



Thyatira—Holiness Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira—the least city gets the longest letter

“The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities.” (Hemer 2001, 106) When the traveler comes to Thyatira, there was nothing visually stunning about the city. No 1000 foot high hill top like Pergamum; no harbor town like Ephesus or Smyrna—just a frontier town plopped in the middle of a plain. Thyatira traded sides in the many wars over the years between competing kingdoms. Thus, it was a battered, bruised, and broken down settlement when the Roman Empire’s *Pax Romana* (“Peace of Rome”) enabled it to become quite a thriving commercial and industrial trade town. There were numerous trade guilds, which were like unions or associations for various trades such as bakers, bronze-workers; clothiers; shoemakers; weavers, leatherworkers, potters, and clothing dyers. (Lydia, who came to Christ by the Apostle Paul in Acts 16, was a high end clothier from Thyatira.) These trading guilds supported the military garrison that was also stationed near Thyatira. (Think Rantoul, IL, next to Chanute; or Killeen, TX, next to Fort Hood; or St. Robert, MO, next to Fort Leonard Wood, etc.)

To have steady and secure employment, one had to belong to one of these trading guilds. Unfortunately, membership in these guilds meant participating in their many pagan religious rituals. Since all the guilds had patron deities, Christian guild members would be expected to pay homage to pagan gods at official guild meetings, which were usually festive occasions often accompanied by immoral behavior. Non-participation would lead to economic ostracism. *In Thyatira, you had to play to be paid!*

Jesus never misses a thing!

Jesus, who identifies himself as the “Son of God” (the only time this title is used in Revelation), says that his blazing eyes see with penetrating insight all that’s going on at Thyatira. The least significant city still has Christ’s focused attention. He commends this church for possessing four essential qualities: love, faith, ministry, and perseverance. Not only did these believers possess them, they were growing in them! They’ve improved! *“You are now doing more than you did at first!”* Unlike the church at Ephesus, who had lost the love they had at first; Thyatira was loving more, believing more, serving more, and persevering more. Is our Christianity like that? We start well—anybody can start well! How are we doing now? Standing still? Falling back? Moving ahead? If you stay on the same path you’re on right now, where will you be in 5 years? What kind of Christian will you look like?

***Jezebel* has got to go!**

Though pleased with their progress, Jesus confronted the church for harboring a female leader known by the code name, "Jezebel", from the Old Testament. Jezebel means, "pure"; she was anything but that. Her RAP sheet is in the 1 Kings 16:29-34; 19:1-2; 21; & 2 Kings 9:30-37.

- Jezebel was the wife of a weak, spineless, man, King Ahab.
- She was not an Israelite. Her father had been a priest who succeeded to the throne by murdering his predecessor.
- She persuaded Ahab to build a temple/altar in Samaria; to practice witchcraft/idolatry.
- She supported 850 prophets of Baal; and killed off as many prophets of YHWH as she could.

There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. (1 Kings 21:25 NIV) The church at Thyatira was tolerating the likes of her in their congregation! Thyatira's Jezebel was saying that involvement in the trade guilds was acceptable including sexual immorality and temple participation! The entire church was in danger and nobody was saying anything! Like problems at Pergamum, the leaders had lost their nerve. When leaders lose their nerve, they're going to lose the church.

So Jesus put them on notice that He will deal with her. After giving her ample opportunity to repent, which she has refused, He will punish her. Those who follow her ways will be punished as well but those who repent will be welcomed home! V. 23 informs the church that no matter where they are Jesus sees what's going on. To put it another way, Jesus will either be your best ally or your worst enemy. There is no middle ground. Dedication to Christ is all or nothing. To be unfaithful to Christ in a small thing is to be unfaithful to Christ in everything!

Holiness is not what you don't do; it's who you're dedicated to!

Many people take a moralistic approach to holiness. They assume that as long as they don't do immoral things, they are holy. If they do good, love much, and hate little, that means they are holy. But this isn't Christianity. Yes, believers in Christ are to love much and do good, but only out of a relationship with Jesus himself! We don't obey God in order for God to love us. Rather, it's because God loves us that we can obey him. God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel after He had saved them, not before! Jesus is to be our sole source of significance and meaning and approval in life; and out of His approval and love, we then enter life acting like Him, speaking like Him, relating like Him! Idolatry is when we go after something or someone else for our significance and approval. And when we do, we partner with the very forces that crucified Jesus!

Jesus promises the overcomer authority to rule with Him in the new heavens and earth. That's what's behind vv. 26-27. Just as the Father gave all authority to the Son, so the Son will share His authority with His redeemed people to rule the new heavens and earth! What an amazing promise! The "morning star" was the symbol Venus, which the Roman legions had on their military banners. It was a symbol of invincibility! Also, Jesus calls himself "Son of God" to Thyatira because every soldier knew that Caesar was called "Son of God." Jesus asserts himself! I am the real Ruler! Not some pretender in Rome! If your ears work, listen up!