

Christ Community Covenant Church
Revelation: I have a letter for you!
Thyatira: The Fallen Church
Pastor Dave Scherrer - July 10, 2011

Revelation 2:18-29

¹⁸"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

¹⁹ "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²²Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

We have said it two ways – in song and in the reading of the word of God. Let me try to say it one more way to get us going. It is the story of Clayton Lonetree.



Born in 1961, Clayton Lonetree has the dubious distinction of being the first U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) ever convicted of espionage. He was at the core of the "sex for secrets" scandal that rocked the Marine Corps in the mid-80s. Lonetree, a Winnebago Indian, enlisted in the USMC at the age of 18. At first, Lonetree was a model enlisted man, entering into the USMC elite Security Guard Battalion in 1984. The graduation rate from the Security Guard Battalion was less than fifty percent, due to the rigor and demands of the courses. The school provides extensive training on espionage, anti-terrorist tactics, and counter espionage.

The nature of his position, as an Embassy guard at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and later Vienna, allowed him access to highly sensitive material and keys to safes where sensitive materials were kept. Lonetree served seventeen months at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow before being transferred to the U.S. Embassy in Vienna, Austria.

In November 1985, Lonetree met a Russian woman named Violetta Seina at the annual USMC ball, held at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador. Seina had been a telephone operator and translator at the Embassy (she was working for the KGB at the time). Not long after their "relationship" began (a relationship forbidden by USMC regulations), Seina introduced Lonetree

to her "Uncle Sasha" (another KGB Agent). Thus began the relationship that ran along the classic lines of a "honey pot" scenario.

When his conscience got the better of him (or when Seina would not travel to Vienna to see him any longer), Lonetree walked into a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials' office and admitted to providing the KGB Agents with low-level classified information while stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna (he never admitted to providing information while stationed in Russia). The CIA turned the information over to the Naval Investigative Service (NIS), who arrested Lonetree. The result of Lonetree's confession was a massive hunt for USMC "spies" in all the U.S. Embassies around the world.

Lonetree was tried on 13 counts of espionage and he was sentenced to 30 years in jail and served 9. He has been out of jail for over ten years and based on my internet search, he has completely dropped out of sight. A sad story of course.

Whether it is a 'slow fade' in a relationship as the Lopez's sang about a few minutes ago, or a meandering drift by a church into disobedience and sin, or the story of a 'man's man' who makes a very bad choice – it is all the same. You see, no one gets up in the morning and says, "I believe that I will let down my country today" - much less a highly trained and committed Marine. No wife or husband says, "Finally I get the chance to really disappoint my spouse and children." It is unthinkable that a church Pastor and elders would say, "Let's teach something really non-biblical this morning, something that sounds good but is flaming heresy." No, as the song said it is a slow fade, a series of small bad choices that leaves you looking at yourself in the mirror one day saying, "How did I get here? Who is this person that I am looking at?" That is the story of our little church of Thyatira, the fourth of our seven churches that Jesus wrote a letter to at the end of the first century through His disciple John.

Thyatira

So far we have learned the story of Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum all coastal towns of Asia Minor, what we now call the west coast of Turkey. Now we turn our attention to the small town of Thyatira, an important center of manufacture; dyeing, garment-making and brass-working. Maybe you remember Lydia, the 'seller of purple' whom Paul met at Philippi when Paul was establishing a church there (Acts 16:14).

Because of its industry, the city was known for its trade guilds, or organized groups and associations for potters, tanners, dyers and bronze workers.

These guilds created a tremendous problem because it was extremely hard for a merchant to pursue his or her trade without belonging to one of these guilds. To belong to these guilds put a Christian in a compromising position because of the pressure from the guilds to participate in their pagan, idolatrous feasts. Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries. It is like belonging to a professional Association or a Union of today only with even more power and control of the members. These are the people that made up the church of Thyatira, people who were constantly being tempted to compromise their values. Sound familiar?

So let's turn our attention to the passage:

Revelation 2:18-19

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ""I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.'"

This is the good news, but it kind of brings up a dilemma we as parents sometimes fall in. We want to show love and acceptance to our children, but sometimes something in their lifestyle needs to be confronted. We want to give an 'accommodation' to something we see that is good,

but we don't want to communicate that we approve of everything they do that isn't God honoring, especially when parts of their lifestyle is in fact dangerous and immoral.

Accommodation or Approval?

Jesus is giving the church at Thyatira an 'atta boy' for being diligent and hard working, and faithful, more than any other church. Like Ephesus, the first church we looked at, only with even more zeal. Ephesus had a godly zeal for sound doctrine and holiness (2:12), but she was lacking in devotion and love to Christ—simply cold orthodoxy.

Thyatira had an even greater ministry of service and endurance, one that seemed to be motivated by faith and love (cf. vs. 19), but Thyatira lacked on the side of zeal for sound doctrine, moral purity, holiness of life, and zeal against false teaching and practice.

