

6. The corrupted church

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The word 'corruption' has a bad taste in our mouth. Webster's dictionary defines "The status of being marked by immorality, perversion, depraved, dishonest, alterations of the fact for dishonest gain." We have seen many corrupted politicians who would do anything to keep their political careers and to gain wealth.

In my opinion, one of the biggest corruptions and jokes on the Capital Hill is Senator Ted Kennedy. In 1973, Senator Ted Kennedy got drunk and drove off the Dike Bridge in Chappaquiddick, MA with Mary Jo Kopechne who was a former campaign worker for his brother, Robert F. Kennedy in his car. There were an extensive cover-up by the Kennedy family and the story soon became an old news in a library. But currently the Senator Kennedy has been a member of the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. Senate that decides the Supreme Court and Federal Court Judges nominations. By the way, prior to that accident, Senator Kennedy challenged the Nixon administration with this bold question, "Do we operate under a system of equal justice under law? Or is there one system for the average citizen and another for the high and mighty?" Come to think of it, it sounds like we have a justice system for the high and mighty Kennedy family and another one for the average citizen like he said.

I am sure that some of you have heard a joke: "Do you know where all the liars go?" The answer is, "Washington, D.C." There are some truth in that.

The T.V. reality shows contestants and producers are so corrupted in their mindsets. They would do anything to gain one hour fame and money including wife swapping and getting stark naked in front of TV audience. In true reality, they are making fool out of themselves.

However, the corrupted religion really makes all of us feel sick. It makes God angry. Let's find out about this corrupted church Thyatira in Asia Minor.

A. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA FROM JESUS

Rev. 2:18 "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:

The longest message was sent to the church in the smallest city! Thyatira was a military town as well as a commercial center with many trade guilds. Wherever guilds were found, idolatry and immorality – the two great enemies of the early church – were almost always present too.

The city boasted a special temple to Apollo, the "sun god," which explains why the Lord introduced Himself as "the Son of God". Apostle John had to deliver a message of severe warning and judgment to this congregation, which explains the description of the Lord's eyes and feet.

The church of Thyatira was under the eyes of Jesus which sees all hidden things and completely fair and thorough judgement by Him.

Thyatira was an important center of business and trade. Each guild having their own patron deity from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods. The city also was famous for the manufacture of a purple dye and fine cloth.

B. COMMENDATION

Rev. 2:19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.

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 how to serve, and had faith and patience for trials and tests.

What's more, their works were increasing and characterized by faith, love, and patience. So the church was not guilty of mere "religious social club."

C. REBUKE

Rev. 2:20-21 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow (1) that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, (2) 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 (3) she did not repent.

The church of Thyatira has three major problems:

1) Jezebel - The center of the corruption at the church at Thyatira is a woman Jesus calls Jezebel. This may not have been her actual name, but a "title" that clearly represents 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.

The name "Jezebel" had a powerful and terrible association. None of us wants to name our children a "Judas" or a "Hitler." Because there is a bad association between the original people and those names. This is the case in point with 'Jezebel.' The original Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, was given to King Ahab of Israel, in marriage. Since Ethbaal was the high priest of Ashtaroah – goddess of sensuality and fertility – Jezebel's background obviously influenced God's people in Israel.

Some ancient Greek manuscripts state the phrase 'that woman Jezebel' as 'your woman Jezebel' or 'your wife Jezebel.' Based on this, some Bible scholars have thought that Jezebel was the pastor's wife.

2) Her teaching was probably similar to that of the Nicolaitans and Balaamites at Ephesus and Pergamos. Jezebel led others into immorality and idolatry. Because of the strong trade guilds in Thyatira, the sexual immorality and the eating of things sacrificed to idols was connected with the mandatory social occasions of the guilds. The requirements 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.

Nonetheless, Christians were expected to stand in the face of this kind of pressure. For an example, let's say a graphic designer of the Playboy magazine just got saved on Sunday at a church service while he was visiting his relatives over the weekend. On Monday, he has to face those raunchy photos and articles or lose his job and stands in an unemployed line.

3) Even though God extended His grace and mercy to this woman known as Jezebel, she would not repent. Christ's strongest accusation directed against, not Jezebel's perversion, serious as that is, nor even against her successful deception of fellow Christians, but against her refusal to repent. God gives time to repent, but it is not an unlimited time.

D. CORRECTION

Rev 2:22-23 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.

The reference to 'adultery' is important. It speaks of both literal, sexual adultery and spiritual adultery which is idolatry. When these Christians honored other gods, they were unfaithful to the Lord who saved them. Jesus says, "You love an unclean bed. Here, I will give you one, and cast you into a sickbed." We know from passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:30 that God sometimes can use sickness as a way to chastise us when we are in sin.

1 Corinthians 11:30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

E. PROMISE

Rev. 2:24-29 "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. 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. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

It seems that this Jezebel led others in the church at Thyatira to discover depths of satan. 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 still use similar reasoning in misguided spiritual warfare today.

I heard a true story about a young dynamic pastor who was going to teach a series of the harmfulness of pornography. He thought to understand the harmfulness and consequences of pornography, he should visit some of the porno sites in the internet. The problem was that the series he taught to his congregation came and went, but he was continuing his research of pornography in the internet. He was hooked into pornography. He became an example of the consequences of pornography.

However, there were many faithful, uncompromising Christians in Thyatira. To them, Jesus simply says 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. The proof of authentic trust in Jesus is steadfastness of belief and continuance in the will of God till Christ returns or death comes.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Those believers in Thyatira are promised authority over the nations, which probably refers to the fact that God's people will live and reign with Christ.

F. A HISTORICAL PARALLEL LINE

I am going to make some of you get upset with me. Before you pick a rock to stone me, please hear me with the mindset of willing to hear the truth.

I believe the church at Thyatira refers to the Catholic Church.

During the Inquisition Period from A.D. 600 – A.D. 1500, the Catholic Church accumulated great amounts of wealth through political power plays. Consequently, the Catholic Church is extremely wealthy due to their land holdings and banking system.

Please hear my heart, folks, I'm not doing Catholic-bashing. This is history. For nine hundred years, vast amounts of money, property, and treasures were ended up in Roman Catholic churches by keeping people in spiritual darkness. For example, if you were going to a party on Saturday evening, you could buy an indulgence from a priest, and thus be "pre-forgiven" of any ensuing sin. During this time, the "doctrine of purgatory" was also developed, which stated one could speed up the process of the purging of a deceased loved one's soul by buying candles and lighting them on his behalf. Their concept was you could buy God and priest's forgiveness and salvation with money.

There were many people including Reformer John Wycliffe who stood up against these kinds of sick religious practice. What did Wycliffe want to do? He said, "It wasn't right that one had to go through a priest to get his sins forgiven." He said that purgatory and the selling of indulgences were an abomination. He said the mass being held in Latin – a language people couldn't understand – was nothing of what Jesus was about. Did Roman Catholic listened to the words of truth? No, they tried to shut him out by burning him to death on the stake.

Some Catholic leaders try to elevate the Virgin Mary as a co-redeemer with Jesus. You can find this doctrine in some of the crucifixion statues that have Jesus on one side and Mary on the other side. The Virgin Mary, as godly as she was, she didn't die for our sins. She couldn't, because she was a sinner just like the rest of us. That doctrine is flat out wrong and demonic.

Presently there are excellent Catholic churches and wonderful Catholic pastors. There are those who have not bought into the deception of Jezebel. There are substantial segments of the Catholic Church who love Jesus Christ and are not into the hocus-pocus imagery and idolatry that keep people away from knowing the Lord personally.

On the other hand, much of the Catholic Church still has the Thyatira mentality – just as much of the Protestant Church is deader than a door nail, as we'll see in the next chapter. Actually, there are a lot more repulsive protestant churches that make God sick.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Do not think that God is winking at your sin, just because He is not giving you the consequences of your sin right now.

It is by God's grace and mercy, He extends our time to repent. If we repent, He would relent. But if not, don't complain later that He is not merciful.

2) If you've been coming to this church for sometime or even just today, most likely the Holy Spirit has been convicting you about your continuing sin. Let's not be like this woman Jezebel who would not repent and continue in her sins.

It is one thing not knowing that what you are doing is wrong. However, it is completely different story to know how wrong your sin is, and still continuing it. That is

the same thing as challenging God's authority. Remember, God gives time to repent, but it is not an unlimited time.

God judges evil. But He also offers deliverance to those who have fallen, if they repent and stop doing their sins.

3) The proof of authentic trust in Jesus is steadfastness of belief and continuance in the will of God till Christ returns or death comes.