

# DEAR CHURCH,

## Study of the Seven Churches in Revelation

### Bible Fellowship Discussion Guide

#### To the Church in Thyatira - Revelation 2:18-29

##### Open It

1. What would be good or bad about having the ability to read others' minds? Why?
2. \*What are the three best habits you have?

##### Explore It

3. What church was the subject of this letter from Jesus? (2:18)
4. How did the speaker in this passage identify Himself? (2:18)
5. How did Christ address the church at Thyatira? (2:18)
6. What did Christ know about the church at Thyatira? (2:19)
7. For what did Christ praise the church at Thyatira? (2:19)
8. For what did Christ chastise the church at Thyatira? (2:20)
9. How did Christ show patience? (2:21)
10. What judgments did the Son of God pronounce on the one He called Jezebel? (2:22-23)
11. \*What challenge did Christ give to those who resisted Jezebel's teaching and sinful behavior? (2:24-25)
12. \*What two gifts were promised to "him who overcomes"? (2:26-28)
13. How did Jesus refer to God? (2:28)
14. \*In addition to the church at Thyatira, who else was commanded to pay heed to this message? (2:29)

##### Get It

15. What are some things people make idols (gods) of today?
16. What does it mean that Christ's eyes were "like blazing fire"?
17. \*What sins do we tend to tolerate in our own lives or in the lives of our Christian friends when we should not?
18. What dangers do we face when we refuse to respond to God or repent of our sins?
19. What value is there in choosing to remain ignorant of certain evil ideas and practices?
20. \*When we are misled by others, what can we do to correct our mistakes? How?
21. When should we take responsibility for the errors of others in the church? How?
22. What have you been tolerating in your life that you need to reject and change?

##### Apply It

23. Who can you come alongside this week to help grow in their walk with Christ?
24. \*How can you include repentance and renewal in your devotional life this week?
25. What specific steps can you take this week to monitor what you take into your thoughts?

# Brief Commentary on Revelation 2:18-29

By Matthew Henry

Even when the Lord knows the works of his people to be wrought in love, faith, zeal, and patience; yet if his eyes, which are as a flame of fire, observe them committing or allowing what is evil, he will rebuke, correct, or punish them. Here is praise of the ministry and people of Thyatira, by One who knew the principles from which they acted. They grew wiser and better. All Christians should earnestly desire that their last works may be their best works. Yet this church connived at some wicked seducers. God is known by the judgments He executes; and by this upon seducers, He shows His certain knowledge of the hearts of men, of their principles, designs, frame, and temper. Encouragement is given to those who kept themselves pure and undefiled. It is dangerous to despise the mystery of God, and as dangerous to receive the mysteries of Satan. Let us beware of the depths of Satan, of which those who know the least are the most happy. How tender Christ is of his faithful servants! He lays nothing upon His servants but what is for their good. There is promise of an ample reward to the persevering, victorious believer; also knowledge and wisdom, suitable to their power and dominion. Christ brings day with Him into the soul, the light of grace and of glory, in the presence and enjoyment of Him their Lord and Saviour. After every victory let us follow up our advantage against the enemy, that we may overcome and keep the works of Christ to the end.

## Extensive Background on Revelation 2:18-29

By Enduring Word Commentary - *David Guzik*

### Jesus' letter to the church at Thyatira.

#### 1. (18a) The character of the city of Thyatira.

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

a. Thyatira: This was the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3. In history, we have no record that the Christians of Thyatira suffered any significant political or religious persecution.

i. “The elder Pliny dismissed Thyatira with the almost contemptuous phrase ‘Thyatira and other unimportant cities.’” (Barclay)

b. Thyatira: Still, this city was a center of *business* and *trade*. It had many active trade guilds, each having their own patron deity from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods.

- i. Acts 16:14-15 mentions Lydia of Thyatira, who was a *seller of purple* cloth from the city of Thyatira. “Thyatira was famous for the manufacture of a purple dye, and numerous references are found in secular literature of the period to the trade guilds which manufactured cloth.” (Walvoord)
- ii. “From the inscriptions which have been found in the neighborhood it is clear that Thyatira possessed more trade guilds than any other town of its size in Asia.” (Barclay)

## **2. (18b) Jesus describes Himself to the church at Thyatira.**

‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

- a. These things says the Son of God: Jesus first described Himself with a title that emphasized His *deity*. In Jewish thought, to be the *son of* a thing meant you had the nature of that thing. The *sons of the sorceress* (Isaiah 57:3) had the nature of the sorceress. The *sons of thunder* (Mark 3:17) had a nature like thunder. So the Son of God has the divine nature, the nature of God.
- b. Who has eyes like a flame of fire: Jesus chose this description of Himself from the presentation in Revelation 1:14 to emphasize the idea that His eyes looked with penetrating judgment.
- c. His feet like fine brass: Jesus chose this description of Himself from Revelation 1:15 to emphasize His *purity* because brass is pure and highly refined in the fire. It also emphasized His *steadfastness*, because brass was the strongest known metal in the ancient world, and feet like fine brass would be strong and unmovable.

## **3. (19) What Jesus knows about the Christians in Thyatira.**

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as for* your works, the last *are more* than the first.

- a. I know your works: Thyatira was the least significant city among the seven cities Jesus addressed, yet they were not hidden to Jesus. Like each one of the churches, Jesus said to the church at Thyatira “I know your works.”
- b. Love, service, faith, and your patience: In many ways, the church at Thyatira was a model church. They had four great essential qualities. They had love, both for the Lord and for one another. They knew service, and had faith and patience worth mentioning.
- c. As for your works, the last are more than the first: This was another compliment to the church at Thyatira. Not only did they *have* these works, but they had them in *increasing measure* – they were *growing* in love, service, faith, and patience.

## **4. (20-21) What Jesus has *against* the church at Thyatira.**

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

a. Nevertheless: Despite all the good Jesus saw in the church at Thyatira, there were significant problems. The problems were big enough for Jesus to say nevertheless, which meant “Despite all the good, I have a few things against you.”

b. Because you allow that woman Jezebel: The center of the corruption at the church at Thyatira was a woman Jesus called Jezebel. This may not have been her literal name, but a title that clearly represented a self-styled prophetess within the church, after the pattern of Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16-21 and 2 Kings 9:30-37).

i. The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we call someone a Judas or a Hitler it means something strong. It was also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal... Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.” (Walvoord)

ii. Some ancient Greek manuscripts state the phrase that woman Jezebel as *your woman Jezebel* or *your wife Jezebel*. Based on this, some (like Dean Alford) think that Jezebel was the pastor’s wife, or that Jesus meant Jezebel was the pastor’s “woman” in a symbolic sense.

c. Who calls herself a prophetess: This “Jezebel” at the church of Thyatira wasn’t really a prophetess, she only claimed to be one. Yet, it seems the Christians there *received* her as a prophetess, and that is why Jesus gave them this warning.

i. Jesus said this would happen in Matthew 24:11: *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many*. Those words were first spoken with a view to the end times, but there have always been those who call themselves prophets in the church, but are not.

d. To teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols: Here, Jesus described the specific *sin* of this woman “Jezebel.” Mainly, she was an *immoral* and *ungodly* influence on others, and led others into sin. Jezebel led others into immorality and idolatry.

i. Because of the strong trade guilds in Thyatira, the sexual immorality and the eating of things sacrificed to idols was probably connected with the mandatory social occasions of the guilds. Perhaps a Christian was invited to the monthly meeting of the goldsmith’s guild, and the meeting was held at the temple of Apollo. “Jezebel” would allow or encourage the man to go – perhaps even using a “prophetic” word – and when the man went, he fell into immorality and idolatry.

ii. The draw to the guilds and their meetings was powerful. “No merchant or trader could hope to prosper or make money unless he was a member of his trade guild.” (Barclay) Nonetheless, Christians were expected to stand in the face of this kind of pressure. One ancient Christian named Tertullian wrote about Christians who made their living in trades connected to pagan idolatry. A painter might find work in pagan temples or a sculptor might be hired to make a statue of a pagan god. They would justify this by saying, “This is my living, and I must live.” Tertullian replied, *Vivere ergo habes?* “Must you live?”

iii. My servants: This shows how terrible Jezebel’s sin was. She corrupted the servants of Jesus, and they belong to Him. Jesus said, *But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in*

*Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42).*

e. Later in this letter, Jesus would also reveal a link to the work of Jezebel and false doctrine: *this doctrine... the depths of Satan, as they say (Revelation 2:24)*. It seems that this Jezebel led others in the church at Thyatira to discover *depths of Satan*.

i. In the days of the New Testament, many non-Christian religions (such as the Ophites and various Gnostic groups) said they knew the “deep things of Satan.” The ancient Christian writer Tertullian said if you asked a Gnostic about their cosmic mysteries, they furrowed their brow and said, “It is deep.” It may be deep – but deep into a dangerous pit.

ii. How could Christians ever fall for *the depths of Satan*? Perhaps the deceptive reasoning went this way: “To effectively confront Satan, you must enter his strongholds, and learn his depths in order to conquer him.” People use similar reasoning in misguided spiritual warfare today.

f. And I gave her time to repent... and she did not repent: Jesus’ greatest accusation was that this “Jezebel” did not repent. She apparently rejected the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart, calling her to repentance.

