

*To the Seven Churches in Asia*

## **The Thyatira Letter**

*Revelation 2:18-29*

### **Introduction**

1. We live in a world full of “experts.” There are some who make bold claims of vast knowledge, and they deceive others into thinking that they don’t know or understand matters of common sense/knowledge. Some have lost the ability to think and reason for themselves.
  2. There are certain environments where these “experts” have a greater influence. When someone is surrounded by forbidden or dangerous things which are attractive or influential, they can be vulnerable to the deceptive ploys of such “experts.”
  3. In the spiritual context, it is not uncommon for some to like the idea of serving God, but who want to be free to engage in the vices of our age. These often claim a deeper understanding of God and His revelation which allows them to engage in such activity without consequence.
  4. The church in Thyatira had given a foothold to such an expert who claimed a “depth” of knowledge, and who was able to seduce servants of God to engage in worldliness and false religion.
  5. We must not be so arrogant as to think we have acquired a depth of knowledge which supplants revealed truth, and we must not tolerate those who do.
- I. Christ’s Portrait
    - A. The Son of God
      - a. In his vision, John saw **“One like the Son of Man” (1:13)** – emphasizing His humanity, especially the Man who ascended to the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdom, the Messiah.
        - i. The vision of glory is clear concerning His Divine nature.
      - b. His Divinity is clear – He makes Himself equal with God – He is omnipotent, and omniscient, and has all authority.
    - B. Who Has Eyes Like a Flame of Fire
      - a. **1:14** – vision of the Son of Man.
      - b. Penetrating vision – **Psalm 90:7-8**
      - c. **“I am He who searches the minds and hearts” (v. 23)**
    - C. His Feet Like Fine Brass
      - a. **1:15** – same word – **“as if refined in a furnace”**
      - b. **Feet – symbolic of procedure** – especially, the procedure of judgment – His coming is in judgment against the evildoing in Thyatira, and it is sure, strong, and will leave behind it tracks of fire.

- c. ***“You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:3*** – promise of YHWH to the faithful.).

## II. Christ’s Praise

### A. Their Works

- a. They are active – in a positive sense, as seen with the following.
- b. Like Ephesus, they are an active church, but unlike Ephesus, they have forces behind their works which are highlighted with great significance – it is not just work, but is work motivated by love, servitude, faithfulness, and perseverance.

### B. Their Love

- a. Their activity was not nullified through lacking substance – **1 Corinthians 13:2**
- b. ***“last [works] are more than the first”*** – contrast – **2:4-5** – ***“left your first love...do the first works”***
  - i. Ephesus left something good and important in the past and needed to return to it.
  - ii. Thyatira is noted as having not only holding on to the good and important character of her youth as a church, but she has built upon it.

### C. Their Service

- a. Their works and love were not turned inward, or isolated, but reached out in service of others – **Galatians 5:13** – service through love.
- b. They were visibly disciples of their Lord through their active ministering to each other – **John 13:14-17, 35**

### D. Their Faith

- a. Fidelity, faithfulness, stemming from their conviction in the truth – **Romans 10:17**
- b. Not mere belief, but a faithfulness to God based in the faithfulness of God – knowing and experiencing His faithfulness through His word and activity in their lives, they have remained devoted to Him.

### E. Their Patience

- a. *hypomonē* – “as steadfast adherence to a course of action in spite of difficulties and testings perseverance, endurance, fortitude” (ALGNT)
- b. All of these churches are experiencing trials of suffering – Thyatira is one who has remained steadfast despite them.
- c. **Romans 5:3-4** – they have allowed their trials to cause growth.

### F. Their Last Works More than the First

- a. **1 Thessalonians 4:1-2** – they were abounding more and more.

III. Christ's Protest

A. **"But I have this against you" (NASB)**

- a. Despite all the good that Christ could say about the church, there was one significant matter that placed it all in jeopardy.
- b. Pergamum had **"a few things"** held against it by the Lord – namely, maintaining fellowship in a spirit of tolerance with some who held certain errors.
  - i. Christ does not express any activity of immorality springing from that error at the moment.
- c. Thyatira appears to be in a stage beyond that of Pergamum – they maintained fellowship with some holding error but also had several influenced by the error to do immoral things and be unfaithful to the Lord.
  - i. **"allow" – "tolerate" (NASB)**
  - ii. **(v. 20) – "and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray"(NASB) – present, active – i.e. she is currently being allowed to do so.**
  - iii. She not only has been allowed to have but is currently having a great influence on some in the congregation – **"those who commit adultery with her" (v. 22), "her children" (v. 23).**

B. They Tolerate the False Prophetess Jezebel

- a. **Jezebel** – among the most notorious figures in Bible history.
  - i. **1 Kings 16:31** – Pagan, Daughter of the king of the Sidonians – increased the evil of an already wicked king.
  - ii. **1 Kings 21:25-26** – she stirred him up – corrupting persuasive influence.
  - iii. **2 Kings 9:22** – **"harlotries"** – in influencing Israel to spiritual infidelity in the worship of Baal; **"witchcraft"** – in her art of persuasion and influence.
- b. **"who calls herself a prophetess"**
  - i. Ephesus – **2:2** – had some claim apostleship – tested.
  - ii. I.e. claiming inspiration – **1 John 4:1-6** – warning, requires testing.
    1. **(v. 1) – "spirit" – "false prophet"** – i.e. one claiming inspiration of the Spirit of God.
    2. **(vv. 2-3)** – test claim by the fruit – teaching – compare to known truth.
    3. **(vv. 5-6)** – test who makes the claim – **"of the world"** – bearing such fruit, their doctrine reflects such.

- iii. Her teaching leads to infidelity and idolatry (v. 20) – like 2:14 – not necessarily instruction to do such things, but doctrine which leads one to do them.
  1. Such fruit shows the falsity of the claim to prophecy (God speaking) – cf. Matthew 12:33-35 – evil men will speak evil, not good things.
- iv. Doctrine of similarity to that of Balaam, and the Nicolaitans (2:14-15) – at the very least a doctrine which gives some license to do that which is contrary to the doctrine of Christ.
- v. “this doctrine...the depths of Satan, as they say” (v. 24) – sheds some light on what Jezebel taught.
  1. Christ identifies it as belonging to Satan – “synagogue of Satan”; “where Satan’s throne is” – Jews didn’t claim relation to Satan, but they were; Pergamum claimed fidelity to Rome, but actually it was Satan who ruled them.
  2. “depths” – bathos – “as knowledge difficult to understand deep secrets, deep-laid plans” (ALGNT)
    - a. 1 Corinthians 2:10 – “the deep things of God.”
    - b. Suggested connection to incipient forms of Gnosticism in the Jezebel doctrine based on this verse.
    - c. **Gnosticism** – a fusion of heathen philosophy and rationalism with Christian revelation claiming higher knowledge, or illumination – hence, “depth.”
      - i. Dualism of ascribing evil to matter and divorcing it from the spiritual.
      - ii. Consequence – 1 John 1:6, 8, 10 – walk in darkness, not have sin, even denying the sinfulness of some activities, still in fellowship with God.
    - d. 1 John 2:20-21, 24-27 – claim of a special anointing of the Spirit beyond the already revealed word – DECEPTION.
      - i. “depths of Satan” – cf. Colossians 2:18 – a claim of deeper insight, or new revelation that allows for looser morality and religious practice is actually of Satan and carnality.

c. The Consequence of Tolerance (vv. 22-24)

i. The Hearts of the Simple are Deceived

1. Pergamum is called to repent and take action against those who held the doctrine lest such lead to some letting go of Christ's name and faith (2:13).
2. Thyatira had tolerated Jezebel and her doctrine, and she had deceived several who accepted her teaching, and bore the fruit of it – (vv. 20, 22, 23, 24) – servants seduced, commit adultery with her, her children, **"have this doctrine."**
3. The pressures of the world are great – **1 John 2:16**
4. Some will stumble, but many times they stumble because of the inaction of those who know better – **cf. Matthew 18:6-7; Romans 16:17-18** – the tolerance by those who know better may not lead to their acceptance of the doctrine, but it will cause others to falter!

ii. Destruction

1. Christ shows that Jezebel's time is up – (vv. 21-22)
2. Christ shows that if others don't repent they will perish with her – (vv. 22-23)
3. **"I will give to each one of you according to your works"** – the Son of Man is not mocked – **Galatians 6:7-8**

