

**Thyatira: Extra-Biblical Authority**  
**Revelation 2:18-29**  
**May 9, 2021**  
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Well let's turn together to Revelation, as we continue to make our way through this wonderful book that's been given to us, that unfolds the past and the future. We're looking at the seven churches and tonight we come to the church in Thyatira. Revelation 2, and I'll begin reading in verse 18. Revelation 2:18: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them - I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Ironically, this is the longest of the seven letters, but it was written to the church in the smallest, youngest, and least important city of all. This letter is more difficult to interpret than some of the others because there are a number of references in it to details of life in the first century city that are now unclear. Archaeologists have explored very little of this ancient city and, frankly, there's very little left to explore because it was destroyed so many times, as we'll learn in a moment.

But the message to this church is clear. Here is a summary of this letter to the church in Thyatira. Christ warns His church about the devastating dangers of tolerating or accepting extra-

biblical revelation. With each of these seven letters, as we're walking through them, we're using the same basic outline and will do so again tonight because it's the outline that Christ Himself uses.

So, as we study this church, we need to begin by considering the introduction to the letter, the command to write in verse 18. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this..." First of all, **as we've** done, let's consider the character of this city. It says write to the church in Thyatira. The name is probably an ancient name that means the castle or city of Thya. And so, there's not much else for us to learn about its name. As far as where it's located, this is a map that orients you. It is, as you can see, just south and southeast of Pergamum. Of the seven churches, Pergamum is the farthest north. When you leave Pergamum, on the journey to Sardis, you head east along the river and then southeast. And the journey from Pergamum to Thyatira is about 40 miles. The city itself was built in a long valley that runs north and south, connecting the Caicus and Hermus valleys. The landscape, where this city is located, is essentially flat. It's situated on a main highway that runs all the way from Byzantium to Smyrna. Here are some pictures. There is very little that has been recovered from ancient times, but here are a couple of pictures of the ruins at Thyatira. You can see there was a collimated road at one point, and these are all the remains that are left. And you see some of the arches that would have spanned that magnificent colonnade, coming into the city.

So, why are there so few ruins and excavations in the city of Thyatira? Well, the city has an interesting and checkered history. It was founded in about 290 BC by Seleucus I, one of the generals of Alexander and he was the founder as well of the Seleucid dynasty. Later, a man named Lysimachus, who ruled Pergamum (that northern city), took the city of Thyatira. Now the city of Thyatira had no natural fortifications. So, Lysimachus made it a simple military outpost that served as a kind of sentinel to temporarily delay invading armies, that were approaching Pergamum, just long enough so that the city could be warned, and the city could become prepared. So, **it was** like a holding place for invading armies; that really was its only purpose. Because of its lack of defenses and because of its vulnerability (it was on a flat plane), it was captured countless times throughout history. In fact, in the records we have in ancient

history, most of the references to the city of Thyatira have to do with it being captured. That's really all we learn. And that's why there's so few ruins because the city was destroyed again and again and again, as armies moved back and forth through these valleys.

The Romans took Thyatira in 190 BC and with the Pax Romana, the Roman peace, the city was no longer needed as a military outpost. So ironically, around the very time in the same decade that John wrote this book, Thyatira had just come into its own. It had just turned from being a backwater military outpost, into becoming a great commercial manufacturing center. It had a strategic location on several important roads that cross the region. It was a natural stopping place between cities for caravans traveling those roads. The city's commerce apparently reached even across the Aegean into Greece and Macedonia as we'll see in a moment.

The sort of mark of this city was something perhaps you read about in history. There were trade guilds like our trade unions - labor unions that are the modern counterpart of them. Sir William Ramsay, an archaeologist, writes, "More trade guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian cities. The inscriptions, though not especially numerous, mention the following." So, here are some of the trade guilds or labor unions, if you will, that were there in Thyatira in the first century: wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers (that is those who dye fabric and cloth), leather workers, tanners (tanners of skins), potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths (that is metal workers who worked in bronze). All of that was in this area. So, you can see, if you can sort of use your sanctified imagination, here is **this** little military outpost **on a** lonely road that, when the Romans take over and the peace comes, just explodes into this major manufacturing center, driven by these trade guilds.

Lydia, you remember, the first convert in Europe - she was saved actually **in** Philippi under Paul's ministry there. But she was from this city, Thyatira, and she too was involved in the textile trade. Acts 16:14 says, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God [that is, she was a proselyte to Judaism], was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." It's interesting the fabric that's mentioned there and the dye, the Turkey red dye, that was used to produce those purple

fabrics that Lydia sold, came from the madder root, a plant that grew commonly in the valley where this city was situated. And so, all of that became a natural product of this place.

There's a city, there where Thyatira was today (you saw even some glimpses of it in maybe one of the pictures I showed a moment ago), the city that's there is about 100,000 people and it's called Akhisar. Now this city was not a religious center in the same way that Smyrna and Pergamum were. However, let's go back to the trade unions, to the trade guilds, because those were central in this town, again, if you can picture **the** explosion of manufacturing in the final decade of the first century, the time that John wrote. So, what really dominated the city was its trade unions. That's what dominated the culture. There were many of them that flourished, and they were inseparably interconnected with the social and religious life of Thyatira, not like ours that you can sort of leave it at work. These were integrated into both social and religious life. These trade guilds were wealthy, and they were powerful. It came down to this: if you wanted to practice a trade in the city, it was essential for you to be a member of the appropriate guild.

The divine guardian of the city was the god Tyrimnos, often identified with the Greek sun god Apollo. It was Tyrimnos that was the patron of all the commercial guilds and here's the rub: if you belong to one of those guilds, when you went to the regular celebrations of your particular guild, it's centered on the worship of this god. It was at the center. He was honored and worshipped at all civic events. Now that gives you the background to why some of the problems happened, that we're going to discover tonight.

So, let's move then. We've seen the character of the city. Let's move on to the history of the church. Verse 18 says, "To the angel of the church in Thyatira..." Again, there's no mention of this church being founded in the New Testament. However, as I mentioned a moment ago, we do read about the conversion of one woman who was from this city, Lydia. She was in Philippi, so she was across the Aegean Sea in Macedonia when she was converted under the ministry of the apostle Paul. But it is possible that she maintained a home in Thyatira. She was obviously a very successful businesswoman. And it's very possible that she had a home still in the center of the manufacturing activity in Thyatira and she crossed the Aegean to find new markets in Macedonia, Philippi, and beyond. And so, we know in Acts 16 that some of her household were

saved with her, there in Philippi. And it's possible that some of them traveled back to Thyatira from Philippi, and that Lydia and her household were in some way responsible for the founding of this church. It's more likely, however, that the other cities in this area or, like the other cities in this area, Paul founded this church during the three years he spent in Ephesus (described in Acts 19:10 when he was reaching out from Ephesus to all of these surrounding towns). That's likely when this church was founded.

That brings us then, in this introduction, to the description of Christ. Borrowing from the vision and chapter 1, Christ here describes Himself, introduces Himself, to the church in Thyatira in three ways. First of all, as fully God, He reminds them that He rules His church. Verse 18: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God..." Now, you read that, and immediately you think, "Well, yeah, I mean **that** occurs everywhere. That's a very common expression." The truth is, this is the first and only time in the Book of Revelation where this title for Christ occurs. The reason that Christ uses it for Himself here, is He's about to quote from Psalm 2 which speaks of God's Son. Psalm 2:7: "I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" By using this title for Himself, Christ reminds this Church of His majesty, His deity, His authority, His right to rule, the fact that He rules now, and He will rule during the millennium. It also reminds them of His deity. He is of one essence with the Father. He is the Son of God. He rules His church.

