

Revelation

*Part Twelve
Thyatira
(Revelation 2:18-29)*

With Study Questions

310)

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
8/8/2021*

Revelation

Part Twelve

Thyatira

(Revelation 2:18-29)

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹ “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. ²⁰ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴ “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – ²⁷ ‘*He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels*’ – as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:18-29).

Introduction

I was having dinner with a friend who attends our church when he said something I don’t think I’d ever heard anyone say. He said that if he attends church without at least inviting somebody, he feels selfish. As if he’d been invited to a meal in a world of starving people while neglecting to consider if others might like to eat. I think this is a pretty widespread problem among Reformed churches. We tend to be inwardly focused.

It's almost as if we take pride in our lack of impact upon the world. We dress this disposition up in the clothing of commitment-our unwillingness to compromise. And I think we should be unwilling to compromise, while at the same time, committed to evangelism. And not merely evangelism, but the discipling of the nations.

This letter from Jesus to the church in Thyatira is startling! It is startling in its language of denunciation and warning of affliction. I daresay, we might all feel a bit uncomfortable with the way things are said by Christ. It is also startling in the magnitude of the promise associated with those who are willing to persevere.

It might be of interest to note that it is in reference to this letter that the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen said that what is taught here "demands postmillennialism." I know that I have not yet fully defined that term. Some have studied this; others can remember this for reference at a later time. It is also notable that these startling words of Christ are found in the longest of the seven letters to the smallest of the seven churches.

Thyatira

In the horseshoe shaped Roman postal route, we are now heading south. Thyatira was socially, economically and politically, the least significant of all the seven churches. It was a commercial center dominated by trade guilds or unions. We often, in our own culture, think of unions as powerful and persuasive entities. The trade guilds of first century Rome were much more powerful.

It wasn't a matter of merely joining them. It was required that you join in their social intercourse. You had to eat with them, and the meals had religious connotations and sexual activity. Committed Christians would not find themselves welcomed unless they lived in stark violation of their convictions, and even denying their convictions.

The principle deity of Thyatira was Apollo, the sun god, which may be a reason Jesus uses the designation He does at the opening of the letter. By the third century, Thyatira became a stronghold for the heresy of Montanism. Two components of this heresy were its emphasis, even obsession, with the imminence of the new Jerusalem. Their best-selling books would have been 'the end of near' sort of books. They were also known for their "Enthusiasts." This did not mean they were merely enthusiastic, but they believed in moment by moment prophetic insights.

They were the Spirit-filled ones and depended heavily upon charismatic expressions of the faith. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass (Revelation 2:18).

We are very used to the designation **“Son of God,”** yet John uses it only once in this entire book. **“Son of God”** tells us that Jesus is God (John 5:18). It is also used repetitively in reference to His role as Messiah (John 11:27). Jesus is God the Savior. **“Eyes like a flame of fire”** tells us of His searching and piercing omniscience (see verse 23). **“Feet like fine brass”** speak of swift power. H. B. Swete records:

This mention of the eyes that flash with righteous indignation and the feet that can stamp down the enemies of the truth prepares the reader for the severe tone of the utterance which follows.¹

I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first (Revelation 2:19).

The commendation from Christ is brief but significant and precious. They were a church that loved people. They worked hard, they were loving, faithful, service oriented and persevering. If you were a person in need of love or help, you might find this a very welcoming church. And they were getting better at it.

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

They were just the opposite of the Ephesians, who had left their first love. This church was getting better. But they were also just the opposite

¹ Swete, H. B. (Ed.). (1906). [The apocalypse of St. John](#) (2d. ed., p. 41). New York: The Macmillan Company.

of the church at Ephesus in that Ephesus heavily scrutinized false teachers (Revelation 2:2). Thyatira had no such vetting process.

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:20).

We see the rebuke of Christ against **“that woman Jezebel.”** It is unlikely that there was actually a woman in that church, named Jezebel, who was teaching this heretical doctrine. Similar to His use of Balaam (Revelation 2:14), Jesus is calling upon an Old Testament person for His reprimand of this church. Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, among other things, seduced Israel to idolatry and was a conniving, manipulative and evil woman (1 Kings 16; 18-21; 2 Kings 9).

The mouth of forbidden women is a deep pit; he with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it (Proverbs 22:14).

The above Proverb indicates that it is the already rebellious person who will gravitate toward this deep pit. The problem with this church was that it allowed this woman to have a doctrinal platform. Time does not allow a full treatment of egalitarianism and complementarianism (the role of women in the ministry). Suffice it to say for now that the Scriptures are not unclear that the roles of pastors, elders and deacons are committed to men.

Jesus, who was clearly not one to be influenced by His culture (one need merely assess how many cultural violations He engaged in while speaking to the Samaritan women at Jacob’s Well in the fourth chapter of John), chose twelve male apostles. Paul taught that an elder was to be the **“husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2)**, literally the man of one woman. And it is in a pastoral epistle that Paul instructs that he does not **“permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12)**. People ask why, and Paul’s only explanation (at least here) is that it was Eve who was deceived.

We are not talking here about a wise woman giving valuable instruction to a man in a proper context, as with Priscilla and Apollos (Acts 18:26). It would be to overstate the issue to suggest that men can’t learn

from women. Yet, at the same time, a woman in a pulpit is, in itself, an act of rebellion whether we fully understand why or not. There didn't seem to be a utilitarian or practical reason Adam and Eve were not to eat of a certain tree, but it was an act of rebellion when they did. Perhaps Eve should have recognized up front that there was a problem when a serpent began talking.

The seduction of her instruction led to **"sexual immorality"** and eating **"things sacrificed to idols."** This seems to be a recurring theme and is likely related to the requirements surrounding the banquets of the trade unions and ultimately the taking of the mark of the beast. We can't say for certain, but it is very likely that the seduction revolved around what a Christian is at liberty to do if it means, say, keeping your job.

To what extent can we adopt modern, cultural standards? These are not easy questions. We are hit with this on a daily basis. Let us pray that God grant us wisdom. But here is the big question: if God gives us wisdom, will we heed it?

And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent (Revelation 2:21).

God is patient. In some way, not revealed in the passage, this Jezebel cult had been instructed in her/their heresy. They had been given time to work it out. They chose not to. A rebel or a heretic is not someone who holds an errant or immoral position on an issue (we all fall into this category at one level or another). It is one who, once instructed, refuses to yield. This woman should have been judged by the church. But the church was negligent. But God is not negligent. He will protect His church against those who seek to introduce soul-damning doctrines.

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works (Revelation 2:22, 23).

There is a bit of irony in this warning. The bed of **"sexual immorality"** would be replaced by a **"sickbed."** She and her followers would be on the wrong side of the **"tribulation"** we will be investigating

when we begin chapter four. The language is graphic, and the judgment is severe. It may not be popular to say, but it is no less true now than when the author of Hebrews wrote,

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

Precisely what this judgment looks like I couldn't say. We do know that the Jezebel cult will find itself terminated. Now and then we see these types of severe actions from the hand of God. Uzzah killed for touching the Ark (2 Samuel 6:7); Moses threatened with death for neglecting to circumcise his child (Exodus 4:24-26); Ananias and Sapphira struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11); members of the church at Corinth getting sick and dying due to their unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30).

If you find all of this off-putting, you may wish to evaluate why. It is very likely that we have grown so accustomed to God's patience and grace that His justice appears unjust. Truly, our minds need renewal.

We may be able to convince our friends and neighbors that our compromises are legitimate. But there is no fooling the One who **"searches the minds and hearts."**

Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come (Revelation 2:24, 25).

Clearly it was not the entire church which had been plagued by this heretical, immoral teaching. In the midst of the chaos, Jesus encourages the faithful to stay the course. There was no other major issue for them.

If we can stop just for a moment on this phrase, **"the depths of Satan, as they say."** I find myself confronted from time to time with people who say they have a method of fighting Satan that goes beyond what we read in Scripture. Think of old movies where thick, ancient books are opened to aid the characters in their battles with the evil spirits. Satan is a foe, no doubt. But some churches want to major in Satanology as if he is not the defeated enemy that he is. James gives a brief crash course on how to deal with the devil.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded (James 4:7, 8).

It is this final promise that is almost shocking. It is here that Dr. Bahnsen said we are, if you will, joyfully forced into an optimistic view of history (commonly called postmillennialism).

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – ²⁷ *‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’* – as I also have received from My Father (Revelation 2:26, 27).

The Old Testament reference here is Psalm 2, which along with Psalm 110 (which contains a similar message) are the most frequently cited passages from the Old Testament in the New Testament. In Psalm 2, this promise appears to be made to Christ alone. Yet here, Jesus extends it to the one **“who overcomes, and keeps [His] works until the end.”**

Now this should not be thought of as some bizarre power-grab by the church. This is not designed to cater to power hungry individuals (and there have been plenty of them through history, both in and out of the church). Remember the theme of Revelation is the victory of Christ over all evil. A reference like this should bring our minds to evil, tyrannical, body-killing, soul-killing systems and leaders who will ever seek to rule.

It’s not as if Christians should feel (as they are often accused) that they are trespassing by seeking to bring the world into the glorious care of the only wise God. It is the job of the church, not merely to evangelize the nations, but to disciple the nations. It is up to the church, faithful Christians, to teach the nations to **“observe all things that [Christ] has commanded” (Matthew 28:20).**

There really amounts to three ways the church can respond to its surrounding culture: We can retreat from it. We can be influenced by it. Or we can transform it. It is the third way that best comports with this promise of Christ in Revelation 2:26, 27. H. B. Swete says it this way:

Historically the promise fulfils itself in the Church's influence upon the world; no other voluntary Society can be compared with her as a factor in the shaping of national character and life: and the individual disciple, in proportion as he is loyal, bears his share in the subjugation of the world to Christ;²

But, lest we mistakenly conclude that a transformed world is our ultimate hope, Jesus extends His glorious promise to something which far exceeds even the most sanctified and godly nation.

...and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:28, 29).

The preeminent gift, one that it is, at times difficult to grasp, is the gift of Christ Himself.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star (Revelation 22:16).

We often think in terms of giving ourselves to Christ, but He speaks here of giving Himself to us. He is the morning star. We belong to Him and He belongs to us. And apart from that, the study of this book, of any book, is an empty pursuit. This is nothing new. The promise of God Himself has always been the treasure of the faithful.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward (Genesis 15:1).

I pray this is true of us all.

² Swete, H. B. (Ed.). (1906). [*The apocalypse of St. John*](#) (2d. ed., p. 46). New York: The Macmillan Company.

Questions for Study

1. Do you think it's selfish to neglect inviting people to church? Why or why not (pages 2, 3)?
2. Describe the city of Thyatira. What similarities does it bear to your city (pages, 3, 4)?
3. In what ways was Thyatira opposite of Ephesus? How would you view your church in terms of these extremes (pages 4, 5)?
4. Discuss the roles of women in ministry. What is appropriate or inappropriate? How was Thyatira being seduced (pages 5, 6)?
5. Is a person a rebel or a heretic for holding a wrong view of the Bible? Explain (page 6).
6. What was going to happen to the Jezebel cult if they refused to repent? Does this seem harsh to you (pages 6, 7)?
7. What promise does Jesus give to those who will overcome? How do we live this out (pages 8, 9)?
8. Talk about the "morning star" (page 9).