

Jesus' Seven Letters to the Churches

Part 4 Thyatira: Unholy Alliances

18 And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, Who has eyes that flash like a flame of fire, and Whose feet glow like bright and burnished and white-hot bronze: 19 I know your record and what you are doing, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your recent works are more numerous and greater than your first ones. 20 But I have this against you: that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired], and who is teaching and leading astray my servants and beguiling them into practicing sexual vice and eating food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she has no desire to repent of her immorality [symbolic of idolatry] and refuses to do so. 22 Take note: I will throw her on a bed [of anguish], and those who commit adultery with her [her paramours] I will bring down to pressing distress and severe affliction, unless they turn away their minds from conduct [such as] hers and repent of their doings. 23 And I will strike her children (her proper followers) dead [thoroughly exterminating them]. And all the assemblies (churches) shall recognize and understand that I am He Who searches minds (the thoughts, feelings, and purposes) and the [inmost] hearts, and I will give to each of you [the reward for what you have done] as your work deserves. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not explored and known the depths of Satan, as they say—I tell you that I do not lay upon you any other [fresh] burden: 25 Only hold fast to what you have until I come. 26 And he who overcomes (is victorious) and who obeys My commands to the [very] end [doing the works that please Me], I will give him authority and power over the nations; 27 And he shall rule them with a scepter (rod) of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, and [his power over them shall be] like that which I Myself have received from My Father; 28 And I will give him the Morning Star. 29 He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the assemblies (churches). Revelation 2:18-29 (AMP)

Portion for the Journey:

Christ love the Churches and longs for them to grow in their relationship with Him. He looks for the day that He will again be reunited with His precious bride. He nourishes and cherishes the Church. It is clear that the writer of these seven letters to the churches had an intimate knowledge of each one of them. He was clearly aware not only of the condition of their hearts but also their environment which presented their particular challenges and obstacles.

Each letter represents a “composite” picture of a particular church with application pertinent to all churches, and to each of us personally. Each letter also represents a prophetic panorama of the churches through history. Watchman Nee in viewing these letters from the historical approach felt that the first three churches will have passed away by the second coming of Christ but the last four would remain until His return.

- Ephesus representing the early apostolic church
- Smyrna representing the church in the second century of intense persecution;
- Pergamum representing the marriage of the Church with the state in the third century.
- Thyatira represented the Roman Catholic church system. The word “Catholic” means universally accepted. It can be used with reference to the teachings of the Church which are universal,

foundational truths or it can refer to the Roman Catholic Church which believed itself to be the one true Christian church.

- Sardis means restoration and speaks of a time of revival in the Church.
- Philadelphia was the only church that had Christ's full acceptance. Its name means church "of brotherly love."
- Laodicea or "people's rights" is called the apostate church, the one in which Jesus could find nothing for commendation. Watchman Nee noted that should Philadelphia fail to maintain its love, it would become "Laodicea" which means "the people's rights."

vs. 18 Address: "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write..."

This letter is the longest of the seven letters, considered to be the least important of all seven churches. Thyatira means "high tower". It was a city located about 34 miles southeast of Pergamum. It is a city that was founded about 300 BC. The area around Thyatira was very beautiful. The city was set on the left bank of a tributary of the great Hermes river. It was guarded by an elite Roman military guard. Thyatira was a flourishing manufacturing and commercial city in Lydia on the site of what now stand the Turkish town of Akhissar" Or "the White Castle" with nine mosques and one Greek Orthodox church. Thyatira prospered under Vespian the emperor of Rome. Eventually, Thyatira was attacked and thoroughly destroyed. The remains that were rebuilt today covers only one city block.

Thyatira worshipped the emperor, the Thyatira war hero, Tyrimnos and the trade guild gods. Thyatira was the headquarters for many ancient guilds, including potters, tanners, weavers, robe makers and dyers. It is believed that Thyatira is where labor unions first originated. The guilds all worshipped their patron deities. For example, the bronze smiths worshipped the goddess of war, Pallas Athena.

