

## 10,29,20 The Spiritual Formation of the End Time Remnant (Part 5)

This week we're going to look at the church in Thyatira. But before we begin, something came up that I'd like to address for a few minutes.

Because of the increasing pressure in our lives (actually in the lives of billions of people around the world), we need to revisit the Biblical response to all this.

In 2 Tim. 2:3 Paul tells Timothy to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Paul knew what Timothy would be facing under the Roman Caesars near the end of his generation and he needed to be prepared. And we have a good idea of what's coming in our generation.

I want to try and illustrate what the scriptures say about this. My illustration may be a little cheesy, so bear with me and go for content over my lack of creativity.

Imagine you're living in a country at war and the times are so desperate that everyone is drafted into the military, sent to bootcamp, and as soon as possible, sent to the front lines. It's the only way the nation might survive.

So, you get to bootcamp and the instructor says, "You're going to need to become significantly stronger physically and more stable emotionally than you are now. And you will need to develop endurance because front line combat will stretch you beyond what you can even imagine at this point. But don't worry about any of those things here; we just assume you'll figure it out when you get into battle."

The Christians in the group, who have decided they would prefer to be among those who don't die in battle, start praying for a miracle of knowledge and skill when the time comes.

Instead, the Lord increases the pressure in their current circumstances. This makes no sense to them, they aren't on the front lines, and they beg Him to stop, but He doesn't seem to care about them at all.

We're all familiar with the time Paul was in this circumstance in 2 Cor. 12. He saw his thorn in the flesh as a major hinderance to his usefulness as an apostle of Christ and begged God to remove it.

God said, "No, and here's why; My strength is developed *in* your weakness, not by removing it."

So, Paul began to rejoice in his hardships anticipating that God must know what He's doing; after all He's God – whatever He does with His children has to be coming from a place of infinite love and infinite wisdom.

For Paul, it was an eye disease coupled, of course, with being beaten almost to death numerous times and suffering physically from whatever the consequences of that would be.

Since we're all unique, all of the circumstances the Lord puts us in have to be unique. For some it's physical; for others, it's their job or career or marriage, or persecution. You can fill in the blanks with the hardships you are personally experiencing. They're designed specifically for what you need most right now.

In 2 Cor. 12, Paul surrendered to his hardship, but in 1 Pet. 5, Peter tells us to "cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us."

So, which is it? Learn to endure hardship while there's still time to learn – or beg the Lord for deliverance from what seems unendurable to us?

It's both.

The issue is not whether we seek the Lord on what comes to us – we absolutely should. The issue is what we do with His response.

If He says, "Yes, I'll remove that – doing so would not hinder your growth; it would be in your best interest." He's done that a million times over our lifetimes and He will do it a million more.

If He says, “Not this time, because removing that would be the worst thing I could do for you. I know what’s coming in your future and, for now, you need training and preparation more than you need a miracle.”

No matter what He does, our Biblical response is, “If possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will by thine be done.”

Ok, let’s get to our passage in Rev. 2.

I mentioned something last week about the prophetic nature of these letters.

Each of the letters in Rev. 2 & 3 were addressed to local churches in Asia Minor that existed at the time the letters were sent. But as we can see from Rev. 1:3, all of the book of Revelation is prophetic:

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it . . .”

So, these letters are not only specific to the first century, they also lay out the full history of Christianity from the first century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As we’ll see, just like Israel gradually drifting away from Jehovah’s original intent for them (given through Moses), over the centuries, the church has drifted away from the Lord’s original intent for us also. We’ve gone from the loss of First Love to the Self-love of Laodicea.

Here’s a quick overview of the way in which these seven churches and the messages given to them fit into prophetic history over the last 2000 years.

Ephesus (30 to 100 AD) begins the departure from God's original thought for His people by leaving what our Lord called "First Love" - the intimacy of a personal leading of the Spirit.

Smyrna (100 to 312 AD) Smyrna is the church under the persecution of the Caesars. This church receives no rebuke and continues the apostolic line of overcomers.