Let's read on . . .

Revelation 2:20-23

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²²Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

Jesus strongly rebukes the church at Thyatira for tolerating a false prophetess with her teaching which promoted immorality and idolatry. She was evidently teaching that a believer's freedom in Christ allowed them to not only belong to the trade guilds, but to participate in the immoral and idolatrous feasts that very often included cultic prostitution.

I think "Jezebel" refers to a literal woman who falsely claimed prophetic powers and who had somehow taken a position of leadership. Her actual name was probably not Jezebel, but she was a virtual Jezebel in her actions. As the Jezebel of the Old Testament enticed God's servants to abandon their loyalty to the Lord and to participate in her idolatrous practices (1 Kings 16:31-33; 2 Kings 9:30-37), so this woman of Thyatira was enticing Christians to abandon their loyalty to Christ and a separated life. Her teaching was probably similar to that of the Nicolaitans that haunted Pergamum.

You are saying, "That couldn't happen here, that couldn't happen to us. Not to me." But it did and it does. In some degree all of us have taken small steps in the direction of letting our hearts wander. Here is what happened back then. See if it seems familiar:

- First, there were those who **tolerated her** (verse 20 – "you tolerate that woman"). In other words, they rejected her teaching, refused to follow her, and refused to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. But, contrary to the believers in Ephesus, they refused to deal with her through church discipline. What she was teaching was clearly license versus true Christian liberty. This teaching was contrary to Scripture, but they tolerated her presence rather than deal with the problem.
- Second, there were those who became her children—her spiritual progeny. These are referred to in the following verses. Evidently, these were those who accepted her teaching and, like Ahab who was influenced by Jezebel of old, followed her example by participating in the activities of the labor guilds which meant involvement in eating things sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality and food sacrificed to idols

Both of these represent the betrayal of adultery. The first is the physical adultery and the second is spiritual, letting our heart's attention and love and trust go to another 'God'. This is the only place adultery is indicated in all the letters. This phrase is almost exactly the same as the ruling at the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15;

Acts 15:19-20

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality,

This participation in adultery Jesus refers to as the deep things of Satan . . .

“... the deep things of Satan . . .”

. . . because these get at the heart of the believer in his or her faith and particularly destroy families and communities. Adultery of the heart in idolatry and adultery of the flesh summarize a failure of the 10 commandments. This is the deep teaching and deep deception and deep hurt of Satan. And it begins with simply tolerating the presence of something and ends up with a painful and sad set of consequences.

What or who is the Jezebel in your life?

It might be a real person who is tempting you to sin. It might be movies and the internet. Typically for men it is pornography, an industry that hurts families and breaks God's heart. For too many women, romance novels and supermarket magazines depict a false love and false sexuality that is an emotional pornography and false image of what is beautiful and is just as devastating. For our young people it might be video games and music that depicts violence and sexuality as though the hurting of others is normal. Just like in Thyatira we are surrounded by these temptations, temptations to not trust God to give us the desires of our hearts and to satisfy us in every way. And it is rarely a leap of sin that gets us into trouble; it is a series of small steps that we seem to get away with. The Slow Fade, the first present to a pretty girl that ends up costing your nation and your freedom.

But there is hope for us. It is called discipline of the Spirit and a moment by moment repentance that places us back into a right relationship with Christ, rather than a giving in to our fallen nature and saying, “This is just who I am.”

Revelation 2:25-29

²⁵Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

First we have to acknowledge that we all struggle against powers and principalities, terrible temptations to take that first small step in the wrong direction.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

But that same passage goes on to give us hope;

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

You see the demise of the church at Thyatira wasn't that they were tempted, or even that they chose poorly, but that they didn't repent. They let the bad choice become an embraced lifestyle. "This lifestyle suits me, makes me happy. I am entitled to this." The rest of us hate our sin and strive against it.

1 Peter 5: 8-10

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

I find deep comfort in these words from Hebrews. When I take my small steps I try to remember this passage and repent and look fast to Jesus. You will find it in Hebrews 12, the first two verses:

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NAS)

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

You see the answer to our saddening small steps away isn't mostly or merely trying harder, setting our will against Satan as though our strength of will is a defense. You remember "our self-will" isn't included in the list of our spiritual armor. The answer is falling deeper in love with Jesus. When we walk with him moment by moment, he will not lead us into temptation. And when our eyes are fixed on Him, we forget what lies behind and begin again pursuing Him with all our heart and all our might and all our soul.

And to the one who overcomes there is the promise of the "Morning Star." The key to the meaning of the morning star is found later in Revelation (22:16) which says, "I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star." This means the brilliant or bright one, the brightest of all the stars, is ours! Jesus is saying to have me is to overcome and to overcome is to have more of me. He is our only hope and He is hope enough!