Secondly, as He introduces and describes Himself, He describes Himself in this way: with penetrating omniscience, He evaluates His church. He goes on to say, "who has eyes like a flame of fire..." The eyes of Christ, as they're described here, are like torches that light up everything He looks at and reveal what He sees to His eyes, as it really is. As, if I were to put it in modern terms, I would say like this: like a laser, Jesus looks into everything and sees the reality of it as it is. This was the same description back in chapter 1:14. This same description will come again at the second coming in chapter 19:12. The point is this: the character of every church, including this church, is transparent to Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is essentially saying to them, "Listen, I see everything. I see everything." He sees everything with crystal clear clarity. His penetrating omniscience looks into the heart of this church, and He knows what is going on in the church as a whole and in the heart and mind and life of every individual.

By the way it's the same thing today. You know, we puny human beings like to think that we can think things and do things that nobody knows. Are there things in your life that you think nobody knows? You're lying to yourself because Jesus sees just as clearly what's going on in your life, and in your heart, and between your ears just as He did this first century church - penetrating omniscience. And it evaluates His church with perfect accuracy and clarity. And we'll see that in a moment, as He explains what's going on in this church.

The third description He gives of Himself here, tells us this: in light of His personal holiness, He purifies His church. The third description there in verse 18 are "His feet are like burnished bronze", like a gleaming metal. Now this polished bronze here **is** probably a refined alloy of copper or bronze with metallic zinc. In chapter 1, it's described as metal that is still in molten form, when it's been made to glow in a furnace. This was a really familiar image in a city known for its metal **workers** guild. Metal, that's still in a molten state, is like a crucible for everything it touches. In the same way, as Christ walks through His churches, He purifies them like metal in a furnace is purified, His personal holiness purifies His church. As one author put it, "With such eyes, the Son of God can see into the most distant and darkest places. And with such feat, He can stamp out all opposition to His rule." This is the introduction Christ gives to the church in Thyatira.

That brings us, secondly, to the body of the letter, the state of the church. This is verses 19 to 25. Here, in the body of the letter, Jesus explains exactly the condition of this church. Now, as He does with all the churches about which He has something good to say, He begins with a commendation of the good in verse 19. Notice what He says: "I know..." Seven times, to each of the churches, He says "I know". And here He says to this church, "I know". His penetrating omniscience knows everything.

He says, "I know your deeds..." Now, their deeds are further explained in the following four qualities. There are two sets of them. The first set identifies motives; the second set, results. Isn't that interesting? Jesus knows motives and He knows results. He knows what drives you, and He knows what actually occurs, what happens. And here it's positive. He knows the good.

**We** tend to concentrate on the fact that Jesus knows the bad. But here He says, "I know the good". I know what's good in this church. He begins by saying, I know "your love". That's interesting, isn't it, in light of what He said to the church in Ephesus? He says, "I know your love..." This church was known for its genuine love for God and for others. And He says, "and faith". Faith, here, is not faithfulness probably. **It's** probably a continuing trust, a continuing trust in Christ and His word. You keep on trusting Me and you keep on loving God and others. He says and I know your service. You see, love for God and for others leads to serving them. And this church was known for its loving service. And He adds and your perseverance. Faith in God and His Word allow you to endure, to persevere. And this church was known for its persevering, trusting faith.

And then He adds this: "and I know that your deeds of late [that is the more recent ones] are greater than at first." He may mean more in number, or He may mean better in quality, or He may mean both. Remarkably, this church, unlike the church in Ephesus **that was** sinking down, this church was still growing in all of these wonderful qualities. Listen! Don't miss this. This was a remarkable church.

But all was not well in Thyatira because Christ next turns to a correction of the sin in verses 20 to 23. Let's look at what's going on in this church. Verse 20: "But I have this against you..." Christ not only knows the good, and He does know the good, but He also knows the bad. And here's what He has against them: "that you tolerate..." It's an interesting word. The Greek word means "to allow a margin of freedom, to leave it to someone to do something, to allow, to tolerate." That's what was happening in the church in Thyatira. They were tolerating one specific false teacher who was wreaking havoc on this church.

Who was this person? Well let's look at her. First of all, consider her character. Verse 20 says, "you tolerate the woman Jezebel..." Now it's clear from the context of this letter, that the rest of the letter, that this was a specific woman who was known and influential in the church. And don't miss this! This was a woman in the church who professed the Christian faith, but Christ calls her Jezebel. Now that's not likely her real name. It's pretty unlikely that she would be named that. I mean, people in the ancient world were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures,

familiar with the detestable character. I mean, anybody here name your daughter Jezebel? No! This is a pseudonym. This is a pseudonym for this woman that reveals her true character. Now if you're familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the name Jezebel is infamous. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre (modern Lebanon area). And she married Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel. And Jezebel's name was to become proverbial for evil in Israel.

Look at 1 Kings. Turn with me to 1 Kings for a moment, chapter 16. Here we meet this woman. 1 Kings 16 and look at verse 29. "Now Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat..." You remember, Jeroboam was the one who built **those** idolatrous images so the people in the north of Israel wouldn't go down to Jerusalem to worship. He was afraid of losing their loyalty. He really started syncretic kinds of worship and idolatry in the north. And the Lord says, "as though it had been a trivial thing for him [Ahab] to walk [follow] in the sins of Jeroboam...he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him." That's what Ahab did.

The story goes on to unfold about Jezebel. Let me tell you what Jezebel did. Once Jezebel married Ahab, she set out to eradicate the worship of Yahweh in the northern kingdom. And she set out to institute the worship of her childhood and patron deity, Baal. Her father's name was Ethbaal. This was the family god. And she set out to make sure Baal was worshipped. I wish I had time to describe to you just how wretched the worship of Baal was. But let me just say this: he was responsible for the storms and therefore responsible for the crops and was seen as the one who produced fertility. They even pictured the rain as representing his semen fallen **falling** to earth, to impregnate it. And you can only imagine all that happened in the worship of Baal. And Jezebel encouraged that, promoted that, sought to stamp out the worship of Yahweh, and replace it with that. She herself engaged in sexual sin. 2 Kings 9:22 speaks of the harlotries of Jezebel because that was involved in the worship. That's what the high places of the Old Testament were for. They were like platforms for the voyeuristic deities to watch immoral activities happen.



That's how you prompted Baal to send rain upon the earth. This was unbelievably wretched stuff.

Now, back to our text. Think about this for a moment. Christ's point here is that there was a woman in this church in the first century, who had the same character as the Old Testament Jezebel. She engaged and she tried to get others of God's people to engage, like Jezebel did, in idolatry and sexual sin. Now how did she go about this? Well, I want you to notice her claim. Verse 20: she "calls herself a prophetess". She calls herself a prophetess. Two times this word prophetess occurs in the New Testament. The other is in Luke 2:36, regarding that woman Anna, you remember, who identified Jesus as the Messiah in his infancy. Jezebel, here, claims special revelation from God. And that those revelations qualified her to be a teacher in the church. Obviously, there were people in Thyatira who supported her claim, who believed her claim, and who followed her teaching. That was her claim. So, think about this. Here's a woman in the church, Christ describes as Jezebel, who says I'm giving you revelation from God.

So, what was she saying? Let's consider her content and its consequences. Verse 20 goes on to say, "and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." Literally, she teaches and deceives my slaves. That's interesting. Jesus calls the people who are being led astray by her His "slaves". This shows that false teaching can impact true believers. True believers can fall into sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:15 and following). True believers can fall, for a time, into idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:21). But our Lord was very clear about the devastating danger of being the one who is a stumbling block, who leads His people into sin (Matthew 18). He says it's better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea, if you're going to lead my children astray. That's what this woman did. This self-proclaimed prophetess taught the believers in Thyatira, notice, to "commit acts of immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Now, clearly, this woman claimed divine revelation. She claimed that God had personally revealed to her that it was okay for Christians, in the church in that city, to attend the pagan temple feast and even to engage in the sexual sin that typically surrounded pagan worship.

