



Part 8 – To the Church in Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

Of the seven cities in Revelation, Thyatira is the least well-known, the least impressive, and as far as cities go, the least important. And yet this is the longest of Jesus' messages to the seven churches. That said, Thyatira was an important center of commerce. The city is mentioned in Acts as the home of Lydia, a textile merchant, who was converted under the ministry of Paul (16:14). By the second and third centuries, Thyatira had become a more impressive economic force in the region due to the success of their various merchants and craftsmen.

Like so many of the cities in that day, Thyatira was significantly influenced by the trade guilds. Based on ancient inscriptions it is clear that the city was known for its shoemakers, fabric manufacturers and dyers, bronzesmiths, potters, bakers, tanners, and merchants. The prominence of the guilds was of great importance for the Christians because each guild adopted a patron deity and combined their business with their pagan religious practices which typically involved sexual licentiousness. Without guild membership, making a living in one of the trades was extremely difficult. This placed tremendous pressure upon the Christians to compromise in order to find a place in the economic life of the city.¹

The Introduction

Vs. 18 – Jesus introduces himself as, “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” – The chief god of Thyatira was Apollo, the son of Zeus. So Jesus quite intentionally calls attention the fact that he is the true Son of God. In **Psalm 2**, a Messianic Psalm, we learn that the authority to judge is entrusted to God's Son. The Lord's “fiery eyes” indicates both his penetrating knowledge and righteous judgment.

“In the desperate situation of Thyatira, with the cult movement of Jezebel running rampant in the church, they need to realize that the exalted Christ is not only aware of every aspect of the situation, but that judgment is imminent.”²

The Commendation

Vs. 19 – Jesus commends the church in Thyatira by saying, “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.” – May the very same things be said of us! Within the church there are those who have grown in their love and good works and patient endurance. This is all the more remarkable considering the wicked influence of a false teacher in their midst.

The Rebuke

Vs. 20 – After his words of commendation, Jesus rebukes them because they “tolerate that woman Jezebel.” Almost certainly Jesus is using the name “Jezebel,” symbolically to refer back to the wicked wife of King Ahab who led the king and the people into the worship of Baal and the immorality that accompanied it (**1 Kings 16:31; 21:25-26**). Notice that the rebuke aims directly at their tolerance of this wicked false teacher. Some, perhaps even most, of the church did not follow her teaching and immorality but they tolerated her presence and influence. Well before the actual practice of immorality and idolatry, is the movement to tolerate those within the church who do. Unlike the Ephesians who Jesus commends for hating the works of the Nicolaitans, the Christians of Thyatira have allowed a place for the wicked influence of this false prophet.

“The flaw in the Thyatirans' growing faith and love was naivete, a lack of discernment that took people at face value rather than putting them to the test of truth. Jesus says to the church at Thyatira, ‘I love your love, but I hate your tolerance.’”³

¹ Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) p. 151

² Osborne, p. 153

³ Dennis Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 80

The Warning

Vs. 21 – “I gave her time to repent...” – The patience of the Lord is often mistaken by sinners as indifference.

Vv. 22-23 – The Lord threatens sickness and even death upon this later day Jezebel and those who practice her immorality. By referring to her followers as “her children,” the Lord makes a strong statement about the union between false teachers and their followers.

“...and I will give to each of you according to your works.” – The significance of this statement must not be missed or minimized. The gospel is the good news that, by the dying and rising of Christ, our sins have been paid for and our guilt has been removed. It is a glorious message and the anchor of our hope. But it is not all that the Scriptures have to say about being truly Christian. Those who have been forgiven of their sins are expected to live lives of increasing obedience to the Lord. God’s grace is not for justification only. God’s grace transforms, sanctifies, and delivers us from the controlling power of sin. And all of us, without exception, will be called upon to answer for the lives we’ve led. These words of Jesus are meant to land upon us with great weight.

- Just as there is a direct connection between false teaching and sinful living (idolatry and immorality always went together) so there is to be a link between holding to sound doctrine and godliness. This point is made repeatedly throughout the Scriptures. We have been saved unto good works (**Eph. 2:10**). God’s grace has come not only to save us from sin’s penalty but in order to train us “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age” (**Titus 2:11-12**). Outside of Christ we are “slaves to sin,” but now we “have become obedient from the heart” (**Rom. 6:17**).
- Elsewhere in Revelation we are told that the Spirit says that the saints “will rest from their labor, *for their deeds will follow them*” (**14:13**). The church is described as a bride dressed in “fine linen,” which “stands for *the righteous acts of the saints*” (**19:7-8**). In the final chapter the Lord declares, “Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone *according to what he has done*” (**22:12**). The Lord will distinguish between those who are his and those who are not his, in part, by placing our lives in the light of his wise judgment. The glorious doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone was never meant to be taken as a license to sin or in any way undermine the Lord’s call to holiness and good works (**Rom. 6:1**).

Vs. 24 – The false teacher Jesus refers to as Jezebel had been teaching what some referred to as “the deep things of Satan.” What this person was promoting in the church was likely being presented as higher and deeper teaching, a way of rising above concerns over morality. In truth, it was nothing more than satanic deceptions.

The Encouragement

Vv. 24-25 – The Lord loves his church and he does not seek to lay upon her any burden too great for her to bear:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (**Matt. 11:28-30**).

But there is a burden to bear when following Jesus. And within the church in Thyatira are men and women who have been laboring faithfully to reject the false teachings that had captured so many others. And to these faithful ones the Lord says, “I do not lay upon you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come.”

The Promise

Vv. 26-28 – The passage relates to Psalm 2, a Messianic, enthronement psalm. The Lord is saying that the authority he has been given over the nations will be shared with his followers. What that means is not explained. But it is a remarkably moving vision of what is to come. To those who reject the sinful enticements and idolatry of false teachers and the world, Jesus promises a share in the reign of God at the end of the age. This promise appears elsewhere in the Book of Revelation. It is an important element of life in the new creation (**5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5**). It is an extension of Jesus’ promise that his people will have a share in his judgment of the tribes of Israel (**Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30**). In his parable of the talents Jesus promises that his disciples will “rule over many things” (**Matt. 25:21**). The Lord further promises the “morning star,” which is likely a reference to himself, “the bright Morning Star” (**22:16**). Even as the Lord will give his people a share in his authority, so he gives them a share in his glory.