

Valley Bible Church – Book of Revelation

The Message to the Church in Thyatira: (2:18-29)

The Adulterous Church

The Commission to Write to the Church in Thyatira (2:18a):

The City of Thyatira: ¹²¹

Geographically: The city of Thyatira was situated midway in a long valley which extends north and south connecting the Hermus and Caicus valleys. It was about 40 miles south east of the city of Pergamum. Thyatira was built in a relatively flat area with no hill for an acropolis. It was located in a very rich agricultural area. Because it was located in a valley connecting two other valleys, it lacked natural fortifications to protect it from invasion.

Historically: Thyatira was founded by one of Alexander the Great's successors, Seleucus, as a military outpost guarding the north-south road. For defense this colony of Macedonian soldiers were planted at Thyatira between 300 and 282 B.C. It therefore became an important garrison city . It later changed hands, and came under the rule of Lysimachus, who ruled Pergamum. Thyatira became known as the gateway to Pergamum. The task for those stationed at Thyatira was to delay an attacker and buy time for Pergamum. Because of its geographical weakness, Thyatira was repeatedly destroyed. In 190 B.C. it fell to the Romans and formed part of the province of Asia. Once again its primary importance was to obstruct the path of the enemy to Pergamum, the capital of Asia. After Roman control, the city became a flourishing commercial center.

Culturally: Population wise, the city (also the church) was predominantly Gentile in composition. The city was primarily made up of those of Macedonian descent, but still there was an amalgamation of nationalities there due to its military and commercial history. There is no mention of the Jewish element in Thyatira. Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities addressed in Revelation.

Economically: Commercially, the period of increase and prosperity had just begun when the letter to the seven churches was written. Thyatira still possessed strong and vivid memories of her military origin even though her fortifications had decayed and been dismantled. Thyatira became a major center of communication. Its location was no longer a liability but became an asset. It connected Pergamum with Laodicea, Smyrna, and the interior regions of the province of Asia. As a result many people passed through Thyatira and it became a major commercial district. Trade guilds arose in greater numbers than in any other city. There were guilds there for wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths. It was said "if you wish to get ahead in this world , you must belong to a guild." The foremost guild was the dyeing and manufacturing of woollen goods. Lydia probably represented her guild in Philippi (Acts 16:14), showing that Thyatira's market extended across the Aegean Sea to mainland Greece.

Religiously: Unlike Pergamum and Smyrna, Thyatira was not an important religious center. The primary god worshiped by the Thyatirians was the Greek sun god, Apollo. Emperor worship did not exist in the city of Thyatira. To hold a job or run a business in Thyatira, it was necessary to be a member of a guild. Each guild had its own patron deity. The members of the guild were expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat the food, part of which was offered to the patron deity. After the

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feast with meat sacrificed to idols ended, the activities characterized by gross sexual immorality began. To walk out on such activity would make one an object of ridicule and persecution. Christians faced the dilemma of attending those feasts or possibly losing their livelihood. How some in the church at Thyatira were handling the situation caused the Lord Jesus great concern.

The Church in Thyatira:

"As is the case with the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum, the Bible does not record the founding of the church at Thyatira. According to Acts 16:14, 'A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God,' was converted under Paul's ministry at Philippi. Verse 15 records that members of her household also came to saving faith in Christ and were baptized. It is possible that Lydia and her household participated in starting the church at Thyatira. More likely, the church there was founded as an outreach of Paul's ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10)."¹²² The Christian church ceased to exist in Thyatira near the end of the second century.

The Picture of Christ to the Church in Thyatira (2:18b):

The title *Son of God* and the two descriptive phrases taken from the vision of Christ in Revelation 1:12-17, emphasizes the deity of Christ and His role as divine Judge.

The Son of God: In the vision of Christ, Jesus is referred to as the Son of Man emphasizing His humility (cf. 1:13). Here in the Message to the Church at Thyatira, He is referred to as the Son of God emphasizing His deity. This is the only time in the book of Revelation that Jesus is called the Son of God, however there are frequent references to God as His Father (cf. 1:6, 2:27, 3:5, 3:21, 14:1). This term could be an allusion to Psalm 2:7, especially since 2:26-27 is a reference to Psalm 2:8-9. This title was claimed by Christ (Mt. 11:27, Luke 10:22), ascribed to Him by Peter (Mt. 16:16), and formed the ground for the indictment brought against Him before the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:63, John 19:7). In the Jewish mind this term was a claim to deity. To call oneself the Son of God was the same as identifying oneself as God very God. The deity of Christ is being emphasized here, stressing the truth that He is of one essence with the Father.

Who has eyes like a flame of fire:

The eyes of Christ are described as a flame of fire. "The Old Testament source of this expression is Daniel 10:6. In this passage the messenger clothed in linen had eyes *as lamps of fire* (LXX) or *as torches of fire* (Hebrew text). This description of Christ is repeated in Revelation 1:14 in the Vision of Christ and 19:12 in reference to His second coming in glory."¹²³

"Eyes represent knowledge. God's eyes, are representing His omniscience (knowing all things)."¹²⁴ 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth," Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good." Jeremiah 16:17 says, "For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes." Jesus stated in Matthew 10:26, "there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." Hebrews 4:13 says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

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"His eyes as a flame of fire speak of the searching righteousness and divine judgment upon all that is impure." ¹²⁵ "His searching, revealing, infallible gaze penetrates to the very depths of His church, revealing to Him with piercing clarity the reality of everything there is to know. The omniscient Lord of the church will not fail to recognize and deal with sin in His church." ¹²⁶

"As the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ has eyes like a flame of fire. His piercing, laser like vision sees all; nothing can be disguised, covered, or hidden from Him." ¹²⁷

His feet are like burnished bronze:

His feet are described as burnished bronze. This phrase was used in Revelation 1:15, but is not found elsewhere. A similar concept is given in Daniel 10:6 however the wording is different, where it is stated as, "gleaming brass" (cf. Ezek. 1:7).

The description here is not only of the process of refinement or smelting in which the metal is purified and made to shine, but it pictures the point in that process where the metal is still at a glow. While there does exist some emphasis upon purity here the greater emphasis is on the red-hot glow conveying the idea of judgment.

"Kings in ancient times sat on elevated thrones, so those being judged would always be beneath the king's feet. The feet of a king thus came to symbolize his authority. The red-hot glowing feet of the Lord Jesus Christ picture Him moving through the church to exercise His chastening authority." ¹²⁸

"With uncorrupted purity Christ is strong enough to conquer sin in the church and pure enough to judge it." ¹²⁹

Conclusion:

"This terrifying description of the Lord Jesus Christ must have created shock, consternation, and fear when this letter was read to the congregation at Thyatira. It came as a sobering realization to them, as it should to all sinning Christians, that Christ will judge continual, unrepented sin. In the words of the apostle Peter, 'It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God' (1 Pet. 4:17)." ¹³⁰

The Commendation to the Church in Thyatira:

The commendation to the Church in Thyatira was an encouraging one. Christ commends the church for their deeds (works). In so doing He highlights four specific areas of good works which the church in Thyatira possessed. Not only does he highlight these areas to further describe the deeds which they possessed but he emphasizes that their deeds are growing. Their deeds of late are greater than at first. They have grown in good works and in particular the four areas of *love, faith, service, and perseverance*. Love and faith emphasize the inward attitudes of the heart, while service and perseverance emphasize the outward expression of those inward attitudes.

Love: The Greek term for love here is *agape*. *Agape* is a sacrificial and unconditional love. Vines expository dictionary says, "it expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver." The term *agape* is used to describe an attitude of God toward His Son (John

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17:26), toward the human race (John 3:16, Romans 5:8), and toward those who believe in Jesus Christ (John 14:21). It is also used to convey God's will to His children concerning their attitude toward one another (John 13:34), and toward all men (1 Thess. 3:12, 1 Cor. 16:14, 2 Peter 1:7); and to express the nature of God (1 John 4:8). This type of love is best described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 not focusing so much on what love is but as to what love does and does not do. *4 Love is patient, love is kind, [and] is not jealous; love does not brag [and] is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong [suffered,] 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails.* Christ was commending the believers at Thyatira because they were showing this unconditional, sacrificial love for God and for one another. It is interesting that Thyatira is the first church to be commended for their love. Their strength was the weakness at the church in Ephesus.

Faith: The Greek word *pistis* is primarily a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing, it is used in the N. T. of belief/ trusting in God or Christ. It is described in Hebrews 11:1, "*Now faith is the assurance of [things] hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" Christ not only commends the church in Thyatira for their love but also for their faith. They had an unwavering devotion in following Christ.

Service: The Greek term *diakonia*, which in secular Greek was used of table service, so that the verb meant to wait on tables. From this meaning the wider sense has been derived, to care for one's livelihood and then service in general. It is translated service or ministry. It is used in the N.T. : 1) to serve at a table (Mark 1:31; John 2:5,9; 12:2; Acts 6:2), 2) to help by providing care (Mt.25:44, Mk. 1:13, Luke 8:3, Philemon 13), 3) to minister or serve in a general sense (Romans 12:7, Hebrews 6:10 1 Peter 4:10-11, and likely here in Rev. 2:19). One of the outworkings of faith and love was a dedication to serving. The true believers in Thyatira were committed to ministry. This ministry is to be distinguished from the Greek term *doulos* which emphasized the service of a slave for his master. *Diakonia* emphasizes a voluntary service or ministry to others. It is the same root as the term used for deacon in the N.T.

Perseverance: The Greek term *Hupomone*, pictures endurance with things or circumstances or trials. It is a brave patience with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the inward and outward world. It denotes patience in trying circumstances. Despite their difficult circumstances, the believers in Thyatira maintained a faithful endurance.

Christ commended the works of the true believers in the church at Thyatira. These works consisted of the inward attitudes of a sacrificial love for God, the brethren and others, and an undeniable faith in the Lord. These inward attitudes resulted in the outward works of ministry and perseverance despite the difficult circumstances around them. In addition to simply commending them for their good works, the Lord Jesus commends them for their growth and maturity in these works as they are greater now than at first. The greater here could speak of quantity and/or quality of the works.

The Condemnation to the Church in Thyatira: (2:20-23):

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Introduction: Despite the wonderful words of commendation to those true believers in the church at Thyatira, and despite the obvious presence of the inward attitudes of faith and love and the outward works of service and perseverance, all was not well with the church. After giving a glowing and accurate review of the church's good works, the penetrating gaze of the Lord discerned serious error. This error did not come from false teachers or some heretical group outside of the church, but from within the church itself. Christ begins this section with a simple conjunction translated "but." In the Greek however this is the strong adversative conjunction *alla* which shows a sharp contrast. The usage of this word emphasizes the dramatic contrast that exists between the commendation and the condemnation given by Christ.

The Present Problems: {2:20} The problems in the church at Thyatira were two-fold, however this two-fold problem developed into a more wide-spread difficulty which engulfed many within the church including true believers.

Compromise: The first aspect of this problem was that of compromise. The church at Thyatira tolerated false teaching within the church from this woman Jezebel. The Greek word used here is different from the one used in the message to Pergamum. In Pergamum, there were some who merely *held* to false teaching, while here in Thyatira they actually *tolerated* the false teaching in their midst. The tolerance of evil within the church was much more widespread than that in Pergamum. The Greek verb for tolerate is in the present tense which emphasizes a continuous action in Greek. The church in Thyatira did not allow this false teaching just once or on an occasional basis, but they were continually allowing the presence of false teaching within their midst. They failed to appropriately deal with the false teacher and furthermore failed to appropriately deal with the widespread problem of sin that developed from the existence of this false teaching. They neglected the process of church discipline laid out by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20.

False Teaching: The second aspect of the problem in Thyatira as is obvious from above was the false teaching itself. "First, they violated the biblical teaching that women are not to be teachers or preachers in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). That led them to tolerate *the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess*. They compounded their error of permitting her to teach by allowing her to teach error."¹³¹ The church at Thyatira was not discerning like the church at Ephesus. In fact the church at Ephesus if you remember was commended because they did not tolerate false teaching.

a) The Identity of the False Teacher:

The false teacher in Thyatira is called *the woman Jezebel*. "Jezebel is a unique name to the Bible. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Sidon, and the wife of Ahab, King of Israel (1 Kings 16:31). She practiced witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22), worshipped Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 16:32-33), supported hundreds of false prophets (1 Kings 18:19), and tried to eliminate the true prophets of God (1 Kings 18:4). Jezebel proved conclusively that she was a ruthless liar and a cold-blooded murderer."¹³² Here it represents a person at Thyatira in whose doings was a great resemblance to the Jezebel of the Old Testament. "Jezebel undoubtedly was not the false prophetess's real name, but like the infamous wife of King Ahab, she was Satan's agent to corrupt God's people. Therefore the Lord branded her with the symbolic name Jezebel."¹³³ So this is a symbolic name for some prominent woman in the church at Thyatira, who like the infamous wife of Ahab, claimed to be a prophetess and sought to mislead the people.

