

NASB 1977 Thyatira, the church unfaithful to Jesus, in bed with the world

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: 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. 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. 21‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22‘Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 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. 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. 25‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 26‘And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27AND 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; 28and I will give him the morning star. 29‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

This is the longest of all of the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3. The longest letter to the smallest church.

Thyatira was not an important city although it is remembered in history for some interesting things. Thyatira was started as a garrison. It was between 30 and 40 miles from Pergammum and farther up a long ish valley.

But if your army was going to march on Pergammum, the capitol city in the

region, you'd have to come by way of Thyatira and it acted as a blockade in a way that you'd have to get by on your way to Pergammum. So while you're up taking care of Thyatira, Pergammum sort of has some time to get it's act together.

Another industry associated with Thyatira was the purple dye industry. Remember Lydia, who was listening to Paul, by a river near Philippi, and the Lord opened her heart to believe. She was from Thyatira, and she was a seller of Tyrian purple.

Tyrian purple was a nasty smelly process. Murex sea snails. A gland from those snails was fermented, a smelly process and then a tiny drop of the dye was extracted. It took up to 12,000 snails to make one gram of dye.

It was so expensive that purple cloth could be more costly than gold. So it became associated with royalty and wealth. Like a status symbol to be clothed in purple.

Thyatira was also known for it's guilds. They developed the idea of guilds, collective bargaining power had it's roots here. And there is much historic evidence of all of their different guilds for different labor categories. Textile worker guilds. Construction guilds. Slave seller guilds.

And of course any time there is collective cooperation for bargaining strength, there is also the reality of canceling who you don't want in your guild. So there is pressure possible in being a christian and trying to maintain your status in a guild which has a direct effect on keeping a roof over your family.

Bend just a little in order to keep your status in the guild secure, for your families sake. It was the world exerting pressure to do what the world does and be like the world is. You might be required to attend the idol worship festivities. You can excuse yourself from eating the meat sacrificed to idols. Or, perhaps not. It's one of those hand shakes with the world that dulls the lines between christian and world.

Those two distinctions, but otherwise, Thyatira isn't remembered as an important placeholder in history. Yet this is the longest, and perhaps the most frightening tone, of all of the letters.

In this letter a dualism is introduced that we haven't seen before. It's as if christianity was a single highway with challenges and problems that were possible to overcome and continue to the destination, until this letter.

Here we see a dualism. One highway no longer leads toward heaven. There was an intersection and one road veered one direction that will never realize heaven, no possibility of heaven, and the other continues on towards the Kingdom of God.

Before this, it was repent, repent, repent and get back on track. Here it is, repentance isn't going to happen. I gave her time but she doesn't desire to return to me. So I'm going to kill her children with death.

There is a tone change from hopeful and positive to no hope, although the grace is still offered. Do you hear that in there. Grace is still available, but you've made up your mind, and you're intent on destruction.

After this letter where the intersection of true christian or false religion christian is passed, it's downhill, except for Philadelphia which is all positive, between Sardis, the hopelessly dead church and Laodicea the vomit church. Hope of repentance is gone in those letters. Always offered, but mostly, never engaged in.

So, let's dive in and see how far we get. We may need two Sundays in this important dualism.

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:

The first four words after the salutation begins the tone. The tone has changed.

All of the greetings reflect back on different facets of the vision of the glorified son in chapter one. Let me bring the beginning of that vision to your remembrance. Rev. 1:12, 13 *And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands **one like a son of man**, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.*

One like a son of man. Son of man was Jesus favorite reference to Himself. Indeed Hebrews tells us the reason. Jesus was a man such as we are. 100% man and 100% God, but Jesus loved to refer to Himself as son of man because it expresses the sympathy of a high priest who understands our weaknesses.

Hebrews 4:15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.*

In this letter that sympathy of being a man, is replaced with God. Before He was son of man, but in this letter, He is son of God.

Be afraid, church. The sympathetic Son of man has left the room, and the person speaking in this letter to this church is the Judge of the living and the dead, the Son of God. Son of God is judge of all the earth.

It's a change of tone that permeates the whole letter. To the point that when He does finally address the trembling little group of faithful Christians, He speaks to them distinctly separately from the folks who are about to receive His judgements.

Dualism. Both groups under the same roof. One group He is judge to; and one group He is pleased with. Remember that in the first century there

weren't multiple christian congregations in the same town. You couldn't just vote with your feet and trot a 1/4 mile over to the other church.

What He says next seals the tone for this letter;

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:

His eyes are flames of fiery judgement that see all things. There's no hiding from those eyes. If you're doing it, He knows it. Pretty simple. He is God, and God is omniscient. All knowing. And He is omnipotent. All powerful. And that's the next part of the introductory salutation to this church;

His feet are like burnished bronze. Red hot flaming bronze still on fire from the furnace. They crush whatever is under them.

It is a reference to the first recorded prophecy about Him in this book.
Genesis 3:15

14 And the LORD God said to the serpent,

*"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly shall you go,
And dust shall you eat
All the days of your life;*

15 And I will put enmity

*Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."*

Satan is from Genesis 3 forward, put on notice, that He will be crushed under the feet of Jesus who will reign forever and ever.

Psalm 110:1 seals the deal;

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."

How terrifying that you are the recipients of a letter from Him whose eyes are flames of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. Who declares to you that He IS the Son of God!

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.

Stop right here and this is my dream church. This is who I want TCC to be. They didn't just talk big from the pulpit, they were out doing stuff. I know. I know your deeds. Know what works of love and faith and service are happening there. Know about your perseverance.

You guys are a machine. Adversity comes and you guys are like a world war II caterpillar tractor. Nothing stops you. Nothing phases you. You put your head down and keep on going. Unstoppable love. Unstoppable faith. Unstoppable service. Perseverance in trouble. And you're doubling down. You keep doing more.

What a commendation! What could possibly bring down a powerhouse like this!? And yet, they did get brought down. A century later when the church fathers were speaking of these churches, Thyatira was already vanished. Gone! How is that possible.

Easy. You get cancer and you do nothing about it. And very soon, it kills you. That's exactly what happened. X2

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.

Cancer is such a useful metaphor for what's happening in this church. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. Each cell affects 5 cells around it until the whole body is full of cancer and then it's dead.

When we get a cancer, we fight it aggressively. The treatment fighting cancer almost kills the patient. Almost. That metaphor holds true in the church. It's never pretty or easy when a church goes through this spiritual cancer removal process. You can't just do nothing. Cancer must be removed.

Emotions run high. Easy to see why. We love these folks. When this level of sin is happening, and you've gone through the whole matthew 18 process and no repentance is going to come, and the cancer has to be cut out, there's always conflict with people in the church that disagree with the diagnosis. We love this person. How could we ever remove them.

And yet, that's exactly what must happen. We pray it's rare. We haven't had to approach this so far in our church. We hope we never do. We can push the metaphor even further, a really healthy church is often not the place that a sinful lifestyle person is comfortable in the first place.

But any time I've seen the process happening, there is pain for the whole church. It's like chemotherapy. The church is the patient that's fighting for life while the remedy is almost killing them.

The easy thing to do is just do nothing. I'm going to be OK. I'm going to hold that person at arms length. We can co-exist together. But the cancer grows and chokes the life away from the rest of the church.

Corinth was tolerating some guy who was *with* his father's wife. And Paul says instead of being sorrowful you're puffed up about it. Look at us. We're tolerant. We're going to win this battle with love. We're going to love this sinner right back into the kingdom. But the next thing you know, you've got a rash. Then the whole church has a rash.

It's interesting to compare Thyatira and Ephesus. In Ephesus, the cure did kill the patient.

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

These folks, at Ephesus, cannot endure evil men. But in their rigid vigilance against evil and false apostles and false prophets and against false doctrine, love had died. They had left their first love.

Thyatira was taking the opposite approach. They tolerated evil. They were tolerant. We can live side by side with evil inside the church. And that cancer metastasized and killed them.

Alistair Begg had a quote that sounds like Alistair Begg. He used to say, *"All Word no Spirit, the church dries up; all Spirit, no Word, the church blows up; Word and Spirit and the church grows up."*

Ephesus died from the first disaster. *"All Word no Spirit* Thyatira died from the second. *all Spirit, no Word* Church life is a tight rope. I know I've said it before. Without the Holy Spirit's help, it's impossible to get this balance right. With the Holy Spirit guiding, it's impossible to get it wrong.

We want to be that church that is both deep in this book and has a grasp on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes this book and causes a deep heartfelt love for Jesus.

OK, let's press on, because there's a huge elephant in this room and none of the commentators that I studied said much about it.

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

We've been warning about tolerance. Tolerating evil. Allowing evil to co-exist in the church. But . . . hello. Didn't Paul forbid women to be in leadership positions over men, in the church? Is this hard to figure out?

1 Tim. 2:12 *And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.* That's pretty clear. You don't have to like it, although I may worry about you if you don't.

Paul, under apostolic authority speaks to the church, with the full inspiration of God guiding his pen. Women may not teach when men are present. Women must teach other women, and we desire for them to teach the children. But a situation where a woman is claiming prophetic authority and teaching in a mixed congregation is in direct violation of what Paul told Timothy and by extension, the church universal. If Paul said it to Timothy, it applies to us!

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*

1st problem. She calls herself a prophetess. Do some word studies for yourself. A prophet isn't only a person getting direct revelation from God and then telling it forth. That describes the office of biblical prophets before the revelation of God was complete and canonized into this book. No new prophecy which is direct new information from God. It *can* mean that.

But the word simply means someone who is telling forth. There is a sense in which preachers are prophets in the sense that they tell forth God's written word. Speaking forth. Public speaking. What I'm doing, even if it's being done poorly.

This lady was claiming that God had made her a preacher. She calls herself a prophetess. A girl preacher.

This church should have had a plurality of godly elders, men, God has limited that office to men, and those overseers should have hit the eject button as soon as this lady walked in the door and claimed, God has made me a girl preacher.

you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My slaves

This church should have had a plurality of godly elders who forbid this lady to lead any of Jesus slaves, who are male.

And finally, doctrine. 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.

