

When Is a Church Corrupt?
Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place
March 7, 2021

I. **Corrupt and Apostate Churches**

- A. Churches that reject the clear teaching of scripture
 - 1. Teachings which have been recognized by orthodox churches ever since the beginning
- B. Rejections
 - 1. **Doctrinal**
 - a. Denying the deity of Jesus – story I told about a presbyterian presbytery ordaining a man who denied the deity of Christ
 - 2. **Ethical**
 - a. Churches that support the practice of sexual behavior that the Bible clearly and unequivocally condemns
 - b. Most recently, LGBT pressure to accept such practices
 - (1) And to ordain those who practice sin
- C. Bottom line – corrupt churches reject scriptural authority
 - 1. Adopt worldly or pagan standards in their place
 - 2. Often do that by appealing to Christian ideas
 - a. Usually the love and mercy of Jesus
 - 3. Pastor found guilty of celebrating homosexual unions: “Those who love **justice** and are **compassionate** and **merciful**, those who have a vision of Jesus where all are welcomed without favor, are injured by this decision today.”
- D. Sooner or later, corrupt churches become apostate
 - 1. I.e., they fall away; cease to be a true church
 - 2. Last message – **Pergamum**
 - a. **Compromised church**
 - b. But there was a correction for the compromised church
 - (1) Told to repent
 - (2) Repentance had to do with no longer tolerating the sinful practices of the Nicolaitans
 - (3) Church discipline
 - 3. This message – **Thyatira**
 - a. Some of the same corruptions
 - (1) **Jezebel** – led Israel into idolatry and immorality
 - (2) Cf teaching of Balaam, Nicolaitans (also idolatry and immorality)
 - b. One difference – church is not told to repent
 - c. Wonder – has Thyatira regressed through corruption all the way to apostasy where there is no longer a remediation for sin?

II. Text

- A. **Revelation 2:18–29** (NASB95) — 18 “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:

- B. 19 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.
- C. 20 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.
- D. 21 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.
- E. 22 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.
- F. 23 '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.
- G. 24 '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.
- H. 25 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.
- I. 26 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;
- J. 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.
- K. 29 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

III. The Judgment of an Apostate Church

- A. General observations
 - 1. Common elements with other churches
 - a. Pergamum
 - (1) Description of Jesus is foreboding
 - (a) Pergamum – sharp, two-edged sword
 - (b) Thyatira – eyes like a flame of fire; feet burnished bronze
 - (2) Same sins
 - (a) Pergamum: Balaam and Nicolaitans – idolatry and immorality
 - (b) Thyatira: Jezebel – idolatry and immorality
 - b. Ephesus
 - (1) Similar deeds
 - (a) Ephesus – toil and perseverance
 - (b) Thyatira – love, faith, service and perseverance
 - 2. Differences with other churches
 - a. Ephesus
 - (1) Lacked love and was growing cold in Christian virtues
 - (2) Thyatira – was loving, and was growing in their virtues
 - b. Pergamum
 - (1) Tolerated teaching; had not disciplined false teaching; false

- teaching was not in control of the church
- (2) Thyatira – discipline had not resulted in repentance; **false teaching in control**, seemed to be the majority report; much more established
3. Thyatira was not as large or as prominent as other cities
- a. Not political or religious center
 - b. Was located in an area of significant trade
 - (1) Good agricultural area
 - (2) Known for its **trade guilds**
 - (a) **Garment industry**
 - (b) **Dyeing** (purple – produced from local root)
 - i) Lydia – first convert in Europe at Philippi; seller of purple from Thyatira
 - ii) May have brought the gospel back to Thyatira
 - (c) **Pottery**
 - (d) **Brass works**
4. Trade guilds provided the focal point of the problems for the church
- a. Couldn't do business without belonging to the guild
 - b. Belonging to guild meant participating in banquets, feasts
 - c. Banquets normally dedicated to local pagan gods (Tyrinnos, identified with Greek sun gods Helios and Apollo)
 - d. Banquets ordinarily degenerated into orgies; occasions for sexual promiscuity
 - e. Difficulties in being Christian in such a context
 - f. Seduction of Jezebel – it's ok to belong to a guild, participate in the idolatrous feasts, even engage in sexual immorality
 - (1) Can't do business without it
 - (2) **Spiritual benefit – learn about the deep things of Satan**
- B. **The identity of the judge** – Jesus Christ Himself
1. Description
 - a. **Eyes like a flame of fire**
 - (1) Penetrating gaze; ancient superman with X-ray vision
 - (2) Even worse – vision would destroy whatever was in its line of sight
 - (3) Local pagan sun god may have been bright; the very gaze of Jesus would have eclipsed any such pretender
 - b. **Feet like burnished bronze**
 - (1) Appropriate for a city known for its fine brass works
 - (a) Particular amalgam was famous for its luster
 - (2) But bronze is symbolic for judgment; altar of burnt offering was the brazen altar
 - (3) This city's church loved its bronze; those who were corrupt in the church would be trampled by it!
 - c. To receive this description at the beginning of the letter ought to

