

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 99-29

Dear Reader

In our continuing study of the 7 churches we now will look prophetically at the professing Church during and after the Dark Ages and glean practical exhortations from what the Lord said to Thyatira and Sardis — real local assemblies about 1900 years ago. Let's begin our study.

THE LORD'S LETTER TO THE ASSEMBLY AT THYATIRA: Please read Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira is mentioned only here and in Acts 16:14. Thyatira means *odor of affliction* or *sacrifice of love*. It was a troubled, badly divided local assembly, spiritually. Yet there were those who were faithfully going on with the Lord in spite of the severe problems brought on by *internal dissent* rather than by outside persecutions as with Smyrna and Pergamos.

Historically-prophetically, we see in Thyatira the “Dark Ages” and Roman Catholic domination, with a few true believers facing great opposition from a false Christianity. This is the longest of the seven epistles and points to the longest period in the history of the professing Church. It is difficult to see this letter being a description of a real local assembly in fellowship with the apostle John. But it was outwardly functioning as an assembly! And the Lord was giving it one last chance before removing its lampstand. *God is patient!* We should be too, reasonably waiting before withdrawing or excommunicating until there is clear evidence of a *willful course of wrong* and that spiritual recovery is unlikely to occur.

The Lord spoke of Himself as “Son of God” (v.18). Rome makes much of Him as “Son of Mary” and Son of Man.” He spoke to the responsible element in Thyatira — those raised up by God to lead. But they had done a poor job of leading. They were *tolerating* evil (v.20). So the Lord described Himself in the same manner as in chapter 1:14-15, except for the “furnace,” indicating deferred final judgment. The eyes as a flame of fire indicate a discernment of sin wherever found. Brass speaks of Him personally being able to withstand the heat, but putting His footprint of judgment on sin everywhere. This is the strongest of the Lord's personal introductions: He wanted Thyatira to realize He will not put up with their sin.

I Know Your Works, Love, Service, Faith and your Patience (v.19)

The Lord first encouraged. There were commendable things in Thyatira ... by a few. When things are going wrong, *perseverance* is important for every *individual* who wants to please the Lord. It's easy to quit the spiritual warfare, to make peace with the enemy (as in Pergamos). Being a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim.2:3-4) is hard and sometimes lonely work. Elite troops are put through intense training. So the Lord may allow problems to see what we will do as individuals and as local assemblies. The Commander-in-Chief knows *exactly* what we are doing and is keeping a perfect record.

As for Your Works, the Last Are More Than the First (v.19)

As the wrong things in Thyatira got increasingly out of hand, it seems these good soldiers (the rest or *remnant* in Thyatira — v.24) shined even brighter in works, love, faith, service and perseverance. These brethren should be a real example for us today. No matter how bad things may seem, there is no excuse to compromise or give up the good fight of faith.

I Have ... Against You, Because You Allow that Woman Jezebel who Calls Herself a Prophetess to Teach and Seduce My Servants to Commit Sexual Immorality and Eat Things Sacrificed to Idols (v.20)

Thyatira had a *Jezebel* among themselves. The Old Testament Jezebel (meaning *unchaste*, indicating her moral character) was the wife of wicked king Ahab of Israel (1 Ki.16:29-33). She was idolatrous, scheming, evil. She went far beyond her place as the king's wife (1 Ki.18:19; 19:1-3; 21:5-16; 2 Ki.9:7), threatening and killing those on God's side, stirring up Ahab to even greater evil (21:25). Jezebel pictures a woman or a humanly-devised church system which gets out of her God-given place and corrupts God's order. Such a woman manipulates others and leads them into immorality and idolatry.

Prophetically, in Thyatira, she represents the Roman church which does the same things (Rev.17-18). God has differing roles for men and women in His Assembly which no one has a right to violate. We studied these roles in Newsletter 98-17. When God's order is violated by a self-willed woman, she becomes to some extent a spiritual Jezebel. Thyatira had such a woman influencing a major faction of the assembly. She evidently preached and practiced, like the historical Jezebel, a sensuous gospel of idolatry, and she had a following! False doctrine and practice seems to get a hold on some people — particularly those looking for the sensual, sensational, emotional type of religion. There was, as a result, sexual immorality. By her name (*unchaste*) and her description, she may have used sexual “favors” to help hold and control her following. Satan was hard at work, for idolatry always indicates demon-associations! They are behind idol-sacrifices (1 Cor.10:18-22).

Thyatira needed to stop her sin and seek her restoration; or if that was refused, to excommunicate her (1 Cor.5) as a wicked person. *But most of the believers tolerated it! That was their collective sin!* Today, every local church is under increasing pressure to make the world's norm its norm! Are we listening to man or to God? How would He rate us?

Immorality, spiritually speaking (Ezek.23; Rev.17; etc.) is turning away from God when pretending to belong to Him. Paul wants us presented to Christ as a “pure virgin” (2 Cor.11:2-4), but there is a danger of being unfaithful to our Bridegroom by being deceived by Satan. Will we will be found faithful to our future Bridegroom.

I Gave Her Time to Repent of Her Sexual Immorality and She Did Not Repent (v.21)

God's timing often is different than ours. Some Christians tolerate most things; others are ready to separate at a moment's notice. Both are wrong. The object of discipline is to stop the evil, and *that* may take a reasonable amount of time while the brethren labor with the offending party or parties. Do we give time for God to work? Or do we *ignore* the situation? Sin, left unchecked, will infect more and more people to a greater and greater extent until a local church becomes *Thyatirian* in character (1 Cor.5:6; Gal.5:9). But “Jezebel” and her supporters wouldn't repent. She and her followers needed to be excommunicated, but the more godly brethren apparently didn't have the support or spiritual energy to do so.

I Will Cast Her into a Sickbed; Those Who Commit Adultery With Her Into Great Tribulation Unless They Repent of Their Deeds (v.22)

If the believers won't or can't act, God has to act. In Corinth, *many* were weak, sick, and a number had died because of sin in the assembly (11:30). God may remove the offending person. When immorality is allowed in a local assembly, how hateful it must be to the Head of the Church! In Thyatira, God was prepared to act. But God adds, “Unless they repent of *their* (or, *her*) deeds.” *She* was the main culprit, but each had to repent of complicity with her in allowing the evil or being involved in it. God wants the evil stopped and unhindered communion restored between Himself and His people!

I Will Kill Her Children With Death (Pestilence), and All the Churches Shall Know That I Am He Who Searches the Minds and Hearts; I Will Give to Each One of You According to Your Works (v.23)

“Her children” are her followers. They will die of pestilence, just as millions historically died from Syphilis and Gonorrhea during the Dark Ages. God is not mocked: that which a person sows, he also will reap (Gal.6:7). God's government is absolutely righteous even if we don't always understand or appreciate it. God can use the natural bacteria and viruses He created to bring down the sinner. When Ananias and Sapphira were killed by God for lying to the Holy Spirit, “great fear came upon the whole Church” (Acts 5:11). Likewise, the Lord was going to make an example out of this New Testament “Jezebel” and her followers. Nothing was hidden from Him (Heb.4:12-13).

To the Rest in Thyatira, As Many As Do Not Have This Doctrine, Who Have Not Known the Depths of Satan ... I Will Put on You No Other Burden (v.24)

Here we have clearly marked out the other side in the Thyatirian assembly, which the Lord approved of! They stood firm against the evil: the Lord kindly supports them: He does not condemn them. The immorality, idol-sacrifices and the Jezebel were the “depths of Satan” — the adversary doing his dirtiest, most evil work, polluting both mind and body, seeking to destroy God's testimony in Thyatira. The remnant godly faction was to remain true and watch God act. The remnant in Scripture always is small, and is comprised of those who will listen and obey God at all costs.

