

- Revelation 2:18-21 - “The Churches of Thyatira”

Introduction:

We dishonor God when we defile His ordinances and precepts and holiness to be tolerant.

During the time of the prophet Elijah, many of the people of Israel were deceived into a worship of Baal by King Ahab's wife Jezebel. Just as Jezebel influenced Ahab to sin against God, this women in the church of Thyatira used deception to influence and sway many members of this church. By her teachings she misleads many into sexual immorality. We have evil influences in the church today that try to alter the teachings of the Bible and deceive multitudes by the guise of social tolerance. The Church at Thyatira is known as the tolerance church, it tolerated gross sin.

This is the longest of the seven letters, even though written to the smallest church. It is in some ways the most complex of the seven letters and demands that attention be given to a number of issues. This is the church that tolerated sin, the church that absorbed sin, and lived happily with it. This is the kind of church that is becoming common today, this is the emerging church.

I. The Church at Thyatira: Background

1. Thyatira was the smallest city of the seven churches. It was about 35 miles east of Pergamum and located halfway between Pergamos and Sardis. It was perhaps the least important from a political and religious standpoint. We know little about the city, but it was not a main center of any kind of pagan worship. Apollo was a key god that was worshipped there.
2. Thyatira was an outpost and had no natural defenses and had a long history of being built and rebuilt. Some historians say this city was rebuilt more than any other ancient city. Originally populated by soldiers of Alexander the Great, it was little more than a military outpost to guard Pergamos. It was the first line of defense for the more important cities and was often destroyed.
3. Later it turned from a military outpost to becoming a commercial city. By being part of the Roman Empire it no longer had to operate primarily as a fort and was situated on the great East Road; a major trade road. Historians tell us it became the center of guilds, trade guilds which would be much like unions today. There were people who had the same trade who banded together. And it had more trade guilds in this city than of the other cities in these seven letters. By the time that this letter was written Thyratira had become a significant economic center. These trade guilds held ceremonies unacceptable to believers but little by little to keep their jobs many succumbed to evil worship. Jezebel, led them into idolatry and immorality.
4. One of the very prominent things there was the dyeing of cloth. An interesting note to observe is found in Acts chapter 16 about a certain lady by the name of Lydia. It tells us in [Acts 16:14](#), And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard [us]: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us.

Thyatira is only mentioned this one other time in the Bible. Lydia is the best known inhabitant to us, who Paul met in Philippi and who was the first convert and leader of the first church on European soil. She had a house in Philippi some 200 miles from her home - town. Lydia was probably an overseas agent of sorts for a local Thyatiran manufacturer and was probably arranging the sale of purple dyed woolen goods at the time Paul met her.

This purple was obtained from the Madder root, and was still produced in the district into the 20th Century under the name "Turkey Red". The other source of dye was a little sea shell fish called murex. And from the throat of that tiny little sea animal came one drop of precious purple dye. And so they would catch these little fish and extract from them this dye.

2. The Historical Setting: Church age between AD 590 - 1520

1. Thyatira - represents the pagan church and the church age between AD 590 - 1500. The Thyatiran period undoubtedly sets forth the union of the church and state. The Roman church has risen to power upon the collapse of Roman rule and is the savior of the common people. The churches outreach to the poor and hungry set the direction of the Roman Catholic Church and it's many avenues of generosity throughout the centuries. Note the commendation of good works. Thyatira means "continual incense" or a continual sacrifice and has reference to the characteristic of this period of Church history as we will note later.

2. The introduction of rituals and church doctrine usurped a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Worship of the Virgin Mary and the Mass were made a definite part of the church service. Mass was said for the dead and was developed gradually as a sacrifice. The word Thyatira itself implies a continual sacrifice. The significance of this is in the great fundamental error of the church of Rome - the sacrifice of the mass.

II. The Lord's Commendation and Condemnation (v.18)

1. Jesus introduces himself as the Son of God (deity) whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. He picks out of that description that which best fits His approach to the given church.

a) These two indications, eyes like flaming fire and feet like burnished bronze, speak of penetrating judgment. His eyes are like fire. They are like a divine laser. They can see through to the fatal flaws in the church. The eyes of blazing fire remind us of the penetration that God has. He can see through any deceptions and wants us to be purified by Christ's blood. We do not have to play act, but to confess our sins before Him. God can see through our motives and also into our situation. It reminds me of the purifying fire that God wants to apply to our lives:

b) He commends them (v.19) in what they are doing well. Unlike the Church in Ephesus, they do have love but corrupt doctrine. "Works" were the credentials of true believers. The Roman Catholic Church is noted for its great accomplishments and help for humanity, like: hospitals, monasteries, societies, etc.

c) "Love". This was a church noted for its love and its ability to show its love to the less fortunate. There were some wonderful saints of God during that period such as John Wycliffe. "Faith". The church is known for its faithfulness because this is what moves the hands of "works" and "love". "Ministry"- Their service to their fellow man is manifested in their good works. "Patience" is their endurance during those days of darkness. "Thy last works are more than the first". In this church, works increased rather than diminished.

2. Condemnation: He reproveth them (v.20-23)

a) They had sadly become indifferent to sin. They tolerated that Jezebel. To expose her true character, the Lord Jesus calls her Jezebel. We don't know who she was in this church but we can get a good idea what she was like when we look at the original character in 1 Kings 16:31.

Jezebel, as I mentioned led Israel into idolatry and immorality, and so here is a woman doing the same in Thyatira and she deserves the same name, Jezebel. She had succeeded in corrupting the church. Characteristic's of Jezebel helps us to understand this Church and this period of time.

b) Jezebel married King Ahab, one of the Kings of Israel (i.e. the Northern Kingdom after the division of the Kingdom in about 930 BC). She was the daughter of the King of the Sidonians and brought Baal worship with her. She stirred Ahab to set up an altar for Baal in the temple of that he built in Samaria. She took possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, by deception which when he refused to give the King his inheritance for money. She had Naboth set up and murdered. **See 1 Kings 21.**

1. She was arrogance and full of pride. Vv7

2. She was a forger, liar and deceiver. Vv 8

3. She was a conspirator and accessory to murder. Vv 9-14

4. She was a thief. Vv 15 She was a mass murderer. - I Kings 18:13 **Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? She was wicked!**

5. This angered God and He punished both Ahab and Jezebel. God gave Jezebel and her followers time to repent. Just as he did the original Jezebel but she would not.

In I Kings 21:27 we read...And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

She never did! She was so wicked she was eaten of dogs when she died just as the Prophet Elijah had foretold in I Kings 9:10. **And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door, and fled. "(2 Ki. 9:33-37)**

c) Jezebel left behind her a name that became a byword "for harlotries and sorceries "(2 Ki. 9:22) Just as Jezebel influenced Ahab to sin against God, this woman in the church of Thyatira was influencing members of the church for evil. By her teachings she misleads many into sexual immorality.

d) Remember Thyatira was well-known for its trade guilds and it was because of them that believers faced bitter persecution. If a man wanted to enter a trade or to advance in it, he or she had to belong to that particular trade guild- Unfortunately, each of these trade guilds had a patron deity and had communal meals that began and ended with sacrifices to their wicked gods.

Drinking and sexual immorality were included in these services. Since earning a living was difficult outside the trade guilds, many believers were tempted to compromise their faith. Here is this compromising woman who comes in and she appeals to their basic need for work and employment and comes up with some philosophy that seems to work, and they buy it.

You say, "My, how could Christians buy into that?" It's amazing what Christians buy into, absolutely amazing. But apparently they did. They bought in to that kind of foolishness. By the way, they're still buying into it. Love was fine. Serving people was fine. Being faithful to the gospel was fine. Enduring through the hard times, that's all well and good. But don't ask us to take a strong stand on sin. Don't ask us to take a strong stand on doctrine....

The Bible says that a woman is not to teach and preach, don't make us take a stand on that. The Scripture is very clear that there's no place in the life of a believer for idolatry,

6. Under the guise of promoting spirituality, the "Jezebel" at Thyatira was advocating carnality and immorality. This woman had evidently been elevated to a place of prominence in the church. Just as Jezebel influenced Ahab to sin against God, this woman in the church of Thyatira used deception to influence and sway some members of this church.

In Acts 15 verse 29, we find the last little paragraph in the council's decision and it says this, "You are to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood, from things strangled and from sexual sin. If you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Sadly, this letter is written at the end of the first century. By the end of the second century there was no church in Thyatira, it was gone, out of existence.

III. Christ offers admonition, verses 24-25. * (references I Timothy 2;12; 2 Thess. 3:6)

a. However a small group of believers saw through her deception, but the rest either followed her or allowed her to teach in the church without objection. He addresses "the rest", that is those who do not hold this doctrine. Christ said that He would put no other burden on them. In verse 20 we see that He held the *church accountable for permitting the woman to teach her false doctrine. The burden placed on the church was to stop permitting false teachers from spreading their error. To the godly remnant, those who resist her evil influence, Christ gives a special word of comfort and exhorts them to "hold fast" to the blessedness which they already have and await His returning (verse 24). In verse 25 He instructs them to hold fast, to remain faithful.

b. Verses 26-27 discuss the fact that we are reigning with Christ in our efforts to carry out the Great Commission and the promise of reward to the overcomers. Verse 28 discusses the

"morning star" in Revelation 22:16 it reveals who the morning star is... a designation of Christ as the herald to his people of the eternal day. Jesus offers rewards those who overcome.

Conclusion:

The result is a bitterly fought battle over the acceptance of gay ministers now being waged in both the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant groups.

We need to be very careful not to be fooled by false teaching - the Jezebel spirit that can easily slip in when we are unaware, especially where there is a lot of love and trust in the church. It is vital that our leaders be ground in doctrine and sound in speech.