

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS
JESUS LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Read Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction

Thyatira was the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3. In history, we have no record that the Christians of Thyatira suffered any significant political or religious persecution. But Thyatira was an important centre of business and trade. It had many active trade guilds, each having their own patron deity from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods.

Acts 16:14-15 mentions Lydia of Thyatira, who was a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. Thyatira was famous for the manufacture of a purple dye, and numerous references are found in secular literature of the period to the trade guilds which manufactured cloth.

Jesus describes Himself to the church at Thyatira.

“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’” (v18)

Christ is introduced as the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. This description of Christ is like that in 1:13-15, but here He is called the Son of God rather than the Son of Man. The situation required reaffirmation of His deity and His righteous indignation at their sins. The words “burnished bronze,” which describe His feet, translate a rare Greek word “chalkoliban”, also used in 1:15. It seems to have been an alloy of several metals characterized by brilliance when polished. The reference to His eyes being “like a flame of fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ.

Obviously, this description of our Lord stresses His authority in discipline and judgment as the Son of God, an expression found only here in the book, and the penetrating power of His knowledge along with the swiftness of His judgment. Thyatira was standing in idolatrous compromise and allowing a false authority to supplant the authority of Christ.

What Jesus knows about the Christians in Thyatira.

“I know all that you’ve done for me—your love and faith, your ministry and steadfast perseverance. In fact, you now excel in these virtues even more than at the first.” (v19 TPT)

I know your works: Thyatira was the least significant city among the seven cities Jesus addressed. Yet they were not hidden to Jesus. Like each one of the churches, Jesus says to the church at Thyatira I know your works.

Love, service, faith, and your patience: In many ways, the church at Thyatira was a model church. They had four great essential qualities. They had love, both for the Lord and for one another. They knew service and had faith and patience worth mentioning.

More than the first: This is another compliment to the church at Thyatira. Not only do they have these works, but they have them in increasing measure - they are growing in love, service, faith, and patience.

Thyatira had a definite and even greater ministry of service and endurance, one that seemed to be motivated by faith and love, but Thyatira lacked on the side of zeal for sound doctrine, moral purity,

holiness of life, and zeal against false teaching and practice. Obviously, the church needs to have both, it needs a balance, or it must eventually lose its testimony and capacity for ministry.

What Jesus has against the church at Thyatira.

“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. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.” (vv20-21)

Because you allow that woman Jezebel: The centre of the corruption at the church at Thyatira is a woman Jesus calls Jezebel. This may not have been her literal name, but a "title" that clearly represents a self-styled prophetess within the church, after the pattern of Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16-21 and 2 Kings 9:30-37).

The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we called someone a "Judas" or a "Hitler" it would mean something strong. It's also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal ... Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.

Who calls herself a prophetess: This "Jezebel" at the church of Thyatira wasn't really a prophetess, she only claimed to be one. Yet, it seems that the Christians there received her as a prophetess, and that's why Jesus gives them this warning. Jesus said this would happen in Matthew 24:11: Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. Those words were first spoken with a view to the end times, but there have always been those who call themselves prophets in the church but are not.

To teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols means Jesus describing the specific sin of this woman "Jezebel." Mainly, she was an immoral and ungodly influence on others, and led others into sin. Jezebel led others into immorality and idolatry.

As the Jezebel of the Old Testament enticed God's servants to abandon their loyalty to the Lord and to participate in her idolatrous practices, so this woman of Thyatira was enticing Christians to abandon their loyalty to Christ and a separated life. Her teaching was probably similar to that of the Nicolaitans.

In His grace, the Lord gave her time to repent, but she had no time nor interest in it. The fact she was called Jezebel suggests she not only was a false prophetess, but an unbeliever. The issue here then was a call to repent in the sense of changing her mind about her present evil course and condition and about her need of Christ so that she would turn to Him in faith.

Coming judgment on the church at Thyatira.

“Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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.” (vv22-23)

I will cast her into a sickbed: Before Jesus tells the Christians in Thyatira what they must do, He first tells them what He will do. Jesus will chastise this Jezebel, and cast her into a sickbed, along with those who commit adultery with her. The reference to adultery is important. It speaks of both literal, sexual adultery and spiritual adultery. When these Christians honoured other gods, they were unfaithful to the Lord who saved them.

For this reason, the figure of a sickbed is fitting. They were guilty of adultery, both sexual and spiritual. It is as if Jesus says, "You love an unclean bed. Here, I will give you one, and cast you into a sickbed."

What was the sickbed? It could simply be an image of affliction, or it could be literal sickness that Jesus would allow in the lives of Jezebel and her followers as chastisement.

Unless they repent of their deeds: Jesus reveals the purpose for this chastening.

- First, it is to draw them to repent of their deeds. They wouldn't listen to Jesus before, so He must speak "louder" through a sickbed.
- Second, it is to give an example of holiness to other churches: and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.

To the pure members of the Church in Thyatira

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira who don’t adhere to the teachings of Jezebel and have not been initiated into deep satanic secrets, I say to you (without laying upon you any other burden): Cling tightly to all that you have until I appear.” (vv24-25 TPT)

We need to distinguish between two groups seen in the church at Thyatira. Compare *“And I will kill her children”* with verse 24 *“But I say to you ...”* In verse 24 the Lord addresses the faithful remnant, those who would not tolerate her and who rejected both her doctrine and her practice. There were many faithful, uncompromising Christians in Thyatira. To them, Jesus simply says hold fast! They must not stop doing what is good. They must not become distracted or discouraged from what Jesus wants them to be and to do. Jesus also tells them how long to hold fast: till I come. We are to "hang in there" and stand strong for Jesus until He comes. It's only then that the battle will be over.

The promise of a reward.

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ‘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; and I will give him the morning star. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”” (vv26-28)

He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end: Even when there is the immoral and idolatrous influence of a Jezebel, Christians can overcome and keep Jesus' works until the end. We must not become overly discouraged at immorality and idolatry around us, even among Christians. God's work will still go on through His overcomers. Jesus promised that He will give power over the nations and that means, His people would reign with Him. Here, there is a special promise to those who overcome the threat of immorality and idolatry. To them, Jesus offers a share in His own kingdom.

He shall rule them with a rod of iron: This quotation from Psalm 2 speaks of the authority of the Messiah when He rules over the earth. In that day, righteousness will be enforced, and those who rebel against Jesus will be dashed to pieces like a clay pot hit with an iron bar. Jesus includes this here to give hope to the faithful Christians of Thyatira, who felt overwhelmed by the immorality and idolatry all around them. Jesus reminds them "You're on My winning team."

I will give him the morning star: Jesus offers them a reward greater than the kingdom. He offers them the reward of Himself because He is the Morning Star (Revelation 22:16).

He who has an ear: This is a letter that applies to everyone.

- It applies to those who are like Jezebel, who lead others into sin.
- It applies to those who follow the teaching of a Jezebel and follow others into sin.
- It applies to those who permit a Jezebel to work her wickedness.
- It also applies to the faithful who must hold fast.

