

# A Letter to a Corrupt Church

Thyatira – Rev. 2:18-29

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Jesus addresses real problems in the first three churches of Revelation. These were problems associated with those local churches that existed in his day. These problems are issues that manifested themselves throughout church history. For example ... the term “**Ephesus**” means “desire.” In other words, it was a zealous local church, which spread the gospel around the world.

They were separate from worldly affairs, doctrinally sound and full of life. The only problem that was their loss of their first love which was creeping into the assembly. This loss was a problem within the church of Ephesus. It was also a general problem with most churches in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

The term, “**Smyrna**” means “myrrh.” They were a very poor church. They suffered serious persecution. The most prominent problem they faced was backing down when persecution arose. Though suffering and persecution was a general problem within the church of Smyrna it later became a global problem with all Christians between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century.

The term “**Pergamos**” means, “mixed marriage.” This church attempted to mix the pagan culture with the true faith. They were also guilty of allowing their leadership to assume an unbiblical authority over them. This was a general problem within the local church at Pergamos during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, however, it became a universal problem within the Christian churches between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century.

So, from this point in history the church incorporated many more false doctrines and practices into its assembly. By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD the church was plunging into an age of spiritual darkness. True Christianity was in peril.

It was called a *dark age* because of the cultural oppression brought on by the rulers of the day and dark because of the spiritual blindness and oppression placed on the people.

**Out of this time-period (*the dark ages*) rose a universal mindset with the churches that was much like that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church of Thyatira.**

## SO, LET'S LOOK AT THYATIRA

It was a real 1<sup>st</sup> Century church. What they did in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century is typical of what took place in most of the churches between AD 590 to AD 1517. This covers nearly 1000 years of history.

It is also interesting to note that Jesus indicated that this type of church would continue until He returns. For He exhorts this church to hold fast to that which is good among them "**till I come**" – Revelation 2:25

In fact, notice the language used in this passage is reflected in the last four churches.

**To Thyatira** (*a church where many in the leadership were corrupt and many of their doctrines were tainted*) Jesus said, "But that which ye have already hold fast **till I come**" – Revelation 2:25.

**To Sardis** (*a spiritually dead church*) Jesus said, "I will come on thee as a thief" – Rev. 3:3.

**To Philadelphia** (*a revived church*) Jesus said, "I come quickly" Rev. 3:11.

**To Laodicea** (*the Lukewarm church*) Jesus said, "I stand at the door, and knock" – Rev. 3:20.

This has led many to believe that the problems reflected in the church of Thyatira are mirrored today in the Roman and East Orthodox Churches. The problems in the church of Sardis (*which was a spiritually dead church*) is mirrored today in the mainstream liberal churches. The issues within the Philadelphian church (*the revived church*) are reflected in the older independent evangelical churches and the problems within the Laodicean church is reflected today in a church that practices neo-paganism and humanistic doctrines. It is neither hot nor cold for Christ.

Though each movement emerged at different times in history, all forms of these churches still exist in the world today. Hence the present tense admonition to each of them. (1) "hold fast **till I come**" – Rev. 2:25; (2) "I will come on thee as a thief" – Rev. 3:3; (3) "I come quickly" Rev. 3:11; (4) "I stand at the door, and knock" – Rev. 3:20.

## **Let's look at Thyatira's History:**

Thyatira was a church in a small town of little importance. There Alexander the Great later established the city as a Macedonian colony.

## **Thyatira's Industry:**

Much like Youngstown OH which was known for the steel it produced or Waterbury CT which was known for the brass it made, Thyatira was noted from purple dye.

It was not the political, cultural, intellectual, and social center. It was a blue-collar town made up of trade guilds that manufactured textiles and dye.

## **Thyatira's Christian Beginnings:**

A woman by the name of Lydia is found in Acts 16:13-15. She was a seller of purple.

Acts 16:13-15 – “And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. <sup>14</sup> And a certain woman named **Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira**, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

She was travelling in order to sell her purple dye and heard the gospel preached by Paul when she passed through Philippi. She was from the city of Thyatira. Many believe Lydia brought the gospel message back to Thyatira.

By the time John was writing this letter to the seven churches, 40 to 50 years had passed since Paul's encounter with Lydia. By the time John wrote this letter, Lydia was most likely with the Lord. He is now addressing a key problem that grew within the church at Thyatira over those years.

## **Thyatira's works – Rev. 2:19:**

The church at first sounds like the grandest of all churches.

“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”

They progressively became more impressive as they increased in: love, service, faith, patience and good works. It must have been wonderful to see a church where love increasingly abounds, where forgiveness and jealousy and bitterness are set aside. Here people were dedicating their lives to help others. They were a people with a simple faith, full of patience and tolerance to all, with boundless energy to do good.

It you lived anywhere in the ancient world. You'd probably want a Thyatiraian Christian to be your neighbor.

**Yet the Lord addresses this church severely in verses 18, 23, & 27.**

**Rev. 2:18** – “And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath **his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.**”

- a. **“The Son of God”** -- This name represents Christ's deity – Jesus is the Son of God and He is God [John 1:1-3]. False teachers are prone to teach Christ's human nature at the exclusion of His divine Nature.
- b. **“Who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.”**

Christ will come with piercing, righteous judgment on the Church for permitting false doctrine to creep in and mislead God's servants.

**“And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”** - Rev. 2:23.

**“And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father”** - Rev. 2:27.

The idea is that the very wrath of God is against some of them. Worldly faith says the church must always be love, service, and good works. But there is something seriously wrong if this is all that there is. Two reasons are given for Thyatira's judgment 1) Corrupt leadership; 2) The promotion of idolatry.

**Thyatira's Corrupt Leadership** - Revelation 2:20:

“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to

seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”

### **The Original Jezebel:**

In the OT she was the most wicked queen of Israel who brought with her the pagan worship of the Phoenicians. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians. Jezebel was the wicked wife of King Ahab who brought in Baal worship and false teaching to God’s people.

She is the epitome of wickedness [1 Kings 21:25]. Only her daughter, Athaliah superseded her in wickedness by killing all her grandchildren [the royal seed] to gain the throne [2 Kings 11:1]. This 1<sup>st</sup> Century false prophetess must have caused many in the church to fall into some sort of idolatry.

There are two forms of false teaching that Jezebel brought in:

a. **Fornication/adultery** – Revelation 2:20.

The original Jezebel brought in Baal and Ashtaroth worship.

Whatever this woman did, she caused the people to worship idols and to commit spiritual adultery and perhaps even physical adultery and fornication. Exodus 20:3-5 and Ezekiel 14:6-8 condemn such practices.

Ex. 20:3-5 – “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: <sup>5</sup> Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: **for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.**”

Ezek. 14:6-8 - “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. <sup>7</sup> For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: <sup>8</sup> And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall

know that I am the LORD.”

God will set his face against anyone who worships or bows down to graven images.

- b. **Eating of food sacrificed to idols** – Revelation 2:20b – “and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”

Apparently, many forms of pagan practice were accepted in this church. God’s word says that the kingdom of God is not of this world [John 18:36; 1 John 2:15-17].

**Heresy falls into two categories:**

**1. A false concept of the personal deity of Christ.**

The church of Thyatira could not be accused of abandoning this doctrine for they taught the deity of Christ in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

They believed in the Trinity. They believed that Jesus Christ is God’s only begotten Son, born of the Spirit and born of the virgin.

**2. A false concept of the sacrificial work of Christ.**

Thyatira means “continual sacrifice”. This heresy has produced numerous forms of false doctrines. Historically we know that the AD 6 Century church began to deny the finished work of Christ and encourages the practice of continual sacrifice of Christ in their worship.

This practice is directly opposed to God’s word [see Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:28; 10:10, 12, 14].

**Rom. 6:10** – “For in that he died, **he died unto sin once**: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”

**Heb. 9:28** – “So **Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many**; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

**Heb. 10:10** – “By the which will **we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**.”

**Heb. 10:12** – “But this man, **after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down on the right hand of God”

**Heb. 10:14** – “**For by one offering** he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.”

Further problems from a continual sacrifice. It causes people to try to earn their own salvation through their works.

“if Christ’s work on the cross is not enough, then you must have to do something to complete the payment for sin.”

The Bible states that Christ is the full payment of sin [Rom. 3:24-27; Heb. 7:25, 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18-21]. Also Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 2:5.

**Heb. 7:25** – “Wherefore **he is able also to save them to the uttermost** that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

**Heb. 9:12** – “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but **by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place**, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

3. **God’s grace** – He gives them an opportunity to repent [2:21]:

God in His mercy gives this church a period of time to repent, but if they consistently refused to turn from their ungodly ways then she will be judged.

4. **Christ’s judgment** [2:22-23]:

This false prophetess will face suffering and death and so will those who associate with her unless they repent [more mercy]. They will face great tribulation because of their false worship [vs. 22].

**“I will strike her children dead”** [vs. 23]:

Perhaps a refers to the second death [Rev. 10:15]. This will happen to all unbelievers no matter what church affiliation they may have [Matt. 25:46; Rev. 21:8].

**“I will pay you according to your deeds.”**

This seems to refer to the Great White Throne Judgment [Rev. 20:11-15]. All unbelievers [who do not accept God's sacrifice] will be judged by their works because there is no sacrifice for their sins their names were not written in the book of life.

**Christ's counsel [vss. 24-25] - "Hold fast until I come."**

Christ is speaking to those who were faithful in this church who were not deceived by false teachings, traditions, and rituals.

**Christ's challenge [vs. 26-28] is "To him who overcomes."**

He is speaking to those who do not give in, who do not bow down to the false religious system found in our day. Christ says to two things to those who overcome in this church -He will give them a position of leadership and authority.

**He will give the morning star.**

Jesus is the bright and morning star [Rev. 22:16]. It is referring to the promise of Christ to come and abide if you overcome. Who are the overcomers? 1 John 5:1-5 states, it is "...he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

"He that hath an ear." Not physical ears but spiritual ears. This is talking of believers [John 10:27] and these promises are only for those who overcome through their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.