

## Letters To Seven Churches (Part Five): Thyatira

**Married to the Enemy**

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Have you ever received a letter from a friend or a concerned neighbor? It might even not have been a letter. Maybe it was face-to-face in a conversation in which the other person tells you something along the lines of: "I really like you and you seem to be doing great. You know, everything is fine, but that X person of yours is a real problem." Now that X person could be anybody from father, mother, spouse, son, daughter, grandkid, or even your dog or your cat causing a ruckus in your neighborhood.

In other words, the other person is telling you that you and your family would be alright but for that one person who is bringing the whole family down. This probably does not happen very often because most people are not real keen on doing something like this, on making such a harsh pronouncement on another person. It is a major criticism, though, and it seems like when most families hear that they circle the wagons and they become defensive and they defend the problem child or the ne'er do well or the equal opportunity offender that happens to be living in your house. Rather than correct the problem, the family often just becomes defensive and justifies the actions and questions. And because they do that, the problem festers and eventually grows septic. And you know what happens when something grows septic? Bad things result.

In our society, though, we do not necessarily have to do that. There are certain people that end up having to do this every once in a while, like teachers and policemen and sometimes preachers have the dubious honor of doing this sort of thing, making such pronouncements. They say things like, "Mrs. Jones, you and your husband are fine, upstanding members of this community. But your son, Barnaby, is this close to doing serious time in Juvenile Hall. One more misstep and he'll be in real trouble. You need to get him straightened out or the state will do it for you." Or, you know, just fill in the blanks there.

But insert Jesus Christ as the authority figure making such a pronouncement, the Thyatiran congregation as the family, and amp up the stakes to eternal life versus eternal death, and we have the letter to the church of Thyatira.

We will be studying this letter today of Thyatira there in Revelation 2, and as a reminder, I want you to understand that we are not going through this prophetically. I have been doing this in every sermon because I want you to understand where I am coming from in these letters; where we are talking about them in terms of them being *letters*, like the letter to the church in Corinth, or the letter to the church in Philippi, or the letter to the church in Galatia. We are also not trying to fit these letters and Christ's descriptions of these people into any of the churches that are extant today. We do not want to make those judgments, but we want to take it more personally. We want to understand and use Christ's insight that He writes in these letters so that we can spot *our* problem, spot *our* own sins and overcome them, and so we found worthy at Christ's return.

So let us go straight into the letter to Thyatira in Revelation the second chapter, starting in verse 18 and I, as I have been doing, want to read the whole letter first so that we get a general overview of what is going on here. By the way, it is the longest of the seven by far.

**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. I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 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 to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you

no other burden. But hold fast what you have until I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessel—as I also have received from My Father, and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The letter to the Thyatiran's is central among the seven letters. There is three before and there is three afterward. Now, some commentators suggest that the theme of Thyatira's letter constitutes the central theme for all seven of the letters and that central theme is *worldliness*. Or if you want to put it theologically or doctrinally, it would be that they have syncretized. The problem is syncretism, where you marry worldly ideas and satanic ideas or pagan ideas, however you want to put them, with the truth of God and you go forward with a mixture that is a little bit of good and a lot of evil.

That is what has happened with modern Christianity. It has a lot of stuff from the Bible, but they have mixed it with other philosophies and the ideas of men and it has gone forward and you see how modern Christianity is today. This is a problem that every church, no matter who it is or where it is, has to face because they are living in the world. So these people in the church have to learn how to separate what is right and good from what is evil and keep the evil out, not let it in at all. And it is hard to do!

It is very hard to do because normally we tend to live six days in the world and one day in church, if you will, and it is always pressing on us. It wants to press us into its mold, as the Bible itself says. So we have to make sure that we do not conform to it, as it says in Romans 12:1-2, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we are in the image of Jesus Christ. That means sticking your hand out and saying the world can come no farther. But churches have trouble doing this, even the churches of God.

We have got to make sure that we do not let the world and its ideas into the church because it defiles morality, as we see here in the term *sexual immorality*, and it also waters down and sometimes totally breaks with God's true doctrines. What it does then overall is it inserts a wedge between God and His people. The relationship begins to deteriorate, and so God feels,

Jesus Christ, the Head of the church feels that He has to correct that right away because He does not want His people to be divided from Him, to be separated from Him, and so He has to correct it. And if He does not, the people will continue to go astray and they will not be worthy of the Kingdom of God.

