

REVELATION

The Triumph of Jesus

As we look at these seven letters in the book of Revelation, it is helpful to remember that they picture seven kinds of churches that you find in any age, in any period of history. Every church in the world today will fall into one or more of these categories of churches.

Thyatira was located about 35 miles southeast of Pergamum. It was a very small city, but a busy commercial center. It was on a major road of the Roman Empire, and, because of this, many trade unions had developed in this city. Everyone who worked there was a member of one or more trades. There were carpenters, dyers, sellers of goods, tent makers, etc. In the church at Philippi, which the Apostle Paul began, there was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, who came from Thyatira. It was difficult to make a living as a Christian in Thyatira without belonging to a trade guild.

The comparison of the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira is interesting. In Pergamum, where Satan's throne was, the believers were pressured to conform to the world and to compromise the truth. However, in Thyatira, where the church was growing, the enemy improvised. Here the damage would be inflicted not by the pressure from without but from the poison from within! (BST, p. 50)

At the time Revelation was written, Thyatira was entering a period of great prosperity. This city was not a great religious center though it did boast of a temple to Apollo, the "sun god". It was known for its numerous guilds and its main industry was wool and dyed good production. Wherever guilds were found, idolatry and immorality—the two great enemies of the early church—were almost always present too.

In light of the clear command to contend earnestly for the faith, how could we possibly neglect the clear teaching of the Scriptures? Chuck Colson, in his book *The Faith*, wrote...

Christians must see that the faith is more than a religion or even a relationship with Jesus; the faith is a complete view of the world and humankind's place in it. Christianity is a worldview that speaks to every area of life, and its foundational doctrines define its content. If we don't know what we believe—even what Christianity is—how can we live it and defend it? Our ignorance (and our tolerance) is crippling us.

I want you to see how Jesus responded to the church in Thyatira and the impact that message has on CFBC and each of our lives individually.

Revelation 2:18... “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this”

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God"...This is the only time the reference to Jesus as the *"Son of God"* appears in the book of Revelation. It emphasizes His deity and His oneness with the Father.

"Who has eyes like a flame of fire"...This speaks of Christ's ability to see through our facades. Believe me; Jesus sees things as they really are not just as we want them to appear to be! Listen to Hagar's words and then John's word...

Genesis 16:13... Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

John 2:24–25... But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

Now let's look at the last descriptive phrase in verse 18...

"And His feet are like burnished bronze, says this"... (Rev. 1:15) This demonstrates His purity and holiness and His sovereign right to judge the world and His church.

1 Peter 4:17... For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

John 5:22... “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”

What a shock this representation of Jesus Christ must have created in the hearts of the church members of Thyatira when this letter was read by their pastor. This is not the domesticated, weak Christ people often imagine in the church today! I want you to know that the Lord Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

Revelation 2:19... ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.’

"I know your deeds"... What an encouraging verse this is. It assures us that the Lord Jesus knows what we do for Him.

"And your love"...The believers were showing love for the Lord and for each other. This was the first of the seven churches to be commended for its love.

“And faith”...The word here literally means *“faithfulness.”* They were reliable and consistent.

“And service”...They were actively serving the Lord Jesus with compassion and love. This is the word from which we often translate as *“deacon”* and it refers to the collective ministry of the church. It is love in action.

“And perseverance”...They steadfastly persevered in the faith. The word here means to *“abide under.”* (Matt. 24:13) How important is this characteristic?

James 1:12... Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Now, look at that last important phrase in verse 19...

“And that your deeds of late are greater than at first”...This is a picture of spiritual growth and greater effectiveness for the kingdom of God. We can learn a lot from our Lord’s commendation of the church at Thyatira. We can’t hide anything from our Lord. He knows when we serve Him and love Him and are faithful to Him! Listen to this verse...

Hebrews 6:10... For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Consider this question. What kind of commendation could Jesus offer to CFBC corporately and to your life personally? Is it well with your spiritual life? Are you advancing or retreating? Did you begin well and now find yourself tapering off?

Revelation 2:20... ‘But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*’

“But I have this against you”...Notice the difference between this church and the church at Ephesus. This church was gaining in love but was tolerating evil, while the church at Ephesus was waning in love and not tolerating evil. What dreaded words!

“That you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess”...There is always the tendency to be committed to the truth and yet not love the Lord or people as we should. And there is the tendency to love the Lord and people and yet not stand for the truth.

Jesus often named people according to their character (Peter for example). Here he chose the name of the most evil woman in the Old Testament. Jezebel of the Old Testament was the daughter of Ethbaal, the pagan king of the Zidonians. His subjects in Tyre and Sidon were Baal worshipers. Jezebel married Israel’s King Ahab and then introduced Baal worship to the

Israelites (1 Kings 16:29-33). She practiced witchcraft, worshiped Baal and Asherah, supported hundreds of pagan priests, and killed the true prophets of God.

Dr. Barnhouse pointed out that ***“every sanctuary of (Baal/Asherah worship) was at the same time an asylum of debauchery and adultery and male and female sexual practices. The priests of Baal were wicked sex perverts.”*** She corrupted the northern kingdom of Israel ...

1 Kings 18:4... for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water.

2 Kings 9:22... When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” And he answered, “What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”

In Thyatira, the Lord Jesus referred to a woman as a type of “Jezebel”. No doubt she was involved in ***“the deep things of Satan”*** (vs. 24). Notice she called herself a ***“prophetess.”*** She claimed to have special insights from God and she boldly taught her hellish doctrines with little or no reproof from the spiritual leaders of the church. Beware church of the Jezebel type who claims they have a new truth from God!

“And she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray”... She essentially exerted spiritual leadership over the church as a whole which the Word of God forbids. As a result, she led people to believe a lie.

“So that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”... The meetings of the trade guilds were connected with the worship of the erotic idols of the Greek world. In order to make a living, the Christians in Thyatira had to belong to a union. However, to attend the union meetings was to be involved with the worship of idols and with debauchery that went along with it.

Apparently, Jezebel had begun to teach that it was all right for them to go along with the requirements of the guild, that they needed to submit to the pressures of the world around in order to make a living, and that God would understand and overlook this.

Dr. Earl Palmer, has said a very helpful thing in this connection.

The most subtle challenge to faith does not usually originate in public amphitheaters but in the daily places where we earn the money we need to live. What the trades need, what professions need, what all deployments of our lives need, is not our soul but our skills; not our worship but our hard work. When we once learn this vital alignment of values, we will do better in our work and have fewer ulcers too. Idolatries, whether of the dramatic, amphitheater type or the low-grade office type, always make us sick.

Do you see how false teaching will always lead people into unholy lifestyles? This woman was the epitome of idolatry and immorality! Doctrinal failure can tear a church apart and bring about a stinging confrontation with Christ.

Revelation 2:21... 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.'

"I gave her time to repent"...Here we see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be fooled by God's lack of judgment concerning sin in the life of a believer or an unbeliever. Listen to this verse...

Romans 2:4... Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Look at these next words of Jesus...

"And she does not want to repent of her immorality"...How foolish! She continued teaching her blasphemous heresy.

Revelation 2:22... 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.'

"Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness"... Please notice that she is judged for her sins because she refused to repent. The Lord Jesus dealt with her through conviction but she stubbornly rebelled. She is *"hurled"* on a bed of sickness that was only a prelude to the fires of hell since it appears that she was an unbeliever.

"And those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation"...Be sure of this, your sin will be uncovered and it will cost you dearly. There is a pay day some day! Distress and trouble are around the corner. The emphasis here is on the spiritual adultery of those who followed JEZEBEL'S teaching.

The suffering that he refers to is most likely a reference to sexual diseases. Maybe it was gonorrhea or syphilis. These were well-known and widespread in the ancient world.

"Unless they repent of her deeds"... There is still time to repent!

Revelation 2:23... 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.'

“And I will kill her children with pestilence”...This refers to her spiritual children—those who bought into her hellish doctrine by practicing immorality as well as teaching it as Jezebel did. but who teach it as well, as Jezebel was doing.

The "death," I think, refers to spiritual death—the terrible destruction of the lake of fire described in Chapters 20 and 21 of this book. A commitment to evil makes repentance difficult.

“And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts”...The word “hearts” refers to the totality of one’s feelings, thoughts, and desires traced back to one’s deepest inner life. Other churches who would read this letter could not be smug.

“And I will give to each one of you according to your deeds”...The judgment of our Lord is just. What a word of comfort for the believer who was true to the Lord and His Word. Those who were innocent would not be punished along with the guilty. “Deeds/works” have always been the basis for judgment. How you live demonstrates your true spiritual condition. In the Bible, salvation is always a matter of grace and faith, but judgment is always based on works.

Revelation 2:24... ‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.

Can you imagine the burden of true believers who had to face this heretical mess every day? Could we ever grasp the temptation they resisted, the passion they exhibited, and the endurance they practiced?

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of the "deep things of God.”

1 Corinthians 2:10... For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Whenever God has something good, Satan imitates it. These dark and hidden matters are Satan's imitation of the wonderfully deep truths in the Word of God.

This woman’s speaking ability and her leadership gifts mesmerized the church. Almost the whole church swallowed her devilish doctrine. But there was a remnant that had stayed true to the Lord and to His Word. They had not been able to uproot this Jezebel. Jesus tells them to sit tight and wait on his intervention of judgment.

Revelation 2:25... 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.'

The words "hold fast" picture for us just how difficult a task they faced in staying true to Jesus. He is saying here that the true believers must hold to the truth even if everyone else caves in and tolerates false teaching. Praise the Lord, we have the promise of His coming.

Revelation 2:26... 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS'

"He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end"...These are believers who live out their faith daily. They are the ones who endure to the end.

"To him I will give authority over the nations"...The coming reign of Christ over the world (Ps. 2) will be shared with His followers (1:6; 3:21; 5:10; 20:6; 22:5). He presents a great reversal taking place between their present persecution and burden bearing and their future prospect of reigning with Christ. This must have given a great deal of hope to the believers of Thyatira. God has given His Son authority over the nations and Jesus has every right to give some of that authority to those who believe in Him and serve Him!

Look at verse 27...

Revelation 2:27... AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father

This is an Old Testament prophecy...

Psalms 2:7-9... "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.' "

The meaning is clear...

"And he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces"...Those nations who rebel against Him in the millennial kingdom will be destroyed.

"As I also have received authority from My Father"... The Father has given Jesus authority over the nation and Jesus will share that authority with His followers.

Revelation 2:28–29... and I will give him the morning star. 29 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

“And I will give him the morning star”... It is best to see this as Jesus Christ Himself who assumes this title in Rev. 22:16. We live in a dark time.

1 Corinthians 13:12... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

The followers of Jesus will behold the Lord in all His fullness and glory! Someone has well said, "If your faith fizzles before you finish, it is because it was faulty from the first!" True faith holds on to the end.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”...What is the Spirit saying to the churches today? Hold fast church. Jesus is coming!