

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

by William McCarrell

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CHAPTER 5

THYATIRA - THE CHURCH SETTLED IN SIN

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; 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. 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. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 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. 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. 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.

SUGGESTIVE STUDY OUTLINE

- I. THE COMMAND TO WRITE. Vs. 18.
- II. THE CHURCH ADDRESSED -- THYATIRA. Vs. 18.
- III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SPEAKER (CHRIST). Vs. 18.

- 1. The Son of GOD.
- 2. Eyes like fire.
- 3. Feet like fine brass.

IV. THE COMMENDATION FOR WORKS. Vs. 19

- 1. Works.
- 2. Charity [love]

3. Service [ministry]
4. Faith
5. Patience.
6. Last works more than first.

V. THE CENSURE -- CRITICISM -- JEZEBEL ALLOWED TO... Vs. 20

1. To teach
2. To seduce CHRIST's servants.
3. To lead into spiritual fornication.
4. To influence towards compromise.
5. leader of idolatry.

VI. THE SPECIAL CONDEMNATION. Vs. 21.

1. Refusal to repent.
2. Stubbornness.
3. Rejection of CHRIST's grace

VII. THE WARNING. Vss. 22, 23.

1. Cast into great tribulation
2. Children (followers) killed
3. Judgment according to works.

VIII. THE COMFORT (ENCOURAGEMENT). Vs. 24.

THE DARK AGES

Each of the seven letters of chapters two and three of Revelation offers abundant practical truth for any saved one or church at any time. Thyatira can be profitably studied as a big church settled in sin. Each letter presents much prophetic truth. The Ephesus letter pictures the powerful, first-century Apostolic Church; the Smyrna letter, the second and third century suffering church; and the Pergamos letter, the compromising church beginning with the third and continuing through the fifth centuries. The Pergamos period, during which church and state were united and Roman Catholicism launched, prepared for that pictured by the Thyatira letter. After uniting church and state, a subtle, pernicious and persistent teaching began, especially at the Council of Sardica in 347 A.D., which advocated establishing the papacy with its claims to authority for the Pope over all civil and religious government.

The Thyatira letter pictures a phase of church history which began with the first pope in the sixth century, and continues until earth's coming great tribulation under Antichrist. The centuries preceding the Protestant Reformation are not referred to in history as "The Dark Ages."

CHRIST THE JUDGE

In each of the seven letters in Revelation two and three, the church name significantly

strengthens the practical and prophetic aspect of the message. **Thyatira** means "*Never weary of sacrifices.*" It suggests continuous, public, formal and spiritually shallow ritualism. In each of the seven letters, the description of the Speaker strengthens each detail of His message. In the Thyatira letter, CHRIST JESUS is described as the "**Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass**" (2:18). The church system particularly addressed is Roman Catholicism. This system exalts and enthrones a man and addresses him as "Holy Father"; -- it displaces in spirit JESUS CHRIST with the Virgin Mary; -- it makes the voice of the church more authoritative than the Bible; -- it presents Peter rather than CHRIST as the practical Head of the Church. The letter warningly exhorts those addressed to hear the message of the Son of GOD.

The eyes of fire remind that CHRIST, the Son of GOD, reads inner heart motives, pierces ritualistic sham, and discerningly demands spiritual reality. As brass symbolizes judgment in GOD's Word, the feet of brass remind that all judgment is given unto CHRIST: "**For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man**" (John 5:22-27). What rebuke to Roman Catholicism or any religious system that attempts to usurp authority over the soul! It warns that such belongs exclusively to CHRIST. This rebuke and warning applies to everything in religious realms that claims power to forgive sins or determine the soul's eternal destiny through baptism, forgiveness, excommunication, church rites, or in any other way. It warns that such religious systems will be judged by JESUS CHRIST at His coming.

HEAVENLY RECOGNITION

The letter's commendation, "**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**" (Revelation 2:19) is significant. It suggests that individuals, though in the system described, often live spiritually above it. During the centuries pictured by this letter, many saved individuals faithfully protested against the spiritual errors and weakness of the system by word and victorious life. These are partially represented by such movements as the Albigenses, the Waldenses, and the Moravians. Practically every hospital, school, and good work claiming CHRIST's Name between the sixth and fifteenth centuries was linked with this system. Thus, while rebuking its weaknesses, CHRIST fairly and graciously acknowledges the faith, works, and love that existed in it.

