

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Message to Seven Churches: Thyatira: God's Gracious and Righteous Judgment

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. (Revelation 2:24–25, KJV 1900)

Despite a sinfully tolerant attitude, a significant number of people in the Thyatira Church remained faithful in their service and in their resistance to the "Jezebel spirit" that endangered the church's future blessings. We could well describe the Lord's reaction to the sinful state in this church as "Righteous severity." However, our present study passage adds another dimension to our thoughts regarding the Lord's righteous judgment of His people. Quite often when humans judge other humans, they readily accept that the innocent must suffer with the guilty. This passage emphasizes that our God has no such limitation. Nor does He practice such lax and unrighteous judgment when He judges His people. There was a time in the Old Testament when the consequences of the fathers' sins fell on the children.

What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? (Ezekiel 18:2 KJV)

However, a careful reading of the remainder of this chapter indicates that this era was ending, replaced by a time when the Lord would enforce precise personal judgment against those who sin, not against others, including their children.

At times, it appears that the Lord indeed passes judgment against a whole church, but perhaps when this occurs, the whole church has crossed the line into rebellion and rejection of His commandments. In the case of the Thyatira Church, our passage makes a point of distinguishing the Lord's discerning judgment within the church between the godly and the wicked. He tells the church that He shall soon judge the wicked, but He also tells the righteous people in the church that He will not unrighteously judge them.

This righteous, discerning judgment characterizes the Lord's judgment throughout Scripture.

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod

of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11:4 KJV)

In the same context, we see the Lord righteously judging the poor, reproofing the meek with equity, even as He smites others with greater—and deserved—severity.

For a moment, imagine yourself as a member of Thyatira Church when it received this letter. Perhaps the people in the church have been quietly aware of the "Jezebel" problem, but they were so troubled by it that they didn't know what to do, so they quietly "Suffered" the situation by doing nothing. Rest assured, "Sister Jezebel" wasn't so idle. Revelation 2:20-22 mentions her active solicitation of followers to her sinful ways. Interestingly, in a church culture, quite often those who seek to promote error are the most aggressive and active people in the church. While the godly quietly grieve and struggle with the sinful path, those who promote it work constantly to give the path of sin the sterilized appearance of a good thing and actively solicit others to join them on their journey down this path. Jezebel actively promoted the notion that she was a true "...prophetess" of the Lord, she taught any who would listen and, by her false teaching, aggressively seduced them to follow her sinful example. She rationalized the worship of pagan idols to her followers. No quiet, passive wallflower, this lady, she stayed busy enlisting more followers of her devious ways.

"Sister Jezebel" had one insurmountable problem. She was quite effective at strong-arming other people in the church, but she couldn't strong-arm the Lord. Nor could she convince Him that she was right in her sinful course. Ah, such is the dilemma of all who choose to ignore the Lord and to follow their own course. We serve in the Lord's church, not in our personal domain, and He reminded His people in the Old Testament that He was a "...jealous God." Here "Jealous" does not refer to a mean-spirited insecurity, but to a strong protective oversight.

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. Often in human strategies, people are required to "Take one step back in order to take two steps forward." God does not enforce this strategy. He commanded the faithful in Thyatira to hold fast

at their present faithful stance. The Lord didn't tell them that they had been decreed irresistibly to hold fast. He commands them to hold fast. They may hold fast, or they may not, but He commands them to do so.

...*till I come*. The Lord has already warned the Jezebel group in Thyatira that He shall soon come in judgment against her and her sinful followers.

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. (Revelation 2:22–23, KJV 1900)

Scripture clearly teaches churches to take personal responsibility for godly conduct and for rejecting sinful conduct in its members. Paul devoted a full chapter (1 Corinthians 5) to the sinful tolerance of the Corinthian Church toward the man who had married his (likely) step-mother. In the end, he gave the church a firm, direct commandment.

But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Corinthians 5:13 KJV)

How does a church "...put away from among yourselves..." a wicked person such as this man?

...*till I come*. The context of this phrase eliminates the Second Coming, but what is the point? In what way does the Lord promise the faithful at Thyatira that He shall come, but they need to hold fast till that time?

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (1 Corinthians 4:5 KJV)

Perhaps in this verse as in few others, the Lord manifests what it means to hold the position of ...*head over all things to the church*. (Ephesians 1:22b) His headship over the church is not one of a passive figurehead. He remains the active, ruling, commanding head over His church. Emphasize the personal pronoun, "His." The church is not mine or yours, but His. At times He may withhold active intervention, but do not mistake His patient delay for passivity. He states in our study context that He gave even Jezebel space to repent. During this season, He suspended His judgment against her, but He goes on to state emphatically that her space is limited, and He shall soon appear in open and decisive judgment against her and her followers.

The wise course for pastors and churches as they deal with difficulties is to face every difficulty on

their knees. Seek the Lord's guiding hand, His leadership, in dealing with problems. Imagine a difficulty in your church. The pastor and members talk about it and seem to have different ideas about the best way to solve the problem. The human solution is to steam ahead and force a course of action. The Biblical way is to wait, prayerfully wait, till the Lord makes His will manifest. Often when sincere faithful believers hold differing ideas about a problem, it is due to their lack of knowledge. Some know more about the situation than others. Some know one thing, while others know something else, leading them to differing ideas for a godly solution. When a church faces this dilemma, they need to wait—wait on their knees. The Lord promised to come and to bring to light things that the people didn't know, even to the point of manifesting the private counsels of the hearts. Once the Lord manifests these added facts, it is time to judge, and praying people will be led of the Lord to a godly, harmonious course of action. The same principle appears in our study of the Thyatira problem.

...*and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.* (Revelation 2:22–23, KJV 1900, emphasis added)

Notice the plural, "churches." Perhaps wicked "Sister" Jezebel decided to expand her influence to other churches beyond Thyatira. The Lord's warning reveals the same point that we find in 1 Corinthians 4:5. At His time and in His way, the Lord brings to light the sinful schemes of wicked men who endanger one of His beloved churches. Similar to the Jezebel situation at Thyatira, the Lord allows space for repentance and convicts those who follow a sinful path to turn back. Often, as with Jezebel, they mistakenly think that no divine judgment is evidence of the Lord's approval of their sinful ways, so they go deeper into the sin rather than repenting. Based on Biblical teaching and Biblical examples, when the Lord does step into a situation, He does so quickly and decisively. To follow the language of the text; He does so in a way that makes it clear to "...all the churches..." that the sudden calamity that befell the Jezebel spirit was a divine judgment, not a coincidental event.

Churches, godly, faithful churches face a constant dilemma. On one hand, they may be too hasty and judge too aggressively and harshly. Or they may fear such haste, and not judge at all. Both actions fail the Biblical commandment. Other believers may approve or disapprove of either action. However, the future and the blessings of a church do not rely on public opinion, but on the Lord's opinion. We live with the ever-present need to call on Him and to rely on Him for guiding our path and for revealing Himself in judgment. And, once He manifests His judgment, we need to faithfully obey.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor