
Develop a Long View

The letter to Thyatira, *Revelation 2:18-29*

John opens his Revelation with letters to seven churches in Asia, using them to introduce the themes and basic message of his revelation. But the letters hold more than literary value; their messages continue to speak to the issues that affect the church today. This lesson will continue our exploration of those seven letters by examining the fourth letter, the letter to the church in Thyatira.

The city of Thyatira

- The city of Thyatira did not have the long history or distinctions that characterized the other cities John addressed; they nevertheless received the longest and most difficult letter.
- While some evidences show Thyatira's existence extends beyond the fourth century BC, Seleucus I, one of Alexander the Great's generals, founded the city approximately three centuries before Jesus' time to serve as a military outpost for his new empire.
- The city, built on a small hill in the broad and open Lycus valley, served as a military garrison until Pergamum and all its cities including Thyatira, passed to Roman control in 133 BC.
- With its introduction into the Roman peace, Thyatira no longer served primarily as a military garrison and began to evolve into a commercial center specializing in dyed cloth, garments, and bronze armor (cf. *Acts 16:14*).
- The increase in trade brought with it trade guilds, who developed a particularly strong presence in the city.
 - Trade guilds functioned more like fraternal orders rather than labor unions, seeking the mutual protection and social and religious benefit of its members (cf. *Acts 19:23-27*).
 - Trade guilds demanded compulsory membership and exercised a monopolistic control over their areas. Anyone working within a trade and not following their guild's expectations would be forced out of business and possibly even forced out of the community.
 - Additionally, the guilds inseparably intertwined with the local gods, supporting and worshipping them.

John's message to Thyatira

- Using imagery drawn from Daniel's visions (*Daniel 10:6; Revelation 1:14-15*), John opens his address to the church in Thyatira by reminding them of Jesus' insight and power (*Revelation 2:18*).
- While Jesus' insight allowed him to know about the growing love and good deeds of the Christians in Thyatira (*Revelation 2:19*), it also allowed him to know about the church's failings (*Revelation 2:20*).

- The church tolerated a false teacher John called “the woman Jezebel” (*Revelation 2:20*).
- John charges her with two specific sins - teaching and leading the Christians to commit sexual sins and to participate in idol-worshipping feasts (*Revelation 2:20; cf. I Corinthians 8:1-8*).
- Context seems to indicate that, in the face of the tremendous pressures from the trade guilds and the influence they exercised over people’s livelihood, “the woman Jezebel” promoted participation in the religious practices of the trade guilds, which would have involved sexual immorality and feasts in service of the various patron gods.
- Jesus’ insights motivated him to act and provided evidence for the strength John’s image attributed to him (*Revelation 2:18*).
 - John declared Jesus’ power by describing the severe punishments he issued against both Jezebel and her followers (*Revelation 2:22-23*).
 - But John also wrote that Jesus’ intended his display of power in punishing Jezebel and her followers to accomplish more than punish sin; he wanted it to remind all of the churches of his sovereignty - he searches everyone’s minds and hearts and responds to people according to their deeds (*Revelation 2:23*).
 - That reminder of Jesus’ sovereignty would have been an encouragement to the faithful people in the city who had not sided with Jezebel because sovereign Jesus promised them ultimate victory and rule over all those who were oppressing them (*Revelation 2:26-28*).

Applications to our lives

- While we have a tendency to consider physical persecution to be the most serious threat a Christian can face, threats against our livelihood often prove more destructive (*Matthew 19:23-25; 6:24; James 4:1-4*).
- Threats against our livelihood prove so effective because we tend to dismiss Jesus’ statements about how we should think about wealth and how we should use wealth (*Matthew 6:19-33; Luke 12:33-34*).
- Because of the great pressure that threats produce within our lives, John encouraged his readers to think long term - God would eventually give them victory (*Revelation 2:25-28*).
 - Thinking long term allows us to see past the temporary nature of things like wealth and therefore put them in their appropriate place (*Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:13-21*).
 - Developing a long view will produce radical results in our lives (*Luke 12:33; 21:1-4; II Corinthians 8:1-5*).
 - But we will only experience true peace when we develop the long view (*II Corinthians 11:24-28; Philippians 3:7-8; II Timothy 4:6-8*).

The church in Thyatira faced great pressures that led some to compromise with their culture. Jesus urged them to develop a long view that would allow them to properly appreciate their circumstances and therefore avoid the urge to conform. Can we say that we have developed that same long view?