

AVOIDING SPIRITUAL PITFALLS

LESSONS FROM THE SEVEN LETTERS IN REVELATION

SESSION FIVE: THYATIRA PITFALL OF ECONOMIC CORRUPTION

To the Church in Thyatira

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. **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. **20**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. **21**I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **22**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. **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. **24**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): **25**Only hold on to what you have until I come. **26**To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations **27**'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. **28**I will also give him the morning star.

The letters to Seven Churches follow this pattern.

The Centrality of Christ

The Affirmation

The Fault Line

The Exhortation

The Promise

A. INTRODUCTION

1. THE CITY

Thyatira (modern day Akhisar, located 42 miles inland of Aegean Sea) was apparently first founded as Pelopian, a shrine of the Lydian Sun-God, Tyrimnus.¹ This solar-city background might have prompted the description of Christ with eyes like blazing fire. Seleucus Nector (301 – 281 BC) rebuilt it and made it

¹ The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. General Editor, Geoffrey Bromiley. William B. Erdmann Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA.1988

into an important frontier garrison. It became a vassal of Pergamum after 190 and later to Rome after 133.

Thyatira was famous for its highly organized trade unions (cooperatives) and its craftsmanship, especially for its advanced technology in producing 'purple' dye from madder root. Lydia was a 'dealer in purple cloth' from Thyatira (Acts 16: 14). The letter to the church was the longest of the 7 letters.

2. The Church

The first Asian convert in Philippi was Lydia from Thyatira. We are read in Act 16) that she was a regular worshipper, who prayed with other women. This usually mean she was a Gentile convert to Judaism. Therefore, there was a congregation of Jews who had established themselves in Thyatira. Acts 19: 10f states that Jewish converts as well as Gentiles along the coast of Asia Minor had heard Paul's preaching during his two years at Ephesus. Therefore, it was possible for a Christian community was set up in Thyatira during that time².

B. OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

1. THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

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.

Christ is referred to as the 'Son of God' (v 18) with 'blazing eyes and furnished bronze' (Rev 1: 14-15; Dan 10: 6). The 'blazing eyes' refers to God's judgment while 'burnished bronze feet' symbolized strength, stability and purity contrast with 'feet of clay.'

Apollo, Zeus' son was being deified in Thyatira and he was often linked to Helios, the sun god. This underscored the identity of Christ as one 'whose eyes were like blazing fire'. Jesus' feet like 'burnished bronze' could also contrast with the city's metal-working trade as a prominent industry.³

2. THE AFFIRMATION

19I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

The Church in Thyatira has much to be commended upon. Jesus is deeply conscious of Thyatira's:

1. Works
2. Love
3. Service
4. Patient Endurance
5. Later works exceeded the first

3. THE FAULT LINE

² The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. General Editor, Geoffrey Bromiley. William B. Erdmann Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA.1988

³ Craig S. Keener. The NIV Application Commentary, Revelation. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 2000.

20Nevertheless, 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. **21**I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **22**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. **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.

The sins in the church at Thyatira, like those at Pergamum, are immorality and compromise with idol worship by tolerating the woman Jezebel, whose teaching had deceived the some of the church people. Further, she refused to repent and continued in her idolatrous behaviors. In doing so, committed spiritual idolatry.

If the Ephesian church were challenged by lovelessness, the Smyranean church by the lack of perseverance, the Pergamum Christians by compromising pleasures, the Thyatira's Christians were seduced by economic corruption resulting in idolatry.

The city and the church were known for their merchants, crafts and guilds (Acts 16: 14). Those who were involved in these trade had to also participate in the guild's religious life. The guild meetings would include a common meal dedicated to their patron deity. This would also include the imperial cult.⁴ Refusing to join in might risk a substantial measure of their economic livelihood.

Jezebel's appeal is her claim to be a prophetess. We need to note that the biblical Jezebel (1 Kings 18, 19) was not a prophetess but a queen. 'Jezebel' reminds us of Ahab's idolatrous Phoenician queen who promoted Baal worship in Israel and persecuted Yahweh's prophets (1 Kings 16: 31-33; 21: 25; 2 Kings 9: 22, 30-37).

