

**Introduction:**

Every Christian's life has a spiritual trajectory. There's a visible course that it takes. Some people begin with great enthusiasm. Then, as time goes on – it could be weeks, months or years – things aren't new and shiny anymore and the Christian life seems dull. This is especially true when people see there is a cost to count in order to stay faithful to Jesus. If relationships or work suffer because of our faith, then sometimes the work or relationships win. Jesus is considered a lower priority.

We saw one way around this struggle last week in Pergamos. Some in the church began teaching that compromise with the world was perfectly fine. A little drunkenness, a little debauchery, a little partying in the temples of idols – it's not going to send you to hell. You're forgiven, right? So who cares? Indulge!

In Pergamos this got pretty bad and Christ reprimanded them for it. If possible, here in Thyatira things seem worse. Both churches had good elements. In Thyatira those good elements were better than most. If we compare this church to Pergamos, we might say the contrast within the church seems greater. The good parts are better and the bad parts are worse.

So we definitely want to avoid this church's grievous error, but we also want to emulate what it did well. The best compliment that Jesus probably gives them is that their last works are more than their first. That's what we want to imitate. The course that we want our lives to follow looks like this:

**We want our last works to be more than our first.**

**A Look at the Passage:**

**2:18 Thyatira** This was the smallest of the seven cities that receive letters, but the letter it gets is the longest. The Jewish population was not significant, nor was Roman emperor worship. This was a working class town known for its trade-guilds. There is more evidence of these guilds in Thyatira than in any other city in Roman Asia. They included: potters, bakers, leather-workers, metal-smiths, slave-dealers and those associated with the manufacture of cloth and clothing. There was a well-known purple dye from Thyatira, so there was guild for fabric dyers.

In **Acts 16**, Paul was in Troas and received a vision of a man saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" So he went. In Philippi he attended a prayer meeting where a woman believed and was baptized. She later hosted Paul and his friends in her house. This first known convert in Europe was named Lydia. She was a seller of purple from – three guesses – Thyatira.

The city later became a center of a sect called the Montanists – splinter group from the early church who valued their own prophets above the original apostles.

**A Note on Trade Guilds** Each had their patron god. Numerous trade guilds meant festivals to each guild's patron – and all the activity that went with that. From the point of the guilds it was all in good fun: sacrifices to the favorite god, a little feasting, drunkenness and debauchery. Purely recreational and very good for the public morale. Invite clients, invite vendors and it's also good for business. This was the spiritual climate in Thyatira.

Remove the veneer of religion and this is just the sort of thing we might encounter at an office party, a trade show or a convention here in America. When things get wild the Christian is forced into an awkward spot. Do I abandon my colleagues? Appear arrogant? Let them accuse me of being judgmental towards them? "I really want to stay faithful to Jesus, but..." We may have faced these situations ourselves.

**Son of God** This is the only place in Revelation where this term is used. Jesus is asserting His authority as He begins to speak.

**Eyes like a flame of fire, feet like fine brass** These go back to **1:14-15**. See also **19:12**. In a moment he tells them that he searches their minds and hearts. He understands our inner intentions and desires. He sees it all – better than we do ourselves.

**2:19** Longest list of positive qualities. Only this church is commended for either **love** or **service**.

**Love** and **faith** are inward motives; **service** and **endurance** are outward fruit.

Every church should want Jesus to say this about them. Think of Ephesus. They had left their first love and needed to go back and do the first works. This church has more works now than ever – and Jesus sees them all. **Their last works are more than their first.**

Let's consider all the people who serve here in ways that are usually unseen: the cleaning, the work outdoors, the sorting of clothes and stocking of food pantry shelves. We could go on and on and on. No one else sees it, but we all benefit from it in various ways.

Of course Jesus sees other things too – and this may not be encouraging. He sees something else happening in Thyatira and not happy at all with it.

**2:20** **a few things** Most manuscripts omit this. There is really only one problem, but it's huge.

**prophetess** Anna in **Luke 2:36**; daughters of Philip **Acts 21:9**. This woman, however, **calls herself a prophetess**. Jesus does call her that. She is a self-proclaimed prophetess – and deceiving the servants of Jesus. Not a good idea.

**Sexual immorality, things sacrificed to idols** The same problems that we saw in Pergamos. Different source, same results. Many paths lead to God? More lead to idolatry and sexual sin.

**Jezebel** Probably not her real name. Like the doctrine of Balaam in the last letter, Jesus is pointing the church to the Scriptures to help them interpret what is going on. Know your Bible.

In the books **Kings**, Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. King Ahab of Israel took her as his wife. They immediately introduced the Canaanite worship of Baal.

*1 Kings 21:25 But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.*

The prophet Elijah opposed Ahab and Jezebel directly. In tough times God raises up tough servants. In **1 Kings 18**, He orchestrated a big showdown on Mt. Carmel against hundreds of her prophets of Baal in calling down fire from heaven.

In **1 Kings 21**, Jezebel convinced Ahab to take his neighbor Naboth's life so that he could take his vineyard. Elijah prophesied how she would die, and that dogs would eat her body.

**You allow or you tolerate** The problem, as Jesus sees it, is more than the mere existence of such false teaching or such a false prophetess. It is that she is allowed access to people in the church. God's servants are being seduced by this error because nobody opposes it.

**2:21 I gave her time** Jesus is not jumping to hasty conclusions. **She did not repent.**

**2:22** Jesus has already decided Jezebel's fate. He is still giving her followers some time.

These letters are primarily written to real churches in Asia in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Still, like other letters in the NT, they are Scripture, so they are applicable to all churches at all times.

Thus, we might consider the **great tribulation** of this verse in an eschatological sense. Christ's coming in **2:25** more or less has to be considered this way. As we go through the book we'll be seeing the awful things that will come upon the earth in those days.

**2:23 I am He who searches the minds and hearts** Jesus is reminding us of those eyes like a flame of fire. He sees all of our works, but more importantly, He sees our motives, desires and intentions. This can be both encouraging and discouraging. He sees all those secret times of prayer, but also knows those secret hateful thoughts.

**according to your works.** 4x more in this book. See **18:8, 20:12-13, 22:12**

**We want our last works to be more than our first.**

**2:24** This remnant may or may not be in the minority. Think of the initial works that Jesus praised.

Two marks of the faithful remnant. They don't have Jezebel's **doctrine** and they have not known **the deep things of Satan**. Jezebel and her followers are apparently using this name for some of their practices or teachings. They may have been probing the depths of evil in order to show that they had authority over them. In any event, it was a really crazy notion.

### **What would motivate these Christians to fall for this garbage?**

Thyatira was a smaller, tight-knit community and the church was surrounded by rampant idolatry. There is probably nothing that Jezebel is advocating that was unheard of in the wider society. The difference was that she didn't approach it as a pagan priestess. She seems to give it a pseudo-biblical twist and then messes with people's heads in the church.

**2:25** The nearness of Christ's coming is an incentive to holding fast what we have – to stand firm in the face of various pressures to compromise with the world. Let's hold onto what Christ has given us. Don't drop it. Hold it fast.

**2:26** The only overcomer to receive a double promise. Reference to millennial kingdom.

**Keeps my works** When we get past the rhetoric of the battle – thinking in terms of overcoming or being victorious – this is what overcoming means. Alexander MacLaren called it *"Dogged persistent obedience to Christ's commandments."* That's what victory looks like while we are waiting for Jesus to return.

**Power over the nations** This takes us into the next verse.

**2:27** See **Psalm 2** about the rule of the Messiah. When Jesus reigns we will reign with Him.

**2:28** **and I will give him the morning star** Not easy to explain.

**2 Peter 1:19** *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the **morning star** rises in your hearts;*

**Revelation 22:16** *"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and **Morning Star**."*

John Walvoord makes the following observation,

*The Scriptures do not explain this expression, but it may refer to participation in the Rapture of the church before the dark hours preceding the dawn of the millennial kingdom.*

This would tie in nicely with the apostate believers going through the Great Tribulation and the faithful in Thyatira being instructed to hold fast what they have until Jesus comes.

**We want our last works to be more than our first.**

**2:29** This reminder is in every letter. It tells us that all of this is written not only for these churches personally, but for all of us as well.

## **Conclusions:**

The church in Ephesus was guilty of discernment without love. This church is guilty of love without discernment.

## **Compromise for the sake of earning a living.**

Many of us work in jobs that constantly put us in what seem to be gray areas regarding our faith. This can be a huge challenge.

1. It's possible that the gray areas are really more black and white than we think. A little prayer, a little more meditation on Scripture, some counsel from trusted friends and who knows? Things might become clearer than they are now.
2. Beyond that, what about the areas that really are not gray?
  - What happens at the office party when everyone is getting drunk? Are we joining in even though as Christians we know we should not?
  - Are we ever confronted with immorality in the work place? That's not a gray area. The Christian is required to get out of there.
  - How about lying to the boss or stealing from the boss?
  - And then the reverse. What if the boss asks you to lie or steal? These are not gray areas. Sometimes we have to stay faithful to Christ and take the consequences. The Christians in Thyatira probably regretted a few things after they got this letter from Jesus.

## **The "Absolute" Authority of Relativism.**

Few people we'll meet appreciate absolute truth in the religious sense. The Greco-Roman world didn't either. They were very tolerant of all sorts of religion. Judaism seemed odd with its belief in a single all-powerful God. Christianity was odder yet, because the Christians said that the Jews now all had to put their faith in Christ. Obviously many would not.

The environment we live in is very much the same. You can believe anything you want as long as you don't claim it is actually true – true in the sense that others ought to also believe it.

So the temptation for Christians is now to compromise in that area. Well, these people are so much fun, so apparently loving and kind, how can I honestly believe that they are wrong about their beliefs? But as Bible commentator Craig Keener points out,

*To suggest that God has other means of salvation in addition to faith in the message about Christ, then, runs counter to the center of the Christian faith.*

The truth is going to sound intolerant. It's controversial; it's irritating; it's like scratching a cheese grater on the opinions of the world. Sri Lankan Bible teacher Ajith Fernando gives the following counsel,

*We are always respectful of people. We never treat them as inferior. But when we know that Jesus is the truth and that other ways will not lead to salvation, we must be intolerant of the untruth that has led them astray – though we will always be respectful of the person who holds this view. Our perception of the truth will cause us to want to persuade them about the truth. But our respect for them will influence the way we present that message.*

### **Stay faithful to the end.**

No form of traditional Christianity believes that we can walk away from Christ and ultimately be saved. Christ is not optional. We have to hold onto what we have till Jesus comes.

And more, we should learn from the good qualities of this church in Thyatira. **Their last works were more than their first.** They were full of faith and love and this led them into service and perseverance. Let Jesus say that about us.

*We must ever have shining far before us the unattained heights which it may yet be possible for our feet to tread. We must never let habit stiffen us in any one attitude of obedience, nor past failures set a bound to our anticipations of what is possible for us to become in the future. We must never compare ourselves with ourselves, or with one another. We must never allow low thoughts, and the poor average of Christian life, in our brethren, to come between us and that lofty vision of perfect likeness to Jesus Christ, which should burn before us all as no vain dream but as the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us. – Alexander MacLaren*

**Philippians 3:12-14** <sup>12</sup>Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Read verses to the overcomer in **2:7, 11, 17 & 26-28**

**May our last works be more than our first.**