Pergamum (313 to 600 AD) moved away from spiritual union with Christ and integrated, morally, with the world. When First Love is forsaken, that love is eventually replaced by something else. In this case it was a church-state union that began the development of Roman Catholicism.

Thyatira (600 to 1500 AD) Thyatira means "continual sacrifice" (as in the Catholic Mass where Christ is continually sacrificed when the members partake of the sacraments – it's called the doctrine of transubstantiation: The belief that when we take the elements, they magically turn into the literal body and blood of Christ).

Here's how the Pew Research Firm worded their finding:

Transubstantiation is the idea that during Mass, the bread and wine used for Communion become the body and blood of Jesus Christ – this is central to the Catholic faith. Indeed, the Catholic Church teaches that "the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life. '"

So, at every Mass, Catholics crucify the Son of God afresh (as the Hebrews believers were warned not to do in Heb. 6:6)

In Sardis (1520 to the late 1700's) we see the birth of the Reformation - a breaking from Rome and new light given. But because of limited truth, Sardis can only maintain the Name of spiritual life, not its essential substance.

Philadelphia (1800 to the mid-1900's) - The recovery which began in Sardis finds a remnant expression in Philadelphia during the age of expanded missionary outreach.

Laodicea (mid 1900's to the present) - is a self-centered, prideful departure from Philadelphia. They take God's blessings for granted without the wisdom to hold on

to Christ as Head of the church in humble dependence upon Him for spiritual life. Laodicean pseudo-spirituality is the primary characteristic of the Church at the end. This is also seen in Paul's prophecy of the great apostacy in 2 Thess. 2:3.

As history has unfolded, the incredible accuracy of Revelation 2 & 3 in both outward conditions and inward spiritual state is amazing.

You and I are exhorted to choose the overcomer position in all of these churches. Laodicea will spiritually seduce all those who are susceptible to that deception in our generation.

Fortunately, there will be believers scattered throughout the world who are Philadelphians and Smyrnans.

Now, let's look at Thyatira:

Revelation 2:18-29

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So, I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.' To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— that one will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to

pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Before we make applications, let's clear up the symbols John uses;

vs. 18; "eyes like a flame of fire"

Because of the outward show of religiosity, "eyes as a flame" piercing to the heart of the matter is the title our Lord uses, and Rev. 1:15 tells us that feet of brass or bronze speak of judgment and strength.

As one author puts it, "What His eyes discover, His feet shall tread upon."

Thyatira was permitting an evil in its midst of a more serious character than any that had yet appeared. This evil is symbolized by Jezebel (we won't take time now, but if you want to read her story, it's in 1 Kings 16).

Jezebel's goal was to unite the religion of Israel with the pagan religion of Phoenicia; to form a mixture of heathen idolatry and Judaism.

Pergamos followed the years of persecution under the Caesars, and when Constantine came to power and made Christianity a state religion, corruption began, and we have the entrance into the dark ages of Roman Catholic domination over organized Christianity.

It was a spiritual black-out of this world.

But as we see in 2:19; within this context of Thyatira's spiritual idolatry, there is an element of purity and even growth.

'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.'

Even during the dark ages, there were remnant believers who met these spiritual conditions (if you want to read what I consider to be the best book written that

traces the spiritual remnant through the 2000 year history of the church, it's called "The Torch of the Testimony" by John Kennedy, not the president; this John Kennedy was a missionary to India).

There have been many Catholic monks and nuns who laid down their lives for the needy and sick in genuine commitment to Christ Himself, not just to "The Church".

Even with all the persecution he received, St. Francis still remained at least outwardly under the Roman umbrella, but his heart belonged to the Lord.

There were many during this time who developed spiritually in spite of the Jezebel spirit; and wherever there is faithfulness, the Lord responds in love.

As shown in vs. 24; these people may have been rare, but they did exist.

"But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you."

I'm sure as we go through these letters, you are seeing what the overcomer is – the characteristics of the remnant that distinguished them from those who are receiving criticism and warnings of judgement.

The overcomers are avoiding and exposing false doctrine (exposing the works of darkness) and they are holding on to what God has given them.

The Lord is not placing any other burdens on them but to simply stay the course.