lead to trepidation

- (1) Cf guilty pastor's comments: "Those who love justice and are compassionate and merciful, those who have a vision of Jesus where all are welcomed without favor, are injured by this decision today."
 2. Jesus stands against this church who tolerates this sin
 - a. **Revelation 2:20** (NASB95) — 20 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.'
 - b. They flatter themselves who think Jesus is on their side!
 3. Jesus executes judgment
 - a. **Revelation 2:22–23** (NASB95) — 22 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 '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.'
 - b. Those who pretend that Jesus is on their side will be astonished when it is Jesus Himself (not some intolerant, bigoted, Bible-thumping fundamentalists) who will actually execute the judgment
- C. **Identify of the judged – Jezebel**
1. Not necessary, even likely, to think that this perpetrator was named Jezebel, or even that it was a woman
 - a. Association with the Jezebel of the OT
 2. Jezebel was an outsider who became an insider
 - a. Daughter of the king of the Sidonians
 - b. Married Ahab; most wicked of the kings of Israel
 - (1) Most wicked because of Jezebel
 - c. Cf Balaam – outsider who remained an outsider
 - (1) Led Moabites in seducing Israel
 - (2) Never a leader of Israel
 3. Jezebel known for the sins identified in Thyatira
 - a. **Idolatry**
 - b. **Sexual immorality**
 - c. Also for **Violence** in enforcing the wickedness
 - (1) Murder of Naboth to acquire his vineyard
 4. Jezebel known for the **extraordinary extent** of sinfulness and **degree of control** which she achieved
 - a. Undoubtedly what this vision communicates
 - b. Not just idolatry and immorality were practiced, tolerated
 - c. Not just that they were taught
 - d. But that they were pervasive; the majority report
 - e. She was in charge
 5. Means of achieving such power – **Self-proclaimed prophetess**

- a. “God told me...”
- b. Cf Ephesians – tested such false apostles and prophets, found them wanting
 - (1) Thyatira had not done that
 - (2) Were paying dearly for their neglect
- 6. Nature of her effect on the church
 - a. Teaches and **Leads bond-servants astray**
 - (1) Not just in doctrine
 - (2) Also evoked their engagement in the wicked practices
- 7. Her response to discipline (by John???)
 - a. Had time to repent
 - (1) Repentance sometimes takes time
 - b. But did not want to repent
 - (1) Rejected the correction
 - c. Cf the OT Jezebel – corrected by prophets
 - (1) Rejected that correction by killing the prophets of God
 - (2) Then corrected by Elijah who destroyed their prophets
 - (a) Even that didn’t turn her
 - (b) Had so much power that Elijah fled after he had destroyed the prophets of Baal
- D. **The nature of her judgment – fits the crime**
 - 1. **Revelation 2:22** (NASB95) — 22 ‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness...’
 - a. Bed could mean the mat upon which they would recline at the pagan banquets
 - b. Bed could mean the beds used by those engaged in sexual promiscuity
 - c. In either case, she liked beds
 - (1) Jesus would put her on one
 - d. Only this time she would drink a bitter wine
- E. **Those who are judged with her** – she won’t go down alone
 - 1. **Revelation 2:22–23** (NASB95) — 22 ‘... and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence...’
 - 2. Her influence endangers everybody else
 - a. Those who commit adultery with her
 - (1) Could be literal
 - (2) Could simply mean those who have succumbed to her wiles and engaged in these sins
 - (3) If they see the light and repent, they could be saved
 - (4) (No repentance offered for Jezebel; she’s had her chance)
 - b. Her children
 - (1) Probably not her literal children
 - (2) Probably those who have committed themselves unreservedly to her teaching and are teaching others

- (3) Probably not redeemable either
 - 3. Tragedy of an apostate church
 - a. Many people go down with the ship
- F. Purpose of the judgment – glory of God and of Christ
 - 1. Revelation 2:23 (NASB95) — 23 ‘... 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.’
 - a. All the churches will know something about Christ
 - 2. Today’s churches know very little of this Christ
 - a. Don’t like the vision of Christ as judge of sin
 - 3. Church discipline has two purposes
 - a. Reconciliation
 - b. Purity of the church
 - 4. Judgment of an apostate church has two purposes
 - a. Retribution of the unrepentant
 - b. Manifestation of the nature and character of Christ
- G. Who is left out of the judgment – The Godly Remnant
 - 1. Revelation 2:24–25 (NASB95) — 24 ‘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. 25 ‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.’
 - a. These are the ones who are growing in love, faith, service, perseverance
 - b. These are the ones who have recognized the sinfulness of this teaching
 - c. These are the ones who, at great cost to themselves, have refused to engage in the idolatry and immorality
 - d. And have done all this as the disenfranchised minority in this church
 - 2. Christ doesn’t tell them to repent
 - a. Just to Hold on
 - 3. There is a remnant in every apostate church
 - a. Just like Elijah
 - (1) So depressed, he thought he was the only godly one left
 - (2) 1 Kings 19:14 (NASB95) — 14 Then he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”
 - (3) 1 Kings 19:17–18 (NASB95) — 17 “It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”
 - (4) Elijah wasn’t the only one left; there were others

- (5) There was a remnant; there always is
- b. God will preserve His own
- 4. The remnant will not just be preserved; **They will be rewarded**
 - a. **Revelation 2:26–28** (NASB95) — 26 ‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.’
 - b. Participants in the judgment with Christ!
 - c. Recipients of **The Morning Star**
 - (1) **Revelation 22:16** (NASB95) — 16 “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”
 - d. Jesus Himself is more precious to the true believer than any temporal benefit
 - (1) Any benefit deriving from accommodation to the world?
 - (2) Any benefit from succumbing to the allures of the Jezebels of our age?
 - e. Great benefit in holding on, holding fast
 - (1) **Jude 3** (NASB95) — 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

- IV. There is hope, even in an apostate church
 - A. Judgment will come
 - 1. Jesus will bring it
 - 2. Repentance will not be possible for some
 - B. But a remnant will always be preserved
 - 1. Hold fast
 - C. That’s what the Spirit says to the churches