

The Letter to the Church at Thyatira Revelation 2:18-29

INTRODUCTION: Setting the Stage

Church age for this period starts around 606/7.

- The first pope was given the name and role over all synods of the church Boniface III (previous popes existed from Peter, but not recognized as leader of all, more of a Bishop)

Here is a list of a few things that were introduced into the church during this time

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- Doctrine of kissing the pope's foot
- Use of holy water
- the rosary (Peter the Hermit)
- Transubstantiation established
- Bible was forbidden to be read by lay people; only the priest (until the 1960s all services were in Latin)

This period was adding to the word, falling for external non-Christian influences, false teaching and compromising their faith in alignment to the world.

This set the stage for the church of Thyatira...

Last Week

Pergamos

- Merger of church and state
- Constantine declaring the end of the persecution and Theodosius I making Christianity the state religion
- Rome was traditionally a **poly theistic culture**, so even though Christianity was the state religion during this time period, many other influences from the other religions crept in.
- The Babylonian influence was very prevalent

- We talked about Cyrus conquering Babylon; the Babylonian priesthood migrated to Pergamos and eventually to Rome
- As a result the Roman Church started to get Latin versions of false gods and the like that shaped the Roman Pagan belief system/culture
- For example, upon founding the new spiritual center in Pergamos; the king gave himself the title **Pontifex Maximus** which was the title of the high priest in the Babylonian religion.
- It was the religious title that the Caesar's took until Damasus, Bishop of Rome declared it for himself.
- Historically this marks the final element of Babylonian practices into the Roman Church.
- As leaders continue to tweak the Christian model in Rome, it caused **churches to be filled with believers of other faiths** and created with pagan influences causing a ton of issues relating to the **church that was married to the world....**
- **Doctrine** that started to emerge as State run church as we see the transition into the Roman Catholic church
 - Praying for the dead -- purgatory (not biblical)
 - Worshiping/Praying to saints/angels
 - Worshiping Mary
 - Priests separating themselves from the laity (robes and collars)

BACKGROUND: The City of Thyatira

- Today it is the modern Turkish city of **Akhisar**(ack-ha-sar) about 45k.
- At the junction of three roads to Sardis, Symryna and Pergamos
- Thyatira was a **trade and manufacturing city** — one of the most industrially active cities in the region.
- Archaeological and historical records reveal a remarkable concentration of **trade guilds** (Greek: *thiasoi*) in the city. We have inscriptional evidence for guilds of:
 - Wool workers
 - Linen workers
 - Bronze smiths
 - Tanners
 - Potters
 - Slave traders

- Bakers
- Dyers
- **Dyers** — is particularly significant. Thyatira was famous throughout the Roman world for its production of **purple dye**, extracted from a plant called the madder root (as opposed to the more expensive murex shellfish dye).
 - Purple cloth was a luxury export -- sign of royalty
 - **Lydia**, described as "a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14). She became Paul's first European convert in Philippi.
 - It is widely speculated — though not confirmed — that Lydia may have carried the gospel back to Thyatira, potentially helping to plant the very church Jesus is now writing to.
- **The Trade Guild Problem**
 - To understand this letter we need to understand this background.
 - In the Roman world, **trade guilds were not merely professional organizations** — they were deeply religious ones.
 - To be in a guild meant participating in guild feasts, and guild feasts were almost always held in the temple of the guild's patron deity.
 - These meals involved: Food sacrificed to idols, Ritual libations to pagan gods, often (especially in certain guilds) sexual immorality connected to temple worship
 - This put **Christian tradespeople in Thyatira in an impossible situation**. If you refused to attend guild functions, you risked being expelled from the guild — which meant you could lose your livelihood, your contracts, your reputation, and potentially your home. The economic pressure to compromise was enormous.
- Thyatira was known for its idols and we read that Jesus is calling this church out for that very thing as a false teacher had risen inside their church.
- *This church there appears to have been genuinely alive and growing — this is actually the church that receives the most praise from Jesus in the seven letters before the rebuke arrives. But that praise makes the rebuke even more painful. They were doing so many things right, and yet they had allowed a cancer to grow in their midst.*

VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY

- Read 18-29

Verse 18

"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."

"Title with a description: Son of God" —

- This is the *only time* in the entire Book of Revelation that Jesus explicitly uses the title *Son of God* to refer to Himself - there is only one Son of God.
- This is not accidental. Thyatira was home to a prominent cult of **Apollo**, the Greek sun-god who was also called "son of Zeus" — essentially *son of god* in the Greco-Roman religious framework.

"Eyes like blazing fire" —

- Fire in Scripture is consistently associated with **purity and the ability to see what is hidden**.
- These eyes miss nothing. They pierce through the darkness of compromise and self-deception.
- To a church that had been tolerating hidden sin in its midst.

"Feet like burnished bronze" —

- To get that color was refined in a furnace until it shines like gold.
- Significantly, **Thyatira was famous for its bronze workers**. Speaking a language they knew
- We discussed a few different times now that bronze symbolizes strength and divine judgment
- One commentary states He does not come to this church with soft sandals. He comes with feet that could crush.

Verse 19

"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first."

Commendation -->

"Your love and faith" — These two qualities are foundational. The Thyatirans were not a cold, dead congregation. They genuinely loved one another and held to faith in Christ. The Greek word for love here is *agape* — the self-giving, sacrificial love that marks genuine Christian community.

"Your service and perseverance" —

- *Service* (Greek: *diakonia*) suggests action, practical ministry — not just belief but action.
- *Perseverance* (Greek: *hupomone*) suggests holding up to the pressures of the culture

"You are now doing more than you did at first" —

- This is stunning. Most of the seven churches are going in the wrong direction.
- The Thyatirans are actually **growing and increasing**. Their ministry is expanding; model church
- This makes the following rebuke all the more sobering.

Verse 20

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols."

"You tolerate that woman Jezebel" —

- Possibly a real person with a symbolic name in their church today
- Jesus is invoking one of the most notorious figures in the entire Old Testament: **Queen Jezebel**, wife of King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 16–21; 2 Kings 9).
- The original Jezebel was a Phoenician princess (Pagan upbringing) who:
 - Introduced Baal worship into Israel dark period for Israel - King allows it.
 - Funded and hosted 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19)
 - Persecuted and murdered the true prophets of God
 - Seduced Israel into spiritual adultery and pagan sexual -- full of idolatry

- Today the catholic church is full of idolatry -- saints, Mary, icons, idolizing the Pope and people like Sister Theresa
- Led her husband into sin rather than following him in righteousness
- Was ultimately thrown from a window and eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:30–37)

"Who calls herself a prophet; who is misleading Jesus' servants" —

- This is critical. She had **a recognized platform** in the church.
- Prophecy was a highly valued and Spirit-empowered gift in the early church (1 Corinthians 12–14).
- A prophetic voice carried enormous weight. She was using that weight — and abusing it — to lead people astray.

"Sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" —

- These were almost certainly connected to **trade guild participation**.
- One commentary describes her theological position was likely something like:
"We are free in Christ. The idols are nothing. The food is just food. The sexual practices at guild banquets are just cultural customs. Don't let legalism cost you your livelihood."

This is what makes her teaching so dangerous — it was *practically appealing*. She wasn't asking people to worship Baal from the heart. She was offering a theological framework that made compromise seem reasonable, even sophisticated. Sound familiar? The same arguments are made today.

Verse 21

"I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling to repent."

This verse is often overlooked, but it contains one of the most theologically weighty statements in the entire letter.

"I have given her time to repent, unwilling" —

- Jesus is not acting in haste or anger. He has been *patient*. He has extended opportunity. This shows something important about God's character: **He does not immediately destroy — He gives space for repentance**

- The original Jezebel of Israel also had warnings from the prophet Elijah. God sent Elijah to confront Ahab and Jezebel repeatedly before judgment fell.
 - So this isn't a failure of understanding. It is pure **hardness of will**. She has chosen it.
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Verse 22

"Indeed, I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their ways."

"I will cast her on a bed of suffering" —

- There is powerful, dark irony in this image. She has led people into beds of sexual immorality — and now Jesus will cast her onto a bed of an entirely different kind.
- The Greek word for "suffering" (*thlipsis*) is elsewhere translated as *tribulation*, *affliction*, or *great distress*.
- This is not a minor inconvenience. This is serious divine discipline.
- The phrase *cast on a bed* is also a direct echo of how Jezebel's end was described — she was thrown down from a window (eaten by dogs). There is a kind of divine poetic justice in the language.

"Unless they repent of her ways" — The Grace of God is real ... we always have an off-ramp -- however big the sin.

Verse 23

"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."

"I will strike her children dead" —

- "Her children" most likely refers to her spiritual disciples
- The word translated "strike dead" is *apokteno* — to kill. This is unmistakable. Jesus is not speaking metaphorically here.
- In the OT God struck down many civilizations, but the NT is also not naive about God's capacity for serious judgment, even within the church as stated

here.

- In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul speaks of certain Corinthian believers who had died because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper.
- In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by the Holy Spirit for their deception.

"Then all the churches will know" — This judgment is not private; reminder that these letters go to all churches.

"I am he who searches hearts and minds" —

- The Greek is literally *hearts and kidneys* (*kardias kai nephrous*) — following the Hebrew tradition where the *kidneys* (or *reins* in older translations) represented the innermost depths of a person's motivations and desires.
- Jesus is saying: I see everything. Not just your public behavior. Nothing is hidden from me. (direct reference to Jeremiah 17:10)

"I will repay each of you according to your deeds" —

- This is not works-based salvation -- but feels more like a works-based judgment.
- Not acceptance by God, but as the evidence of what's in the heart (see Rom 2:6; Matt 16:27; Rev 20:12–13).
- What a person does over a lifetime reveals who they are and what they love.

Verse 24

"Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned the so-called deep secrets of Satan (as they call them), I will not impose any other burden on you."

"The rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching" —

- The tone shifts. After the scorching judgment of the previous verses, Jesus now turns with evident warmth and relief to those in the church who have *remained faithful*. There are two groups in Thyatira — the compromised and the committed — and Jesus distinguishes between them carefully.
- This is important takeaway -- Jesus does not condemn the entire church.

"Have not learned the so-called deep secrets of Satan" —

- *"Deep secrets"* was likely the exact language Jezebel and her followers used to describe their teaching.
- They claimed special, deeper knowledge — an advanced spirituality that the ordinary Christian wasn't mature enough to understand. This kind of claim to spiritual elitism was common in the first century and also today
- Jesus takes their own language — *deep secrets* — and reframes it brutally: *you call them deep things; I call them deep things of Satan*. This is not deep wisdom. This is not advanced Christianity. This is demonic.

"I will not impose any other burden on you" —

- Jesus sees and honors costly faithfulness, even when it goes largely unnoticed by the people around you.

Verse 25

"Only hold on to what you have until I come."

This is the command to the faithful in Thyatira. Hold on ... because I am coming back!

Jesus is the answer to the problems of this church --- because the false teachers will face final judgment and the faithful the ultimate reward

Verse 26

"To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—"

Reward -- Notice the qualification -- there is no finish line until He comes...and when He does

"Authority over the nations" —

- Meaning they/we will have delegated power and a ruling authority.
- Jesus is promising that the faithful overcomer will **reign with Him**. This aligns with the theme of co-regency found throughout the NT (2 Tim 2:12 — *"if we endure, we will also reign with him"*; see also Rev 20:4–6; 1 Cor 6:2–3)

Verse 27

"that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will shatter them like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father."

This is a direct quotation from **Psalm 2:8–9**, one of the great royal Messianic psalms of the Old Testament. Psalm 2 describes the LORD's Anointed King who will receive the nations as His inheritance and rule with absolute authority — breaking the rebellious nations like clay pots.

"Just as I have received authority from my Father" — Jesus is not inventing; He received it. The Father gave it to the Son; and the Son will share it with the overcomer. The chain of delegation.

Verse 28

"I will also give that one the morning star."

This is the most mysterious and beautiful of the promises to the overcomers in all seven letters. What does it mean?

The Morning Star —

- In the ancient world, the *morning star* referred to the brightest star visible just before dawn — in our understanding, the planet Venus.
- Jesus **tells us explicitly later in the same book**. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus says: *"I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."*

Jesus is the Morning Star. And He promises to give Himself to the overcomer.

It is also worth noting prophetically: the morning star rises as the night ends. Implies that the darkness is not permanent – there is a dawn coming.

Verse 29

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The mention of the *Spirit* here is significant. The risen Jesus speaks through these letters — and the Spirit carries those words to the churches across time. This is a living word. The Spirit is still speaking this letter.

The question is are we hearing it? Do we see similarity? Are we even listening for it?