Let us just hop over to I John 2, and read John's warning against this. We will read verses 15-17 and realize that John, the one whose epistle we are about to read, is the same John that wrote the book of Revelation, was the same John who had the bishop's oversight over these seven churches. He was evidently centered in Ephesus and all of these churches answered to him. So here is one of his warnings.

**I John 2:15-17** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

So that is our central understanding of the book of the letter to Thyatira. This is the problem that Jesus Christ is addressing.

Commentator Leon Morris writes this: "The longest of the seven letters is written to the church in the smallest and least important town." Kind of ironic, is it not? Comparatively little is known about ancient Thyatira. It is the modern day city of Akhisar. It sat in a broad valley about 40 miles east southeast of Pergamos (or Pergamum), and what made it important was that it was normally on the border between Pergamum and Sardis. (That is our next one we will do next time I speak.) So as a border city it was always changing hands between Pergamum and Sardis. It was always being fought over, but it was in this broad valley and had no natural protection. It was constantly being fought in, destroyed, changing hands throughout its history.

It was constantly under pressure from both sides, and the only thing that kept it from being totally destroyed, wiped out, was that it was a very important commercial city, and that was because of trade routes. If any of you ever took Ancient Israel in Ambassador College, you know that was the big thing.

Trade routes was pretty much the answer to everything. And it is the answer to Thyatira too. It was a commercial city and because of all the war that was always happening, being a border town like that, it became a chief manufacturing city for war material, especially wool, leather, bronze, and brass items.

Now we do know one person who actually was from Thyatira, and that was the the lady that Paul came across there in Macedonia. Her name was Lydia. She was a dealer in purple goods because that was one of the things that was manufactured right in that area. Actually, those purple goods were worn mostly by the elites. So she was probably dealing with people of rank and substance. If you want to go look at her story, that is an Acts 16, starting in verse 14.

By the way, just an odd trivial comment. Her name was Lydia in the Bible. Most scholars seems to think that was a nickname because she was from Lydia. That was the big major name of that country where Thyatira is. It is Lydia. And so she may have had another name, but since she was a foreigner there in Macedonia, they called her by the name where she was from. You Texans probably know that. You probably go somewhere else and they say, "Hey, Texan, bring me a beer," or whatever. That is kind of how Lydia was.

Anyway, as I mentioned, Thyatira was a commercial center, and this is where we begin to get into the understanding of what is going on in Thyatira in terms of what Jesus is saying. Because it was a commercial center, it had a very large number of trade guilds, unions. More than any other city in this part of the world. It had guilds for wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths. Lots of different occupations had a guild. As a matter of fact, we can assume, properly, that most people in the city belonged to one of these guilds. That is what he was doing there. He was there for his job and he was doing one of these particular jobs and to do one of these particular jobs, he had to join the union. So he did.

Well, what happened in these unions, though, is that they were dedicated to one of two gods, or a god and a goddess. One was Apollo and the other one was Artemis. So when you joined a union, joined a trade guild, you had to dedicate yourself to one of these gods, either Apollo or Artemis, depending

on the guild. And what this did was this obligated you as a member of the guild to attend festivals in honor of these gods, to eat communal meals in their temple, and to participate in perhaps ritual sexual promiscuity. That was part of their worship practices, all these different things.

Now we are starting to see some similarity with the letter to Thyatira. Failure to comply with these rules got a person expelled from the guild. If you were expelled from the guild, nobody would hire you, you had almost zero chance to make a living, and it is possible if you did not get out of there or did not have some other kind of support, you would end up in poverty because you could not get a job. And more than that, Christians refusing to do these things were even more regarded as societal outcasts. They were not conforming with the rest of society and this too jeopardized their livelihoods. Nobody wants to have a pariah in their midst.

This is the situation that is just underneath what we see in the letter to Thyatira. Probably everybody in the church there had some connection to one of these trades. And if they were not trying to struggle as an entrepreneur to make it on their own, then the only other way they could do it was to be a member of one of these trade unions, one of these guilds.

