

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Message to Seven Churches: Thyatira: A Church Warned

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. (Revelation 2:18–19, KJV 1900)

The letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven letters presented in the second and third chapters of Revelation. The church at Thyatira had some good things about her, but she had some major problems that endangered her continued blessing as a church.

The city's most popular pagan deity was Tyrimnas who was referred to by his worshippers as "A son of the gods." In the letter, Jesus refers to Himself as "...the Son of God." Possibly, he used this title to emphasize the contrast between Himself, the one and only true "Son of God," and the false pagan Tyrimnas. More likely, He refers to Himself as the Son of God to emphasize His equality with the Father, and therefore His authority to confront and to rebuke this church for her sins, as well as to commend her for her virtues.

...who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire. Frequently, when people decide knowingly to indulge in sin, they seem to act under the deception that they can do whatever they wish, and no one will know the difference. They forget Jesus' warning that things done in secret shall be fully revealed. (Luke 8:17) It is quite likely that "Sister" Jezebel and her followers thought that they could do as they pleased and never be exposed. The Lord knew all about her and her sinful deeds, and He reminds the whole church that His eyes burn through all the superficial pretenses of sinful people. He sees the deepest thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12; a reference to Jesus, the living Word, as in John 1, not to Scripture. In the verses following, this same "Word of God" is identified as our high priest, a title rightly belonging to Jesus, but not to Scripture), and He shall bring those darkest secrets to light in His time of judgment.

While commending the church, Jesus' use of "...eyes like unto a flame of fire" puts this church on notice that none of her hidden sins have escaped His judgment. In the third chapter of John's gospel, Jesus devoted significant time to a contrast between light and darkness, a point consistently made in several Scriptures. Our eyes operate on the basis of light from the outside entering our eyes. If we peer into the darkness, we can't see. However, Jesus' eyes operate in opposite fashion.

He isn't hindered by darkness around Him. His eyes flash bright light out to expose things that would otherwise hide in the darkness.

I recall a story told me by an older preacher in my youth. A highly respected preacher lost his way and fell into deep and shameful sin. He lost his ministry. Years later he visited his old church. They hadn't seen him for years. He led them to believe that he had repented of his sin and sincerely wanted to return to the church. They gladly received him. Not as concerned as they should have been with the integrity and gravity of ministry, and not at all bothering to verify in any way that the man had in fact repented, they also asked him if he would preach for them the following Sunday. He agreed, and they went home happy. Sometime later it was discovered by these people that the man had not at all repented. His appearance at the church and his claim of repentance were a sham. This little church failed to follow reasonable Biblical teachings in several ways, but they acted sincerely and based on the appearance of legitimate repentance in this man. However, the Lord knew this man's ongoing sinful life, and He refused to allow this little church to be compromised. During the week, this former preacher, now scheduled to preach to the church on the upcoming Sunday, had a major stroke that severely damaged the speech center of his brain. Needless to say, he didn't preach the following Sunday as planned. The Lord's "...eyes like unto a flame of fire..." saw what this naïve little church could not see, and He protected them from themselves. He also passed righteous judgment against the former preacher who seemed quite content to deceive these people.

We may deceive people for a time. We may conveniently hide our sins from the people around us, but we should never think that we can hide our sins from those flaming eyes. It was that contradictory character of Old Testament fame, Solomon, who wrote the following words:

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 KJV)

Perhaps a stronger application of these words to his life might have delivered Solomon from his own character flaws.

...and his feet are like fine brass. We often see people doing things that we do not approve. Try as we might, we may not convince this person to repent of the questionable behavior. You should point out your concerns to someone in this way and urge them to repent. What else can you do? You cannot force that person to change. Beyond gracious counsel, your hands are effectively tied. However, the Lord follows His "...eyes like unto a flame of fire" description of Himself with this "...feet...like fine brass" description. Both descriptive terms here used appear in John's description of the glorified Christ that he saw in the first chapter. There (Revelation 1:15) Jesus' feet appeared "...like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace...." We might draw the representation of glory, dazzling in appearance, despite being in the fires of trial. Or we might draw the image of a well-equipped soldier whose feet are shielded with the best of armament. It seems quite likely, given the deplorable state of this church, that the Lord is warning this church that He not only knows all about Sister Jezebel's antics, but that He shall soon "Put His foot down" against her sins and her sinful influence on the church.

