

# Christ's Letter to the Churches: Thyatira

Don Fortner | Added: Dec 28, 2005 | Category: Theology

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And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 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. 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. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira was the home of Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened. It was a place of great commerce, a city with many, many people passing through its streets every day. Thyatira was a place of wealth and power. In that place of great commerce, the trade unions (guilds) of the day were well organized and powerful. Wool workers, linen workers, tailors, leather craftsmen, tanners, potters, etc, were all associated in business, in one way or another, with pagan idolatry. Each guild had its own guardian god.

The situation there was such that, if you wanted to get ahead in business, you had to belong to one of the unions, one of the trade guilds. If you belonged to the guild, your membership implied that you worshipped its god. You would be expected to eat the food offered to those gods at their

pagan festivals. That implied that you acknowledged that you had received the food from the gods. After the feasts, base orgies would begin. You could not dare insult your peers by walking out of their festivities!

What could a believer do in such circumstances? If he quit his union, he would lose business. If he remained in the union, attended the immoral festivities, and joined in the idolatrous fornications of pagan worship, he would be denying his Lord and sinning against his conscience. God's saints at Thyatira had to face these kinds of problems every day, much like many of God's people do, to varying degrees in this degenerate age.

There was a prophetess in the church at Thyatira, called Jezebel, who claimed to have a solution to the problem. She reasoned that if you would conquer Satan, you must get to know him. You would never be able to influence the idolaters if you condemned them and refused to go along with their religion. You did not have to deny Christ, but you could not expect to get along in the world if you did not accept the world's religion, or at least accept it as an acceptable form of religion. After all, who are we to condemn another man's religion? You just cannot say that someone's religion is false!

Sound familiar? By her cunning craftiness, this prophetess seduced many in the church and persuaded them to commit fornication, not only spiritual fornication, but literally to commit fornication in the name of religious unity! That was the condition of the church at Thyatira.

Almost all the old commentators suggest that this letter has reference to the rise of papacy and the heretical, immoral doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. I have no tolerance for papacy. I am always ready to denounce it as antichrist. Romanism is idolatry. It promotes immorality. Its doctrines are nothing but heretical superstitions. However, it is a grave mistake to limit this letter to the church at Thyatira to the rise of Romanism. Like the other six letters, this letter is addressed to God's saints today. It warns us of dangers the church of Christ is sure to endure in any age. 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.' In this letter our Lord warns every local church, every pastor, and every one who professes faith in His name of the subtle and damning influence of false religion.

#### AN ASSURING REVELATION

As this letter opens, our Lord Jesus makes an assuring revelation of Himself (v.18). He who walks in the midst of His churches and holds her pastors in His right hand is Himself 'the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.' In times of trouble and danger, nothing is more assuring to God's saints than the comforting knowledge of Christ's presence. 'The Lord is at hand' both to observe and to protect His own.

The Son of God addresses Himself to the angel of the church at Thyatira. As we have seen repeatedly, the angel of the local church is her pastor. He is God's messenger to the church. You will notice that in each church there is but one angel, one pastor, one messenger from God to His people. It is his responsibility under God to instruct the people of God and protect them from the many forms of false religion that arise. The means by which he does this is the faithful preaching of the gospel, expounding Holy Scripture (Ephesians 4:11-14; Acts 20:28-30).

Identifying Himself as the Son of God, our Saviour calls us both to trust Him and to obey Him. He who is the Head of the church is not some silly old man dressed up in a fancy costume, but the Son of God Himself, our Saviour and our Lord. He calls Himself the 'Son of Man' (1:13) to assure us of His love and sympathy toward us. He calls Himself the 'Son of God' to assure us of His sovereign, almighty power. Our Saviour is God almighty; and He is a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

His eyes are like a flame of fire. He has a piercing, penetrating, perfect knowledge and insight into all things and all people. He searches the hearts and knows the motives of all actions. He tries the reins and knows the principles of all people.

His feet are like fine brass. As He knows and judges all things with perfect wisdom, He rules all things and acts with absolute strength and perfect steadiness. His works of providence are deliberate and irrepensible. These two things ought to encourage every faithful pastor to remain loyal to Christ and the gospel of His grace: Christ knows all things; and He has all power. Who or what shall we fear?

