



November 12th, 2025
Week 7

¹⁸ “Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze: ¹⁹ I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Look, I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. Unless they repent of her works, ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven’t known “the so-called secrets of Satan” —as they say—I am not putting any other burden on you. ²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—

²⁷ and he will rule them with an iron scepter;
he will shatter them like pottery —

²⁸ just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star.

²⁹ “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Thyatira was the center for the worship of _____ (or Thyrimnus), the god of sunlight, also called Helios. In fact, Apollo was thought to be the “divine guardian” of the city. He was the patron god of many of the city’s trade guilds and was regularly honored at all guild functions.

We know that the people of Thyatira believed that the Roman Emperor was the incarnation of Apollo. In that city both Apollo and Caesar were acclaimed “son of Zeus”—“son of the high god.” The Emperor Domitian named his son “son of god” and on his coins Domitian’s son is portrayed holding seven stars. This might explain why in

this message Jesus speaks of himself as ***"Son of God"*** (2:18). *It is the only place in the whole book of Revelation where he is spoken of as the Son.*

We know something else about Thyatira, something that makes this letter so relevant to us. Thyatira was a prosperous commercial center. It was the manufacturing and marketing hub of the Roman province of Asia. *"The roads which pass through its valley brought the trade of half the world to its doors."*⁴ Lydia, the first person the apostle Paul led to Jesus in Philippi, was from Thyatira. She was likely in Philippi selling the city's famous purple cloth (Acts 16:14).

Here is the important fact that helps us appreciate the burden of Jesus' message. Thyatira was famous for its unusual number of trade guilds. According to Sir William Ramsey, there were guilds for *"wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, bronzesmiths and shoemakers."* Which meant no one could possibly "make it" financially in that city unless he was a member of one of those guilds. Not to join a trade guild meant risking financial loss.

William Barclay says:

These trade guilds had common meals together. The meal would begin and end with a cup of wine poured out as a libation and an offering to the gods. It was in fact the heathen grace before and after the meal. Could a Christian join in a ceremony like that? Still further, such a meal would almost certainly follow a sacrifice. The token part of an animal would be offered on the altar. The meat of it would be given to the worshipper to make a feast for the members of his trade guild. Could a Christian sit and eat meat, which had been offered to idols? Could he participate in a meal where the meat had already been offered to Apollo or Artemis or Thyrimnus, the local god? Still further, this trade guild feast not infrequently degenerated into carousals where drunkenness and immorality were the order of the day. Could a Christian participate in a feast where drunkenness and fornication were the accepted thing?⁵

Remember Jesus' message to the church in Pergamum, participating in an idol feast is never a neutral act. Through such rituals people opened themselves up to forces of darkness and deception that lurked behind the idols. Joining in such celebrations would compromise a disciple's allegiance to Jesus as God. And clearly, joining in the drunkenness and exploitation of the human body would be contrary to the will of God. Yet not joining a trade guild would mean risking financial disaster.

What was a loyal disciple of Jesus to do? Can you feel the tension?

What made matters worse for the church in Thyatira was the fact that a certain woman, whom Jesus calls “Jezebel,” was teaching a theology that justified compromise. Whether her real name was Jezebel or not is not certain.⁶

Probably Jesus uses the name because the woman’s character and thinking had all the marks of her Old Testament counterpart. So briefly let’s review the story of Jezebel of old.⁷ She was a daughter of the King of Tyre and Sidon—cities hostile to Israel. She was a committed Baal worshipper; Baal being the nature god, the fertility god. Jezebel came into the life of Israel through marriage to _____.

Jezebel’s public argument was that one could worship Baal right alongside Yahweh. But she knew better. She knew that different religious systems, at least those so fundamentally different as Baal worship and Yahweh worship, cannot exist side-by-side without compromising one or both. And she knew the clear teaching of Israel’s prophets: that when it came to worshipping Yahweh it is “either/or” not “both/and.”

“You shall have no other gods before me,” says Yahweh (Exod 20:3). Any kind of compromise is out of the question. The choice is “Yahweh or Baal,” not “Yahweh and Baal.” God sent the prophet Elijah to shake Israel back to reality. Again and again, Elijah thundered, **“You can’t have it both ways; how long are you going to sit on the fence?”** (1 Kgs 18:21). Either Yahweh or Baal, but not both. Any compromise means one of the gods loses; for as Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued, the human heart has the capacity for only one all-encompassing, all-embracing allegiance.⁸

The woman Jesus calls Jezebel was at work in the church of Thyatira advocating the “both/and” position. Somehow, through what she called “the deep things,” she was able to get Christians to feel that participating in the ungodly activities of the trade guilds would not _____.

