

THYATIRA: GOD'S FAITHFUL FEW

By Rev. Lawrence Baldrige

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(Rev 2:18 KJV) And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

(Rev 2:19 KJV) I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

(Rev 2:20 KJV) Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

(Rev 2:21 KJV) And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

(Rev 2:22 KJV) Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

(Rev 2:23 KJV) And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

(Rev 2:24 KJV) But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

(Rev 2:25 KJV) But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

(Rev 2:26 KJV) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

(Rev 2:27 KJV) And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

(Rev 2:28 KJV) And I will give him the morning star.

(Rev 2:29 KJV) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

(Rev 2:18 NIV) "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

(Rev 2:19 NIV) I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

(Rev 2:20 NIV) Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

(Rev 2:21 NIV) I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

(Rev 2:22 NIV) So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

(Rev 2:23 NIV) I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

(Rev 2:24 NIV) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

(Rev 2:25 NIV) Only hold on to what you have until I come.

(Rev 2:26 NIV) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

(Rev 2:27 NIV) 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.

(Rev 2:28 NIV) I will also give him the morning star.

(Rev 2:29 NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

William Barclay tells us: "It is an odd fact that the longest of the letters to the 7 churches was written to the church in the smallest and least important of the 7 towns." The most important fact about the city of Thyatira is that it was a city with Roman soldiers stationed there, who stayed there to guard Pergamos. If invaders got past Thyatira, the important city of Pergamos would fall. But another important truth for Bible scholars, it was the hometown of Lydia, the seller of purple that Paul won to Christ in Phillippi to become the first person converted on European soil. For the most part, religiously, the emperor was worshipped. Also the city had a famous oriental fortune-teller called Sambathe, and she gave out oracles to those who were financially able to consult her.

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* tells us: "Although not a great city, it was nevertheless important through commerce in wool, linen, apparel, dyed stuffs, leatherwork, tanning, and excellent bronzework. Associated with its commerce was an extensive trade guild or labor union network which must have played a prominent role in the social, political, economic, and religious life of the city."

Whether a great city or not, Christ had a church in this city, just like he has one in this community; and all His churches are eternally important to Him. Christ speaks to the church with warnings and with promises. Christ speaks to the Church with absolute authority, for He alone is the absolute authority of the church. He is the Lord of the Universe. He is the creator of the world. He speaks, and He alone has the right to say what He says. In speaking to this church, some 45 miles due east of Pergamos, our Lord first gives His credentials to speak. He says: ""These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." Vs. 18. The *Interpreters Bible* tells us that emperor worshippers considered the Caesar the incarnate Apollo, and writes, "Thus the celestial Christ, the Son of God, is set against and above the emperor, who as the incarnate Apollo is the son of Zeus." Jesus is here declaring His Lordship. He is saying, "I see everything. Nothing escapes me. And, I have the power to walk upon the emperor and to crush with my foot all earthly powers."

The Lord of All speaks and he first gives the church a general commendation, for he says, "I know your works, I know your charity, I know your faith, I know your patience, and that your last works are better than your former works." Christ first commends before he blames, he praises them before he faults them. Then, even though he speaks a general word of judgment against the church, if we look very carefully, He also speaks to three groups in the church and the three groups are identified by Him. I want us to look at these three groups that are all included in our Lord's word this morning.

I. THERE WERE THOSE, FIRST OF ALL, WHO COMPROMISED COMPLETELY WITH THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF THAT SOCIETY.

The question is why did they compromise so completely, and even teach others that fornication and eating meat offered to idols was the thing to do? Why did they break God's two commandments?

A. Perhaps they compromised with that society because Compromise offered them a financially successful life. The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* gives us our first hint of that: "Associated with its commerce was an extensive trade guild or labor union network which must have played a prominent role in the social, political, economic, and religious life of the city. Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries." These guilds, we are told, were very much like our 'labor unions.' If you were not a member you could not easily make a living. So, for the sake of financial success, you did what the 'guild' said, and you also, to become successful, became involved in their excesses and their revelries. Compromise was the way to achieve the "Thyatiran Dream" much like it is the way to accomplish the "American Dream" today.

A strong woman in the church, called Jezebel after the infamous wife of Ahab, called herself a 'prophetess' and taught the people that this was the way they should live. She must have been like the father who told his son who was starting his first job, "Compromise, my son, compromise." That still is the way people 'get ahead' in this world; but some things are wrong, some things are rotten, some things stink, and if they do, we should not compromise and do them. There are two rules we should follow, "What would Jesus do?" is one of them. The other is, "What does the Bible say?" And we need to live and die by these rules.

Jezebel had her disciples in that church in Thyatira, and God promised to cast her upon the bed of affliction because she didn't repent when he told her. He also promised tribulation to her followers, and death to her children.

B. But Jezebel and her friends likely compromised because it was religiously convenient to equate the gods with her god. Perhaps she reasoned like some of our own weak-minded professors in colleges, universities and seminaries, "They have their religion and I have mine, and theirs is to them as important as mine is to me. After all, we're all heading for the same place even if we take different paths." Blind mouths! They simply fail to see that there is a big difference between loving people of different

religions, and in thinking their religion is equal to ours. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” If Jesus is the true and only Son of God, if He is Divine, then my faith in Him and my loyalty to Him cannot allow me to equate Buddhism and true Christianity, Islam and true Christianity, Hinduism and true Christianity, and any other world religion and true Christianity. I add true before Christianity, because many Christian groups fall outside the mainstream of the religion that Jesus taught. However, Jezebel and her group joined in with Baalism, and the Nicolaitans, and became so inclusive that they became irrelevant. Once they crossed the line of fornication and idolatry, they were no longer Christians, at least not true Christians.

C. Perhaps another reason for their compromise was that they found it safer and easier to compromise. To live in a world dominated by the Roman doctrine of emperor worship, to live in a society that demanded from them revelry and loyalty to the state religion, was to live in the face of danger each and every day. The paganistic demand was ‘worship Caesar!’ To do so, and along with that, to follow the pernicious and perverted values of a godless society--that was the path of least resistance, the pathway of ease, the broad way that inevitably leads to destruction. The Bible says,

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). I read this statement recently:

“When an individual or a congregation has the attitude of compromise in regard to spiritual values and truths, dark days are ahead. All who strive to be Christians feel a certain amount of pressure from the world. Through the strength that Christ gives, we can overcome the world and its temptations.

The individual or congregation that tries to satisfy everybody ends up by pleasing nobody. If we start compromising, we will end up serving the devil. The man should have put up his sign and then stood by it. This is what we are to do in life. Accept God's will for our lives and stand on His promises.”

When they resisted the Living Christ, when they broke two of the ten commandments and called that religion, when they followed Baalim and worshipped Caesar, Jezebel and her group were on the slippery slope of hell. So is any group in any church. So is any religion anywhere.

II. THE SECOND GROUP IN THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA WAS THE GROUP THAT TOLERATED THE FIRST GROUP.

Listen to God’s word: (Rev 2:20 NIV) “Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.”

So says the *New International Version* of the *New Testament*. When it comes to following God’s word or living in sin, we need to be intolerant, not tolerant. Yet a group in the church, probably the great ‘silent majority’ refused to speak up and to do the right thing; so Christ also is heart broken by their toleration of such sinful practices. In fact, Christ announces His great disappointment of their ‘casual’ Christianity. They just

simply stand by and let the church grow more and more corrupt. What a shame! Why did they behave in such a negative way?

A. Perhaps, first of all, they were in denial. We are such an interesting species, are we not? We can pass by a scene where someone is beating up an old lady, and turn our face the other way. That wasn't what Christ meant when He said, "Turn the other cheek." We are responsible to others to help them if we can, and we are not being responsible when we look the other way. Sometimes the shock of seeing a fellow Christian sin causes us to dismiss the sin because we cannot believe that they would do it. But in Thyatira it was continual, and the church simply dismissed what they were doing, and were under the judgment of God for not speaking out. One of the great leaders a few years ago made a statement that I haven't forgotten. He said, "If we are guilty for every idle word, we are also guilty for our idle silence."

B. Perhaps the Christians in the 'silent majority' at Thyatira were without any Christian depth. Maybe they were what Paul called 'carnal' Christians. (Rom 8:7 KJV) Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Paul told the Corinthians:

(1 Cor 3:1 KJV) And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

(1 Cor 3:2 KJV) I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

(1 Cor 3:3 KJV) For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

(1 Cor 3:4 KJV) For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

The closer we are to God the more we see the very ugly nature of sin, and the more we love the Lord the more we hate sin.