Now, if you're a thinking person, you should be asking the question, why would any of the Christians in that church have ever been tempted to believe her? It's because what she was offering was a handy escape from their cultural situation. It was a transparent justification to avoid persecution. Remember those powerful trade guilds? It wouldn't have been possible for you as a Christian, in Thyatira, to earn a living without belonging to one of those guilds. But membership in the guilds meant regular attendance at the pagan feast, and that meant eating meat which had been sacrificed to an idol and engaging in the sexual sin that went along with pagan worship. If you refuse to join the guilds, you were out of a job. If you join the guilds and refused to show up the feast, you were out of a job. So, this woman comes in with a solution. She offers a handy solution. She claimed that she was a prophetess. She had received fresh revelation from God, that God understood their dilemma, and that He was going to allow them to participate. Now you can see why that message would be very tempting to the believers in such a situation. Her teaching allowed them to maintain their profession of faith, but without any social or financial pressure.

So, on what basis would she argue this? I mean, how do you go about arguing that this is okay? Well, we don't know for sure. But I think it's possible, probably even likely, that she took a very similar approach to those in Corinth, 40 years before this. You remember what they said in Corinth? She may have argued that since an idol isn't really anything at all, what's the problem with attending an idol's temple (1 Corinthians 8:4)? She may have argued, like the Corinthians did, that sexual decisions were a matter of Christian liberty (1 Corinthians 6:12). You remember, they had a slogan in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful for me..." They tried to rationalize their sexual sin as if it were an issue of Christian liberty. They tried to say, "Look! Listen, it's not that important. I love Christ. I'm still a committed Christian." She may have also argued, as those in Corinth had, that the body and its deeds didn't ultimately matter (1 Corinthians 6:13). Again, this was one of the slogans in Corinth: "Food is for the stomach and stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them." This was likely a slogan of the libertines in Corinth to excuse their sin. They argued that, just as God **made** food and the stomach for each other, God made the body for sexual intimacy. So, indulging the body sexual desires, in whatever way we choose, it's as natural as eating. Besides, the body was for this life only. It was a kind of platonic dualism that said, "What I do with my body doesn't matter. It's

my soul that matters." It's possible those are the arguments she used. But don't miss this. Her trump card, her ultimate argument that this was okay was the authority of God Himself, because she said she was speaking revelation from God as a prophetess.

Now that brings us to her recalcitrance, **her** stubbornness, her defiance. Verse 21: "I gave her time to repent [Christ says] ..." Isn't that just like our Lord? I mean, I read about this woman and, if I'm Christ, zap! She's gone, right? I mean... But not our Lord. He says I gave her time to repent. Despite the horrific nature of this woman's sins, Christ was incredibly patient with her. Just like the Amorites, you remember. God left **His people** Israel in Egypt for 400 years because... Remember what He said in Genesis 15? "...the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete [full]..." 400 years! Now what he says here when he says, "I gave her time to repent", that implies that she had received a warning, possibly from the apostle John himself before he was exiled on Patmos. Remember, he served in all these churches. Whatever... however that warning came, sadly she ignored it and she ignored the Lord's gracious invitation and she continued to pursue her sin. Verse 21: "...and she does not want to repent of her immorality." So now Christ's patience is done.

Can I say to you? If you're here tonight **and** you're presuming on the patience of God, God is incredibly patient. But there is a line in the mind of God. Cross that line and you're done. And that was true with this woman.

He pronounces, because of that, her condemnation. Verses 22 and 23: "Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness..." So, we start with the woman herself, with Jezebel the prophetess. "I will throw her on a bed of sickness..." The word "of sickness", you'll notice, are in italics - been added by the translators. That's their interpretation. Literally, I will throw her on a bed. Now there's been a lot of interpretations of what this bed could be. Some have said it's the couch on which she reclined to eat at **the** idol feasts. In other words, Christ is saying I'm going to judge you as you engage in idol worship. Others say no this is **her** funeral bed. He's going to kill her. A third interpretation is **this is** her bed in hell because she was unwilling to repent. The fourth and most common interpretation and the one that I believe is true and I go along with the translators here in the NAS, is a sick bed or a bed of suffering that ends in death. She's going to

be punished. Think about this: she's going to be punished in the same place she regularly sinned against the Lord she claimed. In the case of believers this happens. 1 Corinthians 11:30, speaking of those believers in Corinth who had sinned at the Lord's table: "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." That is, the Lord has disciplined them in death.

But what about this woman? One author, Wall, puts it this way. Listen to this. This is very interesting. "That she is to be thrown upon a bed of suffering may indicate that she championed the opposite, that is, an escape from suffering." He goes on to say, "Her heresy may very well be the ancient equivalent of the current gospel of prosperity." So, Christ says, "I'm going to throw her on a bed of sickness that's going to end in her death. I'm done."

Verse 22: "and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation..." "Those who commit adultery with her" refers to those of Christ's slaves - remember we just saw that, true believers, who were swept along with her teaching and who followed her horrific example. Christ says, "I'm going to cast those slaves of mine who have followed her teaching and leading into great tribulation." Some see this as referring to **the** seven-year tribulation period. It's more likely a reference to Christ's severe chastening in this life - great tribulation, chastening. But again, notice Christ is going to restrain the discipline if there's repentance: "...unless they [**My** slaves who've been sinning against Me] repent of her deeds [that is the deeds they learned from her]."

Verse 23: "And I will kill her children..." Here's another group. So far, we've dealt with the woman. We've dealt with true believers, Christ's slaves, who were carried along in this. Now here's a third group. "And I will kill her children with pestilence..." It's not likely these are her actual children, born out of perhaps her immoralities. We can't be certain who these people are, but it seems to me this is a different group from those in verse 22. Those were believers who followed her teaching. Here, are those who are called her children. They are her offspring. What's the point? They share her nature. In other words, these are people not just carried along by her sin, but people who have completely bought into her teaching and are freely, like her, teaching others to do the same. Christ says He's going to kill them with pestilence, with disease.

As a result of the judgment that Christ said He would bring on this woman, on those sinning believers who followed her example and on her devoted disciples, notice verse 23, as a result of that: "...all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts..." The Greek word translated "minds" is actually "kidneys". In the Greek way of thinking, in the ancient world, the kidneys were seen as the seat of the will and the affections. The heart was the seat of the thoughts. Christ said that when He judged this woman, and those who were following her, all of the churches would know that He searches the emotions, the wills, the thoughts of all those connected to His church. Verse 23: "...and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." Each one - makes this very personal. He responds to each person based on what He finds. But this was really Christ's assurance, I think, that the innocent ones in the church in Thyatira would not be punished along with the guilty. He would, instead, search the hearts - find out who was guilty and deal with them.

Now that brings us to the church's crime. As we continue to look at the correction of the sin, it brings us to the church's crime. What exactly was this church's crime? We've seen the woman, but what was the church's crime? Well, it was threefold. First of all, it was allowing a woman to exercise a teaching role with the whole church. 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids a woman **to** teach or exercise authority over men in the context of **the** gathering of the church. They were violating this obviously in allowing this woman this role. Secondly, they were compromising the truth for personal prosperity. I'm going to come back to that, so I'll just mention it. And then, thirdly, they were replacing the authority of Scripture with extra-biblical revelation.

So, when you look at those three, here's the question: what was the real sin in the church in Thyatira? What should we be on the lookout for in our church, in our lives, and the churches around us? It's very interesting. Think about this for a moment. The result of this woman's teaching is the same result as the teaching in Pergamum that we saw last time. And that is attending the pagan temple feast, participating in the sexual sin that went with it - same results. But it's crucial to note that the authority of the false teachers in these churches is entirely different. In Pergamum, the source of their teaching appears to have been a combination of a misuse of the Scripture and pragmatism. In Thyatira, the source of authority was extra-biblical

revelation. This woman claimed to be receiving revelation directly from God and the church was tolerating it and accepting it.

So, the church's real sin, don't miss this, was tolerating extra-biblical authority and revelation. Now I hope you can see, as I do, remarkably this teaching bears huge resemblance to the modern charismatic prosperity gospel movement, because what you had here was a false claim of extra-biblical revelation. And what was the goal, ultimately? It was financial. It was the prosperity that came with belonging to the guilds in that city, practicing **your** trade in a city that was exploding financially.

That brings us back to our text. As we continue to look at the body of the letter, we've seen a commendation of the good, in verse 19, a correction of the sin, in verses 20-23. In verses 24 and 25, we see a call for perseverance: "But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira..." "The rest", by the way, does not mean that most of the church had followed Jezebel. The same expression is used in other places in the New Testament, speaking of a majority. So, we don't know how many followed her or how many did not. Christ is simply speaking to the rest of the church. And He identifies them, notice in verse 24, in two ways - those "who do not hold this teaching" and "who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them". That's the teaching - the deep things of Satan as they call them. Probably, Jezebel and her followers were making this claim that they knew the deep things of Satan. What in the world is going on here? They claim that they knew experientially about the depths of Satan's kingdom but had experienced it and suffered no spiritual harm. This group was probably an early form of Gnosticism. If so, it went like this: before you could have victory over Satan, you first had to know and experience his works - the deep things of Satan. Bill Mounce, in his commentary, describes it this way: "To fully appreciate the grace of God, one must first plumb the depths of evil. Later Gnosticism boasted that it was precisely by entering into the stronghold of Satan that believers could learn the limits of his power and emerge victorious. [It's convenient]. Along with this, they also held that as long as you kept your soul pure [listen to this], it didn't matter what your body did." Your spirit belongs to God. So, it doesn't really matter if your body attends an idolatrous feast. And if your body engages in sexual sin... That's what this woman and her followers believed and it's what the rest of the church, that Christ is addressing now, rejected.

Verse 24, you haven't believed that and, if you're in that group, "I place no other burden on you." No other burden other than what? Verse 25, here's the burden: "Nevertheless [or it could be read, 'this is what I mean'] what you have, hold fast until I come." Here's the burden I place on you: hold fast what you have until I come. "What you have" refers to the sum total of Christian doctrine, the entire body of doctrine that makes up the Christian faith. That's what you have. And He says hold fast, maintain your grip, hold on to what you have believed until I come. All Christ wanted the true believers in Thyatira to do was to hold fast to the truth they had believed until He returned. Brothers and sisters, that's what He wants from you. Hold fast! Hold fast what you have. Persevere!

That brings us to the conclusion of the letter, verses 26-29. Here is an exhortation to each believer. In the case of the previous three letters we've studied, there was a call to listen and then there was a call to overcome. With this letter and the remaining letters, that order is reversed. So, first Christ extends, here, a call to overcome, in verses 26 to 28.

Verse 26: "He who overcomes..." Now remember, if you're a true believer and you just keep on believing, you're an overcomer. This isn't a special class of Christians. This is every Christian who just keeps on believing, keeps on believing. But here Christ adds a second description of the overcomer. Notice what He says. "He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end..." There is an intentional contrast here between her works in verse 22, Jezebel's works, and My works, Christ's works, in verse 25. The true believer in this church was not going to follow the works of Jezebel, but Christ's. And the true believer will continue to follow the works of Christ, notice, "until the end". That's the perseverance of the believer. **Just** keep on believing. That's all Christ demands of us. Just hold fast until He comes.

The Christian life is not a sprint; it's a marathon. It's not a battle; it's a campaign. And this marathon, this campaign that is the Christian life, requires endurance and perseverance. Every believer will endure and, therefore, will inherit the promises made to the overcomers in these seven letters. These promises are for you. Here in Thyatira, Christ makes two promises to true believers, to those who overcome. These promises are for you, Christian.

First of all, Christ will give every believer authority to rule with Him. Christ quotes, beginning in the middle of verse 26 and verse 27, from promises that the Father made to Him in Psalm 2:7-9. And Christ, here, promises that every true believer will enjoy the fruit of those promises. So, Christ says, "Listen, those promises weren't just made to Me. If you're My follower, they were made to you as well." These verses constitute the first promise in the Book of Revelation that believers will participate in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. With Christ we will all, believers, exercise - notice, first of all, universal authority. Verse 26: "TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS..." We will exercise absolute authority. Verse 27: "AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON..." We will exercise unchallenged authority - "as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces..." In other words, the authority that we rule along with Christ will be such that if anyone dares to rebel, if they dare to reject that authority, they'll be crushed in a thousand pieces like a pot, hit with an iron bar. Our authority will be a delegated authority. Notice how verse 27 ends: "as I also have received authority from My Father..." When did He receive that authority? Well, it was promised to Him in Psalm 2. It was given to Him as a result of the resurrection. You remember, Philippians 2 says, because He humbled Himself, God has given Him the name above every name, the name Lord, so that at His name every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. Think about that believer. You're going to reign with Jesus Christ. You're going to share His throne.

