

## Let Go Of The World And Cling To Jesus Revelation 2:18-28

Of all of the letters that John wrote to the seven churches, this is by far the longest. It is interesting to note that the longest letter is written to what seemed the least important and significant city, Thyatira. This city had no political influence and had very little cultural value. It was a blue-collar town filled with working people. It was known for working hard and playing hard. It wasn't the banking and center of commerce that Ephesus was. It wasn't as luxurious as Smyrna or the political and religious center that Pergamum was. It was the least known and least remarkable.

It was a military buffer city. It was located 40 miles southeast of Pergamos, the capital city of that province. When enemies invaded, they would naturally come to Thyatira first. While its location did not allow it to defend itself very well, its mission was to hold the enemy just long enough for Pergamos to prepare itself for battle. As a result, Thyatira was destroyed and rebuilt many times during its history.

Commercially, the only claim to fame that it had was that it was the center of a wool and dyeing industry. It had a healthy commerce spouting a multitude of skilled occupations: linen workers, wool workers, dyers, leather workers, people who made outer garments, potters, and bronze-smiths.

Thyatira boasted that they had the most trade guilds. If you worked with metal, you would be a part of a guild, or if you worked in textiles, you would be a part of a different guild. The trade guilds were a mixture of labor unions and organized crime families. They were powerful and influential, and they dominated everyday life. Trade guilds had 4 standard regulations: 1-Daily work quotas 2-Monthly meetings 3-Rules for personal life and 4-Rules for religious life.

Each trade guild had a unique patron god or goddess that they believed blessed their guild. Faithful worship of that god and in that temple was expected to ensure the prosperity of the trade. These guild members were expected to attend guild festivals. In those festivals, they were to eat the food that had been offered to one of the gods and ultimately participate in grossly immoral activities that would follow these feasts.

Christians faced a real pressure to participate in these festivals. Christians who refused to participate faced opposition and suffered economically. The guilds held an incredible sway over businesses and employees. They could not buy or sell unless they were participating in these business guilds. The guild would help you find work and protect you if there was a problem, but if you got sideways with the guild, you were out.

The clear lines of what pleased God and what didn't please Him were blurred. Thyatira was a center of occult worship. There was a famous temple in the city dedicated to fortune-telling. It was presided over by a female prophet named *Sambathe'*. There is a legend that she foretold the rise and reign of Alexander the great. People would go there to determine the will of the son of god for their lives.

If you angered the trade guilds, you were left to fend for yourself and make it on your own. To become a follower of Jesus was a bold step and a courageous act.

In our lives we have things that can hold sway and influence over us. It may not be a trade guild but it could be a person, a relationship, a job, a fear, a dream. We put all of hopes and dreams in that and it controls us.

We are told in the book of Acts that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira, and if you remember, she was a merchant of purple fabrics. It was a city that manufactured a very precious purple dye that came from shellfish that were gathered around Thyatira. They manufactured a very expensive purple dye that was valued by royalty and the wealthy of that time. This dye was so rare and precious that one pound would cost the average working man three years of wages. This was the only claim to fame this little city had - a little drop of purple dye. In a real sense, it was a dead town living on dye.

*“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.” Acts 16:13-15*

It's important to note there was a lot of confusion about God and His Son. The people in Thyatira were confused about who the real Son of God was. Some of that had crept into the church.

In the salutation of each letter that Jesus confronts what each city was proud of. Smyrna boasted that they were a city that was dead and came back to life and Jesus starts with, “No, I was dead and came back to life.” Pergamum boasted that they carried the sword and Jesus starts with, “I carry a sharp double-edged sword.”

Thyatira boasted about the statue of Apollo, the son of Zeus. So they boasted that they were the city of the son of god. The city where the son of god lives. There are coins found there that bear the inscription “son of god” along with a picture of Apollo. Jesus introduces himself as,

*“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. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 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. 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. 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, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’ To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:18*

People were forced to worship in the temple of Apollo or be removed from the trade guilds. This forced many believers to compromise by eating meat offered to idols and then participating in the immorality of the temple festivals. Believers in the city were not managing that pressure well. Some of them their faith was crumbling. They were vulnerable to false teaching and pressures from society. Jesus was speaking to a church that needed to defend itself against the world and worldliness.

No one knew the problems of this church better than the Lord Jesus. He is described in verse 18, as having burning eyes, “*who has eyes like a flame of fire.*” Revelation 2:18 Just as a blowtorch can cut through the toughest steel, Jesus has flaming eyes that can cut through the deepest lie. With His supernatural x-ray vision, He can see through formality. He can see through form and discern the problems of the church. The Lord Jesus can not only see through any problem, but He can also look through any problem and see you.