C. The main reason for their silence is probably found in the words of the *King James Commentary*: "Since the city was controlled by a female-dominated dye and cloth industry, it is possible that the church here suffered from female false teachers. There was a self-proclaimed prophetess at Thyatira whom Christ calls **Jezebel**. She was leading the church into false doctrine, idolatry, and immorality just as the Old Testament Jezebel had done to Israel (cf. 1 Kin. 16; 2 Kin. 9). She refused to **repent**, and therefore would be judged along with her followers and her **children** (or disciples)."

The Christians that Jesus speaks about tolerated Jezebel and her followers because they were afraid of losing their jobs. They wanted to protect the status quo. They didn't want to rock the boat for to do so would put them out of work. They were therefore guilty of the sin of not trusting God to help them whenever they did the right thing.

III. THE THIRD GROUP IN THYATIRA WAS THE GROUP THAT JESUS COMPLIMENTED AND GAVE HIS WONDERFUL PROMISES.

They were the group that I have labeled "God's Faithful Few." Thank God we have that 'faithful remnant' in all our churches; and, by the way, they do all the work, too. My most hearty Thanksgiving this Thanksgiving season is for them. There were three distinct things about the "faithful few."

A. They Were the Persecuted.

(Rev 2:24 NIV) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

(Rev 2:25 NIV) Only hold on to what you have until I come.

This probably is a reference to gnosticism. Jezebel was teaching that the way you really learn the 'deep things of God' is by committing these sins. Jesus turns this around and calls them "Satan's deep secrets." There are those in the church who want to know the truth about God. They have been around throughout the *Old* and *New Testament*. In the *Old Testament* they were called the "faithful remnant." Thank God for that loyal group. They are in every church. They put Jesus first. They follow the Word. They know the Lord and want others to know Him too. They have truly been 'born again' and they will not give in to the false doctrines around them. They are founded and grounded upon the Word of God.

But that group is always persecuted for their faith. They are called by all the labels of the world, and by all the labels that can be invented by the world. They are laughed at, scorned, ridiculed, fired, and, at times, physically murdered. You would think that our enlightened age would say, "These are hate crimes." But the only one who comes to the aid of persecuted Christians is the Lord Himself.

B. Not only are they Persecuted, they are Perseverers. I am not certain there is such a word, but the Faithful Few always persevere. They will not be defeated, and they will not be deceived. You know, in any endeavor only those who refuse to lose are the real winners. In the San Antonio paper these words were written about a great Christian author: "Just say his name and most Christian readers will know who you're talking about. In fact, they've probably read at least one of his books. His book sales are exceeded only by the likes of Billy Graham and Charles Swindoll.

Max Lucado has a last name many people struggle to correctly pronounce, but they sure know who he is and they love his books. His book *When God Whispers Your Name* was named the top-selling book of 1994. Word Publishing Company considers a book to be successful when a first-time author sells 50,000 copies and an established author sells 100,000. Each of Lucado's fourteen books have sold more than 300,000 copies. But it hasn't always been that way for the Church of Christ minister. In 1985 he put together his first book while serving as a missionary in Brazil. That book, *On the Anvil: Thoughts on Being Shaped Into God's Image*, was rejected by fifteen publishers. What a treasure the world would have missed had he given up on writing." Lucado refused to lose. So must we.

C. But these last, the faithful minority, are always the ones who have The Promises.

(Rev 2:26 NIV) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

(Rev 2:27 NIV) 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.

(Rev 2:28 NIV) I will also give him the morning star.

(Rev 2:29 NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To God's Faithful Few come God's faithful promises. He first will give them Authority over the nations. They will rule with Him when He returns. Then He will give them the Morning Star. In Rev. 22:6 Jesus is called "the Bright and Morning Star." His promise to the "Faithful Few" is the promise of Himself; it is also the promise that we will shine in glory like Jesus. This promise is reserved for the faithful only, and for no others.

However the society around us, God wants us to be faithful. However bad the church becomes, God wants us to be faithful. His word to us is, "Hold on to what you have." Brothers and Sisters, I for one am going to 'hold on to what I've got', for you see, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold, I'd rather be His than have riches untold." Hold on to what you've got; be faithful; the promises are to you!