

Revelation 2:19-20 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. (20)

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

What was the problem?

Someone in the congregation, a woman, was convincing members of the congregation to eat things sacrificed to idols, which actually was idolatry. That was the essence of what Queen Jezebel did to Israel.

In the time of Queen Jezebel, and in the time of the apostle John, the culture all around them was highly religious or superstitious, with worship of false gods by offering sacrifice to idols.

Acts 17:16-29

This was a major problem for Israel, and for the congregations of Christians. Christians who had grown up in pagan idolatry might not have their consciences immediately and completely cleansed of all superstition, and so might be susceptible to idolatrous worship even when they had come to faith in Christ.

You can tell by how John concluded his letter, 1 John.

1 John 5:19-21 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. (20) And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (21) Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

You can read more about this in Paul's instructions to the Corinthians.

Understand from what Paul wrote that in the congregations there were Christians who knew very well what idols and false gods are, and there were Christians who did not know those things well, who were ignorant about them.

1 Corinthians 8:4-13 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. (5) For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) (6) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (7) Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. (8) But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. (9) But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. (10) For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; (11) And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? (12) But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (13) Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

But sin being so deceptive, there was danger for the more knowledgeable Christians, too, if they took pride in their knowledge instead of taking care.

1 Corinthians 10:1-33 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; (2) And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (3) And did all eat the same spiritual meat; (4) And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (5) But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. (7) Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (8) Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. (9) Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

(10) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (11) Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (13) There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (14) Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. (15) I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. (16) 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? (17) For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (18) Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? (19) What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? (20) But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. (21) Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (22) Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? (23) All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. (24) Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. (25) Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: (26) For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. (27) If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. (28) But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: (29) Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? (30) For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? (31) Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (32) Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: (33) Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

There was confusion in the congregations about whether or not the Bible's commands against eating things sacrificed to idols and about fornication applied to New Testament Christians, or only to Old Testament Israel. That question had to be addressed in a conference in Jerusalem.

Acts 15:28-29 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; (29) That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

So, in this context, apostolic doctrine was:

- keep yourselves from idols; abstain from food offered to idols
- abstain from fornication

Yet a woman in the congregation had managed to teach and seduce the Lord's servants

- to commit fornication
- to eat things sacrificed to idols

How had she done this?

- she called herself a prophetess
- she taught, characterizing her doctrine as being "deep"
- she seduced or deceived, playing the part of Eve
  - God says, "do not eat"
  - Satan convinces Eve there is something deeper than what God has said
  - Eve eats, and gives it to Adam
  - Adam eats

And the congregation had allowed her to do this!

**because thou sufferest**

Trapp:

It is a fault, then, not only to be active in evil, but to be passive of evil.

Poole:

certainly there was some famous heretical strumpet in this church, which the governors did not restrain and cast out of their communion...the officers in it, who ought to have restrained her

Barnes:

tolerate, or countenance her

Ellicott:

For letting her alone, for being timid, paying too much deference to her spiritual pretensions, for failing to see and to show that the so-called “deep things” of these teachers were depths of Satan, the chief minister is rebuked.

Carroll:

They had not exercised discipline

That demand in 1Jn\_4:1 to try them that say they are prophets and apostles was disregarded.

### **that woman Jezebel**

Clarke:

from the allusion we may take it for granted she was a woman of power and influence in Thyatira, who corrupted the true religion, and harassed the followers of God in that city

Barnes:

a woman of vast influence over her husband - an influence which was uniformly exerted for evil

The kind of character, therefore, which would be designated by the term as used here, would be that of a woman who was artful and persuasive in her manner; who was capable of exerting a wide influence over others; who had talents of a high order; who was a thorough advocate of error; who was unscrupulous in the means which she employed for accomplishing her ends

the teacher in this case was a woman

Carroll:

In this case great trouble came to the church from a woman.

RWP:

some prominent woman in the church in Thyatira

### **which calleth herself a prophetess**

Knollys:

we are to understand those false teachers who called themselves prophets and ministers of God, who taught corrupt and false doctrine in this Church

Poole:

It is also plain, that she was one that pretended to Divine revelations

Clarke:

i.e., set up for a teacher

Barnes:

Many persons set up the claim to be prophets in the times when the gospel was first preached, and it is not improbable that many females would lay claim to such a character, after the example of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc.

Carroll:

this Jezebel claimed to be a prophetess, and that this prophetic spirit told her that open communion with heathenism had no harm in it.

RWP:

This woman was not a real prophetess, but a false one with loud claims and loose living.

### **to teach**

Gill:

when it was insufferable for a woman to teach, and especially such a strumpet

### **and to seduce my servants**

JRY:

The essence of how Satan seduces is to tell the woman that something is not really wrong, as God says it is, then for the woman to convince the man.

Gill:

to deceive such who called themselves the servants of Christ, and draw them into the commission of spiritual fornication, which is idolatry; as the idolatrous worship of the Mass, and of images and saints departed:

Clarke:

taught the Christians that fornication, and eating things offered to idols, were matters of indifference, and thus they were seduced from the truth.

JFB:

By a false spiritualism these seducers led their victims into the grossest carnality, as though things done in the flesh were outside the true man, and were, therefore, indifferent.

### **to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols**

It seems obvious to us, but was a difficult question to the congregations in the first century, whether or not the prohibitions against idolatry and fornication were just for the Jews in the Old Testament.

Geneva:

Often in the scripture, by fornication they mean idolatry.

Clarke:

But it is probable that by fornication here is meant idolatry merely, which is often its meaning in the Scriptures.

Barnes:

The custom of attending on the festivals of idols led commonly to licentiousness, and they who were gross and sensual in their lives were fit subjects to be persuaded to attend on idol feasts - for nowhere else would they find more unlimited toleration for the indulgence of their passions.

Trench (quoted by JFB):

“Thyatira was just the reverse of Ephesus. There, much zeal for orthodoxy, but little love; here, activity of faith and love, but insufficient zeal for godly discipline and doctrine, a patience of error even where there was not a participation in it” [Trench].

Fortner (paraphrasing):

This woman’s answer to how Christians could get along in business in a pagan culture was that participation in pagan idolatry and immorality was not unacceptable to God, as long as the Christian didn’t mean it.

## **depths of Satan**

Carroll:

The Gnostic philosophers claimed that they had a new knowledge, later and better than any revelation, as if to say: "You know what Paul says, and you know what John said, but we have the depths of a later and better knowledge." Our Lord admits the depths, but declares them "the depths of Satan."