You may have sin in your life. You can cover it up from the pastor. You can cover it up from your family. You can cover it up from your wife or your husband, and you can cover it up from your church, but you cannot conceal it from God. He has burning eyes, eyes that can burn straight through to the depths of a man's soul, and to the deepest, darkest secrets of a man's heart.

You are not just one person, you are really three. There is the person you think you are, the person others think you are, but then there is the person that God knows you are. Note again that Jesus is described in Roman 8:27 as the one *“who searches the minds and hearts.”* Can you think of anything more securely hidden and concealed from this world than a man's mind and a man's heart?

Jesus is also described as having brass feet. *“And his feet like fine brass.”* Revelation 2:18

In the Bible, brass or bronze refers to the judgment of God. Jesus not only knows His church, but Jesus judges His church. The Bible says *“judgment begins at the house of God.”* 1 Peter 4:17

Jesus was walking through this church with those feet of judgment and searching this church with His eyes of omniscience. Notice what he had to say about the church at Thyatira.

### **1. The Praise For The Church**

As Jesus examined this church, he found several wonderful and redeeming characteristics.

*“I know your deeds.”* Revelation 2:19

This was a busy church; they were not a lazy church. They were a laboring church, they were a church of sweat and sacrifice, a church that was totally sold out to God.

There are basically three kinds of churches. There are some churches who watch things happen. There are some churches who hope things happen, but then there are some churches who make things happen. This was a church that made things happen. They wanted to move out for God. They wanted to do something great for the Lord.

*“love, faith, and perseverance (patience).”* Revelation 2:19

Unlike the church at Ephesus, Thyatira had a burning love for the Lord Jesus. They loved one another. They loved the lost. They loved their church. It was a church of brotherly love. If you had gone to that church, you would have found that to be one of the warmest, caring, loving, compassionate fellowships anywhere on earth, and that's one reason why it was such a growing church.

I heard about a man who joined the church and when the pastor looked at his address he said, “Why do you come all the way across town to this church. You pass at least twenty other churches on your way. Why do you come here?” The man said, “Because you know how to love a guy over here.” Whether you are rich or poor, smart or dumb, shy or outgoing, you would have loved this church because this church would have loved you.

The word “perseverance” in that verse means “patience.” They lived in a town where many different gods were worshipped. Usually their neighbor had a shrine to some pagan god. A Christian could not walk through a neighbor's house without walking right in front of some pagan idol. You could not buy meat that had not been sacrificed to a false god. You could not conduct business without walking through the temple of some ancient pagan deity. You could not even walk through the city without passing the sentries and the priests who managed the worship of Caesar, but because of their patience, their perseverance, their undying faith in the Lord Jesus, the clouds of paganism were always raining drops of persecution upon their head.

Even though the times were rough, they hung tough. The harder things got, the harder they worked. They did not have a sympathy suite nor a pity parlor in the church. No matter how tough things got, they just kept witnessing, worshipping, and working for the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“that you are now doing more than you did at first.”* Revelation 2:19

They were getting better at good works. This church was better than ever. They had determined that they were going to work more, love more, visit more, try more, witness more, and pray more than ever before. This was not a church that was standing still. It was not backing up. It was moving forward. Every church should be able to say that about itself. Every Christian should be able to say that about himself. So many Christians and churches are doing the very same things they have always done. They are not growing. They are not reaching people.

I want us to be able to say we are doing more now than we did five years ago, and I hope that we will be doing more five years from now than we are doing today. When it comes to witnessing, praying, giving, loving, caring, sharing, preaching, teaching, and working, we ought to have only one word in our vocabulary, and that is the word, “more.”

This was a going church. This was a glowing church. They heated their buildings with the love of their hearts. And this was a growing church. They were increasing in size and increasing in strength.

They were a church growing in love, professing Christ, and yet facing the temptation to cater to the flesh and social pressure from the unbelieving world surrounding them.

Every generation of Christians faces the question of what to embrace in culture and what to reject. In each generation, it seems to get more and more complicated.

This is why we need the church. We need faithful teaching, and we need the Holy Spirit to be discerning. These are not easy questions. In the confusing swirl of temptations today, both of these are relevant to us.

## **2. The Pressures Of The People**

In spite of all of these qualities, however, Jesus says, “*nevertheless I have a few things against you.*” Revelation 2:20

For the most part, it was a very healthy body. It was a vibrant, exciting church, but even though it was a healthy body, it had a malignant tumor. It was a firm and faithful fellowship, but it had a fatal flaw. They had a jewel of a problem, and that jewel's name was Jezebel.

*“You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.”* Revelation 2:20

The problem in this church was that many had chosen Jezebel over Jesus.

- Sexual Pressures

The ripples of sexual immorality in our society today are everywhere. From dress and modesty, to media and pornography, to expectations in dating and engagement, to homosexuality to transgender.

It's easy to look at the world and believe sin is not that big a deal.

