

Thyatira – The Tolerant, Undiscerning, and Corrupt Church Revelation 2:18-29

As God deals with the church of Thyatira, we will see not only a tolerant, undiscerning, and corrupt body, but also the necessity of absolutes to prevent that from happening. A church or movement for God that has no absolutes is one that is doomed to failure, allowing false doctrine to enter unopposed.

Looking through the lens of church history, we began with the early period in Ephesus, moved on to the persecuted church in Smyrna, then to the compromising and divided period in Pergamos. Now, we come to the Western or Roman Catholic church period. Don't worry, next time we will see that the Protestant Church in Sardis has plenty of rebuke.

Thyatira is modern day Akhisar, Turkey, located 20 miles southeast of Pergamos, down a valley road between the Hermus and Caicus Rivers. It is one of the three farthest inland churches. It was a wealthy area and a Macedonian colony established under Alexander the Great before becoming a Roman city in 133 BC. Although it was the smallest of the seven cities, having no acropolis or high mountain for natural security, the Romans built it as a first defense location to slow down invading armies as they moved inland. Rome stationed an elite guard there to help ensure its strength.

It was a center for commerce and had more trade guilds, or working unions, than any other of the cities of the seven churches. Belonging to these guilds was very important for employment. There were ones for potters, tanners, weavers, robe makers, and especially dyers of purple, which was used for royal cloth. This explains Lydia, from the book of Acts, who lived there and was described as a dyer of purple possibly made from a local plant.

The city had many false gods, but their primary deity was Apollo, the god of the sun. In the worship of Apollo, there was immoral sexual activity and the eating of sacrifices offered to gods. If one worked in the guilds, you were pressured to be a part of these rituals. If you did not participate, you were ostracized and often lost your job.

Thyatira also had a temple for fortune-tellers that was presided over by a woman. This may have something to do with the influence of the woman said to be leading the church into false teaching and spiritism. We will discuss this later.

The Nicolaitans were influential and considered the elitists in Thyatira. As pointed out in some of the other churches, this was a problem as was the rise of the priesthood which led to lording over the flock of God. God hated it, which makes this period all the more interesting. The era covered in this particular portion of history is known as the Dark Ages and ran from about 590 AD to 1517 AD. During this time, Roman Catholicism was dominant in Christianity. The Roman Catholic influence is interesting since the Roman Catholic Church is still known for its Nicolaitans, or the priesthood, and their spiritual hierarchy.

Thyatira literally means *perpetual sacrifice*, which is exactly what the Mass is all about. This service teaches that the wafer actually becomes the body of Jesus, and the wine actually becomes the blood of Jesus. As one partakes, you are literally re-sacrificing Jesus on the cross each time. They believe that Jesus did not totally pay for the sins of mankind and must be re-crucified on a regular basis in order to cover new sins. If the Mass is a re-crucifixion of Jesus each time it is celebrated, there is a major problem.

The Bible says that Jesus died once and for all for our sins on the cross, and He Himself said from the cross, *It is finished*. To perform a Mass is to say that Jesus did not finish the job, and it is now up to us to complete the work. This is also why the Protestant cross is empty, while the Roman Catholic one still has Jesus hanging on it. We know it was finished on the cross; they still believe He must be put back on it and stay there until heaven.

During this time of false teaching, there were ten false doctrines introduced into the church that are still around today in some circles but cannot be found in the Scriptures:

- **Justification by works**
- **Baptismal regeneration**
- **Worship of images**
- **Priestly celibacy**
- **Confessionalism**
- **Purgatory**
- **Transubstantiation**
- **Indulgences – Give money – Purgatory time reduced**
- **Penance – Self-torture to reduce Purgatory time**
- **Mariolatry and Saintism – Worship of Mary and the Saints**

Recently, many in the Catholic Church have been pushing for Mary to be declared *Co-Redemptrix* with Christ, meaning one can be saved through Mary just as through Jesus.

Jesus first calls Himself the *Son of God* in verse eighteen. This is an identifier not found in chapter one like the other churches had. Why did the Lord do this? One reason might be to show His authority over the false god Apollo, known as the sun god. More likely, this was the Lord establishing the fact that He alone is divine, that He alone is Lord over the church, and that He alone should be listened to, not an apostate woman within the church of Thyatira, nor Mary, Jesus' mother. The way the Lord describes Himself depicts what He will be dealing with among them.

Eyes like a flame of fire literally means eyes of penetrating judgment that search their hearts and minds. *Brass* in Scripture represents judgment, and the Lord is saying that He is viewing them in judgment as He is walking among them. It is important to point out that although we, as Christians, will not face God's judgment in heaven, we most certainly face consequences here if we choose to sin. 1 Peter 4:17 says, *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.*

Although we will see God address many problems with this particular church, we have to acknowledge what they were doing some things right. They performed Christian works, and more at the end than at the beginning, which the Catholic Church is still known for today. They had agape, self-sacrificing love, for others and were great at serving, which went along with their works. The word used here is *diakonia*, from which comes deacon or servant in church vocabulary. They also displayed faith and patience in the Lord. Although there were many positive things on the surface, when it came to fleshly acts, they were openly allowing false teaching within their ranks.

Consistent with the Lord's pattern, He started out with the good. Now He addresses what was wrong. They allowed that woman Jezebel to corrupt the church. This was probably not someone specifically named Jezebel, but the same spirit that had been allowed within the fellowship.

