

Christ's Last Word to His Church: Thyatira: Jesus Searches Our Hearts & Minds Revelation 2:18-29

As we open to Revelation 2:18-29, we come to the letter to the Church at Thyatira.

That term Thyatira is usually a bit foreign to us outside of this chapter. To get our bearings we could also say, we are opening to the geographic area that received more of the books (epistles) of the New Testament than any other geographic area of the ancient world.

Have you ever thought about where these letters we hold were first sent?

God Sent More New Testament Letters Here than Anywhere Else

Here's the lineup if you haven't stopped to do the math.

- Revelation [1] opens with Christ's epistles to the Seven Churches addressed to people living in Roman Asia, which is this western area of modern Turkey.
- Peter's epistles [2-3] were to the northern part of this same geographic area.
- Paul's letters [4-6] to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians were to churches in the central highlands of this same area, as well as his letters to Timothy [7-8] sent to the same western area as Christ's epistles.
- John's three epistles [9-11] were to individuals and churches in this same area.
- Finally, most likely James [12] was also written to this area.

All told there were 12 of the books of the New Testament specifically addressed¹ to this area. Nowhere else comes even close to this number. The believers in the seven church area, were surrounded by God's Word written to them.

In the time of the Apostle John, this area was incredibly Roman.

There are more Greek temples in Turkey than in Greece, and there are more Roman cities in Turkey than there are in all of Italy. This was the epicenter of Roman life in the first and second centuries.

Now step back and remember, this is the fourth church of seven, named Thyatira. This

¹ The New Testament books addressed to this geographic area are: Revelation, I/II Peter, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, I/II Timothy, I/II/III John, which totals up to 11; most likely James' audience ("twelve tribes scattered abroad") included this area. Second in geographic concentration would be Greece with 5 books addressed there: (I/II Corinthians, Philippians, I/II Thessalonians).

is the central letter of the seven, it is the longest, and it is very pointedly exposing sins that had crept into this church.

The saints in Thyatira had a serious sin infection sweeping their body—listen to what Christ said as we stand to hear Him speak:

*Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV) "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: 19 **"I know your works,** love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 **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 eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 **And I gave her time to repent** of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 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.** 24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ' 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; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""*

Pray

This church, called from darkness to light at salvation, saved from the power of Satan and transformed into saints of God was slipping. The Lord on His inspection trip had seen something ominous. The believers at Thyatira were tolerating sinful teachers and teachings, and had allowed the infectious diseases of false doctrine, and sinful conduct, to permeate Christ's Body the Church.

Jesus calls them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. This letter is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed on a daily basis: repent of listening to false teachers and their false teachings, and start listening to Him instead.

Daily Choices: Serve Christ or Not

Thyatira was being seduced by the false teacher Jezebel; and true believers in that church were called upon by Christ to resist all such evil teaching and lifestyles. Christ's message for them and to us today is: *Stay pure; live for Me.*

Every day we face this choice: serve Christ or the world. The letters in Revelation

have a timely application for our lives. They each emphasize why and how we must obey our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Ephesus (2:1–7): Remember that Jesus is jealous of your love, so lay hold of your first love for Christ.

Smyrna (2:8–11): Hope in Jesus through life until the end and trust Christ through your suffering.

Pergamos (2:12–17): Rest in the security that comes from clinging only to Jesus; and conform to Christ, not the world.

Thyatira (2:18–29): Fear the chastening love of Jesus so He will not have to discipline sin in the church.

As it was in Thyatira, so it is in your life today. Daily you have opportunities to either please God or please self. But for a devoted believer, there is only one right choice: honor the holiness of Jesus by purposing in your heart to respond in obedience to Him regardless of the cost.

PART ONE: MEET THE ASSEMBLY LIVING IN HARD TIMES v. 18A

We now look at the longest of the seven letters Christ wrote to His church. We will consider today the least known of all the churches. In fact, the only thing we know is the first Christian named, from this city called Thyatira.

Take a moment with me to look there, it is in Acts 16:14-15, where we meet Paul's first European convert, who was a merchant from Thyatira named Lydia. This is the account of Paul's second journey, as he stops in Philippi, he leads a seeking woman to Jesus (v. 14) a "seller of purple (scarlet) fabrics.

Acts 16:14-15 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

That is where the Scriptural account ends. It could be she moved back to Thyatira and became part of the nucleus of that church, or most likely, she immediately shared Christ with her relatives and close friends and they possibly were the start of this church. However the Lord worked, a church started in Lydia's home town that we read about in Revelation 2.

