

## The Church at Thyatira – The Corrupt Church

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

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Text: Revelation 2:18-29

Purpose: The church at Thyatira was a faithful church in many ways. It was a laboring church, a loving church, a loyal church, and it was a longsuffering church. It was even mature, progressive, and growing. But ... it tolerated immorality in its midst.

A husband and wife are getting ready for bed. The wife is standing in front of a full-length mirror taking a hard look at herself.



"You know, dear," she says, "I look in the mirror and I see an old woman. My face is all wrinkled, everything else is either sagging or bloated. I've got fat legs, and my arms are all flabby."

She turns to her husband and says, "Tell me something positive to make me feel better about myself."

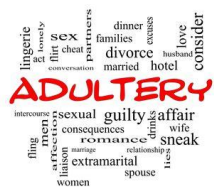
He studies hard for a moment thinking about it and then says in a soft, thoughtful voice, "Well, there's nothing wrong with your eyesight."<sup>1</sup>

We all laugh at this because we feel sorry for that poor husband. But how many of us really want our spouses to be that brutally honest with us? We don't want to hear about how much weight we have gained, or how many gray hairs we have, or how many wrinkles have suddenly found their way onto our body. We don't want to hear anything negative.



The same can be said for the church as well. We don't want to hear how low our Sunday school attendance has dropped. We don't want to hear about the decrease in finances. But we could

tolerate those bits of negative news because it is not personally directed at one person. But what if one member of our church, that was an upstanding member, a well-respected leader, a great financial contributor, suddenly began to become involved in an affair that everyone knew about but no one wanted to confront them?



I know of a pastor, several years ago, had two church members in his congregation involved in an adulterous affair. The man served as a deacon, sang in the choir, and saw nothing wrong with what he was

doing. Several in the church were afraid to confront this person because he was such a strong leader with a lot of family members in the church. To make matters worse, the woman with whom he was having an affair with also sang in the choir. Every Sunday they stood before the congregation leading them in worship. The church knew about it, but refused to discipline these two people.

Eventually the pastor left that church and now the church is half the size it once was.

If you don't think this kind of activity happens in churches today, you must have your head stuck in the sand. It is not just the average church member I am talking about either. This type of sin touches the leadership as well. Almost every week there is a report about a prominent leader resigning from their ministry position because they are involved in some type of sexual sin. So, today's sermon topic is just as relevant to us today as it was to the church at Thyatira 1900 years ago.

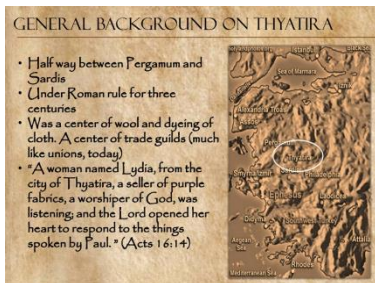


Over the past months, we have begun examining the seven churches listed in the Book of Revelation. In each of those churches we have studied, a similar pattern has emerged. The churches may have excelled or been faithful in many areas of service and ministry, but were lacking in one area. That one area of spiritual weakness had the ability to cancel out all the other good they were doing and caused their effectiveness to be removed.



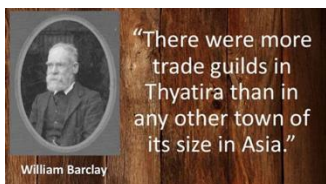
Jesus is sending a message to the church located in Thyatira.<sup>2</sup> This city was not as royal or beautiful as the other cities mentioned before

them. It was a city that was known for its commerce. It was located between two cities on one of the busiest trade routes in Asia Minor.



Thyatira was located halfway between Pergamum and Sardis. It was under Roman rule for three hundred years. It was the center of wool and dyeing of cloth. It was a center of trade guilds, very similar to our trade unions today.

It is the same town that the woman Lydia came from that is mentioned in the book of Acts. She was one of the first people to respond to the gospel in Asia.



Thyatira also boasted of numerous trades such as bakers, bronze workers, clothiers, cobblers, weavers, tanners, dyers, potters, and many others. There were more trade guilds in this town than any other town its size in Asia.

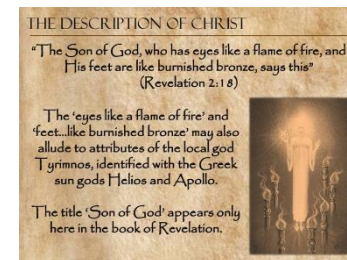
That these guild members supported the pagan gods and Christians had trouble supporting themselves.



The first verse (v. 18) in this letter identifies the sender of this letter as “the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.” This first designation as the Son of God is important because so many religious groups reject Jesus as the Son of God.

- The Jews reject the relationship between Jesus and God. They are still waiting for the Messiah, and they have rejected Jesus as Him.

- The Mormons consider Jesus as A Son of God, not The Son of God.
- The Muslims accept Jesus as a great teacher, but reject Jesus as a part of the Trinity. Because Jesus is “The Son of God” He has the right and authority to judge each and every person on the face of the earth; past, present, and future.



Jesus is also described as the one with “eyes like a flame of fire.” Nothing can stand before a fire. When fire contacts, it destroys and burns away all the dross until everything else remaining is exposed. The eyes of Jesus see everything happening in your life. Nothing can escape from the all-seeing and all-knowing eyes of Christ.



On the back of the United States one-dollar bill, you will find a symbol that is representative of the all-seeing and all-knowing eye of God.

Over and over in the Scripture we find that God has all knowledge in all situations.

- God saw Hagar alone in the desert. (Gen 16:13)
- Jeremiah said God tests the hearts and minds of all men. (Jeremiah 11:20)
- John the apostle tells us that Jesus knew what was in all men. (John 2:24-25)

This claim of Christ, having eyes of fire, is consistent with the nature of God.

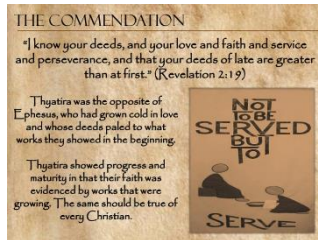
Jesus was also described as the one with feet of brass. When we see brass mentioned in scripture, it is closely related to judgment. We find in verse 23, that if those individuals that are involved in this adulterous situation do not repent, they will be stricken sick and their children would die.



It is important for us to realize that the Christ that judged Thyatira during the 1<sup>st</sup> century is the same Christ that will judge churches today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The

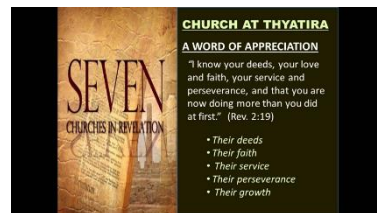
reality of judgment for sin causes me to examine my heart and repent. So many people want to think of Jesus as a forgiving, loving, compassionate, and gracious Lord. He is all that and more! He is slow to anger and quick to judge. However, we need to realize and understand the truth that He WILL judge us all.

Jesus turns his attention to all the positive things that Thyatira has been doing and how faithful they have been. They are being praised for their works.



Unlike Ephesus who had lost its first love, they were showing great works of faith and they were growing.

They were commended for being a good **laborer**. They reached out to others in their community and served them when the need arose.



Jesus also commended them for their **love**. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that love is the greatest of all virtues. I find it interesting that in Jesus' words to Ephesus that they lacked love even though they would not tolerate false teachers or apostles. They knew how to discern true doctrine but they were lacking in love. Now with Thyatira, they were overflowing in love, but they would not exercise discernment or discipline.

Jesus also commended Thyatira for their **loyalty**. The Greek word used here is *pistis* which means faithfulness, fidelity, or loyalty. They were dependable and reliable. I am sure you have met some Christians that start out strong but fizzle out later. The Christians at Thyatira were faithful and loyal.

Another positive characteristic of Thyatira was their **longsuffering**. This is only obtained when you remain faithful and patient in the midst of difficult circumstances. You don't quit when others quit on you. You remain steadfast when others flee. Just as the people at Smyrna didn't quit when they were persecuted, the believers at Thyatira didn't quit. They were patient.

The fifth characteristic we find with this church is they were **maturing, progressing, and growing**. Their last work was greater than their first work. They were more loyal today than last year. They were more loving now than before. They were more patient now than when they first came to Christ.

As good as these five characteristics are, there was one issue that was overshadowing them. Jesus is dropping the other shoe. Jesus begins by using the word, “Nevertheless.” Jesus doesn’t soften his words. He goes straight to the problem.



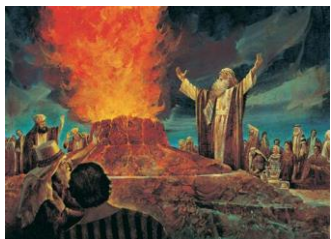
He said, “I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.” (v. 20)

It was the devil’s strategy, then and now, to bring sin into the church through sexual immorality.

The original Jezebel was the wife of the wicked king of Israel, Ahab. Jezebel’s father was a priest of Ashtaroath. It was a pagan religion that separated the spiritual life and the physical life. Worshippers of



Ashtaroath engaged in sexually immoral acts as a part of their worship of Baal. Ahab should have never married a woman like Jezebel. She brought all of her former pagan lifestyles with her and corrupted, not only her family, but also encouraged Ahab to corrupt the people of Israel with this false god. Ahab even built a temple to Ashtaroath in



Samaria and financially supported 850 prophets of her immoral cult. She must have been a woman of great power because even the Prophet Elijah ran for his life after he killed her prophets.

