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c. **THE CONDONING CHURCH!**

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d. **Letter to the Church at Thyatira – 2:18-29**

[THE CHURCH THAT PERMITTED SIN]

1. Background on the City of Thyatira

Thyatira was located some 20 miles South-East of Pergamum on a valley road in the alluvial plain between Hermus and Caicus Rivers. When Rome decided to penetrate into the great peninsula of Asia Minor, the city soon became prominent. The city derived her strength and wealth from the fact that it was a nodal point of communications.

“The city was founded, doubtless on some Anatolian site, by Seleucus I, Alexander’s general who, of all four successors of Alexander, inherited the largest area. Seleucus’ kingdom stretched from far beyond Antioch of Syria to the Hermus valley, where its frontiers pressed hard on those of Lysimachus, who held part of the old Ionian littoral (the region along the sea shore) of Asia Minor. Seleucus planted a demobilized group of Alexander’s Macedonian veterans there, to form a determined barrier against all attempts to disturb the border. In 282 B.C. the Philetaerus rebelled, and the dynamic state of Pergamum, destined to endure for a century and a half, was founded. The new state formed a buffer area between Seleucus and Lysimachus, but a state so founded could not be militarily alert, and Thyatira, a guard post on the eastern road, stood in the front rank against possible aggression from the East. The history of the place . . . suggests that Thyatira on its wavering frontier often change hands, as Syrian or Pergamene power flowed or ebbed on the borderlands.” **[The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, “Thyatira,” by E. M. Blaiklock, pages 743-744.]**

Sandwiched by two stronger cities which used her as a buffer zone, Thyatira never possessed any acropolis like that of Sardis or Pergamum. It had only strategically value in that it could be used to repel an attack from enemies at a moment’s notice. This would hopefully break the impetus of advancing enemies. The people of Thyatira depended not so much therefore on a natural defence but rather on individual personal valour. The religion of the city also reflected this. “The Macedonian soldiers who were first settled there adopted the worship of a local patron hero, who appears on early coins as a warrior on horseback, armed with a battle axe; hence the symbolism of the risen Christ in John’s apocalyptic letter (Blaiklock, 743).”

From 133 B.C. onwards the region of Asia Minor was totally controlled by the Romans after the last of the Pergamenian kings bequeathed his kingdom to the rising power. Roman peace (*Pax Romana*) brought tranquility to Thyatira. Under Claudius, Thy

atira began to issue her own coins once more, for the first time after a lapse of two full centuries. The abundance of the Thyatira coins discovered through excavation points to the fact that they thrived in their commerce and trade for up to the 3rd century A.D.

It was a commercial and trade and communication hub which attracted many dispersed Jews to Thyatira.

Commerce could very well be the problem in the church in Thyatira. In order to do business in the city one has to be part of a local guild. The businesses were numerous. Inscriptions mentioned trades such as workers in wool, linen, leather, and bronze, potters, bakers, dyers, and slavers. Each of these trades had their own guild. These trade guilds had their own demanding social life, pagan ritual, and their periodic feasts. This posed a serious problem to the Christians in Thyatira. To follow Christ or the licentious demands of a Thyatiran way of life was a constant question they had to face.

“It was difficult to abstain from the guild festivities without losing one’s business and social acceptance. To conform meant exposure to the licentious background and pagan ritual that marked the guild dinner (Blaiklock, 743).”

2. Background on the Church at Thyatira

Paul’s first convert in Europe was Lydia, a Thyatiran who sold purple cloth in Philippi, which was hundreds of miles from home. Acts 16:14, *“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”* Dyed cloth and garments, and bronze armour were well known exports of the city. “A coin of Thyatira shows Hephaetus, the divine smith, hammering a helmet on an anvil, and the word in the apocalyptic letter for ‘fine brass,’ ‘*chalcolibanos* (Rev 1:15; 2:18),’ found no where else, may have been a Thyatiran trade name, caught up for local colour (Blaiklock, 743).”

As is the case with the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum, we do not have any record regarding the founding of the church in Thyatira. What we have is basically found here in Revelation. Perhaps the church was founded by Paul as one of the outreaches of his ministry whilst he was in Ephesus for 2 long years (Acts 19:10). Or it could have been one of his disciples who founded it, having heard Paul’s teaching in Ephesus and returned to Thyatira.

