church that is taking the first kiss toward sin ... then the church of Thyatira is the church that has completely gone to bed with idolatry and is suffering the life-threatening side effects of immorality.

The letter to Thyatira is the longest letter written by Jesus to any of the seven churches ... and was necessary to correct, what could very well be the most corrupt of all the churches!

- ***"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)***

A few things about Thyatira are very important. First, it was the headquarters for many ancient guilds: the potters, tanners, weavers, robe makers and dyers guilds. It was actually the center of the dyeing industry (no pun intended). **Remember Lydia, the seller of purple, in Philippi?** She became Paul's first convert in Europe. Acts 16:14 tells us that Lydia was from Thyatira ... Apollo, the sun god, was primarily worshiped here.

It might have sounded pretty significant, but actually, Thyatira was the smallest and most unimportant city Jesus spoke to. It is interesting that this is seemingly the most insignificant church of all the seven churches, but Jesus had the most to say to them. How does Jesus address them? Look at the characteristic of Christ in verse 18.

CHARACTERISTIC OF CHRIST

"These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass."

This is not the introduction the Thyatirans were hoping for. Jesus says He is the SON OF GOD, giving His authoritative place in the Trinity. Then, He refers to His eyes, which are like blazing fire, seeing all things we think are unseen. His feet are like burnished bronze, like a refining fire melting brass. **When Jesus says there is fire in His eyes ... He isn't talking about a romantic stare with eyes of deep passion. It means eyes that see through the pretenses, eyes of judgment!**

Our culture doesn't particularly like the idea of someone looking at us with judgment ... but Jesus' penetrating gaze is ultimately to heal, not condemn. He also has feet of brass or bronze. Bronze is always Biblically symbolic of judgment. It's like when your parents used to call you by your first, middle and last name; you don't know what is coming, but whatever it is, it's gonna be bad! So why is Jesus coming to judge this church? Look at the commendation of Jesus in verse 19.

COMMENDATION

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

- 1) **Works:** This fellowship had hard workers that were known for their actions, not just their beliefs.
- 2) **Love:** The church at Thyatira, in contrast to Ephesus, had love for many people. In fact, they are the only church that Jesus commended for having love. But this could prove to be a downfall.
- 3) **Faith:** Their deeds and love were motivated by their faith in Christ.
- 4) **Service:** This church was heavily involved in ministry and in serving others.
- 5) **Patience:** They had patient endurance/steadfastness.
- 6) **Doing More:** Their latter works exceeded the first. That means they were growing in their faith, not just resting in something God did for them in the past.

I look at the church today ... and I wonder if the same commendation could be said of us: We have great deeds, love, faith, service, persevere. We are doing more now than ever. Someone may read Jesus' words up until this point and stop there and think ... "Ok, wow, that church should get a straight A! But sadly, there is a criticism, and it is a scathing rebuke by Jesus ... that basically flunks this church!

CRITICISM

"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 ..."

Thyatira was strong in love but weak in doctrine. They weren't willing to disagree with anyone about doctrinal heresies. It has said: "It's common for churches to be polarized in one of these two extremes. Either they will have full heads and empty hearts, or full hearts and empty minds. Either polarization is deadly.

God demands both love and sound doctrine. Example: Table salt is a compound, a mixture of two elements: sodium and chloride. Both of these elements are poisonous by themselves. Sodium, an alkali metal, can be explosive if added to water, and chlorine is by itself a highly poisonous gas. If you ingest either sodium or chloride alone, you will die. But if you put them together properly, they become sodium chloride: common table salt. So too, doctrine and love must be found together. One without the other can lead to a dangerous imbalance. But combined they provide flavor and health to the body of Christ.

Jesus said the church in Thyatira TOLERATED Jezebel. Now obviously no one would name their daughter Jezebel. No, Jezebel here is a symbolic name. She represents the despicable woman from 1 Kings. If you remember, king Ahab was basically the most evil and dirty and demonic king that ever reigned in Israel, and he married this evil woman Jezebel.

And as soon as he married her ... Ahab began to serve and worship Baal, the false god that was constantly a thorn to Israel. Jezebel led people to commit sexual immorality and to offer their food to idols. And Ahab, toward the end of his life, developed a sudden thread of a conscience, after he heard what God had to say. You can read about it in 1 Kings 21. But as long as he was with Jezebel, he was tempted to sin gravely against the Lord.

Jesus says He is graciously giving her time to repent--like He gives all of us--like Ahab had time and actually DID repent. **Yet this Jezebel in Thyatira didn't change her ways, so He would cast her onto a sickbed.** Notice that He says that people who commit adultery with her will also face consequences, in this case --- dead children --- meaning more consequences of their sin. Jesus said that if they did not repent, they would eventually die.

Though Thyatira would get an A+ on a lot of areas, there was one area that made them flunk the exam. **In a word, the church was ... tolerant!**

First, there is:

1. A DESIRE TO FIT IN WITH THE CULTURE
2. A FAILURE TO RIGHTLY DEFINE SIN
3. FORSAKING ABSOLUTE TRUTH FOR RELATIVISM
4. MOVING CLOSE HANDED ISSUES INTO OPEN HANDED ONES
5. FAILING TO TAKE A STAND FOR TRUTH

CORRECTION

²¹ *I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.* ²² *Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,* ²³ *and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve."*

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The name "Thyatira" means ... sacrifice or sacrificial offering. Isn't that interesting? They as a church were willing to sacrifice their faith on the altar of compromise. And what began as a small compromise into a little false doctrine quickly became them sacrificing truth in order to accept others. Abandoning what is true for what is convenient.

That's what happened to the church in Thyatira. Church history records that by the second century, they were no longer in existence. They didn't repent. They didn't heed these words!

- Is there an area in your life--which seems maybe small or insignificant--perhaps it is doctrinal or practical, or on the border of sinful--and you aren't paying attention to it?
- Like Pergamum, are you beginning to compromise your beliefs or your behavior?

We can keep tolerating sin, but one day, its destructive effects will take hold of us. Like carcinogenic toxins, sin will slowly kill us, one day at a time, one bad decision after another. *My prayer is that we will stand for truth, keep His word to the end and be the church that is known for speaking the truth in love.*

"You've Got Mail ..."