It is unknown how the church was formed in Thyatira, but we do know that Lydia, whom Paul led to the LORD in Philippi was a seller of purple cloth from Thyatira. Lydia was a worshipper and a woman of prayer. God had given her a teachable heart that He opened so she responded to the Word when it was presented. She had a love for believers and opened her home to Paul and other disciples. Acts 16:14-15; 40

Thyatira is believed to represent Romanism during the darkest ages of the Church from 590 AD to 1500 AD. The Roman Catholic church dominated religious life, falling ever deeper into false teaching and immorality. Initially the word "Catholic" meant the universal church, orthodox, pure from heresy. This period marked a proliferation of false teaching. As believers sought to find unity through the doctrines of the church increasing animosity developed and the spirit of offense resulted in many church splits. The Catholic church sought to unify believers, especially regarding doctrine and fellowship. They believed it necessary to preserve and protect the Church from the heresy of the Gnosticism, Marcionites and Montanism. In their effort to protect the Church according to the purity of the Word and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ they 1) sought Church leadership with direct connection to the disciples of Jesus or those in the early church directly taught by the disciples and 2) sought to assemble the documents containing the essentials of the Christian faith. Due to the perils of the false teachers, they felt justified to increase the structure and authority of the Church leaders. These changes, initiated in sincere concern for the Church, led them away from the more informal structure of the "body of believers" resulted in a gradual departure from the one true faith.

- This led to leadership chosen by the "line of Bishops" (those who traced their teaching back to Peter or Paul) rather than leaders chosen by the Holy Spirit.
- Increased structure of the Church

- Increased distance between the laity and church leadership hierarchy
- Increased separation between church leaders and laymen resulted in the exaltation of the clergy who were believed to be more holy than average people. As special channels of God's grace, they were believed to have the authority to dispense that grace.
- Increased control by leaders over who was able to repent and return to the Church after a fall.
- Those who sinned were required to perform acts of penitence as set by the Bishop in order to be forgiven.
- Sins were confessed to a priest who established form of penitence and provided absolution. This was a serious departure from personal confession of sins and forgiveness by Jesus through His blood. Penance turned the free gift of salvation into something altogether different, flagellation, scourging, floggings, fasting, etc.
- Since sins could be removed by the priest, prayers for the dead were introduced in 300AD.
- Lack of accountability to God led to increased laxity regarding moral standards.
- The relationship between the Emperor Constantine and the friendship of the Church introduced church leaders to wealthy lifestyles of great power and influence in the courts of the emperor. Bishops became known as self-seeking, seeking pomp and luxury.
- Veneration of angels, dead saints, and use of images of saints became objects of worship; 375
- Beginning of the exaltation of Mary, the term "Mother of God" first applied to her by the Council of Ephesus; 431
- Priests began to dress differently from laymen; 500
- Extreme Unction; 526
- The doctrine of Purgatory, established by Gregory I; 593
- By the close of the fifth century, most of the Roman Empire confessed to Christian Church membership.
- Latin Language, used in prayer and worship, imposed by Gregory I; This departure from the study of the Greek and Hebrew led to increased ignorance of the Word. 600
- Salvation no longer by grace, but by obedience and loyalty to the Catholic Church through good works.
- Prayers directed to Mary, dead saints and angels; about 600
- Title of pope, or universal bishop, given to Boniface III by emperor Phocas; 610
- Kissing the pope's foot, began with pope Constantine; 709
- Infallibility of the Pope replaced belief in the inerrancy of the Scripture
- Temporal power of the popes, conferred by Pepin, king of France; 750
- Worship of the cross, images and relics, authorized in; 786
- Holy water, mixed with a pinch of salt and blessed by a priest; 850
- Worship of St. Joseph; 890
- College of Cardinals established; 927
- Baptism of bells, instituted by pope John XIV; 965
- Canonization of dead saints, first by pope John XV; 995
- The Mass, developed gradually as a sacrifice, attendance made obligatory in the 11th century
- Prayers were offered to the Virgin Mary 1050
- Celibacy of the priesthood, decreed by pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand); 1079
- The Rosary, mechanical praying with beads, invented by Peter the Hermit; 1090
- Rome instituted the Inquisition
- by the Council of Verona; 1184