i. In these words we see both the *mercy* and *judgment* of our Lord. Time to repent shows *mercy*. God gives us time to repent, we should deal with others the same way. And she did not repent speaks to the *judgment* of God. God gives time to repent, but it is not an unlimited time. There is a time when God says, *My Spirit shall not strive with man forever (Genesis 6:3)*. This means that when God gives us time to repent, we must *take advantage* of that time.

ii. “‘In space comes grace’ proves not always a true proverb.” (Trapp)

g. Because you allow: This shows the sin of the *church* of Thyatira. On the outside, they were a model church, showing *works, love, service, faith, and patience*. Yet there was significant corruption *inside* the church. The sin of the church was that they *allowed* this corruption.

i. It wasn’t necessarily a large group following Jezebel. A little leaven affects a whole lump of dough, and a few in immorality and idolatry will corrupt the whole church – especially if they influence others the way this Jezebel did.

## **5. (22-25) What Jesus wants the church at Thyatira to do.**

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come.

a. I will cast her into a sickbed: Before Jesus told the Christians in Thyatira what *they* must do, He first told them what *He* would do. Jesus would chastise this Jezebel, and cast her into a sickbed, along with those who commit adultery with her.

- i. The reference to adultery is important. It speaks of both sexual adultery *and* spiritual adultery. When these Christians honored other gods, they were unfaithful to the Lord who saved them.
  - ii. For this reason, the figure of a sickbed is fitting. They were guilty of adultery, both sexual and spiritual. It is as if Jesus said, “You love an unclean bed. Here, I will give you one, and cast you into a sickbed.”
  - iii. What was the sickbed? It could simply be an image of affliction, or it could be literal sickness that Jesus allowed in the lives of Jezebel and her followers as chastisement. We know from passages of Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 11:30 that God can use sickness as a way to chastise His people when they are in sin.
  - iv. The ancient Greek word used here for bed “is also the word for a *banqueting couch*; and if that meaning is taken, the meaning is: ‘I will strike her down as she sits at her forbidden feasts.’” (Barclay)
- b. Unless they repent of their deeds: Jesus revealed the *purpose* for this chastening. First, it was to draw them to repent of their deeds. They wouldn’t listen to Jesus before, so He had to speak louder through the sickbed. Second, it was to give an example of holiness to other churches: and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.
- i. Minds and hearts is literally “hearts and kidneys.” In the mind of the ancient Jews, the *heart* was the place of intellect, and the *kidneys* were the place of emotion. Jesus said, “I know your every thought and your every feeling.”
- c. I will kill her children with death: “All men die, but all are not killed with death... Oh, it is a woeful thing to be killed with death.” (Trapp)
- d. Hold fast what you have till I come: There were many faithful, uncompromising Christians in Thyatira. To them, Jesus simply said, “hold fast.” They must not stop doing what is good. They must not become distracted or discouraged from what Jesus wants them to be and to do.
- i. Jesus also told them *how long* to hold fast: till I come. We are to hang in there and stand strong for Jesus until He comes. It is only *then* that the battle will be over.

## **6. (26-28) The promise of a reward.**

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—

as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.

a. He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end: Even when there is the immoral and idolatrous influence of a Jezebel, Christians can *overcome* and *keep Jesus’ works until the end*. We must not become overly discouraged at immorality and idolatry around us, even among Christians. God’s work will still go on through His overcomers.

b. To him I will give power over the nations: Jesus promised that His people will reign with Him. Here, there is a special promise to those who overcome the threat of immorality and idolatry. To them, Jesus offered a share in His own kingdom.

i. He shall rule them with a rod of iron: This quotation from Psalm 2 speaks of the authority of the Messiah when He rules over the earth. In that day, righteousness will be enforced, and those who rebel against Jesus will be dashed to pieces like a clay pot hit with an iron bar. Jesus includes this here to give hope to the faithful Christians of Thyatira, who felt overwhelmed by the immorality and idolatry all around them. Jesus reminds them, “You’re on My winning team.”

ii. “The word for ‘rule’ (Gr. *poimanei*) means literally ‘to shepherd.’ Their rule will not be simply that of executing judgment, but also that of administering mercy and direction.” (Walvoord)

c. I will give him the morning star: Jesus offered them a reward greater than the kingdom. He offered them the reward of Himself, because He is the *Morning Star* (Revelation 22:16).

## **7. (29) A general exhortation to all whom will hear.**

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

a. He who has an ear: This is a letter that applies to everyone. It applies to those who are like Jezebel, who lead others into sin. It applies to those who follow the teaching of a Jezebel, and follow others into sin. It applies to those who permit a Jezebel to work her wickedness. Finally, it applies to the faithful who must hold fast.