

Honor Christ's Holiness: The Church at Thyatira

LHC: Message Seventeen (980614AM)

Week 17: Honor Christ's Holiness

(Revelation 2:18–29 — The Church at Thyatira)

This week as we approach the end of days, you can find hope as you honor Christ's holiness!

SUNDAY: Holiness Is Fearing Sin

*The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ **depart from iniquity.**"*

—2 Timothy 2:19, emphasis added

The letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven letters Christ wrote to His church. Yet Thyatira, located thirty miles from Pergamos and Sardis, is the least described of all the seven churches in Revelation. In fact, the only thing we know is the name of the first Christian from Thyatira. On Paul's second journey, as he stopped in Philippi, he led a seeking woman to Jesus, a "*seller of purple [scarlet fabrics]*" (Acts 16:14). Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, was his first European convert.

Thyatira was renowned for its trade guilds. Much like our unions of today, the guilds set prices for labor, sales areas, and so forth. Potters, dyers, tanners, bakers, metal workers, textile makers, bronze smiths, slave dealers, leather workers, and the rest all had their guilds in this town.

Trade guilds were compulsory; to be employed in a trade was only via the guild. It was a closed shop. Every guild in Thyatira had a patron god or goddess, and every guild function began with paying homage to that deity by an obligatory offering; business followed, and then the customary banquets known for their sexual freedom.

Sir William Ramsay, the famed nineteenth-century archaeologist, described the scene of what he had excavated as being a place where intoxicated partygoers indulged themselves in immorality as the standard conduct of these pagan trade guilds. Clearly, lounging at a meal surrounded by strippers is not where any believer would want Christ to find him asking for deliverance from temptation. In short, a guild was no place for Christians, but quitting the union was economic suicide.

Thyatira was the church of the Dark Ages (A.D. 600–1500); this period covered from the time of the first pope, Gregory the Great, to the Reformation. If Pergamos was the church that was first wed to the world, then Thyatira was the dead church that had been living a long time in that condition.

Have you, like the wayward Thyratirans, been "dead" inside for a long time? If you have not said no to all sin in your life, and said yes to Christ by asking Him to give

you clean hands and a pure heart, that neglect can trigger the chastening hand of God. Our Scripture meditation this week, Revelation 2:18–29, reminds us that Jesus Christ is “*He who searches the minds and hearts.*” He very explicitly speaks of what happens to those who refuse to come before Him in purity. The chastening hand of God is real, and it will reach out and touch you if you do not choose to fear the Lord.

Fearing the Lord (appearing over 100 times in God’s Word) is a huge scriptural concept—for God commands reverential awe that leads to loving obedience. Have you learned to fear the dreadful consequences of sin? I exhort you to listen this week to Christ’s call to holiness!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Lord Jesus, You have written this letter to the church at Thyatira, and we believe in the inerrant, inspired, supernatural revelation of Your Book; it is the very Word of You, the living God; and You, the living Word. Lord Jesus, we ask that Your Spirit would communicate Your words to our hearts with conviction and piercing sharpness that we might fear Your chastisement. And that in fearing You we might say no to sin and yes to Your sanctifying process in our lives. Search our hearts and know our innermost thoughts. May we at all times abhor, turn from, flee, and disregard the allurements of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the horrible pride of life. Illumine us; touch our hearts with clarity, understanding, and insight into Your Word as we come before You seeking. In the lovely name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Holiness Is Wanting to Grow

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever.

—2 Peter 3:18, emphasis added

The fear of the Lord is a reverential, awesome awareness of how holy God is, and how unholy we are. The phrase “the fear of the Lord” is repeated often in the Bible, but it does not tell us that we are to live in an attitude of terror, *for God has not given us a spirit of fear* (2 Timothy 1:7). As God’s children we are to reverence the Lord so much that we will not deliberately disobey Him or try His patience. We must have a holy respect for God.

Consider this illustration: When I was a little boy, one of my friends was mowing the lawn barefooted. He was pushing the mower up the side of a drainage ditch and got distracted. The mower rolled back down and cut off his toes. It is hard to walk without toes because they help us balance. For the rest of my time growing up, I remembered the great difficulty that boy had, so I learned to fear the lawn mower. No, I don’t lie awake at night thinking it was going to come out of the garage and get me, but when I start the mower, I have my children stand back out of the way. And when I push it, I always remember how quickly that spinning blade can do great damage. My fear of the lawn mower caused me to be respectful of its power, and to do nothing that could lead to harm in my life.