But Hold Fast What You Have, Till I Come (v.25)

Don't ever give up what you know to be truth when conditions occur which you don't know how to handle! This godly remnant had the Lord and they had the truth. They were not to give up any portion of it because of the sins of the majority. For that remnant, the coming of the Lord was a spiritual coming to put things right in that assembly by acts of governmental judgment. For us today, the coming of the Lord is, foremost, the Rapture of the Church. Are we going to be found faithful when He comes, holding fast the truth we have learned from Him? Will we be a true remnant?

He Who Overcomes and Keeps My Works ... I Will Give Power Over the Nations (vv.25-26)

Again, all Christians are overcomers. But here is added the keeping the Lord's *works* because our degree of privilege in our millennial reign with Him over the nations is conditional on present-day *faithfulness* to Christ. We *all* will reign with Him (Rev.20), but our privileged *position* depends on what we do *now* (Lk.19:11-27). It appears in verse 27 that the *overcomer* shepherds with a rod of iron — iron speaking of strong, inflexible rule that won't give in to sin.

I Will Give Him the Morning Star (v.28)

Right at the darkest time of night, before the Sun of Righteousness arises (Mal.4:2), is the time for the *morning star* to shine forth. The Lord is the Morning Star (Rev.22:16) coming at the Rapture. The Rapture instantly takes us completely out of this scene before the Tribulation-trials fall on this world (Rev.3:10). What an encouragement!

THE LORD'S LETTER TO THE ASSEMBLY AT SARDIS: Please read Revelation 3:1-6

The Sardis assembly had sunk into lethargy and formalism, and had allowed in its midst a mixture of saved and unsaved as is common today. There was great pretension with little spiritual power.

He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars; I Know Your Works, that You Have a Name that You Are Alive [Are Living, JND], but You Are Dead (v.1)

In Revelation 1:4 the "seven spirits" (Isa.11:2) before the throne of God gave their greeting. These are the divine resources available to this lethargic assembly and they also are available to us. These seven perfections of the Holy Spirit are seen in our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the "stars" are those responsible to the Lord to lead the assembly in a Scriptural way, and He knew what they were doing, and it wasn't good! Sardis by an outward correctness was *pretending* to be a holy, dedicated, vibrant local assembly, but was not! The Lord had nothing to commend, for He was not fooled by the pretense. He knew their works were not pleasing to Him.

When we look at the local assembly where we express fellowship, do we see lifeless habits mechanically performed week by week? That's Sardis! Are *we* being careless and indifferent in our local church life because we are just too tired, too busy, too worldly or too comfortable to get involved? That's Sardis! *Christians* have spiritual life and are never said to be *dead*. However, we can be so *indifferent* as to be *sleeping* (Rom.13:11). But when spiritual life is gone in local *churches*, they are considered dead. The flame has gone out, so the lampstand might as well be removed.

Historically-prophetically, we see the Reformation (or the *failure* of the Reformation) here. The Reformation — a great turning point in Church-history — showed great promise when it began, involving many godly people, but it ended in the dead formalism of "state churches." Magnificent systems and buildings were built, but often the spirituality of those systems sank almost to the level of the unsaved who came among them. However, there were two huge advancements: a Bible for the general public and a gospel true in its essential characteristics. These have never again been lost.

Be Watchful and Strengthen the Things which Remain, that Are Ready to Die, For I Have Not Found Your Works Perfect Before God (v.2)

The Lord's call to Sardis was to "wake up." Great truths were being compromised. It was almost too late. Although

He pronounced Sardis as “dead,” He would wait to see if there might be repentance. He gives us every opportunity before acting. He called Sardis to reclaim, again maintain and stand upon the truths that once characterized them. At least they could strengthen what remained. I can’t change what I did or didn’t do yesterday, but I *can* change what I do today. In the Lord’s things I can confess the past and with renewed energy from Him, seek to live for Him from now on in both my personal and church life (Phil.3:12-14). I can put away spiritually-childish things!