I also should mention it just in passing, that the shrine of the Sybil Sambathe was also located in Thyatira. Sybils were prophetesses, supposedly, throughout the Roman world, and they were sought out for their ability to foretell events and to give a sagacious advice. This may be the underlying understanding of Jezebel. I am not saying that she was one of these sybils, but they were very familiar with the idea of one of these prophetesses and Jesus may be referring to this to get them to understand that this was an ungodly prophetess within their midst. Not that she was necessarily a sybil, but she was certainly on the same level in terms of being false.

Let us get into the verse by verse here, and I will just read verse 18 again as we begin.

**Revelation 2:18** "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.'

As soon as He names the addressee here, the Thyatirans, He gives these phrases that identify Himself. He is the sender, so He tells who is writing, and He says it is the Son of God, the one whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass. These are very significant to the letter as you would imagine they would be. The last two—the one about eyes and the one about feet—come from the description of the heavenly resurrected Christ in chapter 1. (We will not go back and read those, but they are both there. I believe they are in verses 13 and 14.) So He is making sure that they understand that the same One in chapter 1 is writing this letter to them in chapter 2.

But the one that is first, the Son of God, is not in chapter 1. It is not one of those that you can refer back to in the first chapter of Revelation. There His title is Son of Man. That is in chapter one, verse 13. One like the Son of Man who is standing among the lampstands there. Son of God appears only here in the book of Revelation, and when something is mentioned only once, it stands out as different and makes it significant. What it does here is, it is a reminder to the Thyatirans that the One that they are dealing with here, the One who is sending them this corrective letter, is not like them, if you will. He is like God, one like the Son of God. So it is an emphasis upon His divinity.

He is making sure they understand that He is *far greater* than they. He is far greater than He was even as a man on the earth, where He was often called the Son of Man as an identifier. He would often identify Himself as the Son of Man. But He is telling them, "Look, remember what I told you at the end of Matthew 28. "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me." He is wanting to make sure they understand who they are dealing with. They are dealing with Almighty God here. He is not some man that they can just push aside or not listen to if they do not feel like it. He is wanting to make sure that He is deadly serious. So He is telling them first thing off the bat, the first words out of His mouth: "I come to you with the highest authority, from the Highest Authority. You better listen to what I say." He wants the Thyatirans to see Him as the Almighty King, the Almighty Ruler, the great Sovereign above all.

Let us go back to Psalm the second chapter because when we were reading through the letter, we saw a quotation from Psalm 2 there about, "He shall

rule them with a rod of iron, as the Potter's vessel shall be broken to pieces." We know that Psalm 2 is on His mind and I want you to just be reminded of the the wording of Psalm 2 so we understand what it was invoking in the mind of the Thyatirans as they were reading this letter.

**Psalm 2:1-3** Why do the nations rage, and the people plot of vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves [being up against God], and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."

So these were not little old Thyatirans—pottery makers or people who worked in brass or bronze or, smiths or millers. But the ones that God is dealing with here are kings in Psalm 2. They are coming against Him with all their power and all their might and all their strength. And what does He say? "Let us break them in pieces." They say, "Let us break Their bonds" and God comes back and says,

**Psalm 2:3-12** He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure. [Think of this in terms of the Thyatirans coming to realize what is going on here in this letter.] "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son [Here is the "Son of God" phrase coming to the fore.], today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance [Remember that for a little bit later], and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Now, therefore be wise. O kings [The the subtext in the letter to Thyatira is: "Now therefore be wise, O Thyatirans."]; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him.

So this is like the subtext of the letter to the Thyatirans. He opens up with this idea of the Son of God and the background of Psalm 2. It is really

impressing on the Thyatirans that this is very serious business. And God is not happy—not in the least.

The other two phrases further enhance and emphasize His divinity: "eyes like flames of fire" is on its very surface otherworldly. Do you know anybody who has eyes like flames of fire? If you do, run! It suggests the power of the sun. It suggests seeing everything. It suggests, more than that, judging and punishing for sin. Fire purifies, and He is there in blazing anger, staring at them—directly at them. This is designed to make the Thyatirans shake in their boots, or in their sandals, or whatever they wore at the time.

"Feet like fine brass." We might not think too much of it until we realize that in the ancient world, the time of Romans, especially, in art, in any kind of statuary, or even in the idols that they made to go into these temples, the gods and goddesses were almost invariably shown with bare feet. And if they were not done in, let us say, marble, they were all they were done in brass or bronze, or some other metal like that.

Fine brass expresses fine quality because at the time to make brass, which is copper and zinc, it took quite a bit of knowledge and skill to make fine brass and in Thyatira they were very good at it because what did they do? They were war materiale people, and they knew how to work with it, and it was actually fairly locally available. Zinc was, and the copper, I guess, so they were able to put these two together and make a very strong and very pretty, beautiful metal—fine brass. So the fine brass then denotes high quality. It denotes rareness because it was one of those metals that was not frequently made in these times.

It also makes us think of brightness. Brass, when it is highly polished, is quite bright, has a look almost of gold, and that they are feet gives us some more understanding. It provides an undertone of swiftness and strength. It makes us think of words like tread down, like Jesus Christ being the one in the vat of grapes and He is treading down the wine press. We could go to chapter 14, which we will not do. His wrath comes out of this wine press as He treads down with His feet. And it also suggests durability; that these are God's feet, they are not going to wear out. They will never grow weary. They are just going to keep on. You cannot actually stop Him.

Now what is interesting is this is also an Old Testament reference, and I want to go back to Daniel the third chapter. Now, remember the story here. This is where the three friends of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to bow down to the idol that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. That is one of the underlying problems in Thyatira. They were bowing down to idols. So what we have here is the background of this.

**Daniel 3:16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed towards Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed these those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

So we get here an answer to the problem. He is telling the Thyatirans, be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and this One who is the Son of God will be with you and He will keep you from these troubles. He will solve your problem for you. But no, that is not how they are going to be.

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

I want to mention here that the letter actually mentions three different groups. The first group is found here in verse 19. They are the faithful ones, they are the core group, the ones that are truly with it. Christ commends these Thyatirans heartily for their love, their service, their faith, and steadfast endurance. I just want to mention offhand that the love that is in them works out in service. And the faith that is in them works out in endurance. So they are not only having these things in them, they are working them out in their actions.

What is more, they increased in these virtues throughout the years. Not bad at all. They get good marks, actually. They clearly understood what God required of them. And when they were faithful and held the line, they were *good* Christians, these people from Thyatira. They were growing! Think of them in terms of their works here as compared or contrasted to some of the other churches, like the Ephesians. The Ephesians were reprimanded for backsliding. They had become hardened. They had left their first love. Compare them with the people from Sardis, whose works are dead, and compare them with the Laodiceans whose works are lukewarm, they are neither hot nor cold. God says, "I'm going to spit you out of My mouth."

These Thyatirans made a good witness for Christ, yet Satan was able to turn this eagerness to learn and to grow into an Achilles heel for some of them. Not all of them. But for some, he was able to turn them.

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

Well, the debit side of the ledger is as bad as the credit side is good. Here, the second and the third group's are described. The second group, which actually may contain some of the first group because the whole church is accused here in this particular verse, they are castigated for being tolerant of evil. He says, they "allow this Jezebel," evidently a self-proclaimed

prophetess among them, to teach and deceive God's people. The third group is made up of the heretics who were eagerly following Jezebel's teaching. So Jezebel and all her followers, that is the third group.

The first group is the faithful, the second group are the tolerant, and the third group are the heretics. They are all in this one church and Christ, throughout this letter, lets them all know where they stand.

I should mention that the heresy that is in Thyatira is essentially the same as in Pergamos. It says that they both have problems with sexual immorality and with eating meat sacrificed to idols. Except if you look at them, they are flipped. In Pergamos it says first "things sacrificed to idols" and then "commit sexual immorality." In Thyatira it is "sexual immorality" first and then "eating things sacrificed to idols." So we are dealing with basically the same thing, but it produces somewhat different results, and there is another reason why it is producing different results, which we will get into in a minute.