IV. Christ's Prescription

A. Repent

- a. **The constant prescription for all the churches who Christ protests is repentance.**
- b. **The call is urgent, and serious** – refusal is to dive deeper into the sin and error, and further away from the Son of God.
  - i. **Jezebel – (v. 21)** – she was given time, but neglected it – **"she does not want to repent of her immorality." (NASB)**
    1. Christ knows the hearts of men, but her continued fruit of unfaithfulness despite the call to repentance shows her lack of desire for repentance!
    2. **"I gave her time"** – TIME IS NOT UNLIMITED – **2 Peter 3:9**
    3. Jezebel of Thyatira is found in marked contrast with Lydia of Thyatira – **cf. Acts 16:14** – the Lord opened her heart, where the efforts of the Lord only hardened the heart of Jezebel.

- a. Jezebel was so hardened and prideful, she made herself up in pride knowing of her imminent death – **2 Kings 9:30**
  - ii. **The children of Jezebel – (vv. 22-23)** – they are being given time to repent but warned about the failure to do so.
    - 1. A refusal will only lead to hardening as it did with Jezebel.
    - 2. However, they have opportunity to change the outcome – **“He who searches the minds and hearts”** will know either way.
- B. Hold Fast What They Have Till He Comes
- a. Not all had accepted the doctrine of Jezebel – they were not swayed by the claim of **“deep things” (v. 24, NASB)**.
  - b. Christ’s prescription for them was to **“hold fast”** until He comes in judgment against those who taught and followed the error **(v. 25)**.
  - c. **“I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have” (vv. 24-25)**
    - i. I.e. they have something already, but Christ is not going to give something in addition to it.
    - ii. They don’t need to be concerned about holding fast to something additional, but only to what they’ve already received.
    - iii. I.e. the **“burden”** is not their exposure to trial or hardship, but is something placed in their care.
  - d. Play on words – **“depth” = bathos; “burden” – baros** – from the same root, along with a phonetic semblance.
    - i. These claim to know **“deep things”** of revelation, and entice you with them, but I will not give you any other **“deep things”** than what I’ve already given to you.
    - ii. **Cf. Galatians 1:6-7** – different (*heteros*), which is not another (*allos* = **“other” in Rev. 2:24**).
  - e. When some claim to have some new, profound, deep knowledge that we just don’t have, **“hold fast”** to what we do have!
    - i. **“but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7)**.
    - ii. We need to be confident in what we’ve been given, and not doubt when someone comes along with “a new way of looking at things” – **1 John 2:20-21**
- V. Christ’s Promise
- A. He Will Give Them Power Over the Nations **(vv. 26-27)**

- a. Quotation of **Psalm 2:8-9** – Messianic, fulfilled in carrying out the divine mission of the cross, and ascending to heaven to receive a kingdom.
  - b. This is not power and rule that only comes at the end of time, but which those who are faithful to the Lord have now – **“has made us kings” (1:6)** – **“has made us to be a kingdom” (NASB).**
  - c. Jesus’ rule is in truth – **John 18:37**
  - d. This **“power”** (*exousia*, authority) and **“rule”** which Christ received, and which He promises us to partake in is through the truth of the gospel.
    - i. **Those who claim “depths” of knowledge beyond the revelation of the gospel boast in victory and liberty they do not have.**
    - ii. Hold fast to the gospel and you will have the power and rule over evil forces!
- B. He Will Give Them the Morning Star **(v. 28)**
- a. Of the brightest of the stars.
  - b. Christ is called the morning star – **Revelation 22:16**
  - c. Associated with revelation – **2 Peter 1:19-21** – in context where false teachers were denying the promise of Christ’s coming in judgment, the prophetic word would be as the morning star, dispelling the darkness of error.
    - i. That star is Christ.
    - ii. These claim to have certain **“depths”** that you have not reached.
    - iii. However, fidelity to the **“Son of God”** and the revelation He has given is the light that is needed, the only true light.
  - d. They claim prophecy and deep revelation, but if you hold fast you will be the one with the light.
  - e. The morning star was the harbinger of the light of day – there are deep things we do not yet have, but we will bask in the glory of God one day and know Him fully – **“They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.” (Revelation 22:5)**

## Conclusion

1. We must understand where the spirit of tolerance gets us – a total compromise of faith, and a corruption of our lives.
2. We must have confidence in the truth revealed to us and reject anything which lays claim to a deeper knowledge when it contradicts what we already have confirmed.