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b) The Ingredients of the False Teaching:

Like her Old Testament counterpart, the woman in Thyatira who falsely called herself a prophetess succeeded in leading Christ's bond-servants astray so that they committed acts of immorality and idolatry. In his commentary on Revelation 1-11, John MacArthur speculates as to the content of this woman's false teaching:

"One might speculate that she may have espoused the philosophical dualism so prevalent in contemporary Greek philosophy. When brought into the church, that teaching held that the spirit is good, and all flesh is evil. Since God is only interested in the spirit, its purveyors falsely argued, it doesn't matter what one does with one's body. Thus according to Jezebel, it did not matter if Christians committed acts of immorality or ate things sacrificed to idols. She may also have taken a twisted antinomian view of God's grace, arguing that it did not matter if Christians sinned, since God would graciously forgive them. Perhaps she also encouraged Christians to experience the deep things of Satan so they could better witness to the unsaved."

This type of false teaching is likely what was taking place in Thyatira and had already begun to infiltrate the church by the time of this writing. The content of this teaching with Greek philosophical dualism and antinomianism which is often referred to as an incipient form of what would later be called Gnosticism had already been addressed by Paul in his letter to the church in Colossae, by John in 1 John, and by Jude. Apparently this woman was allowed to teach this doctrine because it brought some relief to the ears of her hearers. Remember that Thyatira was a great commercial center and to maintain one's lively hood membership in one of the trade guilds was necessary. Remember also that these trade guilds each had their own patron deity to whom they paid homage in exchange for economic blessing. These trade guilds would gather together for a sacrifice to an idol which represented their patron deity and then the immoral festivities would begin. When one became a Christian the activities of the trade guilds were clearly a conflict of interest. Jezebel's teachings however opened up the door to practice these pagan rituals and still find favor with God in the church. Whatever the specific content of her false teaching, it led the majority of the Thyatiran church astray from the truth.

c) The Impact of the False Teaching:

The tragic result of allowing this woman to teach her false doctrine was that many in the church had been led astray. These members of the Thyatiran church were being led into committing acts of sexual immorality and idolatry. The members of the church were led into participating in the immorality and idolatry associated with the particular worship festivities of their trade guilds. Those being led astray consisted of a large group. Some were likely just professing believers who had never had a true relationship with Christ. However notice the words of Christ here, *she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray*. In the Greek the *My* is a possessive adjective which is quite emphatic and leads to the understanding that many of those who were led astray were indeed true believers. True believers are capable of sin, including that of sexual immorality and idolatry, however there is a serious penalty for those who lead other Christians into sin. As stated by Christ in Matthew 18:6-7.

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It is such a serious action to cause another believer to stumble or sin that the Lord said that being drowned would be a better option. All was definitely not well in Thyatira. The church had compromised by allowing a false teacher to teach in the midst of the church and the tragic result was deception and wide spread sin among the church's members.

The Past Proceedings: {2:21}

This obviously had not been Christ's first dealing with this false prophetess. He had previously counseled the prophetess to repent. The Greek term *Chronon* translated *time* refers to a definite period of time or event in the past. It is not mentioned how the previous warning was given in the past. It is likely that the previous warning was through the Apostle John as he had previously been the elder at the church in Ephesus and maintained a ministry to all the churches in that region of Asia Minor. Because of this the error of the false prophetess had gone on for quite some time. In fact she had plenty of time to repent of her actions. It was clear to the Lord that Jezebel did not want to repent and would not repent. She was called to repent of her own immorality. Not only did she infiltrate the church with her false teaching, but she also participated as one might expect in the immorality and idolatry of the trade guilds. This has led some to believe that she may have been a primary leader in one of the local trade guilds. Whatever the case she had been given ample time by the Lord to repent of her wickedness. She refused to repent and would therefore face judgment.

The Future Punishment: {2:22-23}

For Jezebel:

Verse 22 begins with the Greek word *idou* translated *Behold!* This word is used to arrest the attention and prepare the way for something unexpected and terrible. In this case it would be terrible divine judgment from the Lord. Christ goes on to describe His divine judgment upon Jezebel for her failure to repent. "Because Jezebel refused to repent, Christ declared, '*I will throw her on a bed of sickness.*' The words *of sickness* are not part of the original Greek text, but were supplied as conjecture by the translators. In light of Jezebel's refusal to repent, it is more likely that the *bed* refers to death and hell, the ultimate resting place for those who refuse to repent."¹³⁴

For Those Deceived by Jezebel:

"Divine judgment was about to fall not only on Jezebel, but also on *those who commit adultery with her*. The Lord threatens to cast them *into great tribulation*, not the eschatological tribulation described in Revelation 4-19, but distress or trouble. Since these were the sinning Christians who had believed her lies, the Lord does not threaten to send them to hell as He did the false prophetess. He promises to bring them severe chastening *unless they repent of her deeds.*"¹³⁵

For Second Generation Errorists:

The third group receiving divine judgment are the children of Jezebel. This is likely a reference to the spiritual children of Jezebel, not her biological children. The church at Thyatira had been around for about 40 years, which is plenty of time for a second generation of errorists to arise. These would not be true believers deceived by the false prophetess, but professing believers who like Jezebel adopted this false doctrine and taught it in the church. Christ declares, "*I will kill her children with pestilence.*" "The severe judgment promised to the false prophetess and her followers again reveals

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Christ's passion for a doctrinally and behaviorally pure church. He will do whatever is necessary to purge His church of sin, even to the point of taking the lives of false teachers." ¹³⁶

Conclusion: The result of this divine judgment would be the glory of the Lord. Christ would receive glory when He judged Jezebel and her followers. When the judgment took place *all the churches* would know that He is the One *who searches the minds and hearts*. They would know that Jesus indeed was God very God and would not tolerate evil in His church. The phrase *who searches the minds and hearts* is used throughout the Old Testament in reference to God (1 Chron. 28:9, Ps. 7:9, Prov. 24:12, Jer. 11:20, Jer. 17:10, & Jer. 20:12) and thus further emphasizes and confirms the deity of Christ. The church would come to the realization that nothing could be hidden from the penetrating gaze of the Lord. Christ concludes in a word of comfort for the true believers in Thyatira saying, "I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." "Christ's unerring judgment would be based on each person's deeds; those who were innocent would not be punished along with the guilty." ¹³⁷ Those who were true believers in Thyatira would be comforted knowing that their deeds revealed their faith in Christ and demonstrated their true character. A reality that comforts those of genuine faith and brings fear into those who teach and practice false doctrine.

The Counsel Given to the Church in Thyatira (2:24-25):

Christ had previously given counsel to the false teachers to repent and they chose not to. In this message His counsel to the church is primarily a counsel of comfort and encouragement given to the true believers in the church. He specifically addresses *the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching*. "Christ further defined the true believers as those who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them. Jezebel and her followers claimed to be plumbing the very depths of Satan's domain and remaining spiritually unscathed. In their perverse, libertine, licentious, false theology, they believed they could do so with impunity. This preGnostic teaching said that one was free to engage the sphere of Satan and participate in sins of the body without harming the spirit. Since the spirit belongs to God, their twisted logic went, what does it matter if the body attends idolatrous feasts and engages in sexual immorality? They imagined themselves to be free to explore the satanic sphere and then brazenly come to worship God." ¹³⁸ Christ told the true believers who had not experienced these things that He would place no other burden upon them. The burden of seeing this false teaching and immoral living within the church was burden enough to bear. Christ does however instruct them, "*what you have, hold fast until I come.*" The Greek word *krateo* (hold fast) is a strong word which emphasizes the urgency of the situation. The present tense emphasizes that this is to be a continuous action. Christ did not desire that they become overconfident or think that they had an easy road ahead. It was an urgent command that they hold fast to the truth until His coming in judgment.

The Challenge to the Overcomers in Thyatira (2:26-29):

As in the other messages looked at so far we see a challenge given to those who overcome. Remember the overcomers are the true believers in Christ. The challenge in each of these letters is a promise given to true believers by their Lord. In each of these messages the promise given by Christ to His own has to do with some aspect of their eternal reward. In the challenge here to the true believers in Thyatira, Christ gives a two-fold promise.

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Authority over the Nations: The first promise would be authority over the nations. "The overcomers will be given authority to rule over the nations in the Millennium, sharing the privilege granted to Christ (Psalm 2:7-9) by God the Father (vs. 27)." ¹³⁹ This promise is taken from Psalm 2:7-9 where the Father gives authority over the nations to Christ. Christ will in turn delegate that authority to the overcomers (true believers) during the millennial kingdom. This thought is not new in Scripture (cf. Luke 22:29-30, 1 Cor. 6:2, Rev. 5:10 & 20:4-6).

The Morning Star: "A second reward promised is the morning star (2:28). This phrase is found only in one other place in the New Testament: **Rev. 22:16** 'I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.' Jesus is that star who promises to give Himself to His faithful followers. For without Him to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16), our authority would be hollow and without glory. As a final note, Christ closes in His usual fashion with a reminder that all churches can learn from the lessons in this letter (2:29)." ¹⁴⁰