- Sale of Indulgences; priestly services could be bought for a price, including promotions to church office, including the position as pope; 1190
- Transubstantiation, proclaimed by pope Innocent III; 1215
- Auricular Confession of sins to a priest instead of to God, instituted by pope Innocent III, in Lateran Council; 1215
- Adoration of the wafer (Host), decreed by pope Honorius III; 1220
- Bible forbidden to laymen, placed on the Index of Forbidden Books by the Council of Valencia; 1229
- The Scapular, invented by Simon Stock, an English monk; 1287
- Cup forbidden to the people at communion by Council of Constance; 1414
- Purgatory proclaimed as a dogma by the Council of Florence; 1438
- The doctrine of Seven Sacraments affirmed; 1439
- The Ave Maria (part of the last half was completed 50 years later and approved by Pope Sixtus V at the end of the 16th century); 1508
- Jesuit order founded by Loyola; 1534
- Tradition declared of equal authority with the Bible by the Council of Trent; 1545
- Apocryphal books added to the Bible by the Council of Trent; 1546
- Creed of pope Pius IV imposed as the official creed; 1560
- Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, proclaimed by pope Pius IX; 1854
- Syllabus of Errors, proclaimed by pope Pius IX, and ratified by the Vatican Council; condemned freedom of religion, conscience, speech, press, and scientific discoveries which are disapproved by the Roman Church; asserted the pope's temporal authority over all civil rulers; 1864
- Infallibility of the pope in matters of faith and morals, proclaimed by the Vatican Council; 1870
- Public Schools condemned by Pope Pius XI; 1930
- Assumption of the Virgin Mary (bodily ascension into heaven shortly after her death), proclaimed by Pope Pius XII; 1950

Add to these many others: monks, nuns, monasteries, convents, forty days lent, holy week, Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, All Saints Day, Candlemas, fish day, meat days, incense, holy oil, holy palms, Christopher medals, charms, novenas, and others.

vs. 18 Author: "Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze," says this..." Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God, an official title of His relationship with the Father and His position before men. He is revealing Himself as a God of judgment. Ps. 2:7,9

Eyes of Fire: Jesus' eyes of fire speak of His ability to see all things and search out all things in the mind and heart. Jesus has piercing, penetrating perfect knowledge and thorough insight into all things. He is able to discern those who are sincere followers versus those who walk in lies. Fire speaks not only of judgement but also purification. Isa. 66:15; Ezek. 18:23; 30:32; John 16:8; Rev. 1:14; 2:18

Feet like burnished bronze: Burnished bronze is also referred to as "white brass." This was a glowing brass that is distinguished for its brilliancy being described as being clear or white in color. Not only speaks of judgment, treading out the grapes of wrath, but also of His stability and firmness. We do not need to fear the judgment of God if we walk in the light. Ezek. 1:7, 27; Dan. 10:6

vs. 19 **Commendation:** Each of the letters to the Churches starts with a point of commendation for their positive qualities. To the believers in Thyatira, He begins by praising them for their

- 1) love (charity),
- 2) ministry of service,
- 3) faith,
- 4) patient endurance in days of darkness,
- 5) works, greater at the last than at the first. James 2:18

vs. 20 Criticism: “But I have this against you: that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired], and who is teaching and leading astray my servants and beguiling them into practicing sexual vice and eating food sacrificed to idols.” Revelation 2:20 (AMP)

This woman of Thyatira was called “Jezebel” named after Queen Jezebel (1 Kings). This woman of Thyatira would have been a woman of power and great influence. Matthew Henry notes that she made use of the Name of God to oppose the truth of His doctrine. Many ancient versions of this script translate this “thy wife” instead of “the woman.” The belief is that she may have been the wife of the Bishop which would increase the criminality of the church to suffer her acts. She was set up as a prophetess and a teacher who taught the church to engage in fornication with false gods and to eat of the food sacrificed to idols. She used every opportunity to seduce the faithful onto a false path.

Following the historical timeline, this woman would have introduced heresies into the church during the “catholic era.” During this time, a number of false teachings were introduced to the church. The worship of Mary as a female deity, the “Mother of God”, introduction of statues of saints for the purpose of prayer; false teaching regarding purgatory and all manner of corruption amongst the church leadership. During the Middle Ages countless faithful children of God who did not pledge their loyalty to Catholicism died at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church.

The wording in the Greek is clear. Jezebel was a member of the church and was influencing it from within. The church was rebuked because they “tolerated” Jezebel to continue in their midst, seducing and leading astray all who would partake of her wares. The word tolerated is ‘apheimi’ (Strong’s #863) and has two parts 1) is “a” which is a negative pronoun indicating “did not...” and 2) phiemi meaning ‘to send away, divorce, let go, be alone, permit, hinder.’ The church did not have governmental power to stop the working of Jezebel, but they did have ministerial power to censure and excommunicate her. Since they did not seek to stop her, they became sharers of her sin. 2 Cor. 11:19, 20; Eph. 5:11; Ezek. 33:1-10; Prov. 24:25; Lev. 19:17; Titus 1:13; 2:15; Rev. 18:4; 1 Sam. 3:13

This reference to Jezebel would be to compare her to Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab, who brought paganism to Israel and seduced the hearts of the people to turn to idol worship. She led Israel away from the worship of the one true God to join with pagans in the worship of Baal. She was a teacher and a prophetess with the power and influence to corrupt the hearts away from the One True God. She also relentlessly persecuted and killed the prophets and those who remained faithful to God. Her influence impacted generations of kings and leaders throughout the history of Israel.

vs. 24-25 Instruction: Jesus said to those who had remained faithful and pure, that He would lay on them no other burden, “only hold fast what you have until I come.”

Hold fast: The Hebrew word for “hold fast” is “dabaq” (Strong’s #1692) meaning ‘to cleave, follow hard after, keep fast, abide, to cling, adhere. In the Greek, there are three words that are translated “hold fast.” 1) “katecho” (Strong’s #2722) meaning ‘to hold firmly, to possess, keep, seize. 2) “krateo” is the Greek word used in the letter to the Church in Thyatira. This word means to hold, keep, retain, lay hold

of, to use strength to seize, hold fast, to be strong, mighty, to prevail, hold firmly.’ 3) “tereo” (Strong’s #5083) carries the connotation of keeping in one’s focus, meaning, ‘to watch, keep the eye upon, to keep watch and give careful heed.’ Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8; Prov. 4:4,13; Hos. 12:6; Luke 8:15

Promise to those who are faithful: vs. 26-28

Note in the first three letters to the churches, the call to overcome always follows with the words, “he who has ears, let him hear” but beginning with this letter to Thyatira, this order is reversed, indicating change in the nature of these churches from the first three.

- I will give him authority over nations Ps. 2:8, 9
- I will give him the Morning Star. The morning star has two characteristics. It is the first star to appear in the sky in the dawn as well as being the first star to appear at dusk. “One day, the Lord will be seen by the whole world, but those who see the Morning Star are necessarily awake much earlier while the vast majority of the world is still asleep.” (Watchman Nee) The Morning Star is believed to be a symbol of the resurrection because as the morning star rises after the darkness of night, so shall the Christian rise after the night of death. Barclay’s commentary offers the following two interpretations: This has been referred to Dan 12:3. There the promise is: “and those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.” If that be so, the morning star is the glory which will come to those who are righteous and have helped others to walk in the paths of righteousness. ...these are very lovely and may all be involved in this promise; but we are quite certain that the correct interpretation is this. The Revelation itself calls Jesus “the bright morning star” (Rev 22:16). The promise of the morning star is the promise of Christ himself. If the Christian is true and holds fast to the Lord, when life on earth comes to an end, he will possess Christ, never to lose him forever. Rev. 21:23; 22:5, 16; Mal. 4:2

What is the Lord Speaking to me?

Responding to the Lord: