

Revelation

A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #8
Revelation 2:18-29
8/16 /2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Thyatira

Following the letter to the compromised church, the church at Pergamos, Christ's fourth letter addressed to the Church at Thyatira, represents the time period between 590 AD and 1,000 AD, and shows us what follows compromise. The church at Thyatira, a picture of the result of compromise with the culture of paganism, became accommodating to the moral standards of the secular-pagan world, and which incorporates idolatry and co-mingles it with the worship of Jehovah.

The city of Thyatira had nothing really remarkable about it. It was a Roman outpost which housed the elite Roman guard and built upon a slight rise in a valley between two rivers. History tells us that it was the center of various trade unions and crafts. Lydia, the seller of purple, which was said to actually be a bright "turkey red" color, came from Thyatira where she derived her dyes from a bush located in that area.

The most memorable characteristic of this letter is its reference to Jezebel, the notoriously wicked wife of Ahab, King of Israel, whose 450 prophets of Baal which Elijah confronted on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). To gain an understanding of the reference to Jezebel, please read the passage which begins in 1 Kings 16:29 through 2 Kings 9:37.

Revelation 2:18 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;

Revelation 2:19 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.

Revelation 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Revelation 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Revelation 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Revelation 2:23 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.

Revelation 2:24 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.

Revelation 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

Revelation 2:26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Revelation 2:27 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.

Revelation 2:28 And I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #8
Revelation 2:18-29
8/16 /2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Thyatira

CHRIST'S SALUTATION

As He addressed *“the angel,”* the pastor of the church, Jesus described Himself as **“These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.”** First, Jesus pointed out His deity, **“the Son of God,”** to emphasize His authority. Then, He mentioned two of His characteristics which obviously relate to judgment. The first characteristic, **“eyes like unto a flame of fire,”** refer both to their ability to penetrate beyond pretense to the truth as well as to their ability to either purify or destroy. The second, **“feet like fine brass,”** clearly refers to judgment, the trampling of wickedness by the purity of His awesome power. Thus, in the opening statement is the ominous tone of judgment.

CHRIST'S COMMENDATION

“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.”

Jesus did have some words of commendation for the church at Thyatira. In the midst of this terribly corrupt church there were some faithful believers whom our Lord commended.

First, their **“works”** were the expression of their genuine faith.

Second, they had the sacrificial **“love”** of God flowing through them. Some wonderful saints of God lived during the last days of this time period such as Peter Waldo, John Huss, John Wycliffe and Savonarola.

Third, those who had genuine **“faith”** in the Lord were bold and courageous, sometimes even to the point of giving their lives for the **“faith.”**

Fourth, Jesus saw the ministry, **“works - ministry,”** of each faithful servant because it stood out in brilliant contrast against the corrupt darkness of their times.

Fifth, their **“patience,”** or endurance in the midst of difficult circumstances drew a word of praise from the Lord.

Sixth, once again the Lord referred to their **“works,”** to say that, even though they lived in difficult times, their **“works”** increased rather than diminished as they went through the difficulties of their times.

CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION

Christ had some serious and startling words of condemnation for the church at Thyatira. **“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.”**

To express His evaluation, His anger and His judgment of the church at Thyatira, Jesus referred the people

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #8
Revelation 2:18-29
8/16 /2006

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back to one of the most evil and notorious individuals mentioned in the Old Testament. It is quite possible that the compromised church at Thyatira did not spend much time studying God's Word. Like many "church-attenders" of today the reference to "**Jezebel**" may have driven them to go to the Old Testament to learn what the Lord had in mind.

Ahab was king over Israel, the northern kingdom for 22 years, from 874 to 853 BC. After Solomon's death the kingdom had divided into two, the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. Every one of the 19 kings of the northern kingdom were wicked, godless men. Consistent with His rebellion against Jehovah God, Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of the Zidonians. Almost immediately, Jezebel brought her religion, the worship of Baal, into the life of Israel and it quickly took dominance over the worship of Jehovah. The contest of her 450 prophets of Baal with Elijah at Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18) is well known to most Bible students. Her name, "Jezebel," meant "unmarried, chaste," which is probably suggestive of the abnormality of her personality. She is thought to have been an extremely beautiful, but perverted woman, and became the power behind the throne of her husband Ahab. Beautiful and alluring, but "sexless," if her character was true to her name, she was a vicious, coldhearted woman who did not hesitate to kill those who did not please her. Her story includes her murder of Naboth, a man who owned a vineyard that Ahab coveted, but could not acquire from Naboth. So, Jezebel had Naboth murdered so Ahab could have his vineyard.