Even if she was only teaching other women, this church should have had a plurality of godly elders, men, who oversee what this woman was teaching to even other women.

The elders, overseers, must know and approve what is being taught.

There are multiple offenses here. Lady teaching men. Lady teaching god's slaves to do things of an immoral nature that are prohibited. Lady teaching God's slaves to partake in idolatrous worldly things at any level.

Where are the overseers? Where are the men who are supposed to protect this flock. Where are the shepherds keeping wolves out of the sheep pen. This place is a wreck. This church is a dumpster fire.

Jesus gets angry! Anytime His sheep are in danger because the shepherds are not feeding and caring for them, Jesus gets mad. This responsibility that God has honored me with here, as an overseer, is frighteningly important. Scary stuff. If the sheep are getting eaten and it's my fault; well, He's pretty clear about that kind of scenario.

If that happens here, it would be better for me to have some cement boots on and get tossed off a bridge into deep water. Better to be drowned in the depths of the sea with a heavy mill stone tied to me.

The lady should have been rejected from a position of teaching over men. Immediately. And if she's teaching immoral doctrines *to* women and children, that's a second level of rejection. The shepherds are in place to steer the church into sound doctrine, and protect God's flock.

At this point in the letter, the language gets pretty difficult to apply to a single church in a single place in history.

It is that. This is a single historic church in Asia minor, in a city called Thyatira, and they literally had all of these problems, and it literally killed them.

But I think we have a clue here that this goes far beyond this single literal church. And it's the name Jesus assigns to this woman. Jezebel.

Jezebel was a real woman but she's also a biblical type. As soon as we hear that name we think of the single most evil destructive woman in the Bible who caused so much damage to Israel that she was finally killed and thrown out of a window and when they went down to retrieve her body for burial, she had been eaten by dogs. Nothing left of Jezebel but feet and hands and head. The rest of Jezebel got turned into dog feces.

I'm a literalist but I have a hard time thinking any loving mother would name her sweet precious little newborn, Jezebel.

I think Jesus is letting us know this woman is symbolic of all of the problems and sins that came upon Israel as a result of the actual Jezebel. So let's do a sidebar and see some parallels.

Jezebel was daughter of the king of Sidon. North of Israel. And in ancient

times you would offer your daughter in marriage to some other king as a way of securing peace. The king of Israel is married to the daughter of the king of Sidon, so we won't attack each other. We're family with them.

Symbolically that's the church marrying the world. Instead of being at war with each other, church and world, we can marry into their family and them into ours and secure a peace.

The problem is that Jezebel was against the worship of YahWeh and had her husband, the wicked king Ahab, take down the altars to Yahweh and put up alters to Baal. So she instituted idol worship. She rejected God's prophets and ordered them killed. Only prophets of Baal allowed.

Then one day king Ahab was sad. He wanted a vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. But Naboth wouldn't sell. So Ahab was unhappy. Jezebel had Naboth murdered and took his vineyard. She gave it to her husband.

She had the prophets of yahweh murdered. They were chased all over Israel. Then Elijah set up a challenge. Build altars side by side and call out to Baal and Yahweh to send fire from heaven to burn up the offering. Well it didn't go well for Baal's prophets.

But God sent fire that consumed Elijah's offering, and then it consumed the stones that the altar was made of. It's all very colorful. 1 Kings 16 and forward. Jezebel then declares that by this time tomorrow Elijah would be dead, and goes after him.

Defenestration was a new word for me. It's the act of throwing someone out of a window to their death. And that's what the new king in Israel, Jehu did. The dogs ate her and turned her into dung. A fitting end. One day you've got power to wage war against God, and the next day you're coming out the south end of a dog pointed north. That's what happens when you go to war with God. Or the Son of God for that matter.

The name Jezebel came to be associated with immorality and idolatry. Spiritual immorality. She caused Israel to leave Yahweh and worship the idol Baal.

Remember here, what we said at first about the 4 different possibilities that each church represents. Each church is a literal real church in Asia minor in history. They were real churches that Jesus sent real letters to.

Then each church is a type. of both individual christians, and individual churches. There are Thyatira type christians. Married and in bed with the world. And there are Thyatira type churches. All through history, there have been churches that married the world. Marry the world and make peace with Satan's cosmos. Thyatira christians and thyatira churches.

But fourthly we believe that in the long saga of church history, there was an era when the whole church was married to the world and had fallen into false religion and idolatry. A historic era where christendom was unfaithful to Jesus her husband and has gone whoring with the world instead.

That era runs from around 606 AD when the papacy was defined, Pope Boniface was crowned, all the way through the dark ages to the 1500's when the reformation began to have a twinkle of light in the darkness.

Not so much the reformers as the printing of the Bible in languages of the people that brought down the church as a whore, the church that looks like what this woman had introduced at Thyatira.

By naming her Jezebel, Jesus gave us a clear image, metaphorically of how wicked and ruthless and idolatress this woman that went to bed with the world actually is. Pretty vile stuff.

Jezebel as the church is the church immersed in spiritual unfaithfulness, the church in bed doing immoral things with the world. The church at war with Jesus.

Let's pick up our verses here next week.