Our fear of God should likewise cause us to respect His power, and do nothing that could lead to His displeasure and consequent chastisement. While it is true that we

can now boldly come to Christ, we must always remember *who* He is: He is always God. If we cultivate this kind of fear, we will realize that there is great benefit in fearing Him. Here are some of the benefits that are ours through fearing the Lord:

- **Fearing the Lord shows us what can last forever:** *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever* (Psalm 19:9). If you will attach your life and all your desires to Him, what you do, what you are, and what you have will last for eternity.
- **Fearing the Lord gives eternal wisdom:** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments* (Psalm 111:10). Fearing God and obedience always go together. If you fear God, you will obey Him.
- **Fearing the Lord reflects the eternal character of Christ:** *The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him [the promised Christ], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD* (Isaiah 11:2–3). This is a prophecy of Christ, like the one in Isaiah: the seven-fold Spirit of God—the complete ministry of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. When we fear Him, as we yield to His Spirit, we will reflect the holy character of our triune God and be walking in Christlikeness.
- **Fearing the Lord produces eternal riches:** *Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure* (Isaiah 33:6). Our real treasure is found in fearing the Lord; even things like economic upheavals cannot take that treasure away.

This is the wonder of Christ: you can make a decision right now that will totally transform how you experience Him. Remove the idea that you are just a spectator and engage yourself by participating fully in worship and service to Him, whether at church or in daily life. As you ponder what has been said—all that lines up with the Word of God—respond wholeheartedly by saying “Yes!” to the Lord.

TUESDAY: Holiness Is Staying Pure

*We should **live soberly, righteously, and godly** in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

—Titus 2:12–13, emphasis added

The fear of the Lord prompts us to seek to be as pure as possible on this sin-cursed earth, and that leads to personal holiness. If you want to advance your walk with the Lord, this exhortation is critical: *Having these promises [the Word of God], beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh* (2 Corinthians 7:1a).

The apostle Paul said that he was as susceptible to picking up the filth of the flesh as we are. He abhorred it, so he purposefully closed the door to it. Every time we leave the door open through anger, an unforgiving and bitter spirit, lust, or an insubordinate and rebellious attitude toward authorities, it is like letting wild animals come into our

house. If a tiger had escaped from your local zoo and was prowling your neighborhood, would you go to bed that night and leave your door open?

Shut the door to temptations. Listen to how Peter encouraged those early saints of Roman Asia in his first letter: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil wants to discourage us and make us doubt God's power and promises. That is what Paul warned us about. We must not give the devil a foothold in our lives through sin (see Ephesians 4:25–32). The instant we are aware of any wrong decision and filthiness of the flesh, we should seek Jesus Christ's cleansing. But there is also filthiness of the spirit, which is coming to God unprepared. Again look at what Paul said to cleanse: *filthiness of the flesh **and spirit*** (2 Corinthians 7:1b, emphasis added).

God wants us to have cleanness of the flesh and of the spirit. If you were invited to an event honoring a dignitary, but it required formal dress, would you attend in old ragged clothes and dirty tennis shoes? If so, you would not be allowed in. Why? Dignitaries deserve respect; they demand respect. Therefore, you must come before God with the right attitude and make sure you are not holding on to sin. You must cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit in order to be *perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Corinthians 7:1c).

This touching story reflects the lifestyle we are to cultivate: A teen once demonstrated this heart attitude when his friends suggested that they go to a certain restaurant for a good time. "I'd rather go home; my parents don't approve of that place." "Afraid your father will hurt you?" one of the girls asked sarcastically. "No," he replied, "I'm not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him."

Young people: love your parents' desires so much that you don't want to go against them. A true child of God, who has experienced the love of God, has no desire to sin against that love. That is how you will know when you have reached adulthood. Be motivated by love. Obey God, not because you are afraid that He will punish you, but because you love Him so much that you don't want to ruin your relationship with Him—you don't want His Spirit to be grieved and quenched.

