

Sermon: The Church at Thyatira

Text: [Revelation 2:18-29 ESV](#)

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November 6, 2022

Introduction: *Resource Material on the Book of Revelation*, Robert Lowery, p. 6 - “Conflict describes the situation in John *the Apostle’s* day. There is conflict when two forces or ideas or individuals are trying to occupy the same space at the same time for opposite reasons. The Kingdom of God versus the Kingdom of the Dragon. And the terms ‘suffering’ and ‘seduction’ describe the situations the Christians were facing in those days. The greatest menace facing the Christians was not in the form of direct persecution, even though there was some form of direct persecution *like Antipas the martyr at Pergamum last week*, there would no doubt be more. No, the greatest menace facing the churches was the temptation to compromise with culture.”

Our text opens up with a description of the Son of God. [Revelation 2:18 ESV](#) 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.

I. What We Know about Thyatira

This is the longest letter to the individual 7 churches, and to the least significant of all the cities. Thyatira was a commercial town. It was famous for dyeing of cloth and its woolen industry. This was Lydia’s home town who was a seller of purple goods and Paul’s first known convert to Christianity in Europe at Philippi ([Acts 16:11-15](#)). It was a trade guild center (full of craftsmen). A guild was a community which was social, religious, and political. They were tied many times to pagan worship which included festive parties, orgies and the worship of other so-called gods. The local patron god was Apollo, a son of Zeus, who like Jesus was also called “The Son of God.” Members were expected to fully take part. Apollo was depicted on their coins much like how Jesus is described in [v. 18](#).

This small and somewhat unimportant and *insignificant* town (Pliny) was founded about 3rd century B.C. and used as a military outpost for the Seleucid Empire after Alexander the Great died. It was considered the gateway to Pergamum. It had an armed garrison that was to serve as protection for the city and the capital of Asia, Pergamum.

There was a fortune telling shrine in Thyatira, maybe like Sylvia out on 25 north of BG.

The Ephesian problem was not correct teaching, but a lack of commitment and enthusiastic loving effort. Here, Thyatira is commended for her work, faith, love and perseverance, BUT they were willing to put up with immorality and idol worship.

II. Jesus Knows Our Works (v.19).

Revelation 2:19 ESV ¹⁹ “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

Question: What are the qualities of the Church of Thyatira that are worthy of praise?

Answer: Love, faith, service (**δουκωνος** - ministry), and perseverance (which builds character), and they were doing more now than at first.

A. **Love** - Love is not some sloppy sentimentality, but an action of the will. It is sacrificial and looks to another’s best interest. It has a willingness to even put one’s life in jeopardy for the good of others.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 ESV ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [a] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Footnotes: [a] **1 Corinthians 13:5** Greek *irritable* and does not count up wrongdoing

Love extends help and withholds action when need be. Love is a work just like everything listed here in **2:19**, and the cross is the perfect example from Jesus for us to mimic in our own lives.

B. **Faith** - Faith is not just a credal statement or a catalog of what we believe. It is the result of love and devotion for our Lord worked out in our lives.

C. **Service** (**δουκωνος**, ministry) This is what we do for our Lord to enhance His name and encourage especially the Church.

D. **Patient Endurance** - (*perseverance*, NIV) - The Greek word carries the idea of holding up under pressure.

E. **Track Record** - The church is doing better than ever before - and that is good, but good works cannot stand alone. Proper understanding of God’s will and His Word are critical as well to our salvation, and the salvation of others.

I might make a mistake on a civic detail about libraries in these 7 towns in Asia, but God help me, if I am teaching doctrine wrongly.

III. Tolerance Is Not Necessarily a Godly Quality (vv. 20-21).

Revelation 2:20-21 ESV 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.

The congregation held to correct doctrine and orthodox teaching, but they allowed, it appears, one of their members to mix in ideas that were connected with the worship of other gods and all that brings into the community of Christ, including sexual immorality.

A woman by the same name in the OT is compared to this self-appointed prophetess in Thyatira who also was introducing other gods and normalizing sexual immorality. Jezebel of the OT brought Baal worship and even supported 450 prophets of that fertility god, and they ate at her and the king's table. King Ahab was seduced along with God's people, Israel.

Question: Who was Jezebel in the Old Testament?

Answer: She was a famous queen married to Ahab who tried to kill Elijah and who had killed others of God's people. (**I Kings 16-19, 21** also **II Kings 9:30-37** to see her death).

II Kings 9:30-37 ESV 30 When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window. 31 And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?" 32 And he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked out at him. 33 He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down. And some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her. 34 Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." 35 But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. 36 When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, 37 and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'" - compost and food for the dogs

It is never good to be a Jezebel or an Ahab! "The greatest threat to Israel of old was the false prophets from within not the enemy without. It was also true for the Church of Thyatira. Who teaches in Christ's Church matters to God!

21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

Question: Why does the Lord allow time for repentance?

Answer: **II Peter 3:9 ESV** 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. **He wants everyone to be saved, but He will not wait forever. His delay does not mean judgment has been suspended.**

Question: Why doesn't God force people to repent?

Answer: Because that would violate our free will. Salvation comes through repentance!