Scripture frequently uses the analogy of fire to call attention to the Lord's righteous judgment that actively shall judge those who sin. Fire is the most frequent descriptive term to depict God's eternal judgment against the wicked, a fire that burns endlessly (not annihilation of the wicked), but is never quenched. Scripture also uses the analogy of fire to warn children of God that they shall face His "Fire" that puts every work they perform to the test. Sinful works are burned up, and they shall suffer loss. (1 Corinthians 3:10-17) Given this rather consistent use of the fire analogy, it seems quite safe to say that the Lord is warning the Thyatira Church that her present behavior puts her on a collision course with divine judgment. She faces His fire if she does not repent.

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. While the Lord fully acknowledges the good things this church does, He focuses far more emphasis on her sins than on her righteous accomplishments. You can almost hear the prideful Thyatira Church as she reacts to His judgments, "But what about all those good things that we do?" And He simply responds, "I know all about them, but that doesn't erase your compromised and sinful choices." If you have raised children—or if you remember your own childhood—this situation is similar to the immature child who faces his/her parent's disapproval for bad behavior. The parent does not punish the child for good behavior, nor does good behavior mysteriously erase bad behavior. Our three daughters had a rather cryptic name for some of

their fellow high school students who were Jesus-followers one week and drug addicts the next week. They called them "Jezoids." The repeated theme of the Lord to these churches is "Be thou faithful unto death," not "Be thou faithful once in a while when it is convenient for you to do so."

"Convenient Christianity" draws the Lord's righteous judgment, not His benevolent acquiescence. Luke 14:15-24 reminds us of the egregious character of this sinful compromised behavior. A respected man schedules a special banquet and sends out invitations to those whom he wants to attend. None of them bothers to send their "RSVP." They rather simply go about their business and ignore the man and his banquet. When the banquet is ready, he sends his servants to remind all of those whom he invited that the time has arrived. They should come to the banquet immediately. Notice how each of them responds. "And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse." (Luke 14:18a)

1. The first man said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused." Any excuse we offer in a contrived rationalization for not obeying the Lord is as empty as the excuses we see in this lesson. How many people would buy a piece of real estate at a sizeable cost when they hadn't so much as seen it? Really.
2. "And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused." In an agricultural society, what successful farmer would buy five, not one, yolk of oxen before he tested them to see if they were trained to work his field?
3. "And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." This man doesn't even bother to offer the lame "...have me excused."

Every rationalization a person makes for not serving God faithfully and consistently is as lame and as transparent as each of these examples. ***A far more significant point in this lesson reminds us of the highly offensive and inexcusable behavior of these invited guests toward the host.*** Applying the lesson to our Christian life, who is the host? And how does He view our superficial refusal to honor Him above all else? How much has He done to ensure that we not only have eternal life, but also to ensure an abundant life, a spiritual banquet, in this life? Given His rich preparation, how do we think He views our rebellious refusal to serve Him despite any hindrances that come our way? How can we in any way hope for blessings when we so grievously offend Him and His gracious hospitality? No excuse we might offer today is any better than the lame excuses that Jesus included in this lesson. Be it Thyatira or be it you and me today, the Lord

knows the good things that we do, but He also knows our sins. His piercing eyes see them, and His burning brass feet warn us that we face two—and only two—choices. Continue in the sin, and we face His certain fiery judgments, as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. Repent and make attending His banquet our top priority, and the rich provisions of the banquet are ours to enjoy.

Pastors frequently hear these same kind of excuses that people explain to them with straight face and really expect the pastor to understand and accept. Translate the Luke 14 lesson into our culture today and replace the various excuses in the lesson with common contemporary excuses. Career, money, family; when we harden our hearts to the Lord's hospitality, any lame excuse is quite acceptable to us, but is it acceptable to the Lord? Read the remainder of that lesson, and you will learn how the host reacted, how the Lord reacts to our own superficial excuses. Such failures clearly discourage a pastor, but these people seem oblivious, as much so as the invited guests in the lesson, to the impact their behavior has on the Lord.

The same Lord described Himself as "...*who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.*" He sees through our facades no less than the host of the banquet in Luke 14. The Lord gives us one overarching commandment that applies regardless the hindrances or difficulties that we face in life. "Be thou faithful unto death." Are we ready to apply this commandment to our lives and to live up to it?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor