**The Church in Thyatira: Part 1**

***The Stumblingblock Church***

Sunday School Lesson 4

*Lessons from the Seven Churches*

*Revelation 2:18-29*

3/8/2020

**Introduction:** The city of Thyatira was the smallest of all of the cities mentioned in the book of Revelation, yet the Lord wrote the longest letter to the church there. Thyatira is mentioned in the book of Acts with the conversion of a woman named Lydia. She was from the city of Thyatira, and she sold the precious purple dye that originated from the city. While her conversion took place in Philippi, it is believed that members of her household were responsible for starting the church in Thyatira. Like the other cities mentioned in our study, Thyatira was filled with idolatry. It was mostly a military and commercial city focused on selling textiles, and it was the center for many guilds. Each of these guilds had their own false god that they worshipped. Overall, the city was significantly more tolerant to the church than any of the other three that we have studied. Its small size and location on a lesser traveled path kept it from the fierce persecution from the Roman emperor. Sadly, despite the greater freedom that the church had, the Christians in Thyatira had erred greatly from what the Lord envisioned for the church. If you recall from last week, the church in Pergamos had compromised by allowing some in the church to accept the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes. The church in Thyatira went a step further than Pergamos. It did not just compromise by allowing some of its members to be engaged in idolatry and open wickedness; it had a teacher that was actively promoting sinful behavior by the church. What is especially interesting is that the church had people in it who did not hold to this belief, but they allowed it to be taught in the church. This happens today as well. In a pursuit of growth, more and more churches are bringing Jezebels into the church, and this is causing a great stumblingblock to immature Christians.

1. THE CHURCH WAS INCREASINGLY BUSY, BUT IT WAS NOT PRODUCING GROWTH FROM ITS MEMBERS. (REVELATION 2:19-20)
2. **Notice that the church was commended twice for its works (Revelation 2:19).** This church was a very busy church. In the same verse, the Lord mentions their works twice, and He emphasized that their most recent works were even greater than their previous works. We don’t know specifically what all of those works were in those days. Obviously, they were laboring in their witnessing. They may have been spending significant time helping one another with physical needs (caring for the widows and less fortunate in the church). They may have been meeting several times of weeks and organizing different functions to support the church. Whatever they were doing, the Lord was pleased with their effort. They were not a lazy church. They were not an apathetic church. They genuinely had a desire to work for the Lord. Every church ought to strive to labor diligently like this church did.
3. **Notice that the church was still struggling with basic tenants of the faith (Revelation 2:20).** Despite their labor, the church was not growing spiritually. There were members openly engaged in immoral behavior. There were members participating in worship of idols. The basic tenant of our faith is that we serve one God and have our faith in the only Son of God. It is also a basic concept that our faith in Christ produces a change in our behavior. The fact that immorality is sinful is very clearly taught in the Bible. Members of this church were busy serving in one moment and busy sinning in the other. Such a contradiction should not exist in the church. Yet, we see this today. There are churches that are always busy, yet you do not see growth in its members. They are openly engaging in sinful practices. Sin does not bring honor to God. Sin does nothing to help the cause of Christ. Works in the church should produce real spiritual growth in the church, not just numerical growth.
4. THE CHURCH HAD A GENUINE LOVE FOR OTHERS, BUT ITS ACCEPTANCE OF SIN WAS HARMING THOSE IT LOVED. (1 CORINTHIANS 13; REVELATION 2:19, 22-23; 1 PETER 4:8)
5. **Notice that the church had the essential ingredient of charity in its labor (1 Corinthians 13; Revelation 2:19).** We find another great quality of those church. It had charity. It was not just laboring out of obligation. It was not just laboring for self-glorification. It was laboring because it genuinely loved others. Throughout the epistles, Paul emphasizes the necessity of charity. A church must serve the Lord with charity. Without it, our works will come up empty. The church in Ephesus had to be reminded of this. The sinner responds to the charity of the believer. There are many people who attend a church for no other reason than the fact that they feel loved there. Obviously, they ought to make a decision based on the truth of the Word of God. Yet, when someone is hurting or in need, they are often just looking for anyone to show them love. Sadly, there are many stumblingblock churches out there that draw men in because they are genuinely loving, but they lead them astray through errant teaching.
6. **Notice that the church opened its member up to the wrath of the Lord by not preaching against sin and by openly endorsing wickedness (Revelation 2:22-23; 1 Peter 4:8).** In 1 Peter, we are told that charity covers a multitude of sins. Perhaps, this church thought it was exercising love by overlooking what was being taught and what was taking place in its church. They probably reasoned that it was okay because at least they were reaching people and making a difference. The church at Corinth made this same mistake. It misunderstood the concept of charity and covering of sin. Charity does not excuse sin. Charity does not whitewash sin. Charity covers sin with the blood of Christ. This covering is found through repentance. How does repentance happen? It happens in response to preaching against sin. Those in the church did not repent because nobody was willing to stand up and tell them that what they were doing was wrong. Consequently, this church did great damage to its members. It opened them up to the wrath of the Lord. A loving parent rebukes a child to keep them from future pain and harm. Every church needs some parental (mature) Christian leaders to rebuke sin. Charity requires rebuking.
7. THE CHURCH HAD KEPT ITS FAITH IN THE LORD, BUT IT HAD TAINTED THE POWER OF FAITH. (REVELATION 2:19, 24-25; MATTHEW 21:21; PSALM 55:18)
8. **Notice that the church never strayed from their faith in Christ (Revelation 2:19).** The Lord commended the church for their faith. This was not a church made up of unbelievers. There were some legitimate converts in this church. These converts are who the Lord is addressing the message to. While they had allowed a false teacher in their church, they had never wavered on the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. There are many churches out there that have at least some members who hold to a true faith in Jesus Christ. The problem is that these members do not stand up to false teachers in their churches. They keep the faith, but they do not guard the faith. This results in a watered-down Gospel that leads to false conversions. Eventually, the church goes fully into apostasy and ceases to be a church at all. This is sadly what happened to the church in Thyatira. It still had a sliver of faithful members when it received this letter from the Lord through John, but it did not heed the Lord’s warning.
9. **Notice that the church’s faith was not actively working because it was hindered by sin (Revelation 2:24-25; Matthew 21:21; Psalm 55:18).** Jesus told His disciples that faith is powerful. Through faith, we can move mountains. When we see our faith working in action, it increases our faith. The new converts in Thyatira did not grow in faith because they never saw their faith fully functional. The reason is that the Bible also tells us that we cannot get answers to prayer with unconfessed sin in our lives. Sin is the counteragent to faith. There are a great number of people leaving the modern-day Thyatira church because they don’t see results. In many cases, they depart the faith altogether. These churches are doing great damage to the faith. It is our responsibility to keep and guard the faith.
10. THE CHURCH WAS PATIENT IN SERVING THE LORD, BUT IT DENIED THE PERFECTING WORK OF PATIENCE. (REVELATION 2:19, 26; JAMES 1:1-4; 2 PETER 1:6; ROMANS 5:3-4)
11. **Notice that the church was patient in their service for Christ (Revelation 2:19).** While the church was not persecuted like the other churches previously mentioned, they certainly still had their fair share of trouble. They may have run into challenges with the guilds in the city. It’s unlikely that they would have been able to join a guild without being accepting of that guild’s false god. We really don’t know what their struggles were, but we do know that they endured those challenges. They weren’t so weak that they closed the doors at the first sign of trouble.
12. **Notice that the church’s patience did not lead to godliness or experience, the perfecting agents of the saints (Revelation 2:26; James 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:6; Romans 5:3-4).** When we let patience work, it does a perfecting work in us. Why didn’t this happen with the church in Thyatira? They were patient, but they definitely were not a perfect church. The answer is found in 2 Peter 1:6 and Romans 5:3-4. These two passages give us building blocks for our faith. Peter tells us that we are to add godliness to our patience. This church had certainly not done this. Instead, their response to enduring was to become accepting of sin. Additionally, Romans tells us that patience produces experience. This experience is an increaser of our faith and hope in Christ. The church did not gain experience because they were not properly patient. While they waited on the Lord, they contrived their own way to handle the challenges that they faced. In other words, they were only able to be patience because they relieved the pressure of suffering by accepting sin in their church. The church in Pergamos had done the same thing. We need churches who are not silent on sin and who are definitely not accepting of sin. Let’s not follow the path that the Christians in Thyatira took. It does not end well for the church or its members!