JEZEBEL TO DATE

The system pictured in the Thyatira letter is marked by grievous sin. This is the only letter of Revelation two and three in which a woman is prominent. False religious systems are at times symbolized in the Bible by women. Many Bible students would say that Jezebel is the most wicked woman described in GOD's Word. The fact that she calls herself a prophetess reminds

that her sins are particularly in the religious realm. The name, "**Jezebel**," has a double meaning. It conveys the thought of "*chastity*," also "*dunghill*."

Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, in Elijah's time seduced and compromised GOD's prophets (religious leadership), and through them, GOD's people (I Kings 16:28-19:3). She opposed with violence of sword that which she could not seduce or compromise. She used government to corrupt and oppose spirituality. She attempted to displace the authority of GOD's Word with that of her personal word. Corrupting spiritual worship through mixture with pagan idolatry, she fostered and produced spiritual fornication: "**Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God**" (James 4:4). She stubbornly refused to repent (change her ways), despite GOD's miraculous work and messages through servants such as Elijah: "**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. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there**" (I Kings 19:1-3). She was drunk as it were with the blood of GOD's saints and martyrs. She continued until destroyed through judgment directed and enabled by GOD. She, who corrupted government and then used it to oppose GOD's work, was destroyed by corrupted government: "**And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a kings daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel**" (II Kings 9:30-37) and "**And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled**" (Revelation 17:15-17).

Roman Catholicism has done and continues to do everything linked with Jezebel. CHRIST states that He gives this Jezebel system much opportunity to repent, and that it refuses to do so (Revelation 2:21). GOD has witnessed to Roman Catholicism and everything that repeats its errors and sins in Protestantism. What appeals GOD has made through godly remnants, faithful Christians, and such servants as John Huss of Bohemia, Wycliffe and Cramner of England, Luther and Zwingli of Germany, Calvin of France, Knox of Scotland, and Savonarola of Italy! GOD still witnesses through Bible-believing Christians, and will continue to do so till JESUS comes. Roman Catholicism's boast is that it never changes. It will continue its course until its destroying judgment occurs as prophesied.

TRIBULATION JUDGMENT

GOD warns that He will cast the system pictured in the Thyatira letter into a bed of great tribulation (2:22). How necessary to emphasize that all who share its sins will share its judgment. Those who commit fornication with her include those in any evil or religious circle who follow her ways. Roman Catholicism, the mother of harlots, has her daughters: **"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.**

And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns" (Revelation 17:1-7).

Much in practically every state church evidences that it is one of her offspring. Protestantism, and every other religious system, will be left and thus enter the Tribulation under the Antichrist. During the Tribulation, these systems will be fully federated under Antichrist's special assistant. This assistant is a false religious leader, the second beast described in Revelation 13:11-18. GOD will then permit the Antichrist and a coalition of kings to destroy these federated apostate religious systems. As Jezebel of old, they will be destroyed by the government they have helped to create and corrupt, especially through an unbiblical alliance (Revelation 17:15-17). This will be the final fulfillment of GOD's warning, **"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds"** (2:22).

INDIVIDUAL WARNING

GOD's warning as to the religious system or systems addressed in the Thyatira letter carries a message to every individual affected: **"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"** (2:23). Those referred to as her children no doubt include individuals who endeavor or hope to secure salvation by works, ritualism, and church, rather than by grace. GOD warns that such persons will be judged according to their works apart from grace. How helpless man is when judged apart from grace! Eternal spiritual death is certain: **"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the**

books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

OVERCOMING ENCOURAGED

GOD encouragingly exhorts His true children to victory over the sins referred to in the Thyatira letter. Overcomers are assured of avoiding "**the depths of Satan**" (2:24). How startling to be told by GOD's SPIRIT that Satanic depths can be experienced in religious realms and church systems! A few of the "*deep things of Satan*" referred to, are: the mellowing of GOD's warnings as to hell through false hope of a purgatory, the detracting from CHRIST's finished work on Calvary through the mass, the weakening of spiritual life through legalism, formalism, worldliness and pagan idolatry, and the corruption of morals through the confession. Roman Catholicism is a GOD-dishonoring mixture of Judaism, Paganism, and Christianity. Protestantism increasingly follows in its train. Those apostatizing from Biblical truth are ever its victims. Overcomers are exhorted to hold fast until JESUS comes (2:25). Those who hold fast believe, declare, and live out biblical truth.

OVERCOMING REWARDS

GOD promises that overcomers will share the earthly reign of the LORD JESUS CHRIST (2:26-27). Roman Catholicism thrives on earthly government; its claim to authority over civil government is voiced in the oft-heard phrase, "temporal power." Many other religious systems ape Roman Catholicism in aiming to exercise authority over civil governments. Many followers in these systems are bribed with promise of material gain and temporal advantage. Overcomers through CHRIST will receive power (authority) over the nations. They will share in CHRIST's earthly and glorious millennial reign. Overcomers will also share in the glory of the MORNING STAR (2:28). The MORNING STAR is JESUS (Revelation 22:16). It rises at the darkest hour of the night and precedes the day ushered in through the rising of the sun. CHRIST is the SUN of Righteousness Who, with healing in His wings, will bring GOD's day to pass on this earth as He reigns over it (Mal. 4:2). Many Bible students believe the MORNING STAR referred to in Revelation 2:28 is associated with CHRIST's coming to rapture His Church preceding earth's coming tribulation. JESUS spoke of it as "**great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be**" (Matthew 24:21). Overcomers will be rewarded with special delight and blessings when JESUS comes for His church (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 3:11-15; I John 3:3; Phil. 3:20-21).

OVERCOMING CONDITIONS

Overcoming false doctrines (teachings), sinful practices and deceptive inducements is impossible apart from a life of separation as called for in II Corinthians 6:14-18: "**Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as**

God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." This condition for overcoming applies to present days and will increasingly apply until CHRIST's second coming. Christians so living are continually and often severely tested. They walk by faith, and not by sight. They submit to GOD's Word rather than to the high-sounding decrees of religious isolation. However, it assures spiritual enrichment, power, and fruit during earthly life and special reward during the earthly millennial reign of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

SIN OF NEUTRALITY

In each letter, GOD exhorts those who have a spiritual ear, made possible by spiritual birth, to hear. **"To hear"** means *"to heed"*; *"to heed"* means *"to act"*; *"to act"* means **"to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only"** (James 1:22). The Thyatira letter calls for more than knowledge of fundamental Bible truths. It calls for living out Bible truth. GOD needs men of convictions rather than men of mere opinions. Men argue for opinions -- they live and die for convictions! The secretary of a Y.M.C.A. wrote the writer that he was neither a fundamentalist nor a modernist, but a middle-of-the-roader. The writer replied that Pilate was also a "middle-of-the-roader," but left no constructive influence after him. The antichrist despises and attempts destruction of those who will not worship him, including any who attempt a neutral position: **"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"** (Revelation 13:15-17). Neutral position is an abomination, even to Antichrist. Neutrality is a misnomer in the present struggle on behalf of fundamental Christian truth and living. GOD hates such neutrality. Any attempt to be neutral in word or act under such conditions grieves GOD's SPIRIT. Separation from the corruptions of Roman Catholicism, which is increasingly manifested through present-day Protestant denominational leadership, constitutes a condition for spiritual revival.

UNAVOIDABLE TEST

Each of the last four letters of Revelation two and three suggests CHRIST's second coming (Revelation 2:22, 25, 28; Revelation 3:3; Revelation 3:10, 11; Revelation 3:16, 21). Corrupted Roman Catholicism (Thyatira), corrupted Protestantism (Sardis), genuine Fundamentalism (Philadelphia), and Modernism (Laodicea), will be outstanding religious factors during last days. Each presents tests for overcomers. These tests assure the possibility of glorious reward for those meeting conditions necessary to be overcomers.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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