Who was Jezebel? She was the daughter of a false priest to the goddess Ashtarte, a devout worshipper of the false god Baal, and wife of the ungodly northern Israeli King Ahab. Jezebel sought out all the true prophets of God and put them to death. This was also a major characteristic of the Spanish Inquisition during this dark period of church history. As king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel faced off with Elijah when he challenged and killed the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. When he killed the false prophets, the queen sought to kill him. She not only taught false doctrine and false worship, but she also domineered over Ahab and pushed for persecution. Between the two, Jezebel was the most feared. Elijah stood up to Ahab but ran from Jezebel when she threatened him. Notice He says she calls herself a prophetess. God does not. She was a self-proclaimed spiritual leader who did not have the backing of God.

There is nothing wrong with strong women in a fellowship, even those who teach within the proper biblical guidelines. But any woman or man who begins usurping the God-ordained authority and leading the fellowship in an ungodly direction is to be shut down. This is apparently what was happening in Thyatira.

Here is where much of the church today is still in error in allowing women pastors. There is a growing number that ordain or approve of female pastors, but God's Word is clear that this is a role reserved solely for men. Paul addresses the proper roles of men and women in the church in 1 Timothy 2:12: *And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man but to be in silence.* Paul goes on in verses 13-14 to explain why; *For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression.* It had nothing to do with her being any lesser than Adam, but there are specific reasons mentioned. First, it is because Adam was formed first; Second, it is because she was deceived by Satan. We need balance with all things in scripture. This verse does not mean a woman cannot speak in church at all. In context, this is only referring to a woman speaking in a pastoral role of authority. Does this mean that a woman cannot be a leader or a teacher within the church? Absolutely not! As a matter of fact, God commands the older women to train up the younger. The only limitation is the pastoral role or authority over a man.

What about a woman like Anne Graham Lotz who holds outreaches to men and women? There is no Biblical prohibition because she is not operating as a pastor but as an evangelist. We see a precedent set for this with the woman at the well in Samaria. When she came to know Jesus, it says she ran into the city and told all the men about the Lord. Jesus did not rebuke her for this, and many were saved because of her testimony!

This Jezebel also taught and seduced them into committing sexual immorality. That is interesting in light of all the idols in Catholicism. Sexual immorality is simply any sexual activity that happens outside of marriage. It is never accepted by God or excused by God, no matter the circumstances - whether you love each other or not! Secondly, she was encouraging the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Notice how gracious God is in verse twenty-one. He gave a warning and time to repent, but she refused. When we refuse to repent of evil, there is nothing else that God can do but to bring judgment. Yet today, the Roman Catholic Church has not repented of these false teachings.

It is not just the corrupt leader who will face God's judgment, but all those connected to her. This is a warning for us as well. The results of unrepentant sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols are a sickbed and great tribulation or troubles. Is that not what we see with sexual immorality today? For those who refuse to repent, they contend with syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, and even AIDS. The consequences to a believer are often worse because they know better! For those who practice sexual immorality, the bed intended for pleasure becomes a bed of sickness.

Verse twenty-four says, *if you are not a part of their sin, I will put no other burden on you.* Keep yourself separate from them and their sin. In regards to *the depths of Satan*, we do not know exactly what the Lord is talking about. Some believe this was referring to a group called the Ophites, who were serpent worshippers. The next verse says to those who are not doing this or have repented, to hold fast what you are doing and stay faithful. If you do, here is your reward: you will rule and reign with Jesus when He returns to the earth and do so with a rod of iron. That is, even as the Lord will have authority to crush sin and rebellion, so will you! In 1 Corinthians 6:2 Paul tells the believers, *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?* And who is a scriptural saint? Anyone who is saved!

Closing out this section, Jesus says, *I will give him the morning star.* He is referred to as the Morning Star in Revelation 22:16, so in essence, He will give us Himself. That is all we truly need and all we should want. Just give me Jesus! There is nothing greater to possess! Again, He ends this portion with, *he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Although we specifically addressed the Catholic Church period, it applies personally to any of us who have allowed false teaching into our lives and have become corrupted. The question is: is that any of us? It's easy to point the finger as we see God addressing problems in other movements, but it is also important to look at ourselves and make sure we are not guilty of the same thing. Have we become tolerant and inclusive of false teachings simply to

get along? We must be loving and forgiving but must never be tolerant of anything that God declares sin. Then we will be no better than the church of Thyatira and will receive the same rebuke from the Lord. Let us examine our hearts and make sure we are standing on the Lord and His Word alone to be our guide in life.

Group Study and Personal Application Questions:

1. What is the impending doom for a church (or movement) that has no absolutes?
2. Thyatira was known as being a center for trade that also practiced worship of false gods. If one didn't go along with these activities, they could have lost their job. Do we see that in our workplace today? How has that affected you?
3. What period of church history does the church of Thyatira represent?
4. What were the practices in Thyatira that correspond with the Catholic Church during the Dark Ages and today?
5. What is the literal meaning of *Thyatira*? What Roman Catholic doctrine & practice corresponds to this meaning?
6. Why is the theology of the Catholic Mass heretical?
7. The Mass teaches that the wafer and wine used actually turns into the body and blood of Jesus respectively. What Scripture, taken out of context, is used for that reasoning? If true, what Old Testament laws would be broken?
8. What are the ten false doctrines that were introduced during the Dark Ages?
9. V18 – Jesus identified himself as the 'Son of God.' Why was this emphasized to the church of Thyatira?
10. Jesus having 'eyes like a flame of fire' means they are eyes of "penetrating judgment." What two attributes of God do these signify?
11. Brass used in Scripture represents judgment. Because Jesus is always walking within His church, why must Christians always be mindful of His judgment?
12. Who was Jezebel? How was the same *spirit* of Jezebel manifested in the church of Thyatira? What is the biblical principle on women pastors?
13. What is the reward promised to those who stay faithful? Who is the *morning star*?

As the 'world' becomes more rebellious towards God and intolerant with Christians, we can expect to be persecuted in some way or another.

- Have you allowed false teaching and corruption into your life?