

Session 05 Letters to the Churches Thyatira and Sardis
Revelation 2:18-3:6

4) Thyatira Dangerous deception 2:18-29

Thyatira was founded as a military outpost and had no natural fortifications. It grew prosperous in manufacturing and marketing under Roman rule and contained a large number of trade guilds. Lydia was from Thyatira and traded in purple goods, Acts 16:14. The trade guilds were intertwined with pagan temple practices. Tyrimnos (Apollo) the sun god, son of Zeus, was the patron of the guilds. The emperor was considered to be Apollo incarnate.

- **Jesus is described as the Son of God - a direct challenge to Caesar/Apollo.** Psalm 2:9 is quoted in v27. Psalm 2:7 speaks of Messiah, "You are My Son ...", c.f. Luke 3:22, 9:35.
He has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished brass. The description reminds us of Daniel 10:6. The identity of this person is not specified; He may or may not be the angel who brought the subsequent prophetic message from 10:10 - 12:13. Possibly it was Jesus with a preliminary revelation of His glory to underscore the prophecy.
His appearance signified His power and splendour and His penetrating gaze and understanding, v23.
- **Once again the message begins with high appreciation and commendation.**
"I know your works, love, service and faith, and your patience ... and the last (works) are more than the first". Attributes (love and faith) have resulted in actions (service and patience), c.f. Ephesus and Pergamos.
- **There is a major problem, similar to but even more serious than in Pergamos.**
A prominent woman had been allowed to spread her evil influence, unchecked by those who led the church. Notice the use of words "That woman ... My servants", v20. **Jesus is jealous for His people,** 2Cor. 11:1-3.
She had a dominating and probably an intimidating presence, apparently inhibiting anyone from taking authority over her. She claimed prophetic inspiration and was using her charismatic personality to lead people astray, Matt. 24:11, 24, 2Peter 2:1-22.
Jesus gave her a "new name" likening her to the wicked queen Jezebel, 1Kings 16:29-33, 18:4, 19, 19:13, 21: 1-16, 23-26, 2Kings 9:30-37. She appears to have been **spreading a pernicious doctrine,** v24 that was **leading to wicked behaviour.**
Her teaching fitted in with "practical wisdom". Participation the trade guilds made good business connections and oiled the wheels of prosperity, but each guild had its own god and worship involved immoral and idolatrous behaviour, v20. **It was seductive and persuasive,** v20, but c.f. 1Cor. 14:20. Gnosticism taught that the body was unimportant, so what you did with it did not matter. Her teaching may have suggested that in order to combat evil it is necessary to investigate and experience "The deep things of satan". By entering satan's stronghold you could discover the limits of his power and emerge victorious over evil – so join in and grow up! What about Masonry?
- **Judgement is imminent**
 - **For "Jezebel" and her children** (?close followers/physical children). **Jesus has given her time to repent but** she had now past the point of no return, v21-23, Prov. 29:1.
 - **For those who had been seduced by her teaching,** v22. They have a short space to repent of their deeds before severe punishment ensues.
 - **The leaders have failed in their responsibility,** v20. Matters have now been taken out of their hands. **Jesus is about to reveal His holiness.** He is not fooled by her seducing words or spurious wisdom - His eyes are like fire. **He is the One who searches the minds and hearts** - the prerogative of the LORD of Hosts, Jer. 11:20, 17:9-10. The churches will come to know what He knows when He takes radical action to cure the cancer at the heart of this church.
 - **Tolerance is often touted as a Christian virtue but this can be disastrous,** Gal. 1:6-9, 2:11. **Each person will receive according to his/her works,** v23. Corporate life has become dysfunctional. What is in the heart is revealed by what we do, Matt. 7:15-23, 12:32-37. Only God can accurately search the heart, Psalm 139:23-24.

Those who have kept themselves separate from this doctrine and practice need to keep holding on to the truth that they have received, v24-25, c.f. 3:11. Keep His works to the end - perseverance demonstrates the reality of what we believe, Matt. 24:4-13, Luke 21:19.

