

Seven Churches of Asia

The Church at Thyatira

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the most infamous kings of Old Testament history was Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel – but the *real* power behind the throne was his wife Jezebel, the daughter of a Phoenician king, and one of the most morally corrupt women of her day.
 - A. For 22 years, Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel ruled the northern tribes with an iron hand.
 1. Jezebel was an avid supporter of the worship of Baal, and did everything she could to destroy the worship of Jehovah in the land.
 2. She got her husband to order the death of all the prophets of Jehovah – and almost all of them were slain.
 - a. Obadiah, the servant of Ahab, managed to hide 100 prophets in the caves of the region and feed them secretly.
 - b. In addition to Obadiah, Jehovah raised up the prophet Elijah, who was responsible for the slaying of 850 of Jezebel's prophets of Baal.
 - B. Finally, God brought an end to the evil lives of Ahab and Jezebel.

1. Ahab was slain in battle, and Jezebel died a violent death by being thrown out of a window, and her body was devoured by dogs – all except her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands.
- C. To this day, the name Jezebel is synonymous with **any** wicked and immoral woman who would stoop to the lowest level to promote her own evil – that's why people don't generally name their daughter Jezebel.
1. And yet, it was just such a woman that troubled one of the seven churches of Asia mentioned in the book of Revelation – the church at Thyatira which we read about in **Revelation chapter 2**.
 2. **Revelation 2:18-29** – *"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, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 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. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 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.

24 "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. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations — 27'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; 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."

- II. The city of Thyatira lay in a river valley half way between the cities of Pergamos and Sardis.
 - A. There is nothing really exceptional about the city of Thyatira.
 - 1. It was not a capital city.
 - 2. It held no particular important status as a religious city – emperor worship was not particularly a problem there.
 - 3. It had no claims to a great library and no well-known medical center, like Pergamos.
 - B. The only two significant factors about Thyatira were:

1. Thyatira stood on the road leading to Pergamos, the CAPITAL city of Asia, and therefore held a military significance.
 - a. Its function was to delay any army approaching from the south until Pergamos had time to prepare its defense.
 - b. Thyatira was essentially an expendable city. Its citizens lived every day with the knowledge that their lives could be sacrificed to save the capital city of Asia.
 2. However, the city WAS known for commerce and trade – and one feature that distinguished Thyatira from other cities was that it possessed more trade guilds than any other city of its size in all of Asia.
 - a. It was the existence of these trade guilds, and the activities associated with them, that created problems for the Christians living in Thyatira.
- C. Every craft and business was represented by a guild (or union) of one type or another.
1. Any craftsman or worker who refused to join his particular trade guild would be subjected to the same kind of harassment as a worker might face today who refuse to join his union.
 - a. In most instances, a man or woman was not permitted to work at a particular trade unless they joined the guild.
 - b. So, what was the problem?

2. Unfortunately, these guilds (or unions) were often closely associated with various pagan deities or gods.
 - a. The trade guilds would frequently hold feasts which involved eating meats offered to the gods of the guilds, and which frequently degenerated into drunken orgies where various types of sexual immorality were practiced.
3. The Christian in Thyatira faced a real dilemma.
 - a. He either compromised his convictions to join and participate in the trade guild activities to ensure he had a job, or. . .
 - b. He refused to join the guilds, and was denied the right to earn a living or to do business with other businessmen who were guild members.
4. This problem still exists today.
 - a. What is the Christians supposed to do today when he joins a union to get a job, only to have the union eventually go on strike against his employer?
 - b. The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians and Ephesians that the servant is to faithfully serve their masters (employees faithfully serve their employers).
 - (1). **Ephesians 6:5-8** – *Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; 6 not with*

eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

(2). **Colossians 3:22-24** – *Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*

- c. Does the Christian go on strike, or does he cross the picket line, or does he refuse to take a job where union membership is demanded?
- b. If you don't face the problem of dealing with a union, what about compromising your Christianity by working for an employer, or working with other business partners, who want YOU to support their unethical business practices?

