

(The Lord and His Church) 7. the Adulterous Church

by Zac Poonen

The Lord judges the church at Thyatira for its compromise and worldly influence, and promises a reward to the overcomer who keeps His deeds until the end.

Scripture: Revelation 2:18

Topics: "Authority in the Church", "Spiritual Compromise"

Description

Zac Poonen addresses the issue of spiritual compromise within the church of Thyatira, highlighting the dangers of tolerating false teachings represented by the figure of Jezebel. He emphasizes that while the church had shown growth in deeds, the quality of their faith had diminished due to worldly influences and a lack of strong leadership. Poonen warns against the spiritual adultery that arises from false grace teachings, which lead believers to take sin lightly. He calls for repentance and urges the faithful to hold fast to true grace, promising that those who overcome will be rewarded with authority and the presence of Christ. The sermon serves as a reminder of the need for discernment and steadfastness in faith amidst challenges.

Transcript

"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. And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold I will cast her upon 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. And 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 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.'" (Revelation 2:18-29).

A False Prophetess

The Lord says here that He has eyes like a flame of fire (verse 18). He searches the hidden thoughts and motives of the heart - and so He does not judge as men do, who only look at the outward appearance. His feet are like burnished bronze - which means that He believes in severe judgment on sin. If there is one clear message that comes down to us from Calvary's cross, it is this: God hates sin and will judge it severely wherever it is found.

The Lord knew the deeds, love, faith and perseverance of the messenger and the church at Thyatira. And He notices that while the quantity of those deeds had increased considerably (verse 19), their quality had come down. Compromise and worldliness had come into the church.

This compromise had come about mainly because the messenger had permitted a woman (symbolically called "Jezebel") to influence the church in an evil, worldly way (verse 20). She had pretended to be a prophetess, and the messenger of the church had been deceived.

Although Christ has given prophets to the church, He has not given any prophetesses (See Ephesians 4:11, 12). Women can be anointed by the Spirit to prophesy in the meetings of the church (Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 11:5). The daughters of Philip are examples of those who did that (Acts 21:9 - KJV).

Men and women can prophesy - that is, share God's Word to the encouragement and edification of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3). All believers are encouraged to seek for this gift (1 Corinthians 14:1; Acts 2:18). But there is a difference between one who prophesies and a prophet. The Lord never appointed a woman to be a prophetess under the new covenant - the reason being that God never intended a woman to have authority over men.

There were prophetesses under the old covenant. We read of five of them in the Bible, with Anna being the last (Luke 2:36). They all spoke the word of the Lord with authority. Deborah is one example of such a prophetess (Judge 4). But under the new covenant, authority in the church is always invested by the Lord in men.

Paul gives us two reasons why God does not allow a woman to exercise any authority over men in the church:

She was created after man - to be his helper;

She was deceived by Satan first (1 Timothy 2:12-14).

A woman is more prone to deception by Satan than a man is. This is one reason why Christ has not set any women-teachers in the church either.

Jezebel, however, called herself a prophetess. And the messenger of the church at Thyatira was so weak and spineless that he could not silence her.

In a home, if the man who should be the head of the house, is weak and effeminate, his wife will take over the leadership of the home. This will be true in a church too. When powerful women see that the elders in a church are weak, they will begin to assert themselves in the church.

God's Word exhorts us to "act like MEN" (1 Corinthians 16:13). There is a great need for that exhortation, for many elders today have just about as much backbone as a jellyfish, when it comes to silencing powerful women! They are like King Ahab who was so scared of his wife Jezebel, that he allowed her to do whatever she liked in his kingdom - even to the extent of murdering innocent, God-fearing people (1 Kings 21). Ahab was the head of Israel only in name. Jezebel actually ran the kingdom. Many church-elders function exactly like Ahab too!

Elijah, however, was a fearless man of God who stood against all of Jezebel's false prophets and slaughtered every last one of them (1 Kings 18:40). That's why Jezebel hated Elijah. And she feared him too. There were 7000 people in Israel at that time who did not bow down to Jezebel's idols. God Himself had said so (1 Kings 19:18). But Jezebel never feared any of them. She feared only Elijah. She knew that those 7000 were scared of her, even if they didn't bow down to her idols.

A Jezebel today does not fear 99.9% of believers, because she knows that those believers cannot stop her, even if they don't agree with her. Jezebels fear only Elijahs. And Elijahs are rare in Christendom today.

Today's Jezebels hate Elijah-like elders and love Ahab-like elders. Every elder of every church follows either Elijah or Ahab in this matter.

The Wife of the Elder

The Greek word translated as "woman" here can also be translated as "wife". This would mean that Jezebel was the wife of the messenger of the church. This would certainly have made the situation more difficult for the messenger.

If the messenger had been a true disciple of the Lord and had learnt to "hate" his wife (as Jesus had told His disciples to do - Luke 14:26), there would have been no problem at all. But he obviously loved his wife more than he loved the Lord and the church. And so he did not want to offend her. And so he let her have her way in the church. That was how the church at Thyatira was corrupted. And that is how many churches are corrupted today.

Many a church has been ruined by a Jezebel, who is often the wife of one of the weak, effeminate elders. A woman like that can seek to make herself prominent in the meetings of the church through frequent speaking in tongues, or through interpreting her own "tongues", or through long prayers or in other crude, unBiblical ways. She may also seek to change the decisions of the elders by influencing her husband at home.

There are foolish elders who, after having discussed church matters at the elders' meeting, then go home and discuss these matters with their wives. Then being brainwashed at home by their wives, these effeminate men express their changed views at the next meeting of the elders!! And the decisions that were taken in the previous meeting are then changed!! Such is the power of a hidden Jezebel to influence a church!

In other cases, the Jezebel could be a woman who has acquired influence over one of the elders in some soulish way. There are some elders' wives who have such powerful personalities and such soul-power that the other men in the church (including the elders) are afraid to displease her in any way. In some cases, even her own husband is frightened of her.

It will be impossible to build the body of Christ in any place, if the elders in the church there, allow a woman to have power over them in any way.

The wife of an elder must be an example as one with "a meek and a quiet spirit", taking extra care to hide herself at all times. She must not be an Assistant Pastor or Song leader or Assistant Administrator (as many women are), but a hidden helper to her husband and not one who seeks to run the church from behind the scenes. Praise God that there are such wives too, who are real helpers to their elder-husbands, because they recognise their boundaries as women. Blessed is the elder who has such a wife.

All elders must keep a special eye on any woman who seeks to be prominent in the church in any way. She will almost certainly have the spirit of a Jezebel. If she is allowed free rein, she will certainly become Satan's agent to destroy the church slowly but surely.

The "adultery" spoken of here (verse 20) is obviously spiritual - because a righteous God cannot possibly punish innocent children born of adultery. Spiritual adultery is more dangerous than physical adultery, because it is less recognized. Religious harlotry results from the teaching of false grace that leads believers to take sin lightly. Disobedience to God in small things and little unfaithfulnesses are glossed over. It is such teaching that builds Babylon, the harlot church. And this is what the Lord denounces here.

Time to Repent

The Lord gave Jezebel time to repent (verse 21). Even Jezebels are given time to repent. Such is God's mercy.

But God also placed a time limit for her to repent. If she did not repent within that time, she would be judged. Not only Jezebel, but all those who committed adultery with her, and her children (verses 22, 23) would also be killed. God's patience with sinners and hypocrites is not endless.

Jezebel's partners in spiritual adultery were those who propagated this false teaching along with her. Her "children" were those half-converted hybrids who were the products of this teaching of false grace, who imagined that they were converted without having repented from sin first, or who imagined that now that they were "converted" they could take fleshly indulgence lightly.

People who live in sin in the world are not judged so quickly by God. But those who come into the church and treat sin lightly are dealt with more severely and more quickly.

God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira and of those who sinned in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:29, 30) are examples of the severity of God towards those who take the name of Christ lightly.

The Lord goes on to say that He will give to each one according to his deeds (verse 23). This is to counter the teaching of false grace in Thyatira that taught that "our deeds won't matter if we just believe". Our deeds do matter.

God's Word says,

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

"If you are living according to the flesh, you MUST die" (Romans 8:13).

The Lord said that He would cast the sinners in Thyatira into "great tribulation" (verse 23).

There are two types of tribulation spoken of in the New Testament, and we read of both of these types in the book of Revelation:

that which comes from men in the form of persecution against the disciples of Jesus - (most of the references in the New Testament are to this type of tribulation);

that which comes from God in the form of judgment "on every soul of man who does evil" - (Romans 2:9 & Revelation 2:22 are the only two references to this type of tribulation).

God threatened to cast the unrepentant sinners of Thyatira into great tribulation. But this could not possibly be referring to THE great tribulation to come in the days of the Antichrist - for that is still in the future, whereas the sinners of Thyatira have already died. So the Lord must have meant the judgment that God brings on sinners and hypocrites.