As we have considered already, each church is not only a local church, it also portrays the ongoing struggles that the church has gone through over the centuries.

As Ephesus portrayed the apostolic church and Smyrna the church persecuted AD 60-313, and Pergamum the church wed to Rome 300-600.

So Thyatira is the church of the dark ages from AD 600-1500 from the first Pope Gregory the Great to the Reformation.

Lesson #1: As in Thyatira, then so in your life today, it is a choice each day: **To follow either Christ or the world.** It was compromise and prosperity or Christ and poverty. No one can serve two masters Christ said.

PART TWO: MEET THE AUTHOR OF EACH LETTER TO EACH CHURCH—JESUS CHRIST THE JUDGE v. 18B

JESUS IS GOD THE SON: "Son of God" this is not the Revelation 1:13 "Son of man", this is the Risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, as the fullness of divine power, why? Believe they were compromising--tolerating evil!

JESUS IS ALL SEEING, ALL KNOWING ALWAYS PRESENT: "Who has eyes like flames of fire" - v. 23 Wow - penetrating and discerning, seeing and assessing.

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

JESUS IS THE JUDGE OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE: "His feet burnished bronze." Bronze always picture of judgment.

John 5:22-29 "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

So the author is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ with fullness of divine power searching eyes/heart- knower, meeting out judgment.

Lesson #2: Jesus Christ knows our heart perfectly well today and is ready to

judge us in any way that is necessary to keep us pleasing to Him in our daily lives!

The Mindset of Worldliness Experienced in Thyatira

The saints in Thyatira needed to stop their friendship with the world that led them to be displeasing to God. You may ask, in what way was the mindset of worldliness felt or seen in Thyatira?

To answer that, we need to go back for a brief history lesson. Let me describe daily life in this 1st Century Roman city, named here in Revelation.

Thyatira was renowned for manufacturing and industry. Most workers in Thyatira were members of guilds that operated much like our labor unions of today. The guilds encouraged their members by setting prices for their labor, and for the prices of the goods they sold.

That meant that all of the various trades: potters, dyers, tanners, bakers, metal workers, textile makers, bronze smiths, slave-dealers, leather-workers, and the rest had their guilds in this town. History of this period notes three things.

- **Trade guilds were compulsory:** to be employed in a trade was only via the guild. We would say that this area had what is sometimes called a closed shop.
- **Trade guilds were pagan:** every guild in Thyatira had a patron god or goddess. Thus, every guild function began with paying homage to that deity by offering-- this was the obligatory opening to all meetings which were required to be an artisan/craftsman.
- **Trade guilds were pleasure-dominated:** business followed the invocation to the patron deity, and then came the customary banquets that each guild sponsored, that were known for their sexual freedom. The cost for the Christian was unmistakable.

Sin was Everywhere Present and Powerfully Alluring

William Ramsay, the famed 19th century archaeologist, writes: "revelry, license and intoxication marked these pagan religious societies (trade guilds) lounging on dining couches, surrounded by troupes of unclothed, dancing and singing slaves, would be fatal to all self-restraining spirits".

In short, a guild was no place for Christians; and yet quitting the union was economic suicide.

- **Their Flesh was Tempted at Work:** Believers found that their battle with the

flesh raged every day in the daily work schedules of Thyatira and all the other towns of Roman Asia.

- ***Their Flesh was Tempted after Work:*** Add to this the personal necessity for daily trips to public bath houses in every city, where prostitution was normal and considered healthy.
- ***Their Flesh was Tempted at Sports:*** Then compound the picture with the fact that any involvement in sports meant trips to the athletic facilities where such emphasis was placed on the human body that many sports were practiced and competed in total nudity.

All of those forces meant that these saints were vexed with the flesh, temptation, and sin. We could say that they were:

Living in a Cesspool of Sin

What immense pressures the world placed upon every marriage in the early church. Wives knew that each month their husband was going off to a guild meeting: knowing that he was served all the alcohol he could ever drink, followed by a pornographic, strip show.

What immense pressures the world placed upon families. Godly parents knew that to allow participation in sports, their sons and daughters would be required to take all of their clothes off, and practice and compete with other young people all in complete nudity.

Daily life was filled with temptations, allurements, and blatant sensuality in Thyatira and nearly every other town and city of the Roman Empire. That was the world into which the early church was born, and with it the call of Jesus Christ to live out a pure and holy lifestyle.

Christ's Call to Holiness Has Never Changed

Probably the most succinct statement to these people came in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. Galatia was about as close to Thyatira as Chicago is to us. The road between these two urban areas was safe, clear, and heavily traveled.

By the time of Christ's letter to this church, Paul's Epistle to the Galatians was known, read, taught, and most likely, this portion memorized.

Paul always taught that the battle was already won by Christ: the world, my flesh and the Devil were all defeated at the cross. We just need to believe and act upon that truth! How do we do that more regularly?

Now listen to Paul's words to believers, marriages, and families who had to live in this most intoxicating time of sin in all of history up until our day. He confessed to them the only way to survive, in Galatians 2:20.

We need to repeat, reaffirm, and remember over and over again that, the past work of Christ's death on the cross: saved me, and keeps me. Listen to Paul in Galatians 2 as he sets forth the attitude we are to have.

*Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ (**past event--justification**); it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (**present event-sanctification**); and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (**present event-sanctification**), who loved me and gave Himself for me (**past event--justification**). NKJV*

Notice the sandwich type presentation. The past work of Christ on the cross secured my salvation in the present and offers my sanctification in the present, based on the past work of Christ's cross.

Living in the Present Based upon the Past

How did I get saved? By trusting, believing, clinging to the truth that Jesus Christ took my sins, and stood in my place and bore the punishment of God's wrath I deserved. The guiltless One took my guilt; the sinless One took my sin; the holy One took my wretchedness, and on and on we could go.

But did I see Him there personally? No, it was by what? Yes, faith.

I believed the truth of God's Word and God changed me forever. The same way we were saved is the same way we live the rest of our lives.

So apply that faith that you and I have for the work of Christ on the cross in our place and apply it now to the rest of our walk.

Flesh can't defeat flesh. Resolves, promises, fighting and striving in our own power only leads to further defeats--it is only by yielding to the power of the cross. And what is the power of the cross? It is the defeat of death, sin, and Satan that Jesus accomplished once for all time, when He died on the cross.

Now, in simple faith that saved you repeat that to yourself. (Just like my old pastor John MacArthur always used to tell us 'preach the Gospel to yourself!') Say something like this:

Even if I do not feel it, understand it, or even at times want it I WILL by faith, believing YOU, consider myself dead to sin.

Or in times of need, “Lord I operate on what I know is true, you have made me dead to sin.”

When I truly prayed, asking in simple faith for Christ to save me—whether I felt a strong emotional feeling or not, God began His work within me. I started changing from the inside out. The same is true with these imperatives.

- Jesus lived—that’s **history**.
- Jesus died—that’s **theology**.
- Jesus died for me and took my sins upon Himself on the Cross—that’s **salvation**.
- Jesus died for me to live through Him—that’s **sanctification**.

And Christ's work on Calvary forever gave us the power and authority so we can stop anything that enslaves us and so that we can start anything He asks us to do!

Just as there is nothing we can do before our salvation to make us accepted by God; there is also nothing we can do after our salvation that makes us acceptable to God.

As we were saved only by the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—so we live each day ‘by faith’ (the same faith by which we were saved). We are always dependent upon Christ's gracious death upon the cross that saves and keeps us!

Part Three: Seek Christ's Approval

v. 19

1. Your deeds [Greek word: **erga**]
2. Your love [Greek word: **agapen**] = only church with love;
3. Your faith. [Greek word: **pistos**] = faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity;
4. Your service. Greek word: **diakonian**] = deacon ministry as a servant.
5. Your perseverance. [Greek word: **hupomone**] = to abide under, steadfast endurance.
6. Your deeds of late greater = wow!

Lesson #3: The Christian life is a life of growth, deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance and growth. If it’s alive, there’s growth or you’re sick.

I Thessalonians 2:13 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

This church, called from darkness to light at salvation, saved from the power of Satan and transformed into saints of God was slipping.

Jesus calls them to repent, to have a change of mind that would lead to a change in behavior. This letter is a challenge from Christ for His children of faith to do what is needed: repent of listening to false teachers and their false teachings, and start listening to Him instead.

APPENDIX:

Part Four: Listen to Christ's Admonition

v. 20-23

But I have this (one thing) against you, toleration of evil in the church. Does that mean don't bring lost to church? No, bring them, just don't start parading them as saints, redeemed ones and part of the body of Christ.

What was the evil? Jezebel - Woman by the name of Jezebel who was a powerful false teacher, or a woman that was like that brazen idolater wife of Ahab in the OT.

