

## Thyatira: The Licentious Church

**Text:** Revelation 2:18-29

### Introduction:

1. This letter is the longest of the seven, written to the church in the smallest town.
2. The word 'Thyatira' means "continual sacrifice" and describes a church that is idolatrous.
3. Central to the problems of this church was a false teacher, a seductive woman, labelled 'Jezebel' by Christ. Like Pergamos, this church was under threat of being destroyed from within.
4. We will study Christ's letter to Thyatira under 5 headings

### I. The Revelation of Christ (Vs. 18)

#### A. The Audience given the Revelation (Vs. 18a)

1. Thyatira located approx. 45 miles (72 kms) southeast of Pergamos (Thomas). Modern Turkish city of Akhisar stands over the ancient site of Thyatira.
2. Thyatira was famous for its dyeing processes. "A small quantity of this expensive dye would cost the equivalent of a workman's wages for a year." (Marlin) Lydia was from this city and involved in the textile industry as "a seller of purple" (Acts 16:14).
3. City famous for its guilds. Thomas: There were "guilds for wool workers, linen workers, manufacturers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths. Membership in a guild was compulsory if one wanted to hold a position. Dyeing and manufacturing of woolen goods appears to have been a foremost industry of the city...Pagan worship was associated with trade guilds in that each guild had its guardian god. Guild members were expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat food, part of which had been offered to the deity...At the end of the feast grossly immoral activities would commence. To exit at the time of such activity would lay a person open to ridicule and other kinds of persecution..."

#### B. The Author of the Revelation (Vs. 18b)

1. Christ's Designation – "the Son of God"
  - a. In the vision of Chapter 1, Christ is called "the Son of man" (Vs. 13), emphasizing His glorified humanity. Here Christ refers to Himself as "Son of God" emphasizing His Divinity, Sovereignty and Authority. The titles "Son of God" and "Son of the living God" appear 48 times in the N.T. in reference to Christ.
  - b. It is intended to impress upon this church, a sense of soberness on account of the exalted position of the One addressing them.
2. Christ's Description – "eyes like unto a flame of fire...feet are like fine brass."
  - a. Christ's Eyes

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- i. picture His perfect Omniscience. Nothing escapes His penetrating gaze. Hebrews 4:13 *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*
- ii. Picture His Holy, Just indignation against the sins of this church. His eyes flash with Holy anger at the wickedness He sees.
- b. Christ's Feet – the "fine brass" a picture of judgment. The feet of the One who walks amidst the candlesticks would enter this church with a severe message of warning.

## II. The Commendation of Christ (Vs. 19)

This church commended by Christ as it was...

### A. A Loving Church (Vs. 19a)

1. 'charity' = a love that acts; a love towards both God and others
2. This church was succeeding where Ephesus was failing.
3. 1 Thess. 4:9-10 *"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye **increase more and more;**"*

### B. A Serving Church (Vs. 19b)

1. 'service' = ministry. The Greek word is 'diakonia' and refers to voluntary service as compared to the compulsory service of a slave. The word 'deacon' comes from the same root word. This church was full of people who willingly, joyfully and freely gave of their time to the service of God.
2. Challenge: We are not saved by good works (Eph. 2:8-9) but we are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:10). Is service to you a job or a joy? Is it a bore or a blessing? Do you serve at all?

### C. A Believing Church (Vs. 19c)

1. This church had faith in God. Faith is "a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing, always in the N.T. having as its object God or Christ or spiritual things." (Thomas).
2. Their faith pleased God. Hebrews 11:6 *"But without faith it is impossible to please him..."*
3. Illustration: Christ often reproved His disciples for their lack of faith in the Gospels.

### D. An Enduring Church (Vs. 19d)

1. 'patience' = this church endured through the trials and provocations of the Christian life. They, like the other churches at that time, would have been suffering persecution for their faith.

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2. Challenge: Do you give up at the first sign of suffering in the will of God?

### E. A Growing Church (Vs. 19e)

1. "the last to be more than the first" = this church was increasing and growing in these positive qualities.
2. Thomas: "The later deeds were in some sense more in number or in quality, perhaps both, than their earlier ones. As time progressed, their works had grown."

## III. The Condemnation from Christ (Vs. 20-21)

Christ rebukes the church for its tolerance of an evil woman in its midst. Look at...

### A. The Indifference of the Church (Vs. 20a)

1. "thou sufferest" = means to permit or allow. Same word translated "let alone" in Acts 5:38.
2. Wiersbe: "It is interesting to contrast the churches at Ephesus and Thyatira. The Ephesian church was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers; while the people in the assembly at Thyatira were growing in their love, but too tolerant of false doctrine. Both extremes must be avoided in the church. "Speaking the truth in love" is the biblical balance (Eph. 4:15). **Unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise are both hateful to God.**"
3. Note: The seven letters reveal that churches can easily get good things out of balance.

### B. The Identification of the Woman (Vs. 20b)

1. 'Jezebel' = may have been her actual name but more likely a title given her by our Lord revealing her character was similar to her Old Testament counterpart. See 1 Kings 16:31-33; 21:25-26.
2. Jezebel was the daughter of a pagan king and she promoted within Israel the very worst type of heathenism.