D. Sadly, there was a very influential woman **within** the church at Thyatira who was urging her fellow Christians there to compromise their convictions and maintain their trade guild affiliations – even if it meant

participating in the drunken orgies that were often associated with these guilds.

1. And, just as Jezebel of Old Testament history urged her husband Ahab to sin, so this woman, whom the Lord symbolically names Jezebel, is urging her brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same.
2. Let's turn our attention to the letter addressed to the church of Thyatira, and see what the Lord has to say about this situation.

BODY:

- I. The Lord begins His address to the church at Thyatira by using words and phrases we found in the first chapter of Revelation.
 - A. After speaking "*to the angel of the church of Thyatira*" (which is probably a reference to the inner spirit or inner life of the church itself), the Lord reminds them that He is the one who "*has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass*" – similar to John's statement in **Revelation 1:14-15**.
 1. The "*eyes like a flame of fire*" suggest the Lord's penetrating vision – His ability to see within the very heart and soul of every man and woman.
 - a. Nothing escapes the penetrating vision of the Lord – He sees all and He knows all.

2. His feet being described “*like fine brass*” (bronze) – suggesting the Lord’s ability to trample under foot His enemies.
 3. The saints at Thyatira needed to know that the Lord could not only see into the heart of the congregation, He could also see into the heart of every member – there was simply no point trying to hide the truth about themselves, for the Lord sees everything.
 4. Furthermore, the saints at Thyatira needed to understand that the Lord was prepared to trample under foot all who oppose Him and His righteousness, even those within the church at Thyatira who compromised their convictions with the one called Jezebel.
 5. As the letter continues, the Lord takes an inventory of the church at Thyatira, and tells them what He finds. He began His remarks with those familiar words, “*I KNOW!*” (**Revelation 2:19**)
- II. What did the Lord see with His penetrating eyes when He looked into the church at Thyatira? The text says the Lord knew their **works**, their **love** and **service**, their **faith** and **patience** or perseverance – and as far as their works were concerned, He found “*the last to be more than the first.*”
- A. The church at Thyatira was a **working, growing** church. Several commendable things are said about this church.
1. First, they were growing more and more in their work of **love**.

- a. Unlike the church at Ephesus, whose love had diminished over the years, the church at Thyatira was deepening in its love for both Christ and for their fellow man.
 - b. What about our love – is it growing more and more?
2. They were growing in the work of service (ministry).
 - a. They were taking care of the physical and spiritual needs of one another, because they genuinely loved one another.
 - b. This “*service*” or “*ministry*” is the same word used in **Ephesians chapter 4.**
 - (1). Paul said that the Lord gave the church “*apostles... prophets... evangelists... pastors (elders)... and teachers*” for the purpose of these men equipping the “*saints for the work of ministry (service) for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” (**Ephesians 4:11**)
 - (2). Paul further added that the body is “*joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*” (**Ephesians 4:16**)
 - (3). The church at Thyatira was NOT a church where members sat around waiting to be served, or waiting for

someone to take care of their needs – they were a working, serving church, where every part did its share.

- c. What about us – are we truly doing our share of the work in this congregation? Are you doing your part taking care of the physical and spiritual needs of others?
3. But not only was the church in Thyatira growing more and more in love and growing in the work of service, they were also abounding more and more in **faith**.
 - a. They had built a solid foundation of faith in Christ, and in the promises of God -- and they had learned to depend on God to see them through even the most adverse times.
 - b. Since the church at Thyatira was growing in faith, and since *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (**Romans 10:17**), where do you suppose they spent most of their spare time – immersed in the Word of God.
 - c. What about us – is our faith abounding more and more because we spend time totally immersed in the Word of God?
4. The church at Thyatira was also growing in **patience** (perseverance) – patiently enduring hardship, suffering and persecution.
 - a. Having to endure persecution (even persecution from their own brothers and sisters in Christ – which was a problem in

Thyatira) didn't cause these saints to leave the Lord.