WEDNESDAY: Holiness Is Making Right Choices

“Choose . . . this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

—Joshua 24:15, emphasis added

Clearly, having a reverential fear of God is not optional: *Be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off* (Proverbs 23:17–18). We are to *“fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

We do not have to fear that our soul is going to go to hell, but we do need to fear that God will destroy our body if we do not repent of sin. The chastisement of Jesus Christ goes from conviction of sin, to the grieving of the Holy Spirit, to the quenching of the Holy Spirit, to weakness of the body, to sickness of the body, then to death. This is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 11, 1 John 5, and Revelation 2–3.

Fearing God has both positive and negative elements: *Obey in all things . . . , fearing God* (Colossians 3:22). In a positive way, every true believer has reverential fear of God—an awesome awareness of His power, His holiness, and His glory. Proper worship always includes that kind of fear of the Lord.

“The negative aspect” writes John MacArthur,

has to do with dread and terror. Even believers should have a measure of that kind of fear, which acts as a protection from sinning. The writer of Proverbs observed, ‘By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil’ (16:6). For the very reason they are God’s children, believers are subject to His chastisement (see Heb. 12:5–11). Sometimes His dealing with disobedient believers can be severe, as with Ananias and Sapphira, who lost their lives for lying to the Holy Spirit. God used that punishment to produce godly fear and obedience within the early church (see Acts 5:1–11). Some of the believers in the church at Corinth also died or became ill by the direct infliction of God’s chastisement for their sin (1Corinthians 11:30).¹

Every day we face this choice: serve Christ or the world. The letters in Revelation have a timely application for our lives. They each emphasize why and how we must fear Jesus.

- **Ephesus (2:1–7):** Remember that Jesus is jealous of your love, so lay hold of your first love for Christ.
- **Smyrna (2:8–11):** Hope in Jesus through life until the end and trust Christ through your suffering.
- **Pergamos (2:12–17):** Rest in the security that comes from clinging only to Jesus, and conform to Christ, not the world.
- **Thyatira (2:18–29):** Fear the chastening love of Jesus so He will not have to discipline sin in the church.

As it was in Thyatira, so it is in your life today. Daily you have opportunities to either please God or please self. But for a devoted believer, there is only one right choice: honor the holiness of Jesus by purposing in your heart to respond in obedience to Him regardless of the cost.

THURSDAY: Holiness Is Pleasing Jesus

*We urge . . . that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how **you ought** to walk and **to please God**.*

—1 Thessalonians 4:1, emphasis added

In the first chapter of Revelation, John captures several characteristics of Christ that point to fearing the Lord. Each characteristic is a wonderful lesson to meditate on throughout the day.

Jesus is God the Son. The “*Son of God*” in Revelation 2:18 is not the same as the “*Son of Man*” in Revelation 1:13. “*Son of God*” signifies the fullness of His divine power. Why does He introduce himself as the Son of God? He is warning His church not to compromise nor tolerate evil.

Jesus is all-seeing, all-knowing, and always present. He has “*eyes like flames of fire*” (1:14). Why does He say that? Because Christ is always penetrating, discerning, seeing, and assessing the thoughts and actions of man: “*I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways,*” And *there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are . . . open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account* (Jeremiah 17:10; Hebrews 4:13).

Jesus is the Judge of the entire universe, and of my sin. He has feet like “*burnished bronze*” (1:15a). Bronze almost always pictures judgment upon sin: “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*” (John 5:22).

The author of Revelation is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, with fullness of divine power, with searching eyes, who alone knows our hearts and will mete out judgment accordingly. Always remember that Jesus Christ knows your heart perfectly well today, and is ready to judge if necessary.

Before Jesus addressed the corruption in the church at Thyatira, He acknowledged these good things about its saints: “*I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first*” (Revelation 2:19).

Jesus commended the Thyatirans for these qualities: Christ saw what they did for Him; He saw their love (this is the only church with love noted); their ministry as servants to others; their faithfulness, loyalty, and fidelity; their steadfast endurance; and that they were growing because their latter deeds were greater than those at the beginning.

Here is a lesson to meditate upon: The Christian life is a life of works, love, service, faith, and patience. Christ commended the saints at Thyatira because they did not pull back in their service. Paul gave the Thessalonians a similar commendation: *We . . . thank God always for you . . . because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other* (2 Thessalonians 1:3). The spiritual lives of these Thessalonians did not hit a peak and then decline. If Christ is alive in you, there will be growth. No growth indicates that you are sick, and that you need to honor Christ’s holiness by returning to Him.