A bit about Jezebel, because she is the image that Christ brings up for us to understand this prophetess and what she was doing. In the Old Testament, we know Jezebel was Ahab's queen. She was a Sidonian princess, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. You can find her story, if you want to go and look, in I Kings 16:31 and it goes all the way through the life of Ahab there through about chapter 21. And then her fate is shown in II Kings 9 the last several verses there, starting with verse 30. I do not want to get into all that. You probably know the story fairly well.

I just want to tell you what she represents. Jezebel represents the evil person who incites others to forsake God and do wickedness. Let us go to Proverbs 2 instead and wise King Solomon tells us a few things about such people.

**Proverbs 2:10-22** When wisdom [think of this in terms of being a Thyatiran] enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who

are devious in their paths; to deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God. For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead; none who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life—so you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness. For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

If you were a Thyatiran you should now be shaking in your boots even more, because He shows clearly what happens when you follow the immoral woman, the Jezebel, even if it is not for any kind of sexual reasons. Although there were those sexual reasons Thyatira. By the way, just as another offhand comment, verse 20, that little phrase where we read "that woman Jezebel," in the majority text it says, "your wife, Jezebel," indicating that she may have actually been a person of prominence in the congregation. Some say perhaps she was a minister's wife.

It seems that this Jezebel in the Thyatiran congregation used her influence to persuade members that they could participate in the ritual fornication and the guild meals that were taking place in the city within their guilds. And what she probably did, nobody knows for sure because we do not have a whole lot to go on here, but if what she said about the guild meals and everything is what it was, then she was probably twisting what Paul said in I Corinthians 8, and I do want to read that. I want to read what she *may have* twisted, and we know that Peter says that people with unsettled minds twist what Paul had to say, because there are things that are hard to understand. Paul is speaking here about meat sacrificed to idols.

**I Corinthians 8:1** Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

So that is what he is talking about. The difference between knowledge and love. The difference between knowing that we may have some sort of liberty, but how do we express the love, even though we may have liberty to do what we what we would like to do.

**I Corinthians 8:2-6** If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us, there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

**I Corinthians 8:8** But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat, are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

This could be the passage that she twisted. Basically stopping right there and not going on to what other things he had to say in this rest of this chapter, and in chapter 10:18-22, Acts 15:19-20 and also versus 28-29, as well as Romans 14. Paul talked about this often. It came up frequently. My conclusion about all of this is, that in terms of eating meat that had been offered to an idol, Paul felt it was a matter of conscience. That it was okay to do because the demon was nothing and it was clean meat. Now if it was unclean meat he just said, "No, do not eat it." God says, do not eat that meat. But if it was clean meat and it was a matter of conscience and you felt that it was okay, then if your conscience did not provoke you at all, you thought it was okay, then you could do it. By the way, I add another caveat here, the meat was not in a temple, but it was being sold by a meat seller, and you had no idea whether it was actually offered to an idol or not.

But there were a lot of other things that he said about this that we have to think about when faced with a moral dilemma like this. Two things needed to be answered here before you would even think about eating meat offered idols. (1) It did not bother your conscience or a brother's who knew that you were eating it. And (2) that you knew or not whether the meat was offered to an idol. If there was a question about whether it was offered to an idol and it did not bother you, then that was fine. It was not going to mar your conscience. But as I mentioned before, eating meat in a pagan temple in a ritual meal with the god, would be strictly forbidden. You should not do that.

**I Corinthians 10:14-18** [He says to start this section] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

He is showing what we do and what Israel did. They were all bound together through this meal through the sacrifice that was made, some given back to the person to eat, some going to the priest, some going to God. They are all one. They are all united in this one action that is reverence and worship of God.

**I Corinthians 10:19-22** What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? [The answer rhetorically is, "No," it is really nothing. But notice the next verse starts with "but."] But, I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

This is exactly what is coming out in the church of Thyatira. They provoked Him to jealousy by becoming one with demons while they purport to be one with Him.

So the major difference between the sins of Pergamos and the sins of Thyatira is that in the former church of Pergamos, the temptation to apostatize comes from without. It comes from somebody not in the church. They were being pressured by people in the world to do this. While in the church of Thyatira, the temptation was coming from right among them. It was some lady in the congregation who thought of herself as a prophetess. And perhaps in Pergamos the idolatry was the worst sin because it is mentioned first, and perhaps there in Thyatira, the sexual sins that came out

of it were the major problem. If you do go through the book of the letter of Thyatira, there is a lot more sexual imagery than idolatry imagery.