IV. Jezebel's Sin Is a Mutual Problem (vv. 22-25).

Revelation 2:22-25 ESV 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 (**the reins and hearts, KJV; lit. Gr. kidneys and hearts**), and I will give to each of you according to your works. 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.

I am he who searches mind and heart, is a quote from **Jeremiah 11:20a ESV** ²⁰ But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind,

This is a continual searching and a clear declaration of Jesus' deity doing exactly what God, the Father is doing and what He will do at the end of time here on earth.

Question: What is the result of an individual sinning?

Answer: Personal punishment, and also it leads others astray resulting in their punishment. **Romans 1:32 ESV** ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Listen to Gregory Beale, pp.263-64: "Consequently, the judgment due Jezebel and her cohorts is that deserved by unbelievers, which are in process of proving themselves to be. This tribulation is already occurring in some sectors of the church (cf. 1:9; 2:9-10).

The tribulation of these people is described in more detail in v. 23. As Jezebel's followers, they are called her 'children,' and their tribulation will involve their death, which was also the punishment of Jezebel and Ahab's seventy sons because of his sin against Naboth at Jezebel's instigation."

Question: Is this adultery figurative or literal?

Answer: Could be either, but likely a combination (s. v.20). Her children could be products of sexual immorality or those who simply follow in her teaching as a prophetess.

Sometimes judgment is to teach a lesson to the offender. Other times it may be a warning to those only tempted to follow the wrong path.

If you were doing anything that could/would take your life if continued, wouldn't you want someone to tell you? This is why we must talk to our neighbors, friends and family about Jesus.

KJV uses the words reins and hearts.

Question: What is meant by reins?

Answer: Literally translated this is kidneys and hearts (*nephrous* and *kardias*). The NIV says hearts and minds. ESV reads mind and heart.

Illus. Buckeye Mart experience ---- “You're just too honest.”

There was a tendency then and now that the Body of Christ could share in many activities hosted by the culture. **Beale shares here (p. 265) again**, “Possibly the false teachers were misapplying Paul's statement in **I Cor. 8:4** by saying that if, indeed, ‘an idol has no real existence in the world,’ then participation at a feast honoring an idol could not harm one spiritually. They might also have appealed, in support of this teaching, to a misunderstanding of Jesus' words in the Gospels (‘render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's, **Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17**) or of Paul's admonition that ‘every person be in subjection to the governing authorities’ (**Rom. 13:1**).”

Revelation 2:24 ESV 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.

Be careful where you get your Truth!

These so-called deep secrets are probably a Gnostic reference. **I Corinthians 2:6-12 ESV**
⁶ Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

Revelation 2:25 ESV ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come.

....until the end. This is the end of the age (Judgment)

Make no mistake. Jesus is “The Coming One.”

V. There Is a Future Reward (vv. 26-28).

Revelation 2:26 ESV ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, (*nations is literally Gentiles, ethnics.*)

What is being gifted here is only for the faithful. “The person who used to be a good church member will receive the wrath of God, not the crown of life.” - Strauss, p. 66

There needs to be a continuous overcoming and working until the End for any of us to receive our reward. There will be more responsibility given to the faithful even in the area of judging. **I Corinthians 6:2-3 ESV** ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

Question: How was authority for the church established or transferred?

Answer: God to Jesus, and then Jesus gave authority to the Church.

Matthew 28:18-20 ESV ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in [*into*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Revelation 2:27-28 ESV ²⁷ and he will rule[a] 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.

Footnotes: {a} Revelation **2:27** Greek *shepherd*

The word translated “rule” is literally shepherd (verb). Sometimes a shepherd must act harshly. God can and will both protect and punish depending on our relationship with Jesus. If we are faithful, Jesus says he will give us the “morning star.”

Who or what is this “Morning Star?” I think it is no one other than Jesus Himself. We hear this at the end of this book of Revelation. **Revelation 22:16 ESV** ¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

There is future reward for those who will listen and obey now before it is too late. **Revelation 2:29 ESV** ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Conclusion: (*Resource Material on the Book of Revelation*, Robert Lowery, pp. 6-7) - “Like Babylon of old, Rome acted as a seductress, using all of its moral, social, economic, religious, political and military might to lure Christians into compromising relationships and complacency. And if that would not work, Rome would force itself upon the Christians. Resisting the power of cultural seduction is sounded repeatedly in the book. Some Christians had clearly capitulated while others had remained loyal to Christ. Many needed to be shaken from their spiritual lethargy and challenged to accept the cost of discipleship.

Or in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words: ‘When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.’ And I have no doubt that John would say ‘Amen. There is no other way than to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, and where he goes may involve incredible suffering, but also incredible blessing.’

When the church refuses to be seduced by culture, she should not be surprised when she experiences rejection. On the other hand, when seduction is successful, the church will be ignored and or tolerated,” *at least for now*. And finally its light (candlestick) will be removed.

Barclay, p. 137 - “It is in the mercy of God that the teaching of Jezebel and her like did not become the view of the Church. If that had happened, and if it happens in the days to come, the Church would have become, and will become, a kind of cultured, pleasant paganism.”

Some listen to the opinions of others rather than the “voice” of the Holy Spirit. It does not matter what others think at the end of the day, or how *they* might evaluate your life. It only is how God judges us to be true or not that is eternally important.

Let’s stay true to God’s holy Word and faithful in all our years, and all for His glory!