

Thyatira: Revelation 2: 18-29

Do you like unions? That question can easily ignite an intense argument! OK, perhaps better leave that alone!

Thyatira was a union town. Most cities in the Greco-Roman world centered on the guilds, but in Thyatira, they were prominent (some inscriptions noted the shoemakers, the makers and **sellers of dyed cloth**, and the bronze smiths). Lydia, a wealthy woman in the Bible and a **'seller of purple'** was a founding member of the church in Philippi (Acts 16:12-15) and came from Thyatira.



Most towns tended to be laid out in squares, with each guild controlling its portion of “squares”. Furthermore, each guild had its patron god/goddess, and the frequent feasts of the guilds were religious and often decidedly immoral. These feasts formed the heart of the social (and commercial) life of the city. To refuse to participate meant the loss of both friends and business (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 153-54). Christians felt pressured to participate in the idolatrous life of the people due to the link with the guilds. However, our Lord does not comment on the “unions”, but rather on the sin within the church.

Remember! Christ's disciples live *in* the world but do not belong *to* the world. He made this clear in his words to the eleven on the night he was betrayed. He told them, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world" (Jn 15:19)—and so it doesn't. He warned them, "In this world, you will have trouble" (16:33).

And yet, astoundingly, he did not ask God to remove any church- Thyatira or ours—from the culture. Instead, he prayed, "My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. **Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth**" (17:15). Amazing! He wants us to live in the culture without being harmed by its values

"If Ephesians Christians were tempted by rigidity and lovelessness, Smyrna Christians by persecution, and Pergamum's Christians by a wide assortment of idols; then, **economic pressures and indulgences lured comprise among Thyatira's Christians**" (Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation*, 132).

Study Questions

1. Open With Prayer and read the letter several times.
2. If you are daring enough (!) ask your group their opinion of unions. If not, just smile and move on to the next question 😊 Or, a safer question: Jesus uses a “nickname” to describe a particular woman in the church (ie Jezebel). What nicknames have you worn over the years...and did you like them?
3. For what does Jesus commend them in verse 19? How does this compare to His commendations of other previous churches? The four words describe both motives and deeds. Why is this important? **NOTE:** The Greek word (*diakonian*) “service: refers to charitable service and ministry to others. (Grant Osborne, 154, 55).
4. Our Lord here writes the longest judgment of all the churches (20-22). A leading woman in the church, code-named “Jezebel”, lured the church into many sins. How did she convince people? What did she encourage? Assuming “Jezebel” is a nickname, why does Jesus call her so? (read 1 Kings 16: 29-34 and 21:25-26).
5. What might the temptations of “Jezebel” look like today? What are some temptations of our culture that lure us the most? If comfortable share them with the group. Temptation often comes through a person we trust or a group we admire. Has that been your experience? What does Jesus assure will happen to her?

6. When pressured to compromise, keep your eyes focused on Jesus. How does He describe Himself throughout the letter? Why is this particular description suitable to them (vs. 18)?

NOTE: "*son of God*" stands in strong contrast to the local cultic worship of Apollo Tyrimnos, which merged with that of the emperor (identified as Apollo incarnate) so that both were acclaimed as sons of Zeus. Thus, it is not the emperor or the guardian deity of Thyatira, but the resurrected Christ, who is the true son of God" (Robert Mounce, 101-102).

7. How should the other people in the church of God react to this issue (vs. 24-25)?
8. Jesus closes the letter with a stark quote about judgment and also a promise of shared authority (note Psalm 2:1-3). How does that add urgency to the readers?
9. Jesus uses both Old Testament Biblical stories and selected passages to warn these readers. Why do you think He tells these very old stories? Name some biblical verses or stories that have helped you to deal with temptations.