**Revelation 2:21** [Jesus says] "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent." [Talking about this Jezebel.]

What we find here is that the problem that was going on there in Thyatira was ongoing and it was long term. It had not just popped up. This is something that had been going on for a while. She had been at it for a while, and the church had been warned. I wonder if John himself had done that in one of his visits, but they had done nothing about it. In fact, the Greek there for that final phrase "she did not repent," actually says "and she would not, or she will not, to repent." So it is much worse than just failure. It is more like unwillingness to repent.

They set their will, she had especially, but those who followed her also, to continue these ungodly practices. We could even go so far as to say that they had convinced themselves that participating in these things was good and repenting of them would be detrimental, and you will understand what I mean by that in a minute.

They may have swallowed the Gnostic idea that posited that, at the very least, allowing the body to participate in sins had no effect on one spiritually. Because spiritual things were on a higher plane than physical things, and the material could not affect the spiritual, it had no influence on the the physical. So they reasoned that it was better to do these things and live since they were nothing (Remember, that is what Paul said. The demon is nothing or the idol is nothing.), than refuse to do them and lose their jobs and to suffer persecution and perhaps even die. It is a very twisted logic, very twisted reasoning. And it is especially twisted when you think of how many times in the New Testament God says that He calls for faithfulness and purity.

**Revelation 2:22-23** "Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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."

Here He lowers the boom. He pronounces His judgment. He will punish Jezebel with sickness, put her, not on her bed of pleasures, but on a sickbed. And I just have to question here, was He going to punish them, or her specifically, with a venereal disease, with a sexually transmitted disease? I do not know, an interesting speculation, and so she would have to suffer for her sins, specifically for the sins that she was getting other people to do, and her followers then would be confronted with great tribulation. I just want to say here, this is not *the* great tribulation, but it is just a generic great tribulation. Although if any people are acting like Thyatirans when the end comes, it will be *the* great tribulation that they will have to face. But here it is more general.

So in their avoiding persecution, they will be punished with heavy trials and persecution anyway. As much as they try to avoid it through sin, they end up being caught in it anyway.

Her children here are obviously her followers and God sentences them. Jesus Christ sentences *them* to death and this has parallels with what happened with Jezebel. Remember the story of Jehu when Ahab wanted the field that was there in Jezreel, which belonged to Naboth, which had the vineyard or whatnot, and he said he did not want to sell it, and he was killed for it. Jezebel was the one that was responsible for that. Well, Elijah came and said what was going to happen. That Ahab would die and then Jezebel would die, and then she would be eaten by dogs. And then it was when Jehu was called to do what he was going to do there, that she was thrown from the window. She splattered on the ground and the dogs came and ate her.

But also in that thing is that Ahab's 70 sons were put to the sword. Jezebel's children. There are connections there. I am sure she did not have 70 sons. But it was all the sons of of Ahab and since she was his queen, they were considered her sons too. So all of those people were wiped out. Jesus is getting the Thyatirans to look back on the historic parallel here to see what happened. It is not a good end. Not at all.

He says here that He would kill them, kill her children, with death. This seems repetitive. But what it does is it actually amplifies the idea of how they would die. It would be a very bad death. As a matter of fact, a similar

phrase occurs in Genesis 2, when in verse 17, He told Adam what would happen if he ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He said, "You shall surely die." Well, in Hebrew, it is actually "dying you will die." And so it is this double idea of dying that makes you understand that it is not a good death. It is not going to be fun at all. Death, by the way, in Revelation, often means some sort of pestilence, some sort of sickness. If you go look at the fourth seal there in chapter 6, verse 8, death is pestilence, the pale horse.

So, Christ's stern punishment and judgment here are a sign to the church that He is aware, that He is engaged. He is evaluating and He is acting on the church's behalf. He is heavily involved in His people's lives. He is heavily involved in the church, and He is going to make sure things are done right. It may take some time. We see here in Revelation 2 that it took some time. Remember He had warned her and He had given them time to repent. But after a while He decided He had to act, and when He acted and they had not repented, it got grizzly and bad. You do not want to push God like that.