3. The Church of Thyatira in Revelation – 2:18-19

i. Character of Jesus Christ – 2:18

Revelation 2:18, "*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;*"

‘The Son of God’ (only reference in the whole book of Revelation) – is a title reserved only for the Lord Jesus Christ. This phrase emphasized Christ’s deity and his oneness with God the Father in very essence, power, glory and truth.

In Rev 1:13, Jesus called Himself the Son of Man emphasizing His humanity. This points to his self-humiliation and identification with the Christians at large who were being persecuted for their faith. Hebrews 2:17-18, "*Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*" Jesus sympathizes with us in our trials and will always be there for His children in their time of need. He is able to succor and strengthen us when we cry to Him.

But the church at Thyatira was not a church in need of sympathy but of rebuke. Therefore Christ came and calls Himself “The Son of God.” Hence Jesus comes as the Son of God here. That means He comes as the Divine Judge rather than a sympathetic High Priest.

‘Eyes like a flame of fire’ – Fire burns through everything. Christ is described as having eyes like a flame of fire which refers to a piercing vision which sees all things. Nothing can be hid from Him. No disguise could be covered-up or hidden from Him. All hypocrisies will be exposed. Every motive good or bad will be made manifest. God will see through the works and motives of every man.

‘His feet like fine brass (chalcolibanos)’ – Feet are used for trampling. Fine brass depicts Christ’s purity and holiness. Hence He tramples upon sin and impurity based upon His perfect and highest standard of purity and holiness.

ii. Commendations on the Church – 2:19

Revelation 2:19, "*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*"

“know” i.e. absolute knowledge.

‘works’ – good deeds that they have done. This was mentioned twice perhaps to drive home the point that Jesus Christ REALLY knows their works very completely and thoroughly. There is no mistake in His evaluation of their deeds.

‘charity’ – “agape” love a God given love is mentioned here. Their motivation was love for Christ. They retained and maintained their first love. It was also a love based upon concrete actions.

‘service’ – The word is “*diakonian*” which is the root word for deacon. It refers to acts of service rendered to one another. The Christians in Thyatira were helpful and caring. They looked after each other’s physical needs.

‘faith’ – They trusted God to see them through. Faith is one of the most indispensable gifts from God, for God had said that without it no man can please God. They were faithful in the discharge of their responsibilities. In other words, there were true genuine Christians in Thyatira exercising genuine faith.

‘patience’ – the word is “*hupomone*” which refers to perseverance in the face of difficult circumstances. When you have love and faith, it will result in service and patience. They had both of these fruit of the Spirit.

‘The last to be more than the first’ – The deeds of the Christians at Thyatira had increased and become more consistent. They had matured and grown as they persevered. In other words they were growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as they continue to walk by faith and not by sight.

Thyatira was a growing, serving, loving, faithful and persevering church. As far as the outward appearance was concerned it had top marks in nearly every detail.

These were all commended by Christ. They did good!

4. The Sin Committed in the Church at Thyatira – 2:20-23

iii. Sin of Jezebel – 2:20

Revelation 2:20, "*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.*"

Not one but a FEW things against the Christians at Thyatira. The problem was not external. The problem was internal.

“Jezebel, the woman who called herself a prophetess” – Who was Jezebel? Undoubtedly it was not the woman’s real name. It was a nickname given to her because her actions and character resembles that of the OT Jezebel.

Notice that she called herself a prophetess BUT the leaders allowed her to call herself. She was a domineering woman.

Jezebel was the infamous wife of King Ahab who brought great calamity to Israel. 1 Kings 16:30-33, "*And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.*" [emphasis added]

1 Kings 21:25-26, "*But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.*" [emphasis added]

Jezebel was a prophet killer. 1 Kings 18:4, "*For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.*"

She was so filled with hatred and pride and audacity that she was not even afraid of Elijah. There was absolutely no fear of god in her! 1 Kings 19:1-2, "*And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.*" [emphasis added]

2 Kings 9:7, "*And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge **the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel.***"

Jezebel controlled her husband, the king. 1 Kings 21:5-7, "*But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.*"

1 Kings 21:11, "*And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them.*"

Jezebel's other sins included whoredom and witchcraft. 2 Kings 9:22, "*And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?"*

“sufferest that woman Jezebel to teach” – “sufferest” is the Greek word “eas” which literally means “to permit,” “to allow” or “not to hinder.”

Matthew 24:43, "*But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*"

Luke 4:41, "*And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.*"

1 Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

Teaching the Word of God is a most noble task and regarded as one of the highest honours bestowed upon God children. The leaders in Thyatira allowed Jezebel to teach God's Word even though they knew of her wickedness and immoral conduct.

Ministry of Moses -- Exodus 18:20, "*And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.*"

Exodus 24:12, *"And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them."*

Ministry of the High Priests -- Leviticus 10:11, *"And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses."*

Ministry of the Prophets -- 1 Samuel 12:23, *"Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way."*

Ministry of God -- 1 Kings 8:36, *"Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance."*

Psalms 25:4, *"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths."*

All leaders of God's people must be able to teach -- Ezra 7:25, *"And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not"*

1 Corinthians 4:17, *"For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."*

1 Timothy 3:2, *"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach,"*

Trademark of Continuity in faithfulness -- 2 Timothy 2:2, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."*

Severe Judgement upon errant teachers -- James 3:1, *"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."*

Women not allowed to teach in the church -- 1 Timothy 2:12, *"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority*

over the man, but to be in silence." Public teaching is not allowed here but not private teaching say at home when the mother instructs the children, servants, younger women, or her own husbands in her own home or even a private instruction to another man as did Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:26.

“sufferest that woman Jezebel to seduce God’s servants (slaves)” – “seduce” in the Greek means “to lead astray,” root word for “wandering.” In this case Jezebel led many astray into fornication and eating food offered to idols. The teaching of this woman resulted in a wayward life of sin and sexual immorality.

“which led to fornication” – Greek word is “porneusai” which means “to play the harlot,” from which we get the English word for “pornography.” All sexual sins are included in this word. Adultery, homosexuality,

“which led to eating food offered to idols” – It was more than just the eating of the food but rather a participation of idolatrous worship and all the rituals that accompanied it.

Biblical guidelines on eating food offered to idols are found in 1 Cor. 8 and 10 as well as in Acts 15. If the Christian is not aware that he has eaten food offered to idols he has not sinned. The idols are nothing because there is only one true and living God. They have eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear and mouths that cannot speak.

But the moment you KNOW that the food has been offered to idols, the Christian must refrain from eating it. The reasons are stated here in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, *“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours **become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.** For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? **But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.** Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”* [emphasis added]

1 Corinthians 10:25-30, *“Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, **This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake:** for the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man’s conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?”* [emphasis added]

How did Jezebel do what she did? Perhaps it was due to these two reasons:

- a. She may have espoused **the philosophy of dualism**. This was prevalent in contemporary

Greek philosophy. When brought into the church it basically teaches that spirit is good but the flesh is inherently evil. Since God is only interested in the spirit, and that the flesh is evil anyway, why bother to live a holy and sanctified life in this carnal body of ours. Let everything go and indulge in all the sexual sins and carnal activities that your heart desires. God does not mind for He knows and only the spirit matters to Him.

b. She may have also taught **the twisted form of antinomianism**. God's grace is sufficient for all sins. Let us sin more that God's grace may more abound. God will forgive all sins anyway. We cannot live a sinless life anyway why try? Sin all you want for God will always forgive.

c. The leaders of the church in Thyatira CONTINUED TO ALLOW ("sufferest" – present tense and literally it means "to leave alone") Jezebel to perpetuate her teaching and in leading others into sin. **They CONDONED her grievous sins CONTINUOUSLY. They did it knowingly and with full knowledge of what she was doing in the church. By their very act the leaders are just as guilty if not more guilty than Jezebel!**

d. What could possibly be some of the reasons that prompted the leaders to allow such wanton acts of sin by a woman to continue on? Could it be that she was rich and influential? Or that she might have a rich and influential husband in society or in the church? Could she have been a very "fierce" woman that the men in the church including the leaders were afraid of her? Perhaps the leaders were mere puppets and they were in the leadership for name only? Whatever the reason or reasons were, the leaders were more to be blamed than Jezebel!

