

## Thyatira: The Church That Went Astray Revelation 2:18-29

**“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction of themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”** So writes Peter in his second epistle. **(II Peter 1:20-2:3)**

Much of Paul’s teaching also advocated that we be wary of false teachers. Of special note is what Luke recorded for us in **Acts 20:28-31** when Paul in a farewell meeting with the church leaders of Ephesus at the city of Miletus encouraged them with these words: **“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”**

Those are good passages to keep in mind for our text today. That is a tall order for those in leadership – to ensure that the church remains doctrinally sound and morally pure. But it’s our

Biblical mandate, our task, our charge to defend the truth without apology or compromise. It means that we as leaders – Pastor and Deacons – need to have a good handle and knowledge of God’s Word so that we can detect and disarm any doctrinal error before it has a chance to take root in the Church. That was one of the commendations of Christ to the Church of Ephesus when He wrote to them. They tested false teachers, those claiming to be apostles and didn’t let them peddle their false doctrine. They were well grounded in doctrinal truth.

Here’s what Paul had to say to the Corinthians about false teachers: **II Corinthians 11:13-15 “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”**

Throughout church history the church has always had to contend with false teachers. It was a problem in the early church just as much as it is now. Left alone there is a slow erosion of the truth until it is blended with error. Consider for a moment the Dark Ages, the period of history that best depicts the church of Thyatira. The church slowly mingled pagan practices and idolatry with Christian works and worship. The papacy was elevated to secular power under Gregory I in AD 590 and strengthened by Gregory VII in AD 1073. The church introduced rituals and doctrine that superseded personal faith in Christ. The worship of the Virgin Mary and the Mass were incorporated into the service. Mary was elevated to female deity through whom prayers to God were made and by whom you have favor for salvation so that she became a co-redeemer. Purgatory was introduced as a doctrine and Mass was said for the dead.

[I read this week that the Pope is guaranteeing less time in Purgatory if you follow him on Twitter.](#)

Documents labeled Donation of Constantine and Decretals of Isidore gave more power to the Pope. We are called to retain doctrinal purity. But that doctrinal purity couldn't be said about the church at Thyatira. They were the church that went astray. Let's take a look at Jesus' words and warning to them found in **Revelation 2:18-29**.

We'll consider the same points today about Thyatira as we did last week about Pergamum.

The culture of the city

The character of Christ

The conduct of the church

The conquering Christian

## I. THE CULTURE OF THE CITY – v. 18a

The city of Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities Christ wrote to, yet He has the most to say to them. Traveling from Pergamum about 40 miles to the southeast you come to Thyatira. You will recall that the seven cities beginning with Ephesus form a crescent shape with Pergamum being the most northern city.

After Alexander the Great conquered the land from Persian rule, he destroyed many of the cities in his wake and built new ones. Thyatira was one of those cities that he built. It served as a military outpost acting as a warning to Pergamum of advancing enemy armies. The city was located on a very flat plain and had no natural defenses so it could only detain an enemy army for a short while allowing Pergamum time to better prepare for enemy advancement. It was destroyed and rebuilt a number of times. Alexander the Great entrenched the city in the Greek culture. It would continue to be influenced by it even after the city was taken over by Roman rule in 190B.C.

Not only did it serve as a military outpost, it was also a commercial center. The city was ideally situated in a very fertile valley between two rivers. It was noted for its abundant crops and especially

the manufacturing of purple dye. Acts 16 tells us that Paul was in Philippi ministering when he met a woman from Thyatira by the name of Lydia who sold purple cloth. She was probably representing her guild there in Philippi and was Thyatira's first convert to Christianity.

The structure of the town centered around guilds. Guilds were similar in nature to labor unions. If you wanted to do business in town, you needed to belong to a guild. There were guilds for the textile industries, guilds for copper and silver smiths, and a guild for those selling purple cloth. It was said that the minerals in the water were so exceptional for dying purple cloth that there was a market all over the world for this particular product, especially among royalty. If you had purple cloth from Thyatira it would be like having a Gucci purse, a Rolex watch or a Bentley car. It was a cut above the rest in quality.