The Deep Things of Satan

There were some however in Thyatira, who did not agree with Jezebel or follow her teachings. To these, the Lord says that He will place no other burden on them (verse 24). They had steered clear of "the deep things of Satan", because the anointing within them had told them that something was wrong with this false grace that Jezebel preached; and they had listened to the anointing (1 John 2:27).

Notice that the Lord calls the teaching of false grace as "the deep things of Satan". False grace is one of Satan's masterpieces, with which he has deceived most of Christendom. So it is appropriate to call it one of "Satan's deeper truths"!!

Doctrine is like a seed. The proof of whether a seed is good or bad is seen in the fruit it produces. Many Christians analyse various types of seeds (doctrines) under their theological microscopes and pronounce some as bad and some as good. But that's not the way to find out the quality of a seed. It is better to sow the seed and to see what type of fruit it produces.

Any doctrine of "grace" that takes away the fear of sinning is certainly a false teaching. If a doctrine enables you to sin lightly and to ask for forgiveness cheaply, without the deep sorrow and vehement hatred for sin that true repentance brings, then you can be sure that that doctrine is one of the "deeper truths of Satan"!

There are many believers nowadays who mouth impressive phrases such as "End-time truths" and "Kingdom truths" etc. The test by which we can evaluate every so-called "truth" is the test that Jesus Himself gave: "The truth shall make you freefrom sin" (John 8:32-36). A "truth" that does not liberate you from sin in your daily life is not the truth of God, however Scriptural it may appear to be to you. It is a false doctrine.

One indication that you have understood God's truth correctly will be that you experience more and more liberty from every type of bondage in your life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

The Lord then exhorts the remnant in Thyatira to hold fast to what they have - that is, to "the true grace of God" (1 Peter 5:12). We need to hold fast to this, because Satan would like to snatch it away from us. We

are commanded to hold fast to it until Jesus comes (verse 25).

The Call to the Overcomer

The overcomer is described by the Lord here as one who keeps His deeds until the end (verse 26). Jesus' deeds are His victories over temptation, in the days of His flesh. The overcomer is one who overcomes temptation, even as Jesus overcame, and who endures in this path until the end.

The Lord promises the overcomer the reward of authority over the nations in the future (verse 26). This is not a domineering over others, as we understand authority in the world today. The expression "He shall rule them" (verse 27) actually means "He shall shepherd them" (the word "rule" here comes from a Greek word meaning "to shepherd").

This is the type of authority that the overcomer exercises in his home and in the church now, and that he will exercise one day over the nations of the world. Those who domineer over others today, whether in a family or in a church, are actually exercising a Satanic form of authority and will be unfit to shepherd the nations. All of us who have authority - fathers, mothers and elders - are being tested by the Lord now.

The Lord then uses the expression, "As I also have received authority from My Father" (verse 27). The Father gave Jesus authority primarily to give eternal life to all whom He had chosen (John 17:2). This is the purpose with which the Lord gives His messengers authority in the church too - to lead others to take hold of eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12). Any elder who exercises authority in any other way is actually misusing his authority.

Those who reject this authority of the Lord over their lives will be dealt with one day, with a rod of iron that Jesus will wield (Psalms 2:7-9; Revelation 12:5; 19:15). The Lord will share that rod of iron with the overcomer, who would have learnt during his time on earth, how to use the rod of authority with gentleness and firmness (Revelation 2:26, 27).

"He who rules his spirit is better than he who captures a city" (Proverbs 16:32). It is only those who have overcome the lusts in their flesh, the attractions of this world and the wiles of Satan, who are truly qualified in God's eyes to rule the nations one day in His kingdom.

The overcomer is also promised "the morning star" (verse 28). The morning star is Jesus Himself (See Revelation 22:16). Jesus is also called the Sun of righteousness Who will burn the evildoers and bring healing to the nations (Malachi 4:1, 2). The world can see Him only as the Sun of righteousness, but the overcomers will see Him as the morning star.

The morning star is seen just before the rising of the sun. In the last moments of this age, at the end of the great tribulation, while the world is lying in darkness, the last trumpet will sound, and the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. The overcomers of all generations will then be taken up to meet Him in the air to welcome Him back to earth. Then they will see Him as the morning star.

The Lord will then descend to the earth as the Sun of righteousness to judge and heal this sin-sick world. And every eye will see Him. The overcomers will also come down with Him at that time to reign with Him on earth.

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying (verse 29).

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