#### AN ACKNOWLEDGED REGARD

Our Lord displays an acknowledged regard for the faithfulness of His people (v. 19). The Lord God promises to honour those who honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30). Here He fulfills that promise. The Son of God here publicly commends the good works of faithful men and women. — '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.'

This commendation was not given by a stranger, or even by a casual observer. It was given by One who was well acquainted with them and with the principles upon which they acted<sup>1</sup>. In this nineteenth verse our Saviour names five specific works for which He commended His saints at Thyatira.

1. They were men and women of obvious charity.

This is a clear evidence of real grace. Those who are born of God love Christ and love one another. Faith 'worketh by love' (Galatians 5:6; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 4:20-5:1). Love is much more than a phony, candy coated smile. Love is a thoughtful regard for and active

pursuit of another person's happiness and well-being.

2. The saints at Thyatira were men and women of service to the gospel.

No doubt, they served one another in many ways. But the words, 'thy service', here seem to have a particular reference to the church's commitment to the ministry of the gospel. They were a missionary church, committed to the spread of the gospel. With great diligence, they sacrificed money, time, and labour, so that others might hear the gospel of the grace of God (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

3. The people in this church demonstrated great faithfulness to Christ.

The Master commended their 'faith', their faithfulness. They were not lukewarm, half-hearted religious professors, but faithful followers of Christ. Faithfulness is the one thing God requires of His people, and the one thing all His people give (1 Corinthians 4:2).

4. They were patient, too.

Those who are most charitable, most diligent in the cause of Christ, and most faithful in the things of God are likely to be the most tried. But in their many trials they display patience. 'Tribulation worketh patience' (Romans 5:3). It cannot be learned any other way. Patience is simply the peaceful, believing resignation of one's heart to the will of God (Philippians 4:12).

5. Added to all these things our Lord commended the Thyatira saints for the fact that they steadily grew in devotion to Him. He says, of their works, — 'And thy works; and the last to be more than the first!'

Their last works were better and more numerous than their first. Others had left their first love and lost their first zeal. Not these people! As they grew old, they grew wise. As they matured in years, they matured in grace. As they declined in physical strength, they grew in spiritual strength.

These five things ought to be matters of constant concern and prayer to every believer. Let us ever seek grace from our God to love our brethren, serve the cause of Christ, be faithful to our God, walk with patience before God and men, and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### AN ALARMING REPROOF

In verses 20-23, our Lord sounds an alarming reproof to those who embrace, or even show a tolerance for false religion. — '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. And I gave her

space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.'

This reproof is not so much directed to the church itself as it is to the wicked seducers within it. Yet, the church itself was at fault. She is reproved for her tolerance of false religion.

There was within the church a woman who claimed to be a prophetess, a female preacher. No one dared assert the teachings of Scripture and reprove the abominable practice. But our Lord called this woman, Jezebel. He compared her to Ahab's wicked wife, Jezebel, because she encouraged the patronage of false religion, kindness to false prophets, and the acceptance of idolatry. She seduced God's servants to engage in the pagan festivities connected with idol worship, including fornication! She did all this in the name of God, pretending all the while that she was promoting the worship of Christ. And people believed her!

The church in Thyatira was to be blamed in part for the spread of this wicked woman's heresy because they tolerated her and afforded her opportunity to preach her damning doctrines. They allowed a woman not only to teach, but also to preach, in direct opposition to the Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). By allowing her to spread her doctrine, and by embracing her as a believer, this church became partaker with her in her evil deeds (2 John 10-11).

If we would be faithful to the souls of men and to the glory of God, false religion and false prophets must be pointedly and plainly exposed by us. We preach a positive gospel. We endeavour to avoid being negative. Yet, we must never allow any room for the acceptance of any doctrine that is contrary to the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ. The popular, accepted, mainstream religion of our day is a religion of works. The vast majority of religious denominations, respected religious leaders, and churches, local, national, and international, are unified in the essence of their message. Virtually all preach salvation by man, either by his works or by his will. They are modern Jezebels, deceiving and seducing the souls of men. We have no point of agreement with them. If free grace is true, free will is false. If the gospel of grace is true, any and every mixture of works with grace is false. Two opposite messages cannot both be true. That means that there is no room in the house of God for free will, works religion.

