

## **Seven Churches 3-3-01 Thyatira**

Thyatira was a city in the valley that connected Pergamum with Sardis. We know little about the city except that it was founded to house a military garrison to slow down any assault on Pergamum, the capital. It is the least important city of the seven and yet Christ has more to say to the believers here than any other church. Apparently they had many of the same problems and temptations that the church in Pergamum had.

One other thing we do know from an archeological perspective is that the town had a number of trade guilds. They were established for the profit and pleasure of those in different trades. Much like the union today, you would have a hard time doing work that these guilds did unless you joined them. To join them however meant you would eat with them which included the sacrifice to idols and the loose morality that went along at these often time drunken gatherings. Lydia the seller of purple was from this town. Lets look at the letter from the glorified Lord to the brothers and sisters in Thyatira and let the Holy Spirit apply it to us.

Rev 2:18 (NIV)<sup>18</sup> "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

The description here and also in 1:13,14 is also found in Daniel 10:6. The eyes of fire are eyes that search past and illuminate the dark recesses. Remember fire is the light of the world of that time, lamps burned olive oil with a flame. And so the fire in his eyes is the searching out of everything hidden by darkness. Fire was also a symbol of purity – and judgement, burning the impurities and cleansing. Heb 4:13 (NIV)<sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The feet of burnished bronze – speaks of justice and judgement. The altar of the Tabernacle and Temple was made of bronze. His feet walk in justice and bring him to judge, for his judgements are true and righteous. Combine these two descriptions and you have the Lord speaking to them who sees the heart and is coming to judge, to purify, to act justly. And I believe this is the call of the church – to discern truth from error in the light of Christ and to act justly. We will see how the problem in the church is an attack on this very thing. Psalm 73:11, Ezekiel 8:13, Zepheniah 1:12, Psalm 139:11,12

Rev 2:19 (NIV)<sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Just as with the church of Ephesus the deeds of this church are commended. Not only were they an active church but they had love and faith, service and perseverance. They weren't waning, in fact, they were reaching out more than they ever had – doing more than they did at first. This is not dead works trying to earn salvation, these are the fruits of being a new creation. God is commending their work. This is a church that seems to have all the right ingredients.

"Here is a warning. A church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real Church. It is possible for a Church to be crowded because its people

come to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed instead of confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation; it maybe a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation.” William Barclay

I don't quite agree with this conservative commentator. This church was a body of believers – but I do agree that our focus as believers can shift from works led and empowered of the Holy Spirit bearing fruit that remains, to works of man that merely keep us busy and away from time with our Savior. Instead of gathering around our risen Lord, we can gather around our activities. But here in Thyatira they are praised for their actions, so the actions must be inspired by Christ.

We can be so anti – dead works that we don't do the works the Spirit is leading us to do. In that case we end up in that terrible not hot or cold - lukewarm condition. Let Christ lead us into increasing works led of the Holy Spirit so that Jesus can say to us, 'you are doing more than you did at first.'

Rev 2:20 (NIV)<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Nevertheless,... Spirit led important work BUT Any church can be doing good things yet tolerate horrible compromise. Last week we discussed this same problem in Pergamum. The Lord calls this woman in the congregation who calls herself a prophetess– Jezebel. First, there were woman prophets in both old and new testaments. In the New, Anna (Lk 2:36), and the four virgin daughters of Philip (Ac 21:9). Remember Paul told them that all could prophesy in the church in 1Cor 14. Next look at the expression, “calls herself”, she is not called by the Lord or by his leaders but claims the gift for herself. This is not necessarily “to see the future” not do I believe it is what we think of in some so called Spirit filled churches, but speaking forth what the Spirit of God is saying at a given time. If you have gift, there is no need to tell people. They will recognize the Spirit working in your life. The only people I have had tell me they were prophets were thieves, and I mean that quite literally.

The problem in this church is that they tolerate her. If they are called to have discernment and judge justly among themselves they need to expose this evil in their midst. Maybe they were afraid of a church split? Maybe they didn't want to offend, maybe they thought they needed her abundant offerings – but the absence of action leads others to believe what this woman is presenting as from the Lord is OK. Just like those with the spirit of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, she encourages them to take part in the feasts of the Greek and Roman temples and the fornication that goes with it.

