

## Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 16

*Rev 2:18-29*

*18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:*

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

*20 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.*

*21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.*

*22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.*

*23 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.*

*24 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.*

*25 But hold fast what you have till I come.*

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

*27 '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;*

*28 and I will give him the morning star.*

*29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '*

The Lord Jesus Christ has called His church to be holy and maintain purity by dealing with sin in its midst.

In fact, the very first instruction He gave to the church was about confronting sin.

*Matt 18:15-17*

*15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

*16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'*

*17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

The practice of church discipline that Christ instituted to maintain the holiness of the church has a twofold purpose:

- 1. To call sinning believers back to righteous behavior**
- 2. To purge from the Church those who stubbornly cling to their sin.**

In either case, the purity of the church is maintained.

After the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord demonstrated His commitment to a pure church by executing Ananias and Sapphira;

*Acts 5:1-11*

- 1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.*
- 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
- 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"*
- 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*
- 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.*
- 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.*
- 7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.*
- 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."*
- 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."*
- 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.*
- 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.*

The Jerusalem Council commanded believers to observe *"these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well"* (Acts 15:28-29)

The apostle Paul also had a passionate concern for the purity of the church. Horrified at the Corinthians' casual attitude toward flagrant sin in their assembly, Paul wrote:

*1 Cor 5:1-5*

- 1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife!*
- 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*
- 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.*
- 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
- 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul himself put two unrepentant sinning leaders out of the Ephesian church:

*1 Tim 1:19-20*

- 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,*
- 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

In His second epistle to them,. Paul explained to the Corinthians what motivated him to desire the church's purity:

*2 Cor 11:2*

*2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

In Ephesians also, we see the teaching that the church is to be a pure bride for the Lord Jesus Christ:

*Eph 5:25-27*

*25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*

*26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,*

*27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

Despite the clear biblical teaching to the contrary, churches throughout history have tolerated sin, following a pattern like the Thyatiran congregation, whose members were engaging in both spiritual and physical adultery.

Through the insidious efforts of a false teacher, those sins had become pervasive in the church at Thyatira.

The letter Christ addressed to its members was a sobering one, and marks a new phase in the letters to the seven churches.

Commentator Charles Erdman offers this perspective on the place of this letter among the seven:

The letter to the church in Thyatira begins the second group of messages to the churches of Asia. In the first group, the church of Ephesus was characterized by loyalty to Christ which was lacking in love.

In the church at Smyrna loyalty was tested by fire. In the church of Pergamum the loyalty was lacking in moral passion.

Yet all three churches were true to the faith, and had not yielded to the assaults of evil.

In the case of the church in Thyatira, as with the churches in Sardis and Laodicea, the situation was far more serious. Here not merely a small minority was indifferent, but large numbers had actually yielded to the demoralizing influences of false teaching.

*(The Revelation of John [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966], 56)*

There is a progressive worsening in the character of these seven churches, as they depict becoming more and more influenced by evil.

That downward spiral reached its lowest point at Laodicea.

The phrase "*the deep things of Satan (2:24)*" reveals how far the Thyatira church had slipped in relation to those in Smyrna and Pergamum.

The Smyrna church faced hostility from the "*synagogue of Satan,*" that is from the unbelieving Jews (2:9).

The Pergamum church existed at the site of Satan's throne (2:13), symbolizing Gentile false religion (particularly the cult of Emperor worship).

But the church at Thyatira had plunged headlong into the very depths of satanic deception.

The letter to this church is the longest of the seven, though addressed to the church in the smallest of the seven cities.

It has an important message for the church today:

**False doctrine and sin are not to be allowed, even under the banner of love, toleration, and unity.**

There may be much that is commendable in a church.

It may appear on the surface to have an effective ministry, be growing numerically, and even have cordial society.

Yet immorality and false doctrine, if not confronted, will bring judgment from the Lord of the church.

The same seven elements constitute the letter to Thyatira:

**The correspondent,  
The church,  
The city,  
The commendation,  
The concern,  
The command,  
And the counsel.**

### THE CORRESPONDENT

*Rev 2:18c*

*the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: says this*

The title **Son of God** and the two descriptive phrases drawn from the vision of the risen Christ in *Rev 1:12-17* identify the writer as the Lord Jesus Christ.

As noted, in identifying Himself in the seven letters, Christ chose the phrases from that earlier vision that best fit His approach to each church. The phrases chosen here focus on His role as divine Judge.

**Son of God** emphasizes Christ's deity, stressing the truth that He is of one essence with the Father;

*John 5:18*

*<sup>18</sup> Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.*

This is a significant change in wording.

In the vision recorded in Chapter 1, Christ was described as the Son of Man (*Rev 1:13*).

The title in the vision, emphasizes His humiliation, His sympathetic identification with believers as their merciful High Priest.

It offers encouragement to persecuted Christians:

*Heb 2:17-18*

*17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

*18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*

The title Son of Man views Christ in His ability to sympathize with the needs, trials, and temptations of His church.

In this passage under review, however, Jesus is identified as the *Son of God* (the only time this phrase appears in Revelation);

Here the emphasis is not on His humility, but on His deity, because His approach to the church at Thyatira is not as sympathetic High Priest, but as divine judge.

Not comfort, but judgment is in store for the church at Thyatira when Christ's divine power moves against this adulterous assembly.

As the divine *Son of God*, Jesus Christ *has eyes like a flame of fire*.

His piercing, laser like vision sees all; nothing can be disguised, covered or hidden from Him.

Describing Jesus Christ in His second coming glory:

*Rev 19:11-12*

*11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.*

*12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.*

Daniels vision of Him;

*Daniel 10:6*

*6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.*

A church may feel satisfied with itself, have a good reputation in the community, or even with other churches. But the penetrating eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ sees it as it really is.

The description of *his feet* as being *like burnished bronze* is reminiscent of *Rev 19:5*, where it says of Christ that *"He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty."*

That Christ's feet glowed brilliantly *like burnished bronze* depicts His purity and holiness as He tramples our impurity.

This terrifying description of the Lord Jesus Christ must have created shock, consternation, and fear when this letter was read to the congregation at Thyatira.

It must have come as a sobering realization to them, as it should to all sinning Christians, that Christ will judge continual, unrepented sin.

In the words of the apostle Peter:

*1 Pet 4:17*

*17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

## THE CHURCH

*Rev 2:18b*

*to the angel of the church in Thyatira write*

As is the case with the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum, the Bible does not record the founding of the church at Thyatira.

According to *Acts 16:14*, “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God,” was converted under Paul’s ministry at Philippi. *Verse 15* records that members of her household also came to saving faith in Christ and were baptized.

It is possible that Lydia and her household participated in starting the church at Thyatira. More likely,, though is that the church there was founded as an outreach of Paul’s ministry at Ephesus (*Acts 19:10*)

## THE CITY

*Rev 2:18b*

*“Thyatira”*

From Pergamum, northernmost of the seven cities, the Roman road curved east and then southeast to Thyatira, approximately forty miles away.

Thyatira was located in a long north-south valley connecting the valleys of the Caicus and Hermus rivers.

Unlike Smyrna or Pergamum, Thyatira was built in relatively flat country and lacked an acropolis.

Its lack of natural fortifications would play a significant role in its history.

Thyatira was founded by one of Alexander the Great’s successors, Seleucus, as a military outpost guarding the north-south road.

It later changed hands, and came under the rule of Lysimachus, who ruled Pergamum. Thyatira was the gateway to Pergamum, and the task of the defenders at Thyatira was to delay an attacker and thus buy time for Pergamum.

Unfortunately since Thyatira had no natural defenses, the garrison there could not holdout for long. Thus the city was repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt; the scanty references to it in ancient literature usually describe its conquests by an invading army.

Finally about 190b.c. Thyatira was conquered and annexed by the Romans and enjoyed the Roman peace.

The city then became a flourishing commercial center.

Its location once a liability, now becomes an asset.

At the time the book of Revelation was written, Thyatira was just entering its period of greatest prosperity.

Thyatira was known for its many guilds (roughly the equivalent of today's labor unions.)

Thyatira's main industry was the production of wool and dyed goods (especially purple goods dyed with purple dye extracted from the madder root.), but inscriptions also mention guilds for linen workers, makers of out garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze smiths (William Ramsay, *The letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* [Albany, Oreg.: AGES Software; reprint of the 1904 edition], 260)

*Lydia probably represented her guild in Philippi (Acts 16:14)*, showing that Thyatira's market extended across the Aegean Sea to mainland Greece.

Unlike Pergamum or Smyrna, Thyatira was not an important religious center.

The primary God worshipped by the Thyatirans was the Greek sun god, Apollo.

Nor does there appear to have been a sizable Jewish population.

The pressure faced by the Christians in Thyatira came from the guilds. To hold a job or run a business, it was necessary to be a member of a guild.

Each guild had its own patron deity, in whose honor feasts were held, complete with meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality.

Christians faced the dilemma of attending those feasts or possibly losing their livelihood. And how some in the Thyatira church were handling the situation caused the Lord Jesus Christ great concern.

Thus this letter to them from Him.