### C. The Influence of the Woman (Vs. 20c)

1. Her Claim – "callest herself a prophetess"
  - a. She was a self-proclaimed, self-promoted spiritual leader.
  - b. She offered her adherents access to "deep things" unknown to others (Vs. 24).
2. Her Conduct – "to teach and to seduce"
  - a. "to teach" = the church allowed this woman to have a formal teaching platform in the church, thereby leading many into error. This violated the clear Apostolic instructions of 1 Tim. 2:12-14 & 1 Cor. 14:34-35. "There are many examples of Jezebel in church history, from Mariolatry in the Roman Catholic Church to modern day prophetesses and tongue speakers in the Charismatic movement." (Cloud)

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- b. “to seduce” = the word means “to deceive, lead astray”.  
Translated ‘deceive’ 7 times in the rest of the Revelation (12:9, 13:14, 18:23, 19:20, 20:3, 20:8, 10). She led people astray into two areas:
  - i. Into Immorality – “to commit fornication” “The orgies that followed the feasts dedicated to pagan gods were well-known happenings.” (Thomas)
  - ii. Into Idolatry – “to eat things sacrificed unto idols”
- c. It appears that she advocated a tolerant view of a Christian’s participation in the trade guilds with their idolatrous, immoral feasts.
- d. Note: When the pressures of a sinful world come upon the church, the church is presented with a choice – accommodation or separation. Because of the reproach of a separated life, and the bias of our sinful nature, we are susceptible to any teaching that allows a more tolerant view of the world. Beware of syncretism!

### D. The Impenitence of the Woman (Vs. 21)

- 1. “I gave her space to repent” = the word ‘repentance’ is mentioned 8 times in Christ’s letters to the churches (Rev. 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). The word ‘space’ is the Greek word ‘kronos’ meaning time or season. The Lord had given this woman an opportunity to repent before He poured out His judgment. God is longsuffering but his longsuffering has a limit.
  - a. Rom. 2:3-4 *“And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”*
  - b. 2 Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but **is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**”*
- 2. “of her fornication” = Christ required to repent of specific sin.
- 3. “and she repented not” = she made a choice not to repent!

## IV. The Caution of Christ (Vs. 22-23)

### A. The Pronouncement of Judgment (Vs. 22)

- 1. “her...and them” = judgment pronounced upon Jezebel and her followers
- 2. “into a bed” = a bed of judgment described as “great tribulation”.  
Christ would bring severe chastisement to bear upon this false cult, even to the point of taking their lives (Vs. 23a).

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3. Note: Prophetically it seems Thyatira represents the Papal church. This church will enter the Great Tribulation. The true church will be raptured out before it (Rev. 3:10).

### **B. The Pattern of the Judgment (Vs. 23)**

1. "all the churches shall now" = the judgment of God poured out on Jezebel and her cohorts would serve as an example and warning to the other churches.
2. "I am he which searcheth the reigns and hearts" = the 'reigns' literally means kidneys. It came to refer to the inner part of man. Christ's eyes penetrate the deepest recesses of man's heart and He is able to give perfect judgment based on this knowledge.

## **V. The Exhortation of Christ (Vs. 24-29)**

### **A. The Precept for the Overcomers (Vs. 24-25)**

1. The remnant's description (Vs. 24)
  - a. "But unto you...and unto the rest" = Christ now addresses a faithful remnant within this church
  - b. "as many as have not this doctrine" = the remnant had rejected Jezebel's pernicious teachings and kept themselves pure
  - c. "and which have not known the depths of Satan" = it was common in ancient religions and cults for them to claim a superior, secret knowledge (deep things). Christ unmask these so called 'depths' as coming from Satan. Behind Jezebel's smooth sounding teachings and plausible arguments, stood the angel of light. The sweet-sounding whispers of Jezebel were actually the breathings of the dragon. Satan is the engineer of error, the architect of apostasy and the developer of deception (1 Tim. 4:1).
  - d. Challenge: Make sure you are getting into the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10) and not the deep things of Satan (Rev. 2:24).
2. The remnant's duty (Vs. 25)
  - a. "hold fast" = they were to hold fast to the truth
  - b. "till I come" = the imminent return of Christ the motivation. "The nearness of His coming is held up as an incentive to stand true in the face of pressure to compromise right standards of behavior." (Thomas)

### **B. The Promises to the Overcomers (Vs. 26-28)**

1. A Millennial Kingdom Promise (Vs. 26-27)
  - a. "to him will I give power over the nations" = Believers will share in the glory of Christ's triumphant reign on earth. (See Rev. 20:4 & 6). "The overcoming Christians are promised places of authority, sharing Christ's rule over the nations of the world."
  - b. "rule them with a rod of iron" = clear reference to Christ's reign

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- i. Psalm 2:8-9 *"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. **Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**"*
  - ii. Rev. 12:5 *"And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with **a rod of iron**: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne."*
  - i. Rev. 19:15 *"And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with **a rod of iron**: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."*
  - c. "as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers" = 'they' refers to the 'nations' (Vs. 26). The kingdoms of men will be shattered before Christ and He will rule and reign supreme.
  - d. "even as I received of my Father" = while Christ is the Primary Ruler, it is clear that the overcomer is promised a degree of participation in Christ's glorious reign. We will "reign with him a thousand years." (Rev. 20:6)
2. A Morning Star Promise (Vs. 28)
- a. A reference to Christ – Rev. 22:16 *"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and **the bright and morning star.**"* See also 2 Peter 1:19
  - b. "The morning star appears at the darkest part of the night preceding the dawn. That Christ is the believer's morning star signifies that He is the ever-soon-coming One." (Cloud)
  - c. This "seems to refer to Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16) in His role as the returning One who will rapture the church before the dark hours preceding the dawn of the millennial kingdom." (Walvoord)

### C. The Plea to the Overcomers (Vs. 29)

- 1. To the individual
- 2. To the church.

**Conclusion:** What is your view of sin and error? Does it reflect the attitude of Christ?