The character of some local churches has changed from night to day when there was earnest prayer of humiliation and a revival in the hearts of the believers. As a result there was spiritual energy to correct wrong things and to emphasize the good. People then devoted themselves to reaching their neighbors and people were saved and taught the whole truth, often in home meetings, and assemblies grew. Sometimes through the unusual energy of even one or two families or individuals, dramatic changes for good have taken places in local churches. Is this happening with us?

Remember Therefore How (What) You Have Received and Heard. Hold Fast and Repent (v.3)

Paul set forth the great truths of the Church. But the Lord puts the responsibility into our hands to make this truth a practical reality in the local assembly. This is the privilege Sardis once had, had partly lost and was about to lose completely if the Lord removed their lampstand. *Their great sin was their failure to maintain the truth they had once maintained.* The Lord strongly urged them to begin over again, to repent!

If You Will Not Watch, I Will Come to You as a Thief, and You Will Not Know What Hour I Will Come Upon You (v.3)

This is a divine ultimatum: watch, wake up, repent, get back on track or lose your lampstand! The Lord would come *as a thief*. A thief comes unexpectedly (Mt.24:43), often when people are sleeping. If no repentance, the Lord would come, spiritually speaking, without further warning, and their lampstand of testimony would be gone (Rev.2:5). Only when it was too late would they realize they were no longer a functioning testimony for the Lord in Sardis.

In the future the Lord is *physically* coming “like a thief” (1 Thes.5:2-4; 2 Pet.3:10; Rev.16:15) at the “day of the Lord,” to the Mount of Olives (Zech.14:4) to put down all corrupt authority. Suddenly, to the horror of His enemies, the Lord comes ... and they lose (Zech.14)! That future coming illustrates His coming *spiritually* to Sardis.

You Have a Few Names Even in Sardis Who Have Not Defiled Their Garments, and They Shall Walk with Me in White, for They Are Worthy (v.4). He Who Overcomes Shall Be Clothed in White Garments (v.5)

The “angel,” the responsible element, is addressed here as the “you.” The Lord doesn’t say *they* hadn’t defiled their garments, but that there were a few — not looked at as the local church but as individuals, a remnant — who remained true to their Lord. One’s garments speak of what he is. These few, not forgotten by their Lord and in fact singled out for blessing, had the clothing of purity and righteousness. White in Scripture speaks of holiness and purity (Mt.17:2; Rev.6:11; 7:9, 13-14). The promised blessing is that these would walk with the Lord in white, for they were His. Contrary to nature, something washed in *His* blood (spiritually speaking) comes out white and spotless (Rev.7:14)!

We have seen that every Christian is an overcomer. Therefore, every Christian is seen in Christ’s purity, regardless of his or her failures on earth. This divine promise therefore must cheer every true believer.

And I Will Not Blot Out His Name From the Book of Life (v.5)

I see this as a warning and a promise — a warning to some in Sardis who were only pretend-Christians who got in while the doorkeepers were sleeping — and a promise of eternal security to every true believer. The true Church is only comprised of born-again Christians, but there is a certain class of unsaved people who like to feel religious and thus creep in to the fellowship of the local church unnoticed (Jude 4), and are able to do so because the true Christians are spiritually sleepy or don’t care. These unbelievers may *think* their names are in the book of life, but only the real believers’ names are there and there permanently. See Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; and 21:27. But there is a “book of the living” (Ps.69:28) where professors like Judas and the unsaved in Sardis are blotted out.

I Will Confess His Name Before My Father and Before His Angels (v.5)

The Lord made a similar promise back in Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8, and He cannot lie (Heb.6:18). This promise shows how much the Lord appreciates every overcomer. The Christian is singled out individually and praised before God the Father and His myriads of angels. What a privileged people we are!

RPD