All who deny the totality of man's depravity deny the Word of God, which declares it plainly (Romans 3:9-19). All who deny the sovereignty of God in salvation deny the Word of God, which declares it (Romans 9:11-16). All who deny the efficacy of Christ's blood atonement deny the Scriptures, which proclaim it universally (Galatians 3:13). All who deny the effectual,

irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit in regeneration deny the gospel, which asserts it boldly. Such people (men, women, churches, denominations) must never be received, heard, embraced, or supported by the people of God as our brethren, as co-labourers with us in the cause of Christ (Galatians 1:6-8; 5:12).

God will destroy all false prophets and all who follow them, if they do not repent and receive the love of the truth (vs.22-23). There is nothing more damning to the souls of men than Arminian, free will, works religion. Those who are deceived by it shall be damned by it (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Matthew 7:15).

The purpose and design of Christ in destroying these wicked seducers is that His elect may be both made manifest and instructed (v.23). When heresies come, God's elect are made manifest by their adherence to the truth (1 Corinthians 11:19). When false prophets are destroyed by the hand of God in judgement, God gives instruction and reproof to all men.

God's judgement upon the seducers of men reveals His infallible knowledge of their hearts. God knows the deceitful principles by which they operate, the hypocrisy of their religion, and the motives of their actions. And He will judge them accordingly. His justice is impartial. He will give every false prophet the exact reward of his works. In the day of judgement they will not be able to hide behind the name of Christ. Their popularity will provide them no sanctuary (Matthew 7:21-23).

#### AN ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITY

In these dark days of apostate religion our Lord lays before each of us an assigned responsibility (vs.24-25). — 'But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.'

These false prophets call their doctrines the depths of theology. They love to dazzle men with deep mysteries, and persuade them that they have profound insight into the things of God. They love to talk about prophetic mysteries, the nature of angels, the work of demons, and most anything that intrigues the imagination.

Our Lord calls their deep things 'the depths of Satan'! (Read 2 Corinthians 11:3.) False prophets will always draw your attention away from Christ and the gospel of His grace. Their mysteries are the mystery of iniquity, satanic delusions, and diabolical doctrines. The gospel sets forth the mystery of godliness, which is Christ crucified. Let us never be turned from it. Christ crucified is the solitary message of the Bible, the solitary object of all true faith, the solitary centre of all true worship, the solitary theme of all true preaching, and the solitary motive of every believer's life.

It is our responsibility to hold fast the doctrine of Christ until He comes again. That is, first and foremost, above everything else, the business of every local church (2 Timothy 1:9-13; Titus 1:9). That form of sound words, which we must hold fast, can be summed up and set forth in six brief statements.

1. God almighty is absolutely sovereign over all things (Romans 9:11-26).
2. All men and women, since the sin and fall of our father Adam, are spiritually dead and totally depraved (Romans 5:12; 3:9-19).
3. God has an elect people in the world, chosen from eternity, who must and shall be saved by His sovereign operations of grace (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).
4. The Lord Jesus Christ died for and redeemed all God's elect, infallibly securing their everlasting salvation by the satisfaction of divine justice on their behalf (Isaiah 53:8-11; Hebrews 9:12).
5. God the Holy Spirit regenerates, calls to life and faith in Christ, and preserves in grace all who were chosen by God the Father and redeemed by God the Son, by His almighty, effectual, irresistible grace (Psalm 65:4).
6. All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ shall persevere in faith, being preserved and kept unto eternal glory by the grace and power of God (John 10:27-30).

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, He will put an end to all heresy, and truth shall reign triumphantly forever.

#### AN ASSURED REWARD

If we persevere in faith and hold fast the doctrine of Christ, our Saviour, the Son of God, promises us an assured reward (v.26-29). 'And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.'

Those who overcome are those who hold on to Christ's works, not their own. They shall rule and reign with the Son of God forever. We shall rule with Christ over all our enemies. All who persevere in the faith of the gospel shall sit as kings with Christ upon His throne and rule over all things with Him forever (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29; Revelations 3:21; 20:4). All believers will sit with Christ in judgement over all His enemies. Fallen angels, false prophets, every rebel to Christ's throne, and Satan himself

shall be judged and condemned by our Lord; and we shall be His witnesses in the judgement (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrew 13:17; Psalm 2:8-9). The Lord Jesus Christ will give us Himself (all of Himself!) forever (v.28). He is our souls' eternal 'Morning Star' (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16). The Day Star which shall introduce us into the glorious day of eternal bliss is Christ Himself! He is our glory. He is our crown. He is our heaven (Psalm 73:25-26).

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