

The Church at Thyatira, a Persevering Church— Strengthening your Commitment to Christ (Revelation 2:18-29)

One of the most devious characters in the Old Testament was a woman named Jezebel. In fact, her name still rings with the connotation of treachery and evil. She was a queen of Israel who advanced the worship of Baal and did all in her power to destroy the prophets of God. Her name is associated with a member of the First Century church in the city of Thyatira. This church was the fourth in Asia Minor that Jesus addressed in the book of Revelation. The church at Thyatira wrestled with maintaining correct doctrine and therefore struggled to sustain proper purity. It did manage to persevere in the face of false teaching, however, and serves as a reminder to us that we must continually strengthen our commitment to Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ commends the church's diligence and perseverance (2:18-19).

The city of Thyatira was, by comparison to the other cities of Revelation 2-3, a less significant city even though it received the lengthiest message to the seven churches. Still, the message Jesus sent to the church in this city hints at some of the activities that were a part of the culture of Thyatira with a warning against spiritual compromise.

Jesus addressed the ancient church at Thyatira, a church that had persevered in spite of internal discord (2:18).

Thyatira was located in a valley on the road passing from Pergamum to Sardis. Its geographic location made Thyatira a corridor of commerce in spite of its less defensible position. Following the conquest and subsequent death of Alexander the Great, one of his generals, Seleucus I, took control of Asia Minor. He established the city of Thyatira and colonized it with Macedonians who had served in Alexander's army. Political instability put Thyatira in the middle of conflicts until the Romans established peace in the region. Otherwise the city of Thyatira had little political significance.

Those who settled Thyatira set up a number of trade guilds which became the economic heart of the city. Ancient inscriptions indicate that there were guilds for those who worked in wool, linen, leather, and bronze as well as guilds for bakers, tanners, and those who dyed cloth. Purple dye was a product of this region, and purple dye and dyed purple cloth were major exports of this city. Acts 16:14 mentions a woman from Thyatira named Lydia, a convert of Paul, who was involved in selling purple cloth. In addition to their commercial influence, the trade guilds in Thyatira likely controlled much of the religious culture of the city.

Each of the trade guilds in Thyatira would have had its own patron deity. Worship of these gods or goddesses would include feasts and immoral celebrations. The two most prominent deities in Thyatira were Apollo (the sun god) and Artemis (the moon goddess). The pressure on Christians to conform to the pagan practices of the trade guilds must have been intense.

The origin of the church in Thyatira is uncertain. During his ministry in Philippi, Paul led Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira who was involved in the purple cloth industry, to a

saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Lydia had apparently become a proselyte to the Jewish faith, hinting that Thyatira was home to a measurable Jewish population. Lydia used her financial means to support Paul and the work of the church in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15). It may have been through Lydia and her acquaintances in Thyatira that the gospel of Jesus Christ first reached that city. It's also possible that the church in Thyatira came into existence as an extension of Paul's later ministry in Ephesus.

Jesus described Himself as the Son of God, having eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze (2:18b).

The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself to the church at Thyatira as the Son of God. He emphasized His deity to that church, reminding them that He is God over all. His appearance is awe inspiring. He has eyes like flames of fire, penetrating in judgment (compare Revelation 1:14; 19:12). His feet are like burnished bronze, brilliant in appearance. Bronze speaks of judgment, and the brilliance of this image is reminiscent of the radiant glory of God. Jesus Christ is God. All the splendor and power of deity belong to Him. He is the righteous, divine judge.

Jesus commends the expanding work and loving perseverance of His people (2:19).

In His commendation to the church at Thyatira, Jesus Christ pointed out several notable characteristics. He took note of their works. The church was a hard working church, committed to serving Christ. He saw this church as characterized by true love, a love for Christ and a love for others. It was a caring fellowship. He noted this church's faith, its trust in Christ through difficult times. Christ also noted this church's service. The church at Thyatira had a servant mentality, being eager to help others—verse 20 describes the people of this church as Christ's servants. Jesus commended the church for its perseverance. It was a church that didn't give up. Finally, Christ commended the church at Thyatira for its progress in its service. Its works for Christ (mentioned here twice as well as in verses 23 and 26) were growing in fullness. This church had not become stagnant. It continued to expand its witness for Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ challenges the church's tolerance of misleading people and immoral practices (2:20-25).

For all its love, faith, perseverance, and service the church at Thyatira had one fault. It was too tolerant of false teaching and its consequent sinful practices. Probably due to its caring nature, this church was reluctant to oppose those in the wrong.

Christians must discern between right and wrong and reject those who promote error (2:20).

Jesus identified the main antagonist in this church as the woman "Jezebel." Although some have identified Jezebel as a symbolic name for an ungodly sect in Thyatira, it seems best to understand this name as referring to an actual woman in the church at that time. Some have identified this woman as the pastor's wife (some Greek manuscripts call her "your wife"), but such an association is a stretch at best! Jezebel was probably a woman who, claiming to have the

gift of prophecy, was in fact teaching people contrary to God's ways. She was leading Christ's servants astray, enticing them to participate in sexual immorality and idolatry—eating food offered to idols and engaging in pagan sexual practices.

Because of her evil practices Jesus calls this woman "Jezebel," comparing her to the wicked wife of ancient Israel's wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-33). She was the motivating force behind Ahab's idolatrous practices, bringing God's disfavor on the nation of Israel. The prophet Elijah predicted that Jezebel would die a horrible death (1 Kings 21:23-24), a prediction that was fulfilled in vivid detail (2 Kings 9:30-37). Jezebel was instrumental in leading God's people into worshiping Baal. For this reason her wickedness became the illustration of the wickedness latent within the church at Thyatira. No church can afford to tolerate sin. God calls for purity.

Those who refuse to repent of their immoral ways will suffer judgment as an example to the churches (2:21-23).

In an extended way Jesus Christ warned the church at Thyatira about His coming judgment on their Jezebel. He had given this false prophetess ample time to repent but she refused. Christ would therefore throw this woman into a bed, presumably a bed of sickness or judgment of some kind in contrast to her bed of adultery. Those who had followed in her adultery through spiritual unfaithfulness and physical immorality would also suffer greatly unless they repented. Christ would put to death "her children," those following her ways (literally "kill with death," an intensive expression of judgment). This judgment would serve as a testimony to all churches that Christ searches the minds (literally "kidneys") and hearts of His people—the seats of human intellect, emotion, and will. Jesus knows our thoughts and motives. He will justly repay everyone's works, whether good or evil.

Christians must persevere in the truth even in the face of deception within the church (2:24-25).

Although Jesus Christ is a stern judge, He also discerns between those who are hypocrites and those who are His own. To those in Thyatira who had remained faithful to Him, Christ commanded only that they hold on to what they already possessed until He returns. Those who did not hold to the teachings of Jezebel were holding to the teachings of Christ and should not lose their grip. Those who had resisted Jezebel's teachings had not entered into the "deep" things of Satan, probably a hint at the false teaching in the church about secret knowledge. Such early Gnostic teachings stand in contrast to the deep things, the mature teachings of God and His Word (1 Corinthians 2:10). God's people must stand up for truth. Thankfully it's possible to stand up against evil without knowing or experiencing all its depraved ways (compare 1 Corinthians 14:20). Christ didn't add to the burden of His true followers at Thyatira. He simply told them to hold fast to His ways. They were to keep working hard and growing in their spiritual influence as they had been. Jesus Christ will eventually return and rescue His people from this sin-filled world. We must stay faithful to the end.

**The Lord Jesus Christ comforts the church
with the promise of eternal authority over the nations (2:26-29).**

Jesus Christ gave comfort to the church at Thyatira by reminding the true believers of their exalted position and future role in His eternal plan.

All true believers will share in Christ's future rule over the nations (2:26-28).

True believers in Jesus Christ are those who overcome, those who are victorious. All true believers remain faithful to the end, following the way of Jesus. Obedience isn't a condition of eternal life but an evidence of eternal life. Jesus' true followers will receive from Him authority over the unbelieving nations. Here Jesus quotes Psalm 2:9, a psalm referring to the Messiah's authority to rule the nations. HE will rule the nations, using His people as the instruments of His authority. Christ received authority from the Father, and believers will receive authority from Christ. The word translated "rule" in verse 27 is the Greek term for "shepherd." Christ's rule is loving and gracious, yet firm.

Christ also promised the church at Thyatira that He would give His people the "morning star." Revelation 22:16 identifies the morning star as Jesus Christ Himself. True believers will one day experience unending spiritual union with their Savior.

Christians must learn to pay attention to the Holy Spirit's message to the churches (2:29).

Jesus concludes His message to the church at Thyatira with the call for all to hear what the Holy Spirit says. God speaks to His people through His Spirit and His Word. God searches for commitment in our lives, a commitment to both service and purity. Like the Christians at Thyatira we must continually strengthen our commitment to Jesus Christ.