- Social Pressures

Not eating meat put before you at a work banquet could cost in Thyatira. There were economic pressures to just go along with the false religion in town.

How often are we tempted to just go along with what society is serving us?

Whether it's what our jobs pressure us to affirm, or what our entertainment involves, what is it that makes sin look normal and righteousness strange? In movies, on television, in sports, in polite conversation?

This church had one problem. It could be summarized in one word: Compromise. The leadership of the church had decided to tolerate a false prophetess by the name of Jezebel.

Who was this woman Jezebel? She was a false teacher in the church who had usurped the authority that belonged to others and had taken it upon herself to become the official prophet and teacher of the church.

Jezebel was not her name but it describes her character. Jezebel was in the Old Testament. She was one of the most vicious, evil, and powerful women ever described in God's Word.

She was the daughter of a pagan king of Tyre and wife of the ungodly king Ahab. She introduced Israel the very worst of paganism and heathenism. She swept aside the worship of the one true God and instituted idolatry in its place, commanding all of the people that they must worship the god of Baal.

To call a woman Jezebel in the days that John wrote this book would be like calling a man Judas. She was a persuasive, powerful, but perverted teacher.

There were many people in this church who had become liberal and said, "Let us be open-minded. We don't need to be so dogmatic. We do not have a monopoly on the truth." They began to compromise and let this false teacher pour out her poisonous preaching on this fellowship. They did it all in the name of toleration and peace and compromise. And this compromise was beginning to cause chaos in the church.

- Christ's Patience

*"I gave her time to repent."* Revelation 2:21

Jesus doesn't rush to judgment. He gives us time to repent. What patience and kindness!

Leon Morris said, "Jesus still holds out the prospect of mercy. This is to be noted throughout this book. It is full of severe judgments, but always there is the prospect of deliverance for those who repent." This does not mean we should confuse patience with compromise. The patience is not indefinite.

- Christ's Justice

*"Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead."* Revelation 2:22

This is an aspect of Jesus we are not always comfortable with. He is a righteous judge who takes sin seriously. The punishment will fit the crime. The bed of sexual immorality will receive a sickbed. Like Haman hung from his own gallows in the book of Esther, and like the man in Psalm 7:15, *"He [the wicked man] makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends."*

Christ is patient, but not indefinitely. He will, in time, exact fitting justice, which leads to His final message to this church.

What sin do you tolerate in your life? Maybe immorality. Maybe gossip. Maybe drugs or alcohol. Maybe unforgiveness? And you tolerate it. You tolerate a cozy Christianity? You can only serve one master. You have let go of one to cling to the other.

### 3. The Promises Of The Lord

*“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, except to hold on to what you have until I come.”* Revelation 2:24

The advice that Jesus gave then is the advice that Jesus gives now. Living in an age of false teaching of liberalism, modernism, humanism, and secularism, we must simply hold fast to the Word of God.

Make up your mind that not matter how many people may follow the last days liberal lies, you are going to stand by the Word of God. Hold fast to what you have!

The promises of Jesus to His church in these seven letters are powerful!

Ephesus: “to eat of the tree of life.”

Smyrna: “not be hurt by the second death.”

Pergamum: “hidden manna and a white stone.”

Thyatira: “I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne.”

*“The one who is victorious and does my will to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with an iron scepter, and will dash them to pieces like pottery, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”* Revelation 2:26-27

Jesus, the God-man, received authority from His Father to rule over the nations. And now, He will give that authority to His people. Psalm 2 celebrates Jesus, as Christ, will be King of the nations and rule over all peoples, but He says His people will rule with Him.

*“And I will give him the morning star.”* Revelation 2:28

The planet Venus has long been known as the morning star because it appears on the horizon just before the sun. When you see Venus, you know the sun is coming up soon. Day is close. The morning star represents hope for a new day and that the darkness is soon to be broken.

What does it mean for us to get the Morning Star?

There are very few mentions of the Morning Star in Scripture, and only one other in Revelation 22:16.

*“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

The Morning Star is Christ Himself, and this is the greatest possible thing He could promise His church. He will give us Himself. We will see Him face to face. We will be His, and He will be ours. Our final reward is to be with our Lord.

Don't give up, don't let down, don't pull out, just hang on. One of these days those of us who are true to the faith are going to be rewarded by God.

In all of our dark troubles and trials, Jesus says, “Just stand firm. Just stand fast and know that one day you will not only see the Morning Star, you will have the Morning Star.”

Just think about it. One of these days we are going to have Jesus, all there is of Jesus, and all that belongs to Jesus. Isn't it wonderful to know that everything that Jesus has is yours, but it's more wonderful to know that all that Jesus is, is also yours. You see, it is wonderful to have the blessing, but it is better to have the Blesser. There is something better than the gift and that is the Giver. Jesus Himself is ours to have forever.