NOTE: **It is one thing to sin but it is a very serious sin indeed to lead others into sin against God.** Matthew 18:6-10, *"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."*

iv. Punishment Due to the Followers of Jezebel --- 2:21-23

Revelation 2:21-23, *" And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not."*

“Time was given to Jezebel to repent” – The patience and longsuffering of God are not infinite. There is only so much time and so many opportunities for sinful man to repent. After that it will be judgement time. Jezebel openly and defiantly refused to repent!

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 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.”

Judgement comes upon –

Jezebel – she will be cast upon a bed i.e. made bed-ridden. Probably a very grave and serious illness will befall her which will ultimately result in death. In other words she will die.

Jezebel’s followers – Great tribulation, not the tribulation that will befall those in the last days as Jesus was referring to Christians who were led astray by Jezebel. This word refers to distress or trouble. Probably severe chastening that might even lead to physical death. Remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They must repent of their sin right now. The axe is about to fall on them if they do not!

Jezebel’s children – probably refers to her spiritual children rather than her biological children. If the church was founded around the time of Paul’s two-year stay at Ephesus then it would be about 40 years old by the time they receive this letter. A new generation of Jezebel followers would most likely have arisen from within the church. These are the direct disciples or co-teachers of Jezebel. They propounded the same wicked doctrines of Jezebel. They will be killed with death. The way they die will be so obvious that the children of God will know that it will be a direct judgement from God.

God’s children must know that Jesus Christ is the omniscient One who will search into the very depths of our motives that is behind every deed done and word spoken. He will judge us according to every deed done based upon every motive.

Remember the word “works” mentioned twice in verse 19!

NOTE: The seriousness of doctrinal and behavioral purity is underlined here by God. Jesus Christ will take whatever steps necessary to purge His church of whatever sins that will contaminate His witness in that church.

5. The Reader's Response – 2:24-29

Revelation 2:24-25, *“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. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”*

Jezebel and her followers – have not realized the depths of Satanic influence in their perverse teachings and way of life. “In their perverse, libertine, licentious false theology, they believed they could do so with impunity. This pre-Gnostic teaching said that one was free to engage the sphere of Satan and participate in sins of the body without harming the spirit. Since the spirit belongs to God, their twisted logic went, what does it matter if the body attends idolatrous feasts and engages in sexual immorality? They imagined themselves to be free to explore the satanic sphere and then brazenly come to worship God (**MacArthur**, 104).”

The deadly diabolical nature of Jezebel's sin was not fully known to the followers of Jezebel but they kept on doing it. It is Satanic in origin even though it was propounded by a woman. Wrestling not against flesh and blood but against principalities in high places is a very real and truthful Revelation. Remember this truth and hide it in your heart. Do not treat erroneous doctrine and a sinful life lightly. Behind it is Satan himself like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour.

To those who have not held onto to Jezebel's evil doctrines “**HOLD FAST**” (Aorist imperative—focus on action and command) – to the truth and what you are standing for right now. The idea of “hold fast” implies that it will not be easy but you have to do so nonetheless.

Revelation 2:26-29, *“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 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. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

‘he that overcometh (pres. participle—lit. “to conquer”) **and keepeth** (pres. participle—lit. “to keep watch or guard and prevent from escaping”) my works to the end” – The only exception out of the seven churches in Revelation where the exhortation here includes challenging the believer who overcomes that *he must also keep!* The present tense in both instances reveals that it is a continuous effort without any let up. There is “relaxation” or “taking leave” from being faithful in the work of God!

‘power over nations and rule with a rod of iron” – refers to the millennium kingdom that will come in the future. The believer will be given the privilege to rule and reign with Christ in the millennium!

Perhaps this encouragement points to the fact that the leaders in the church of Thyatira were the culprits who have allowed women like Jezebel to rule the church. But one day the faithful believers will be the ones ruling and it will be

swift justice when that day comes. Members who used erring church leaders as an excuse to indulge in sin or remain in sin will be judged by God. There is no excuse for sin. Members who are faithful must remain faithful because it is the right and godly thing to do as new creatures of Christ Jesus!

‘Morning Star’ refers to Jesus Christ. Revelation 22:16, *"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."* Thus Jesus promised all His faithful believers that they would possess Jesus Christ just as He possesses them.

The conclusion is the same in the other earlier churches, let all who have ears to hear listen very carefully for our eternal destiny depends upon how we react to what we hear today!