I can just hear the justification. “We must be among the world and show them that we are like them. How are we going to reach them if we don't go where they go?” I have a friend who is a believer but he keeps making the same excuse for going to the bar. He has a problem with drinking and consumes way too much. But there is his excuse. With Jezebel (not her real name but her spiritual error) the guilds insisted on joining them in the feast. Jezebel probably testifies, “You know – they don't think we are so bad since I've been joining them. I even shared the gospel with a few at my table.” What she doesn't say is who she went home with after everyone had one too many.

It is her teaching of compromise that misleads others in the flock. She justifies her desire for higher wages and the pleasures of the world with religious rhetoric. Others who are weak will fall for it and end up as ensnared in that system as she is, justifying their actions and thereby teaching others to compromise. The eyes of Jesus Christ see right down into her dark heart and his feet are at the door in justice. It is the same with every compromise within the body that leads others away from Jesus to things of the world that will steal his place in your heart.

You know, I think, in the confused mind of people caught in this compromising trap, they convince themselves they are helping the church rather than harming it. When confronted by the elders they will make excuses, leave and then call them judgmental. Others will follow them because they preferred a watered down gospel that does not cost so much. Their message is really this: You can have the world and be spiritual, you can indulge your flesh and love God. Oh, they would never say it quite like that, but that is the end result of that teaching.

Rev 2:21 (NIV)<sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

We sometimes wonder why God does not act more swiftly in these blatant cases of evil. He is patient and not willing that any should perish. God waits for that cry of repentance. That is what the elders should plead with her for, recognition of the error and repentance for it, and restoration.

Rev 2:22 (NIV)<sup>22</sup> So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

Spiritual adultery (which is worshipping other gods) or physical adultery, I believe both are the case here. God brings suffering to wake us up and help us face the truth. His mercy brings the suffering. The ones in the fellowship that are involved will also suffer. You wonder if it is some kind of STD. There is one way out – repentance. Forsaking the sin once and for all, recognizing the error of it, and determining never to return to it. If the Holy Spirit has brought to mind some compromise in your life you can be sure He will not let you go on with it. He will cause you to suffer until you see it and repent of it. It is not always so clear to us as we look on the outward appearance – and do not have those flaming eyes. But God looks down into your heart and sees where its treasures are. He loves you too much to leave you where you are at.

Rev 2:23 (NIV)<sup>23</sup> I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Justice is on the way, and when it hits, the churches will hear about it and know, God is serious. They will know he sees past the rhetoric and looks right down into the heart. It is by the fear of God that men depart from evil. We see his justice, examine our hearts and repent of the compromise. Jesus is not a lord among lords but Lord over all lords, and He will not hold equal status with sin's poison within your heart. Here we have that expression of what those eyes do, search the heart and mind. All actions are repaid, good or evil. Imagine the repayment for causing the little ones to stumble.

Rev 2:24 (NIV)<sup>24</sup> Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

She must have taught some of the Gnostic teaching that says what the body does has no affect on the soul. You must experience evil to the full with your body but keep your soul from it to know what the enemy is up to. These are twisted distortions that trap men in lust and destroys them. Paul said a real Christian knows the deep things of God (1Cor 2:10) as opposed to the deep secrets of Satan. The focus is entirely different. To those who did not hold to this teaching Jesus just says keep on keeping on. Amazing how in one church there can be such extremes.

Rev 2:25 (NIV)<sup>25</sup> Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Do you hear the Spirit say this to us? He has given us so much truth and direction and what we need to do is cling to it. Persevere as those were who were not giving in to this teaching. They probably had a very limited means of support but they would not compromise. In Japan, 20 years ago, I met a man who had a camera shop. He was an outspoken Christian. Because of it he had very little business. Those who knew he was Christian and that he would not attend the Buddhist events boycotted his shop. It cost him, but he was not going to pretend. How will they know unless we are different?

This compromise could have swept through the church and then we would have just another of one of Rome's many religions that did nothing to change lives, or change the world. How tragic that would have been. Thank God for his grace that kept the church – that wrote this letter to the church to keep it pure. And what about us? We can be of no influence in our community if we will just compromise. Speak the truth in words and actions and be different regardless of the cost. That is the message to both Pergamum and Thyatira.

Rev 2:26-29 (NIV)<sup>26</sup> To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--<sup>27</sup> 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'-- just as I have received authority from my Father.<sup>28</sup> I will also give him the morning star.<sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The scripture quoted, Ps 2:9 is about Christ, but here He says He will share that authority with those that are in Him. We may be last now but we will rule with Him then. The morning star Jesus gives us is Himself. 22:16 There is no greater gift! The promises of what we receive far outweigh what we give up. Hold on – persevere. You have a great promise before you if you will not be seduced by her teaching.