- **Promises to the over comers - those who hold fast and keep His works until the end**, Matt.24:13.
- **Power over the nations, as His people, His kingdom**, 2:26-27, Psalm 2:9, c.f. Rev. 19:11, Luke 22:29, Daniel 7:13-14 c.f. Dan. 7:26-27, Rev. 5:9-10.
- **The morning star is symbolic of Jesus as King**, Matt. 2:2. As Manna nourishes life so the star gives light and glory. **Believers who overcome are in reigning relationship with Jesus**, Num. 24:17, Rev. 22:16.
- **Listen to the Spirit**

5) Sardis 3:1-6 A dead and dying church

Sardis had been a very powerful city, partly built on a high cliff. Twice, through lack of vigilance, it had been taken by enemies. In Roman times there was a catastrophic earthquake (in AD 26). The city was rebuilt and became famous and wealthy, becoming the first city to make gold and silver coins and inventing the art of dying wool. Sardis was dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Cybele) who was believed to have power to restore the dead to life.

- **Jesus is the One having the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.** He is speaking to a church that should be bursting with the life of the Spirit and have dynamic spiritual leadership, but is in fact dead or dying.
- **“I know your works”.** Apart from a few individuals Jesus has nothing good to say about this church. This is in contrast to their reputation - **they “have a name”**. They are reputed to be a lively church, presumably on the basis of much visible activity. It may be the kind of church that attracted visitors to see a good working model. They have not made use of the resources that God has made available, Eph. 4:11-13, 5:18-20, and have been relying on human energy.

They are said to have **“defiled their garments”**, suggesting that there was widespread and serious compromise with pagan society. Their reputation before God is quite different to human assessment.

They have forgotten the truth they received and are no longer listening to the Spirit through the word. **It is a nominal church**, a religious society operating comfortably within the surrounding culture and is, apparently, untroubled by pagan society. They are fitting in nicely.

- **What’s to be done? “Be watchful ... watch” forms a bracket. This includes “Remember, repent, strengthen the little that remains, hold fast”.** Over against the compromise and passivity and complacency comes a clarion call to take vigorous and decisive action. **The situation is not yet irreversible – “if” - but it is urgent.** They must not wait for God to act – when He takes action it will be too late to avoid judgement, 1Cor. 11:27-32.
- **A grim warning – “I will come upon you like a thief in the night”** c.f. Joel 2:9, Matt. 24:42-44, Luke 12:39-40, 1Thess. 5:2-4, 2Pet. 3:10, Rev. 16:15. This expression is always in the context of judgement. “I will come upon you”, (repeated). Completely unfruitful branches are “taken away”, John 15:2 and burned, v6. Historically, Sardis had experienced sudden defeat and sudden disaster – invasion and earthquake.
- **The exceptions – “A few names, even in Sardis!”** It is interesting that He refers to them as “names” – contrasting with the “name” reference to the church. They have chosen to be different. Possibly they are regarded as odd balls or fanatics who go “overboard” about their faith rather than fitting in with the culture. **They have not defiled their garments** – made clean by the blood of the Lamb, 7:14, kept pure by loyalty to Jesus, 6:11, and by their righteous deeds, 19:8. Sanctification is the fruit of justification, Titus 2:11-14.

“They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” – purity and holiness. It does not mean that they have earned salvation. When Jesus is proclaimed as worthy, 5:9, the emphasis is not on His

intrinsic worth but on what He has done. This has qualified Him for the right to open the scroll. In the same way these few are qualified to walk in intimate relationship with the Holy One, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, 2Tim. 2:20-22, Heb. 12:14, Rev. 14:4.

- **“He who overcomes”.** This is a call to other individuals to follow the example set by the few – an act of humility, possibly causing ridicule, Heb. 13:12-14. They need to overcome an ingrained attitude and walk before God rather than men, in the fear of the LORD.
- **The promise**
 - Clothed in white garments – fit for the presence of the King, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, c.f. Lev.16:4.
 - His name not blotted from the book of life, c.f. Ex. 32:30-35, Psalm 69:28, Daniel 12:1, Mal. 3:16-18, Phil. 4:3, Rev. 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, 21:27. At death citizens’ names were erased from the city records. Not so for the faithful in Sardis – citizens of the Heavenly City.
 - By contrast, his name confessed before His Father and the holy angels, Luke 12:8-9 – the fruit of loyalty and faithfulness.
- **“He who has an ear to hear ...”**