Here was the problem though. Guilds were synonymous with immorality and idolatry. To belong to a guild you also had to pay homage to Apollo, the patron deity of Thyatira. If you wanted your guild to do well, you had to sacrifice to him. You had to participate in all the festivals in his honor. If you didn't, you might be the reason crops failed or merchandise didn't sell. You could be the reason the guild suffered if Apollo was mad at you and who wanted that on their conscience. You could be put out of the guild, lose your job, lose your status within the guild and community. You were ostracized.

We see that in our world today. Christians are being marginalized and restricted from doing business. We're told to fit in, be tolerant of other groups or religions even though we don't agree with what they do. If we don't fit in with the office politics we won't get the promotion, we're scandalized and blackballed. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to live as a Christian, to hold to doctrinal and moral purity in a non-Christian

world. Churches in America are caving in to cultural tenets and changing their doctrine to fit in with what they believe to be culturally relevant. It's okay for two Christians who are not married to live together.

It's okay for churches to accept into membership others who don't necessarily agree with their beliefs – one way or another everyone will get to heaven.

The church in Thyatira was facing a culture of extreme tolerance. If you didn't want to fit in you were shunned. They had to make important decisions. Now let's take a look at how Christ reveals Himself to this church. Let's look at His character.

## II. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST – v. 18b

Christ begins by referring to Himself as the Son of God. In this one statement about Himself Jesus is refuting the claim about Apollo, who was worshipped as the sun god. Christ was saying He is the only Son of God, not Apollo. It was to reaffirm to the Church the deity of Jesus.

Jesus then makes two statements about Himself.

**“His eyes are like blazing fire.”**

**“His feet are like burnished bronze.”**

In this description Christ pictures Himself in judgment. Christ wants them to know that His all-seeing eyes don't miss anything when it comes to what the church is doing or is going through – good or bad. It is a description of His righteous indignation over sin. He cannot and will not overlook it and He will deal with it, whether it's in the church or outside the church. His description is that of bringing severe judgment, judgment that will be just, righteous and fair. His judgment will be based on His own righteous character and will be consistent with His nature.

**Hebrews 4:13 “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and**

**laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give and account.”**

The warning of pending judgment does not come from His position as High Priest who knows and sympathizes with the plight of the church. It comes instead from His position as deity to bring condemnation for the Church's tolerance of sin.

Christ looks at the church from different eyes than what we do. We can look at our church or some other church and think it's the best or worst church in town, but Christ's penetrating gaze sees what each church is really like.

### **Ezekiel 8:1-9:10**

Here's the scene. Ezekiel is given a similar vision of what John sees with **“a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be His waist down He was like fire, and from there up His appearance was as bright as glowing metal.”** He was then taken to the Temple of God where the Israelites worshipped, where they brought their burnt offerings and animal sacrifices. But Ezekiel was taken into the inner chambers of the Temple to see what was really going on behind the scenes. What he was shown was appalling. On the outside worship appeared normal, perhaps even engaging and exciting. When he saw their worship through the lens of how God saw it Ezekiel had a much different perspective. Worship was really just a mask for idolatrous practices. They were just going through the motions to put up a front. Those who were supposed to be leading the people in true worship of the living God were actually worshipping detestable things. God was angry with them and He was bringing justice to bear on them for their idolatry.

If we don't want to be judged by the all-seeing, all-knowing God then let's make sure our worship is what God desires and deserves. Let's not judge other churches for what they may or may not do, God has His eye on them too, but He also has His

eye on us.

I want to read part of an article about a church in New York City that came from the Associated Press this past week.

Carl Lentz is not your typical pastor. Along with his half shaved head and slicked back Mohawk, he's dressed in his usual Sunday attire: black jeans and an unbuttoned denim shirt with a tank top underneath. His tattooed arms, including one with two guns crossed, peek out from under his rolled-up sleeves.

His Hillsong Church NYC holds at least six sermons every Sunday in a ballroom-style concert venue that has hosted such bands as U2 and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. People squeeze into whatever space they can find and take notes on iPhones as Lentz marches across the stage, peppering his sermon with Bible verses, jokes, pop music lines and street slang.

"If you're new to our church, we love you," says the 34-year-old Lentz. "Don't be alarmed by the craziness you see. One time somebody said, 'Y'all are crazy in your church,' and I said, 'You ever seen you dance drunk? Don't be judging us up in church.'"

New York has become a magnet for startup evangelical churches in recent years. There are currently more than 200 in Manhattan alone, according to Tony Carnes of the research project, *A Journey Through NYC Religions*, and Hillsong is one of the fastest-growing.

Much of Hillsong NYC's success can be attributed to its unorthodox leader. Lentz is a hyperactive, self-proclaimed insomniac who would rather stand than sit. His gift for gab lends itself to creating hype for the church. He loves hip hop music and often calls getting the word of God out "a hustle." At one service, he broke out Coolio lyrics. At another he called the biblical Saul the "LeBron James of Judaism." He is an avid basketball fan and player, and is a fixture at New York Knicks games. Lentz has established himself as his own brand. He has more than 67,000 followers on Twitter and

59,000 on Instagram, where you can find pictures of him standing next to Jay-Z and NBA star Kevin Durant. Justin Bieber posted a picture of himself eating lunch with Lentz, "talking 'bout our savior Jesus Christ."

I probably didn't get through the first paragraph and many of you had already formed an opinion about them. It's easy to do. **Who knows?** Maybe they've gotten worship right. Maybe we're the ones who are hiding behind the veneer of stained glassed windows and empty worship.

Here's the point: let's let Christ be the one to judge the Church down the road, just as He will judge us. Our task is to remain true to what we believe Scripture to teach and live it like we mean it instead of being condescending, critical, legalistic Pharisees. Let's let the judging be left to the One who has the eyes like fire and the feet like polished brass. He is the only rightful judge.

I think I digressed a bit there. Back to the passage.

### III. THE CONDUCT OF THE CHURCH – v. 19-25

#### A. There Conduct Was Remarkable – v. 19

As with the other churches Jesus comments on what He knows about them. He has an accurate assessment of them. He knows their work. He sees their activity. He understands their motives and He finds it to be remarkable.

There work was with love.

There work was with faithfulness.

There work was out of service to others.

There work was with perseverance.

There work was greater than when they first began.

When someone had a need they compassionately met the need.

When there was a need for volunteers, people readily volunteered.

When times were tough they stuck to it and didn't give up.

And Jesus concluded that they were doing greater things than when they first began.

Their efforts were with the right motive and for the right reason and Christ was aware of them. They are qualities to be commended for sure. May the Lord say that about us.

But Christ singles them out. He saw something He didn't like.

## **B. Their Concession Was Reprehensible – v. 20-23**

### **1. His comparison – v. 20**

To understand what Jesus is saying we need to go back to the Old Testament and Queen Jezebel to see why Christ would use this comparison here. Her story begins in **I Kings 16:29ff**

It all started when Ahab became king. **Verse 30** tells us that Ahab was the most vile and wicked king of Israel. He not only committed the same evil practices as Jeroboam who led Israel into idolatry by making another temple and crafting golden images, Ahab also married Jezebel who was the daughter of the king of the Sidonians. They worshipped Baal and Scripture tells us that with this marriage Ahab began to worship Baal as well. He built Asherah poles around which cultic rituals were practiced to Baal. He even set up an altar for Baal in the temple. He didn't build a temple for Baal, he used the temple in Samaria that had been built to worship God as a temple to Baal. **Verse 33** says **“he did more to provoke the Lord...to anger than any other king before him.”**

Jezebel not only incorporated Baal worship within government getting the king to practice this cultic idolatry, but in time she also got the nation of Israel to follow. Like all the other false religions of the day, Baal worship included gross sexuality along

with child sacrifices as part of its ritual. She made a temple to Baal in Jezreel with 450 priests. She had another 400 priests that ate regularly at her table. When they were soundly defeated and destroyed by Elijah on Mt. Carmel she swore to kill him. She conspired to have Naboth killed so that the sulking king could take possession of a coveted vineyard. She killed most of the prophets in Israel. She sought to drive out all worship of God in Israel and almost succeeded.