Even though this woman Jezebel was dead when John wrote chapter two, her model for corruption was not. In the church at Thyatira there was a woman promoting the same kind of immorality, and no one tried to stop her. John Stott said, “If the devil cannot conquer the church through the application of political pressure or the propagation of intellectual heresy, he will try the insinuation of moral evil. This was the dragon’s strategy at Thyatira.”

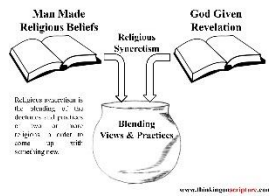
Jesus is making three declarations regarding the church at Thyatira.



The **first message** is directly aimed at those that are participating in the cult. Jesus said he would cast her and all those that followed her “onto a bed of affliction.” He would give them time to repent, but eventually they would be judged and sentenced to sickness.

I am sure you have heard the phrase, “You made your bed, now you have to lie in it.” This applies to this woman who is leading others astray at Thyatira. But it also caused innocent people to suffer as well. The children of those that followed in this immoral way would be killed.

This punishment was such that all the surrounding communities that heard about her sickness and the death of her children would stand up and take notice. All would know that Jesus is in charge and will judge sin.



The church in the Middle Ages was guilty of combining Christianity with pagan philosophy and heathen religious practice. It was religious syncretism that was considered as unholy in God's sight. This was true then and it is true today.

A **second message** was sent directly to those that did not follow after Jezebel. They will not have to suffer any additional burden. They are to remain faithful and stand strong in the Lord. There are many things that assail the church of Jesus Christ today, we are simply called to stand faithful.

To those that are successful, **Jesus gives them two promises.** If they remain faithful in the midst of strife they will be given the **right to join Christ and rule over the nations.** This is a reference to the day when the saints of God will rule and reign with Christ.

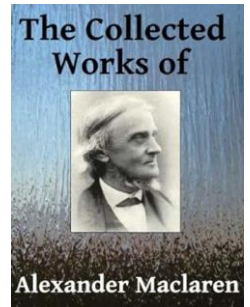


The second promise is related closely to the first promise. The scripture promises to **“give them the morning star.”** In Revelation 22:16 we find the morning star referring to Jesus Christ.

Instead of referring to a star that sets in the evening like the star of the goddess Istar which represented death, Jesus is promising a morning star which represents life. It represents the gift of Jesus Christ which we will have as our possession forever. We are promised a place of ruling over the nations with Christ and eternal life with Christ, if we are conquerors over sin.

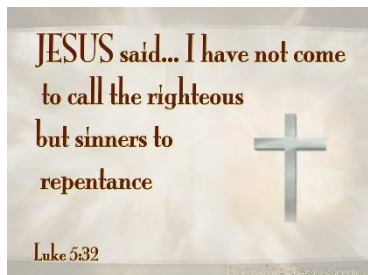
Alexander Maclaren in his exposition of Revelation said,

“Brethren, it is for us to choose whether we shall share in Christ’s dominion or be crushed by His iron scepter. It is for us to choose whether, molding our lives after His will and patterns, we shall hereafter be made like Him in completeness. It is for us to choose whether, seeing Him here, we shall, when the brightness of His coming draws near, be flooded with gladness, or whether we shall call upon the rocks and hills to cover us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne.



Time is the mother of Eternity. Today molds tomorrow, and when all the todays and tomorrows have become yesterdays, they will have determined our destiny, because they will have settled our characters. Let us keep Christ’s commandments, and we shall be invested with dignity and illuminated with glory, and entrusted to work, far beyond anything that we can conceive here, thought, in their farthest reach and most dazzling brightness, these are but the continuation and the perfecting and the feeble beginnings of earthly conflict and service.”<sup>3</sup>

The message to the church of Thyatira is timeless. If you are involved in sin, no matter how small or insignificant, you need to repent and turn to Christ. He may not put you on a sick bed or cause others to suffer because of your sin,



but He can. He is still in control. But if you turn to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin. To those that overcome, we are given the privilege to rule and reign with Him, and to have the gift of Jesus Christ forever and

forever.

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

## **LET US PRAY**

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Mikey’s Funnies, July 16, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Outline taken from “Escape the Coming Night” by David Jeremiah, Thyatira

<sup>3</sup> Expositions of Holy Scripture, Alexander Maclaren, Volume, “John, Jude, and Revelation.” pages 231-232.