Persecution only served to strengthen them more.

- b. How do we handle hardship? How do we handle suffering and persecution – especially when it comes from our own brothers and sisters in Christ?

- (1). Rather than let it discourage them, the saints in Thyatira actually grew from these experiences.

- B. How do we compare as a people, or as a church? Can we truly say we are abounding more and more in **love, service, faith,** and **patience**?

1. Let me put it this way – we are either moving forward and growing in these areas, or we are losing ground.

2. There is simply no such thing as “remaining the same” or “holding our own” as Christians **or** as a church.

3. The Lord has no place in His kingdom for stagnant Christians or stagnant churches – and if we realize that we have become stagnant over the years, either as a Christian or as a church, then its time we wake up to the fact that:

- a. We have a world dying in sin all around us, and the Lord is depending on **US** to take the message of the gospel of Christ to them.

- b. We have members of the church who grow discouraged or become disheartened for one reason or another and drift back

into the world, and the Lord is depending on **US** to find out why and encourage them.

4. One or two people in the church can't do all the work of ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of the members – let alone take the gospel of Christ to the lost in the surrounding community.
 - a. It takes a church that is “*joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*” **(Ephesians 4:16)**
 - C. If we are not growing in **love, service, faith**, and **perseverance**, then let's do something about it now – before we're called to stand before the Lord in judgment, and asked to explain how we could sing the words of that song and not mean it.
 - D. Anyone would be pleased to be part of a church like Thyatira – a working and growing church.
- II. But as the Lord looked further into the inner spirit of the church, He found some things that needed immediate attention.
- A. **Revelation 2:20** – *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.*

1. The church at Thyatira was troubled by a powerful manipulative and influential woman who, like Jezebel in the Old Testament, was urging her fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to compromise their moral and ethical convictions.
 2. And the worst part of all this was that the church at Thyatira was **allowing** this to happen – they had raised no protest against this woman, and allowed her to continue influencing the saints unchallenged.
 - a. Keep in mind that the church was **not** being charged with complicity in this teaching, but with **tolerating** it.
 - b. Even though they were abounding more and more in love, service, faith and perseverance – they were condoning sin in their midst for fear of causing a disturbance.
- B. Sadly, far too many churches today do the same thing.
1. All too often, congregations take a compromising attitude toward sin – and for the same reasons as the church at Thyatira took theirs.
 - a. Why didn't Thyatira deal with this woman? It may have been that she was a strong, influential force within the church.
 - (1). Unfortunately, many churches are reluctant to deal with sin, or even recognize sin, in the lives of strong, influential members – especially if this member is actively taking a

public part in the work and worship of the church (such as one who waits on the table, leads in prayer, or is a song leader, a teacher, a preacher, or a deacon, or perhaps even an elder).

(2). But as far as the Lord is concerned, it doesn't matter who they are or what role they take in the work of the church – if someone has a sin in their life that they refuse to do anything about, the church needs to lovingly but firmly confront them, and if necessary, withdraw from them.

b. Another possible reason for the church in Thyatira failing to deal with this woman may have been because she had a following.

(1). Likewise, many churches are reluctant to deal with sin in the lives of popular and influential members, because they might lead off a faction and split the church!

(2). There is perhaps nothing the Lord hates more than division among His people. But if taking an uncompromising stand against sin causes a faction to split away, then, sadly, there's nothing more that can be done!

(3). We need to be like the psalmist David who would rather stand alone with the Lord than “*walk in the counsel of the*

ungodly,” or “stand in the path of sinners,” or “sit in the seat of the scornful.” (cf. Psalms 1:1)

C. Although the Lord had given this woman time to repent, she had spurned the Lord’s call. Now, time was running out for her, and for her followers.