If you can remember a time when you served and loved the Lord more than now, you need to repent, or end up like the Thyatirans who failed to receive the approval of Christ. The Lord wants you to ever-increasingly love, seek, and worship Him!

FRIDAY: Holiness Is Staying Scriptural

“He who has My commandments and keeps them . . . loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

—John 14:21, emphasis added

What did the visiting Christ say that He had against the church at Thyatira? He said that there was toleration of evil in the assembly. Does that mean we shouldn’t bring the lost to church? No, bring them—just don’t start parading them as saints, redeemed ones, and part of the body of Christ. What was the evil? They allowed a disobedient and

sinful woman to teach them: *“I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and [seduce] My servants”* (Revelation 2:20). Who was Jezebel? She may have been the wife of a pastor or a powerful false teacher who was leading the church astray.

There is a heritage of women who have educated generations of young people. They have a gender specific role in the church, as they have in the family. However, they are not to be the primary teacher or leader of a church. This is normal—the world is abnormal. God said women are not to teach *the* church (1 Timothy 2:12), but they may teach *in* the church. Women are not less or inferior; God simply gave women a specific role that is subordinate. Jesus is subordinate to God the Father; the church is subordinate to Jesus Christ; men are subordinate to the church; and women are subordinate to men. Jesus is not less than God. This is how God ordained things. But the Thyatirans decided not to obey that divine order.

Women being in submission to men in the home and the church has its roots in Creation, not the Fall. This is mandatory in Christ’s church: women are not to lead the assembly (1 Timothy 2:12–14; 1 Corinthians 14). But this Jezebel defied God’s order and was leading Christ’s bondservants astray. However, that was not new. In 1 Kings 18, Ahab’s Jezebel led Israel into gross idolatry and introduced male and female sex perverts into the priesthood of Baal worship. The falsehoods of Christian Science were started by Mary Baker Eddy. Theosophy’s errors were propounded by Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky. Seventh Day Adventism was led astray in the teachings of Ellen White, and so forth. Beware of women who go against God’s Word and lead churches, for they will face judgment.

What can we learn from today’s lesson? Be scriptural and be balanced. We should not be hard-hearted, legalistic, Ephesus-like Christians who harshly judge others and punish with loveless indifference. Neither should we be weak and limp, tolerating all in love, with no rules and no offense. Both legalism and undue tolerance lead to error and judgment. Be scriptural: know it and do it. Be balanced: love with a pure heart, and hate sin.

SATURDAY: Holiness Is Trusting Christ’s Promises

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—’He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

—Revelation 2:26–29

In Revelation 2:25, when Jesus says, *“hold fast what you have till I come,”* He is making the first mention of His return in the seven letters. There are many precious promises concerning Christ’s coming to remember. I’ll share some of them with you now.

God will reward us with immeasurable treasures. This is an investment that will reap blessings which will never pass away: *“There is no One who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and*

the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time— . . . and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30).

God will overwhelm us with unbelievable pleasures. When we reach heaven, we will finally become all that God created us to be: *He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (2 Corinthians 12:4).

God will give true believers an important future. We will reign with Christ over the earth. I do not know what each of our specific duties will be, but we will have authority: *“to him I will give power over the nations—’He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father”* (Revelation 2:26b-27).

God will give true believers a bright and glorious future. We can never lose Jesus’ light, life, and hope in the dark and gloom, so we are on the winning team with Christ! Consider these precious promises: Jesus is *“the Dayspring from on high”* and salvation is described as when *“the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts”* (Luke 1:78; 2 Peter 1:19). What glory lies ahead for us! For *there shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever* (Revelation 22:5). All true believers will make it safely to the end. Hallelujah!

Make a choice to live in hope: You cannot experience these pleasures if you come before God with unclean hands and filthiness of heart and spirit. Are you tolerating evil? Stop. Are you growing in Christ? If not, start. Are you pressing on to the end? Good—you’re an overcomer! The words of this old song nicely describe the growth process of the Christian life—the desire to keep pressing on to honor Christ’s holiness.

Higher Ground

*I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”*

*My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim is higher ground.*

*I want to live above the world,
Though Satan’s darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.*

*I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I’ll pray till heaven I’ve found,
“Lord, lead me on to higher ground.”*

*Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on heaven’s table land,*

*A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

—Johnson Oatman, Jr. (1856–1922)

¹ John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).