God's tolerance of her wickedness exhausted His patience and He pronounced her doom, that her blood would be spilled and the dogs would consume her body and her blood. To accomplish her judgment, God used another cold-blooded killer by the name of Jehu whom she could not seduce with her beauty. The description, found in 2 Kings 9, is one of the most gruesome accounts in all of the Bible. From this description of Jezebel in the Old Testament some clear spiritual lessons can be drawn:

First, compromise with the pagan culture, in disobedience to God, leads to the pollution of the worship of God and to the worship of idols.

Second, extreme moral corruption follows the compromise of the faith with idolatry and paganism.

Third, sexual perversion and immorality always accompany such compromises because sexual promiscuity and perversion is always a part of idolatry and paganism.

Fourth, what God said in Galatians 6:7-8, "**Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting,**" was perhaps most important spiritual lesson.

Fifth, pagan religions often involve sexual promiscuity and perversion as well as female leaders, priestesses and teachers. This was true of Baal worship and something similar must have existed in the church at Thyatira.

What specifically the situation was in Thyatira was is not indicated except that the church "**suffered that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.**"

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #8
Revelation 2:18-29
8/16/2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Thyatira

Quite possibly this included both sexual sin and idolatry. Both, along with witchcraft, were connected to the **"Jezebel"** in the Old Testament (2 Kings 9:22).

As we have pointed out, the various churches were not only real, historical churches, they also represented a period in the history of the church. In addition, some traits of most of the various churches can be found even in churches today. The part about the use of female ministers, priestesses, and leaders is surely seen in some churches today along with the emphasis upon sex and sensuality. In conjunction with this, today we see churches compromising and importing facets of the pagan culture, the worship of various idols, being included in the normal worship services and activities of churches today. One must ask if some of what is seen today is a repeat of what existed in the church at Thyatira.

Jesus said, **"And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not."** God's patience is amazing. The historic period represented by this church continued in its heresy even while God reached out to it calling it to repentance. The "fornication" mentioned often was a reference to both the physical sexual act as well as spiritual "fornication," the people allowing themselves to be seduced into various forms of idolatry. Repentance, and thus a return to a healthy relationship with Jesus was offered, but always rejected.

JESUS' JUDGMENT PRONOUNCED

God does not ignore sin, particularly sin that He has clearly revealed to the sinner. Therefore, Jesus said, **"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."**

The **"tribulation"** is likely a reference to the **"great tribulation"** described by Jesus in Matthew 24. The apostate church, churches which pretend to serve Jesus Christ, but have polluted the faith with some mixture of paganism, will still be here during the **"great tribulation."** They are made up of people who have compromised the faith, while pretending to be Christians, and will be left here on earth when Jesus **"raptures"** or calls up His own to be with Him.

The "death" referred to is **"the second death,"** or the separation of the lost from God eternally and completely at the **"great white throne"** (Revelation 20:11-15). While physical death is a time of separation of the life of the person from his body, **"the second death"** is the final, complete and eternal separation of the lost sinner from the presence of God after his judgment is pronounced. The **"children"** mentioned are those affected and produced by such churches. Their fruit is destined to doom, damnation, and destruction. In Revelation 20:12 God tells us that the lost will be judged or punished according to their **"works,"** or their evil actions. God does keep books and records and there will be degrees of punishment for the wicked. Jesus tells us that He searches **"the reins and hearts."** We are not able to read another person's mind or to know the intents of his heart, but Jesus is and He will punish accordingly.

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #8
Revelation 2:18-29
8/16/2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Thyatira

JESUS' PROMISE

Just as Jesus is able to read a person's mind and heart, He also knows those who have been faithful to Him and He will bless those. They may be in the minority or rare, there are always those, even in the middle of the worst of times, who are faithful to their Lord. He knows each one. He will bless each one, but He also knows such a one's weaknesses so He said, **"that which ye have already hold fast till I come."** Obviously, Jesus was saying that He was going to come to take them out of this evil world and those who were truly His would be faithful until He came to get them.

Then Jesus had another word of promise and encouragement for them, a word that looked forward to the establishment of His Kingdom here on the earth. **"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."**

The ones who **"keepeth my works"** stand in sharp contrast to those who follow **"Jezebel"** and do her works. Those **"who keepeth His works"** will rule and reign with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 1:6; 20:6; 2 Timothy 2:12).

With His closing statement, one more time Jesus repeated His urging: **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."**

Over and over again, the Lord emphasized **"pay attention. I mean what I say and say what I mean."**

It reminds us of the warning Paul gave to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 13:5, **"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; and prove your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."**