1. **Revelation 2:21-23** – *And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 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.*

2. Unless she and her followers repented, the Lord said He will “*cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation.*”

a. The “*sickbed*” mentioned here is a bed of pain and affliction which inevitably follows sin – and both this woman and those who have followed her into sin will share the same bed of suffering and pain.

b. The “*adultery*” which she and her followers had committed is a reference to spiritual adultery – probably idolatry in the literal sense, especially since she had urged her followers to

compromise their moral and ethical convictions by joining with and participating in the trade guilds where sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols was common.

2. Furthermore, the Lord says He “*will kill her children with death.*”
 - a. The term “*children*” in **verse 23** seems to be a reference to those who have completely succumbed to her influence – her most devoted followers.
 - b. These so-called “*children*” are to be distinguished from those who have been influence by her somewhat, but have ***not*** completely devoted themselves to her teachings.
 - c. While these are still capable of being redeemed, her “*children*” (those who are her accomplices) will be “*killed with death*” – perhaps meaning they would not die a normal death, but like Jezebel of the Old Testament, suffer a most terrible and painful form of death.
3. When the Lord brings His judgment against this woman and her children, “*all the churches will know that [the Lord] searches the minds and the hearts.*”
 - a. Rest assured, we may fool our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and we may even fool ourselves, but the Lord searches our minds and our hearts with His penetrating vision (the One

who “*has eyes like a flame of fire*”), and nothing escapes His notice – He sees all, and He knows all.

4. Not only does He see all, but He will also reward each of us according to our works! **(v. 23b)**
 - a. Stop for a moment and think about the significance of that statement. Do you realize what the Lord is saying here?
 - b. He sees ***everything*** we do, and He knows everything we’re ***supposed*** to do and ***don’t*** do, and He is going to give to each one of us according to our work.
 - (1). If the Lord were to come at this very moment, and reward each one of us according to ***our*** works – what would your reward be?
 - c. How frightening for some of us to know that the Lord is preparing at this very moment to give to us according to our work – or lack of!
- D. To those faithful saints in Thyatira (those who have maintained their faith), the Lord will add no further burden upon them other than telling them to hold on.
 1. **Revelation 2:24-25** – *“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. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come.*

2. In other words, keep on growing in love, service, faith and perseverance, and *“hold fast what you have till I come.”*
- III. What does the Lord promise those who overcome and keep His works until the end?
- A. **Revelation 2:26-29** – *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations — 27'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; 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."* Two things are mentioned here:
1. First, power to rule the nations just as Jesus had received from His Father – a reference to **Psalm 2:8-9**.
 - a. We share in Christ's victory over all the sinful and immoral forces at work among the nations of the world.
 - b. Let every nation of men know that they exist only by the grace of God extended through Jesus Christ. And when that nations rises up in opposition to Christ's teachings and His elect (His saints) they will be broken to pieces like a potters vessel.

2. Second, the morning star.
 - a. Christ calls Himself “*the Bright and Morning star.*” (**Revelation 22:16**) The “*morning star*” always heralds the dawning of a new day.
 - b. Likewise, Jesus promises a “new day” to those who overcome – a day crowned with victory and eternal joy.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How do we compare to the church at Thyatira?
 - A. Are we growing?
 1. Are we abounding more and more in our works of **love, service, faith** and **perseverance**, or are we simply remaining stagnant, and therefore actually slipping back?
 2. Do each and every one of us truly do our part in ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of others, and take the gospel of Christ out into this community, “*according to the effective working by which every part does its share?*”
 - B. And, are we taking a strong and uncompromising stand against sin – even if it’s practiced by the most powerful, popular and influential members of the congregation?

- II. Let us never forget – the Lord’s promise is only to those who “*overcome*” – those who “*keep My works until the end.*”
 - A. Rest assured of one thing; the end ***IS*** coming – it’s coming for me, and it’s coming for you.
 - 1. And when the end does come, the will Lord search our minds and our hearts, and reward us according to our works.
 - 2. What will that reward be?