There's another promise to the overcomer here. And that is that Christ will give every believer the morning star. Verse 28: "and I will give him the morning star." What is that? Well, the morning star is defined here in the Book of Revelation. Turn over to chapter 22, Revelation 22:16: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. [This is Jesus talking now]. I am the root and the descendant of David, [I am] the bright morning star." So, the promise to the church in Thyatira, the promise to all true believers who just hang on, who hold fast, who just keep believing - the promise to you is the presence of your Lord forever. The ultimate reward that you and I can receive is simply to be with Jesus forever. And our Lord, here, says that's exactly what you get. You get the bright morning star. Oh and, by the way, that's Me! It's like John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved



Me before the foundation of the world." *Father, let them be with me where I am.* To the true believer who just keeps on believing in Jesus, Jesus promises that He will give the true believer, Himself.

This letter ends with a call to listen. Verse 29: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This is the ancient equivalent of "Listen up, believer! Pay attention to what Christ says in this letter!" So, how can we pay attention? But let me bring out, briefly, the enduring lessons from this letter to the church in Thyatira. They're just a handful of them.

Number one: this letter reminds us that Christians in every generation must guard the temptation to accept and adopt their culture's values, standards, and practices. Like the prophetess and her followers, it's easy to exalt expediency over principle. It's easy folks to justify conformity to your culture, even when it's sinful. Be aware. Be on guard. It wasn't just the first century where people heard a good excuse for fitting in and took it. It happens in every generation. It's happening with you. It happens with me.

Secondly, claims of new revelation will always displace the value and priority of Scripture. Can I just tell you, that the moment you say, "Okay, if you could choose between a book that was written between 2000 and 3500 years ago and it was written to all of God's people, if that's on one side, and on the other side is God talking personally to you today, which are you going to choose?" Well, you know what you're going to choose, if that's a real choice. So, the moment that choice is offered, guess what happens? The importance and priority of the Scripture immediately diminishes significantly. And it never comes back. Look at the churches where that happens and I can promise you, claims of new revelation always displace the Scripture.

Thirdly, extra-biblical revelation will always lead to error and doctrine and failure in practice. The church in Thyatira is a perfect example. You know what's interesting? Eventually this church, Thyatira, embraced the Montanist heresy - a movement led by a false prophet who claimed continuing revelation from God outside the Scripture. History tells us this church disappeared by the end of the 2nd century, following the same course they were already on.

Number four: we must reject every kind of supposed revelation outside of Scripture - every kind. Folks, that's modern apostles, that's prophecies - whether it's at the biblical level or whether it's that second tier level that's taught in a lot of charismatic circles. It means we must reject "words from the Lord". We must reject people who write saying they're writing under some quasi-inspiration like "Jesus Calling". We must reject the sort of pedestrian, everyday version of this in Christian churches - "The Lord told me to..." - you fill in the blank. Unless it's in the Bible, the Lord didn't tell you. Don't say that. We must reject every kind of supposed revelation outside of Scripture.

And number five: we must hold fast to the truth that the Scripture is sufficient. Listen, you don't need anything else. We have, here, everything we need for godliness. Don't be looking somewhere else. Don't be following the latest Jezebel. Instead, follow our Lord and His revealed Word.

Let's pray together.

Father thank You for our study tonight. Thank You for the lessons we can learn from this church that had so much going for it and yet had tolerated an extra-biblical authority, extra-biblical revelation **and** that allowed it to stray so dramatically. Lord help us to remain committed to Your word. Help us to say no in every conceivable way to supposed revelations outside of the Bible. Thank You for Your external word which we can read and understand and have confidence is Your very Word. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!