There is a heritage of women who have educated generations of young people. They have a gender specific role in the church, as they have in the family. However, they are not to be the primary teacher or leader of a church. This is normal—the world is abnormal. God said women are not to teach *the* church (1 Timothy 2:12), but they may teach *in* the church. Women are not less or inferior; God simply gave women a specific role that is subordinate. Jesus is subordinate to God the Father; the church is subordinate to Jesus Christ; men are subordinate to the church; and women are subordinate to men. Jesus is not less than God. This is how God ordained things. But the Thyatirans decided not to obey that divine order.

Women being in submission to men in the home and the church has its roots in Creation, not the Fall. This is mandatory in Christ's church: women are not to lead the assembly (1 Timothy 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 14). But this Jezebel defied God's order and was leading Christ's bondservants astray. However, that was not new. In 1 Kings 18, Ahab's Jezebel led Israel into gross idolatry and introduced male and female sex perverts into the priesthood of Baal worship. The falsehoods of Christian Science were started by Mary Baker Eddy. Theosophy's errors were propounded by Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky. Seventh Day Adventism was led astray in the teachings of Ellen White, and so forth. Beware of women who go against God's Word and lead churches, for they will face judgment.

Hold on now - two serious errors noted here:

1. God said **women are not to teach the church** (I Tim: 2:12-14). "She teaches" implies that she was teaching the gathered church which God does not allow. God's Word explains that the roots of women being in submission to men in the home and the church, started in God's plans from creation, not because of the fall, and it's mandatory in church.
2. God said **women are not to lead the church** (I Tim: 2:12-14; I Corinthians 14). This false teacher "leads my bondservants astray".

And so on--beware of women who go against God's word and lead churches. They face judgment.

Lesson #4: Be Scriptural and be balanced.

What can we learn from today's lesson? Be scriptural and be balanced. We should not be hard-hearted, legalistic, Ephesus-like Christians who harshly judge others and punish with loveless indifference. Neither should we be weak and limp, tolerating all in love, with no rules and no offense. Both legalism and undue tolerance lead to error and judgment. Be scriptural: know it and do it. Be balanced: love with a pure heart, and hate sin.

Part Five: Heed Christ's Appeal

v. 24-25

Hold fast till I come. First mention Christ's return.

Jesus commended the Thyatirans for these qualities: Christ saw what they did for Him; He saw their love (this is the only church with love noted); their ministry as servants to others; their faithfulness, loyalty, and fidelity; their steadfast endurance; and that they were growing because their latter deeds were greater than those at the beginning.

Here is a lesson to meditate upon: The Christian life is a life of works, love, service, faith, and patience. Christ commended the saints at Thyatira because they did not pull back in their service. Paul gave the Thessalonians a similar commendation: *We . . . thank God always for you . . . because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other* (2 Thessalonians 1:3). The spiritual lives of these Thessalonians did not hit a peak and then decline. If Christ is alive in you, there will be growth. No growth indicates that you are sick, and that you need to honor Christ's holiness by returning to Him.

If you can remember a time when you served and loved the Lord more than now, you need to repent, or end up like the Thyatirans who failed to receive the approval of Christ. The Lord wants you to ever-increasingly love, seek, and worship Him!

Part Six: Trust Christ's ASSURANCE

v. 26 - 28 "Morning Star"

In Revelation 2:25, when Jesus says, "*hold fast what you have till I come,*" He is making the first mention of His return in the seven letters. There are many precious promises concerning Christ's coming to remember. I'll share some of them with you now.

God will reward us with immeasurable treasures. This is an investment that will reap blessings which will never pass away: "*There is no One who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time— . . . and in the age to come, eternal life*" (Mark 10:29-30).

God will overwhelm us with unbelievable pleasures. When we reach

heaven, we will finally become all that God created us to be: *He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (2 Corinthians 12:4).

God will give true believers an important future. We will reign with Christ over the earth. I do not know what each of our specific duties will be, but we will have authority: "*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*" (Revelation 2:26b-27).

God will give true believers a bright and glorious future. We can never lose Jesus' light, life, and hope in the dark and gloom, so we are on the winning team with Christ! Consider these precious promises: Jesus is "*the Dayspring from on high*" and salvation is described as when "*the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts*" (Luke 1:78; 2 Peter 1:19). What glory lies ahead for us! For *there shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever* (Revelation 22:5). All true believers will make it safely to the end. Hallelujah!