When Jehu rode into town wielding the sword in judgment for God against the house of Ahab, Jezebel dolled herself all up hoping to entice him with her charm. Two servants threw her out the window of the palace where she died on impact. After several hours Jehu was convicted. He felt that the daughter of a king should have a proper burial. When they went to retrieve her body, the dogs had eaten everything except her hands, feet, and head. Scholars say that not even the dogs would eat the very things that brought such wickedness. She died just as Elijah had foretold.

Now, let's go back to Revelation. There was within the church of Thyatira a woman who had a similar reputation. Like Jezebel, this woman was shrewd, ruthless, cunning, charming, charismatic, and deceptive. She had tremendous influence in the church of Thyatira. Some scholars believe she was none other than the pastor's wife. Most believe that she had risen to power within the church taking her cue from Lydia who was the first convert to Christianity in the city bringing the gospel back to Thyatira and leading the church until a pastor was established.

Christ is saying that the church in Thyatira had someone just like Jezebel in their congregation who was leading many of the people away from worshipping God. Just as Jezebel of the Old Testament had corrupted Israel, so this “Jezebel” had corrupted the church.



Scholar Herbert Lockyer writes that Jezebel is “a name which has come to mean in all ages a striking proverb for seductive power, worldly subtlety, and wickedness of the worst type. She had a great force of intellect and will. She was salvage and ruthless and prostituted her gifts to further evil.”

Perhaps Paul hits the proverbial nail on the head by defining what she may have been like and the doctrine she taught when he wrote to Timothy.

**“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. (II Timothy 3:2-5a)**

This woman in Thyatira had led many in the church away from worshipping the true God; she only had a form of godliness.

## 2. His condemnation – v. 21-23

**Did you notice something very interesting in this section?** It says that God gave her time to repent. Even those who are the most blatantly anti-God, He still gives them the opportunity to repent, but His patience will someday, one day end and He will bring judgment.

Christ identifies three groups within this church who will receive judgment.

The first is Jezebel. She would receive a bed of suffering. Some believe that it was some disease that she was given. I believe this is eternal punishment, that the bed she would lie on is death and hell. Like the Jezebel of the Old Testament, she would meet a gruesome but fitting end.

The second group receiving punishment is those who were her followers. On them Christ said they would receive intense punishment until they repent.

Hebrews tell us that those Christ loves He chastens to bring them back into a right relationship with Him.

We ought to be mindful that God won't tolerate our sin and that if some affliction or hardship comes our way we should first ask if there is some sin we have not confessed or some sin we are continuing to practice.

Some may continue in sin because they believe that even their ongoing sin is covered by God's grace. They figure if God is going to forgive anyway then go ahead and sin.

Others may continue to sin because they don't see God punishing the sins of other people. **Who's to say that God hasn't or isn't chastening them?**

The third group marked for judgment is **“her children.”** These are the ones who would be the second generation followers. They don't know any better or any different. It's what they grew up with so they just follow it without asking questions. Their fate is the same as that of this “Jezebel.”

Keep in mind that these were people in the church. That is quite a sobering condemnation for going astray and for leading others astray. Jesus warned that greater punishment will be on those who lead others astray that it would be better to have a millstone tied around their neck and drowned in the sea.

There is one more word given to the church.

## C. Their Charge Was Comforting – v. 24-25

It's the same word of encouragement that Christ gives to us when we are facing challenges when we see others giving in to the pressure to follow idolatrous or immoral practices with seemingly no judgment on them.

**Browsing Facebook this last week, there was a post by my friend. He was the one who contended for**

the faith, but decided to follow “Jezebel”. He was encouraging others who have gone through what they call “deconversion” to read an article about someone who grew up in a Christian home, won all kinds of awards in church, whose father taught her apologetics in order to defend her faith, but who walked away from Christ in college. She said it was freeing.

If we see someone start to fall away we need to come alongside them and strengthen their faith. Even though the majority of the church in Thyatira had shifted its doctrinal beliefs to follow the teaching of this woman, there still remained some faithful Jesus followers. Jesus was not going to give them any additional burden. They were apparently bearing enough of a burden already. He had but one simple charge. It’s the same charge He would give to us when we feel like the odds are against us, when we wonder if it’s worth the battle – **“hold on until I come.”**

If this were a western, He’d say “hold the fort.” Stand your ground. Don’t give up, keep going. This had to be comforting words to them. Comforting in the sense that Christ knew about the difficulties they were facing inside and outside the church. It was a reminder to them that Jesus was coming again, so be faithful.

Paul penned these words to his protégé and friend Timothy near the end of his life. **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me but also to all who have longed for His appearing.” (II Timothy 3:7-8)**

It can be discouraging when you look around and see the success of other churches or people who practice a dual faith of blending Christianity with other religions or worldliness. There is the temptation to join them, especially when we others

joining. There is a big movement going on today with something called Chrislam. It blends Christian and Muslim doctrine. Christians are buying into it. Where or how it started isn’t of concern. That it has is.

The true church of Jesus Christ must awaken.

The true church of Jesus Christ must arise.

The true church of Jesus Christ must avert false teaching so that it does not take root in the church.

We must stand up.

We must stand strong.

We must speak out.

Hold fast, Christ is coming. If we do not know the truth, it is hard to defend the truth. Read and study your Bible as if your life depended on it. Test what you hear with what Scripture teaches. Learn to detect truth from error. Don’t allow the wind of every doctrine to carry you this way and that. Be comforted that Christ is returning for His faithful followers.

**Verses 26-29** tell us what the reward is for those who stand in their faith.

#### **IV. THE CONQUERING CHRISTIAN – v. 26-29**

##### **A. The Conquering Christian Will Rule the Nations – v. 26-27**

**I Corinthians 6:2 “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”**

Near the end of his vision, John says in **Revelation 20:4** that he saw thrones set up for those who would rule.

Paul writes that **“If we endure we will reign with Him.” (II Timothy 2:12)**

This is a future promise, something we will receive in the future during the Millennial reign of Christ on earth. We will rule with Him. The responsibility to rule the nations was given by God the Father to the Son and the Son is giving the same authority to the conquering Christian. The word means more than

just ruling as in judging; it also means shepherding, of providing care – helping the wounded, caring for the afflicted, encouraging the fainthearted. That is what we can do now for those who may be tempted to follow some “Jezebel” because her ways seem more immediately rewarding.

Hold on, Jesus is coming. If we don’t we’ll become a casualty and become just like Thyatira, the church that went astray.

## **B. The Conquering Christian Will Receive the Morning Star – v. 28-29**

The morning star was the last star to come out just before dawn. When that appeared you knew that the night was almost over, daytime was near. What Christ is saying is that the one who overcomes will receive Christ Himself. His coming will end our darkness. **John Piper says that “Jesus Himself is our greatest reward.”** We will receive Him in all His fullness, in all of His glory, in all of His splendor. There isn’t a better reward we could receive.

The church is like a garden. Tend to it regularly and the weeds of false doctrine will be kept at bay. Let the weeds go and pretty soon they take over. Flowers can still grow but their beauty is overshadowed by the weeds.

The church needs to continually look after the weeds of false doctrine and pull them up or else like Thyatira some “Jezebel” will come and take over. Somewhere along the way that church had allowed those weeds of false teaching to take root and they didn’t deal with it. Many had begun to follow her. Some remained doctrinally faithful and morally pure. They didn’t want to fit in to culture, they wanted to wait for a heavenly future.

How firm a foundation, Ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

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