But the reality is exactly the opposite. And that is why Jesus is so firm in his letter. Yes, he has many good things to say about the church. In fact, he gives one of the most glowing commendations of the seven letters. **“I know your deeds,”** he says, and **“I know your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first”** (2:19).

They were *growing* and *maturing* in discipleship. But in spite of that, they were tolerating Jezebel. Which meant they were tolerating the spirit of _____. And compromise will not be tolerated by Jesus.

Why? Because to compromise means to commit spiritual adultery. And spiritual adultery inevitably leads to spiritual sickness and, eventually, to spiritual death. We cannot have it

both ways. Try as we might it simply does not work. It cannot work. It is “either/or” not “both/and.” In any compromise arrangement involving *Jesus Christ*, in any balancing scheme, it is the *relationship* with him that is short-changed.

The message to Thyatira forces the issue that confronts us all each new day—the issue that the rest of Revelation will sharpen.

Who will I follow: Jesus or the leaders of the trade guilds? Who will be first: the Lord Jesus or the expectations of the trade guilds? What will be of uppermost importance: the success of my business (or ministry) or the vitality of my relationship with him? Which will take precedence over and control my everyday decisions: the values and priorities and spirit of my contemporaries or the values and priorities and Spirit of the Lord of Life?

Most of us in the West are not faced with the specific form of tension faced by believers in Thyatira. We do not have to join in idol feasts in order to function in our city, although some are members of organizations which, if not explicitly, implicitly make it improper to name the name of Jesus.

And we are not obligated to join in drunken orgies in order to operate a business, although some feel great pressure to at least make “an appearance” at events that border on the unholy.

But even though we do not face the tension in those specific forms, we still wrestle with the spirit of *compromise* every day. Jezebel still has her prophets. We hear their voices all the time. For instance: “Look, a person needs to strike a balance in life,” as though Jesus and his mighty claims could be put on the same scale with anyone or anything else. “Look, I’m all for loyalty to Jesus but things just don’t work that way in the real world,” as though the “real world” does not include the real presence of Jesus Christ.

What other world is there but the real world in which he calls us to follow him? Or, “Business is business,” “politics is politics,” “it is the way it is,” as though just saying it makes it right. Or, “Keep your religion out of business and politics,” as though Jesus Christ can be confined to one sphere of life.

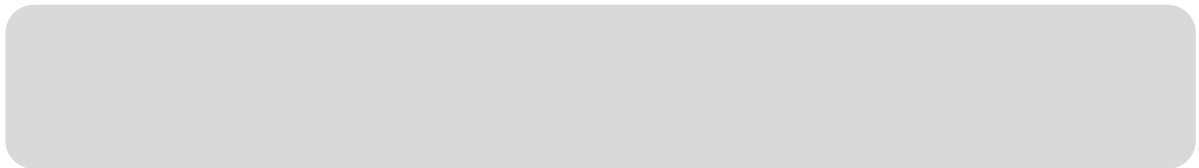
This is called “_____” —one set of values and priorities for one sphere, another set of values and priorities for another sphere and yet another set of values and priorities for yet another sphere. As my friend Dr. Jeff Bjorck wrote in a letter to me, “Compartmentalization is the means by which we ‘maintain the illusion of

the both/and.’ In other words, I can be both holy on Sunday and allow poison into my head on Monday because it is ‘entertainment’ or whatever.”

Jezebel is still very much with us. In fact, I suggest that the spirit of our age is her spirit, the spirit of her Baal worship. It exerts tremendous pressure, as we will see when we get to Revelation 15 to 19. Of course, no one actually uses the name “Baal,” but the spirit is, nevertheless, the dominant, controlling spirit of the public square.

What do I mean? Baal was thought to be the god of nature—more specifically, the god of nature as it is now. The prophets of Baal get their clues about right and wrong from nature as it is instead of from what it ought to be; from nature as it was before sin and will be after sin is taken away. Basing your life on “the way things are” is the spirit of Baal worship. It is the fallacy of thinking that because I have certain desires and drives, they must be right—simply because they are.

1. But what does Jesus teach us?



Jesus calls the disciples in Thyatira to hold on to what they have—to hold on to him and the fullness of life in him (2:25). And he calls them to reject, decisively and vigorously, the spirit of compromise. For compromising our commitment to him is spiritual adultery, and spiritual adultery leads to spiritual sickness and, eventually, to spiritual death.

*Written portions are taken from “Discipleship on the Edge” by Darrell W. Johnson.