"He who searches the minds and hearts," as He says here, refers to those eyes that flame like fire—He is watching. It also has a very similar meaning, as what we saw in Pergamos, that He has this sharp two-edged sword that came out of His mouth. Remember, we went back to Hebrews 4, and we saw what that sword does. It pierces through to the very heart, goes to the marrow, knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. He is that aware of what is going on. He knows that about each one of us, and He will act accordingly. The same thought is again expressed in what He says there, "I will give to each one of you according to your works."

This is idea of evaluation and judgment and being able to see exactly what you have done and what you have not done, God will evaluate His people with His piercing and totally unavoidable ability to see right down into our motives and intentions. And He will make a righteous judgment, a just judgment, because He knows all the facts and we will not be able to dispute it or resist it because He is going to have all the power and all the facts and everything on His side. And what will we do except just submit to it. Actually, what we should do is repent. But you know, if you are to that point where you are not willing to repent anymore, then you are just going to have to take it.

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

He reassures that first group, the faithful group, those who had neither swallowed Jezebel's Kool-Aid or tolerated the evil with among them. He tells them, "You don't have anything to fear because you've been good. You've done right. You've done everything that you were supposed to do, so you don't need to worry about the judgment." He would not require any kind of penance or anything of them because they had been doing what is right. Remember, He gives them good marks, good grades. They had done well, so He just tells them to keep enduring, keep remaining faithful. Do not compromise, just keep on keeping on. Remember what it says there in Matthew 24:13. "He who endures to the end shall be saved." Keep going and endure.

I do want to mention that where He says here, "I will put on you no other burden." That word *burden* maybe a reference to Acts 15:28. Remember during the Jerusalem Council when they were finally coming to their conclusion about the Gentiles being included, and they said we are not going to lay on them any other burden than these necessary things. And he mentioned four things that they had to abstain from. Two of them are mentioned here in the letter to Thyatira: Do not eat what was sacrificed to idols and abstain from sexual immorality. So He is going back and He is saying, "Look, Thyatirans. This has been part of it since long before, maybe 50 years before." They should have known these things, and God gave them the burden at that time, those four things, and He was not going to add to what they had to watch out for any more than that.

Now, what is this depths of Satan? As He says here, "who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say." It is actually not very clear it all what it means. Obviously, it is serious evil. Perhaps the depths of Satan is actually Satan's long game for deceiving the church, the children of God, to turn from Him. Perhaps that is what the depths of Satan is. Some believe that it is Christ actually twisting one of their phrases. That it may be the apostate Thyatirans made a proud statement saying something like, "By God's Spirit

in me, I know the deep things of God." This actually was a statement of Paul although not quite that way. But he talked about the deep things of God, that we should be understanding them, and these things will be revealed to us. He says that in I Corinthians 2, verse 10.

But Christ is twisting this and saying, "You thought you were learning the deep things of God, but you were actually learning the deep things of Satan." That may be it, but He does say there that, "as they say," which makes a little difference, that they were actually saying something about the depths of Satan. So another possibility, it may refer to Jezebel and her followers thinking that by comprehending all of Satan's wives—remember, we are told to do that, to know what Satan's wives are—that they could not be brought into bondage to evil. "Ah, we know Satan. We know that the way he works can't affect us." That they had somehow become inoculated against sin by the Spirit of God. And so they may have believed that it was their Christian duty to participate as fully as possible in the pagan society around them, which is the Satan's field of operation, to know and experience life in Satan's world.

But they were confident that their baptism and their spirituality, the Spirit of God in them, gave them supernatural protection from Satan and from the evils that were produced. In other words, they thought they could handle fire and not get burned. This is similar to the Gnostic idea that I mentioned before, that what was done in the physical body had no effect on a person's spirituality or spiritual standing with God. So really what it was, was just enormous spiritual pride, even arrogance, if you want to put it that way, that they were stronger than Satan, they could they could handle anything.

**Revelation 2:26-27** "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'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."

Thyatira's "He who overcomes" statement promise contains an additional element that the other six churches do not. And that is that Christ adds, "and keeps My works until the end." None of the others say that. They just say, "To him who overcomes, I will give. . ." But He says here, "he who overcomes *and* keeps My works until the end to him, I will give. . ." It is an

additional thing that He is telling them that it does not matter how good they were in the past, that they may have kept God's words for a time, maybe at the beginning of their conversion. Maybe they were converted then. I do not know. That would be His to judge, but at some point they had stopped and rested on their laurels, you might say.

They had thought that they had reached a high point of spirituality, and they had gone no further. Maybe they had overcome some things early on, but Jesus says that is not good enough. You have to keep My works *until the end*. He is telling them, reminding them, that Christians have to prove their loyalty and obedience and outgoing concern over time. This is a transformation process. It does not just happen at the beginning and then everything is hunky-dory. He is telling them "you have to maintain these works until the end." Que Matthew 24, verse 13 again. "He who endures to the end the same shall be saved."

This idea is in line with the whole letter here to the Thyatirans. Jesus keeps alluding to the passage of time. He did that in verse 19. He did it in verse 21. He did it in verses 25 and 26 as well. He is saying here it is not a *point* in time. It is a *long* stretch of time when we have to be faithful throughout that whole time. A Christian cannot just overcome one or two or a few things at a given time and then rest on his oars. But the process of repentance and transformation into the image of Christ must be continued and maintained until death, or Christ comes. If a person apostatizes, all his former righteousness and good works mean nothing to God, unless he repents. This was said way back in Ezekiel the 18th chapter. I want to read one verse. I will try to get there quickly. Time is fleeting.

**Ezekiel 18:24** "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? [Rhetorical question. "No!"] All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."

Jesus is kind of letting them know this was what awaited them if they kept on with their apostasy. We can never afford to think we have arrived at full spirituality and coast from then on in. It is not going to work. Such a person

will invariably backslide and possibly fall away in pride and self-righteousness. It is only the one who overcomes and endures who will receive power over the nations. God will give rulership, and here the word is distinctly "to shepherd." That he shall shepherd them with a rod of iron. He will give this rulership only to those who have demonstrated over years of time that they can rule themselves, rule themselves first. Only those who have character like Him. He *never* gave in. He *always* rejected Satan. He *always* rejected Satan's temptations. He rebuked evil. He *always* did what was good. And He is looking for people to rule with Him who will do the same thing.

Verse 27 is the one here that contains the reference to Psalm 2, where He has shown using His power in a godly way, shattering rebels and unbelievers in righteousness and justice. That is the kind of people He wants to make, to form into someone like Him. All right, let us close out this letter here.

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

With the power that He promises over the nations, He also says "I will give him the morning star." This is explained in Revelation 22:16 where it says here, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." So clearly what we have here is that Jesus gives them Himself. By the way, just to throw in another fact here that adds to it. The Morning Star, which is the planet Venus, has long been associated with sovereignty. This was especially true in the Roman world, in the Roman Empire.

That being said, as with the rewards to the other churches, the central point here is intimacy with Christ, that they are going to become one with Him. The overcomer will be so closely associated with Jesus Christ that there is no separating one from the other. What He is doing here is trying to make us think of things like what Jesus said in that final Passover service to His disciples, that He would come and be in them and the Father would come and be in them and then in His prayer there in chapter 17 He said, "I in you and you in Me." That is what He wants. That is what He is aiming for. He and His Father want absolute unity with the chosen of God.

This corrupt church is tainted with false teaching, with syncretism and apostasy. You know, I give my little nicknames to these churches. I have called them "married to the enemy" or, if you like, just "plain old worldly Christians." As James 2:10-12 puts it, they are a spring that issues both fresh and salt water. And in an understatement of the millennia, he comments, "My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

Many a Thyatiran had eaten heavily of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and would soon reap the consequences. They would surely die. They still have one foot very firmly planted in the world, and it shows in their rank ungodliness and evil.

So what is our Savior telling the people of Thyatira? It is essentially this: You cannot serve God and mammon. Choose your side. Fish or cut bait. Either come in or stay out.

So he who has ears to hear, let him hear!