

THYATIRA: A SPACE TO REPENT

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In Exodus 34:6-7, God showed His glory to Moses: “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” The nature of God is merciful and forgiving, yet He will punish all who are guilty of sin. This is echoed in Romans 11:22, which says, “*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*” Christ’s letter to the church at Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29 strongly illustrates the way in which the Lord deals with iniquity.

God’s goodness that leads to repentance

The church at Thyatira had some problems that were going to cause them to lose their souls if they did not repent. Like Pergamos, Thyatira had false doctrine and immorality in their midst. In Revelation 2:20, Jesus told the church at Thyatira: “*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because you suffer that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*” The Lord’s rebuke of fornication and idolatry is clear for all to see. Neither fornicators nor idolaters will enter heaven (1 Cor 6:9-10). But we do see the longsuffering and forbearance of the Lord here too. Jesus had given Jezebel space to repent of her fornication but so far she had refused to do so (Rev 2:21). The Lord is gracious to give us opportunities to repent of our sins instead of immediately destroying us. “*God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve*” (Ezra 9:13), and, “*He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities*” (Psa 103:10). But while we recognize God’s mercy and kindness and thank Him for it, we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we will be given endless opportunities to repent. Romans 2:4-11 says, “Or

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(continued)

despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God.”

There is a limit

We must recognize that there is a limit to God’s forbearance. The church at Thyatira was getting perilously close to that point. The Lord told them that he would cast this Jezebel into a bed, and cast the ones that committed adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repented (Rev 2:22). Jesus said he would kill Jezebel’s children with death (Rev 2:23). This is another classic example of the fact that we must repent before God will forgive our sins. This is one of the main lessons in this rebuke of the Thyatirans. Christ tells us about the punishments he had in store for these erring Christians so that *“all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”* (Rev 2:23). Notice that this message is to *“all the churches.”* Jesus is searching our inward part and he sees exactly what we are. One day Jesus will judge us and he will not excuse us just because we were faithful Christians at one time. He will judge us according to our works. We as Christians cannot afford to be satisfied with ourselves. If we turn to sin and do not repent, we will lose our souls. This fact is reinforced with the promise at the close of the letter to *“he that overcomes and keeps my works unto the end”* (Rev 2:26).