However, the association of Jezebel had a number of parallels:

1. She sought to take the lives of God's prophets (1 Kings 18: 13; 19: 2)
2. She sponsored spiritual harlotry by leading God's people away from God (2 Kings 9: 22, her religious activities were compared to witchcraft cf Rev 9: 21; 18: 23).
3. She advocated entanglement in local civic and commercial life, demanding idolatrous compromises in immorality and religious adultery, evidenced by eating food offered to idols. (See discussion in Church of Pergamum)

The prevalence of this false teaching was the Lord's only criticism.

The 'bed of suffering' may be interpreted in two ways:

- a. 'Bed' is a reference to sickness. Physical ailment is also seen as a punishment for sin (Mk 2: 1-12; 1 Cor 11: 29, 30). Christ will strike Jezebel with sickness and suffering (2: 22). Or it could also refer to deathbed, since the Lord promises to strike 'her children dead' (2: 23).
- b. 'Bed' can also describe as the place of intercourse (Heb 13: 4) or as a metaphor for idolatrous worship (spiritual adultery). Those who commit sexual sin or spiritual adultery will be cast upon a bed of suffering.

Christ will also kill her 'children' (2: 23), undoubtedly, referring to her disciples and members of the church under her guidance. The slaughtering of her children connote the possible allusion to the slaying of Ahab's seventy sons in 2 Kings 10: 1-11.

Death awaits the fate of those who follow Jezebel's influence. Striking dead is a Hebrew expression of divine judgment of a plague or pestilence.

4. THE EXHORTATION

⁴ Craig S. Keener. The NIV Application Commentary, Revelation. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 2000.

24 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): **25** Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Jesus Christ's clarion call is to repentance was not heeded by some.

This falsehood is subtle like in the other churches. In Ephesus, there was a false claim of apostleship (Rev 2: 2), some in Smyrna and Philadelphia, there were false claim of Jewish faith (Rev 2: 9, 3: 9), the Laodicean Church claimed to be rich. Jezebel's false prophetess claimed to offer 'deep secrets' (Rev 2: 24).

The 'deep secrets' may mean:

- a. Secrets of spiritual life – Believers were promised that they have access to some deep spiritual life which in reality, are nothing more than the deep things of Satan.
- b. Magical incantations – These are used by those who are engaged in Hellenistic mystery religions. Sometimes, we are seduced to think of instant spiritual through magical formulas of faith.

Like Satan (12: 9; 20: 2, 8, 10) and the world system (13: 14; 18: 23; 19: 20), 'Jezebel' is a deceiver seeking to mislead God's people.⁵

Believers are told to persevere and hold fast to the truth until Christ returns (Rev 2: 24). As searcher of the heart and mind, Christ reminds us that He is the only one who knows the deep truth of human kind, as contrasted with the deep secrets of Jezebel. The true source of their revelation is Satan, who has also the author of other oppositions (Rev 2: 9, 3: 9).

5. THE PROMISE

27 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. **28** I will also give him the morning star.

Jesus promises those who overcome will rule with Him with an iron scepter (Psa 2: 9). The rule is also about shepherding the people, who will share in His authority (Rev 7: 17). This is consistent with the eschatological promise of reigning with the Messiah (Ps of Sol 17: 23-24, Rev 12: 5; 19: 15).

The promise of the morning star refers to:

- a. Jesus: Jesus is Himself the morning star (Rev 22: 16), who will be believer's reward. He is greater than the stars, which are angels of the church (1: 20).
- b. Dawn of eternal life
- c. Immortality of the righteous as in Dan 12: 3
- d. Final defeat of Lucifer (Isa 14: 12). This is the final vanquish of Satan, referring to the triumph of God.

Those who overcome will rule with Christ forever!

⁵ Craig S. Keener. The NIV Application Commentary, Revelation. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 2000.

Study on Repentance

The word 'repent' appears 8 times in the letters to 7 churches. Obviously, it is a very important concept for the church. In fact, for the church to grow and become more like Christ and to shine as lamp stand, repentance is a key.

I. Why do we need to repent?

1. We all have fault lines. We are human. We fail, falter and sin. And therefore, we need to be corrected. Sin blocks our relationship with God and blinds us to ourselves.
2. We can spiral downward to our own destruction, if we don't repent.
3. We need to come to terms with ourselves. God confronts us with our realities not to belittle us but to grow us. God does not demand perfection but honesty.
4. We can recover from our sins. God is gracious enough to forgive and forget. He wants us to recover.
5. We can be transformed into His likeness. A growing love for God and others is possible. God wants us to become more like Him and we can!

II. Why unwilling to repent?

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

Repentance is one of the most difficult aspects, if not the most difficult aspect of the Christian life.

A. Nature of Sin

1. **Sin is very attractive & seductive.** We love darkness more than light. "Think, and be careful what thou art within; For there is sin in the desire of sin." Ralph Waldo Emerson
2. **Sin is deeply personal.** There is a personal and emotional attachment to the sin. We enjoy that particular sin so much that we find it difficult to let go. "For, though every man has sin in him seminally, yet there are some sins which by nature he is more inclined to than others, according to his constitution." Christopher Love
3. **Sin is self-delusional.** We slip into sin and not fall into sin. We become comfortable with sin. It's like boiling a frog. "The wages of sin are unreported." Sin blinds us as well as binds us.
4. **Sin is self-addictive.** One sin leads to another, and another and another. There is no stopping. It is like a run-away train, once started hard to stop.

B. Nature of Repentance: 'Metanoia' –The 'metanoia' in Greek refers to the mind (gnosis – knowledge)

1. **Involves a change of mind about ourselves.** We are not that strong. We are not that self-sufficient. In early Greek, *metanoia* has the idea that our previous knowledge and understanding, previous opinion was wrong.

2. **Involves a change in emotion.** This change of opinion has, therefore an emotional aspect: there is a sense of remorse or regret. There is a sorrow for sin. "When a child can be brought to tears, and not from fear of punishment, but from repentance he needs no chastisement. When the tears begin to flow from the grief of their conduct you can be sure there is an angel nestling in their heart." Horace Mann
3. **Involves a change in attitude.** Your attitude towards sin has to change. Instead of loving it, we hate sin. We can have knowledge of sin, without feeling the deep wrong and abhorring it. Sorrow for sin is not equivalent to repentance. Sometimes, we feel sorry because of the consequences of sin and not for the sin itself. 'If your eyes cause you to sin, gouge it out!' There is no room for half-heartedness. There needs to be a deliberate change. "Our repentance is not so much regret for the ill we have done as fear of the ill that may happen to us in consequence." Francois de La Rochefoucauld
4. **Involves the change of will.** It involves an act of will to turn from sin and turning towards or returning to God. This will then lead to a complete change of lifestyle. The most critical element of repentance is volition. This is the positive aspect to the change: There is an ethical dimension. Yet, this return is an act of God, working in our hearts convicting us of our sin and turning our hearts back to Him. This is the paradox of repentance – an act of human will coupled with the divine initiative. "Of all acts of man repentance is the most divine. The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none." Thomas Carlyle
5. **Involves the act of forgiving and forgiveness.** It is letting go of the pain and hurt. This is the spiritual dimension. True repentance involves not only a conviction of personal sinfulness but also an earnest appeal to God to forgive according to His mercy and grace. No material sacrifice will suffice, it is our heart that God wants.

C. DISCUSSION & APPLICATION

1. Focusing on economic success, like sin, is subtle. How does our economic system promise, corrupt and delude us?
2. We are often tempted by 'spiritual deep secrets'. What are the new 'spiritual deep secrets' that will lead to suffering and death?
3. Christ's clarion call to us is always to 'repent'. Why do you think repentance is so difficult for the Christian?
4. The defeat of sin and Satan is sure. How will we live differently when we know that those who overcome will reign with Christ forever?