But the most important thing is that we don't allow the details and symbols to become the end in themselves.

We have to get a personal sense of the *type of person* an overcomer is, not just the specifics of what overcomers are, or are not, supposed to do, as if being an overcomer is conformity to a set of rules or an external law.

We are ideally pressing toward becoming a certain kind of person rather than just someone who's desperately trying to check off overcomer traits on a list we've put together.

The Lord wants us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind; He's trying to move us toward a mindset; an attitude of the heart toward God.

(Phil. 2:5) "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. . . "

As we've seen before, overcomers are those God can entrust to govern according to His will. They don't just obey because it's "the right thing to do"; they rule according to His will because they love what He loves and hate what He hates.

They aren't just similar to the Lord in outward behavior; they share His thoughts and desires, and they embrace His purpose because they are one with Him in the deepest part of who they are, and doing His will, doing that which pleases Him, is what they want and desire.

God is developing a new humanity, organically from within; He's not making an army of automatons – programmed to do His will.

Overcomers aren't just the servants of the Lord; they are the bride of the Lamb, also called the New Jerusalem; and when this age is complete, Rev. 19:7 says;

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

She's not a distant, cold, legalistic, reluctant bride. She's rejoicing; she is in love with the Man she will marry, just as she knows He is in love with her.

The overcomer does what he does *because of who he is* and because of who Christ is; he serves because of relationship, not out of hesitant necessity.

Now, lay that grid over the characteristics we see in these letters.

First love in Ephesus

Faithfulness in Smyrna

Rejection of immorality and false religion in Pergamum and Thyatira

And we'll see more as we go through the rest.

These aren't the characteristics of reluctant, fearful and compelled followers of a hard taskmaster; they are traits of love and affection for someone who has loved them more than they could ever have imagined being loved by anyone.

Once those character traits are formed in us, we will *search* for ways to please our Lord, not shrink back from what we feel are legalistic demands.

Ok, let go to vs's. 21-23 where we see the warning to the non-overcomers at Thyatira;

"I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So, I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

In spite of all warnings Rome received over the centuries "...she repented not". The Pope is not going to repent any more than Jezebel did.

Vs. 24 through 29 hold out both hope and reward to the remnant.

"But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless, what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The elements of reward to these saints include "authority" and "the morning star".

Let's do the second first; here's how Watchman Nee explains this offer;

"The morning star is the so-called daybreak star in the orient. At the darkest hour, just at the time the day is breaking, it appears for a little while, and then the sun arises. Many people see the sun, but few have seen the morning star. One day the Lord will be seen by the whole world, as recorded in Malachi four. But before everyone sees the light, you may have already seen it first while in darkness. This is what it means to receive the morning star. Just before the day breaks, it is really dark. But it is at that very moment the morning star appears. The Lord promises the overcomer that he will receive the morning star at the darkest time... When you see the sun, it is always during the daylight hours, but he who sees the morning star is one who makes a special point of rising to see while others are asleep. This is the promise to the overcomer." (Nee)

At the end of this age, just before the rapture, the world will become darker than it's ever been. But there will be overcoming believers in every nation who have "made a special point of rising to see, while others are asleep."

They are the ones who are expecting and longing for the Lord's appearing. And in response, He is revealing Himself in them as the "Morning Star arising in their hearts."

Listen to these passages in Galatians and 2 Peter;

(Gal. 1:15-16); "But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me . . ."

(2 Pet. 1:19); "We also have the word of the prophets as confirmed beyond doubt. And you would do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

As to the idea of “ruling with a rod of iron”, this is the promise of the Father to the Son in Psalm 2:7-9;

“He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.  
‘Ask of Me, and I will give the nations as Your inheritance,  
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. ‘You shall break them  
with a rod of iron . . .”

In our passage in Rev. 2, to the overcomers, Christ allows them to share His throne as co-rulers with Him.

The idea of reigning with Christ over the nations during His Messianic rule is a common theme throughout Scripture and we'll see it again in Rev. 3:21.

We covered this extensively in the study we did on the governance of creation in an earlier study, but there are a couple of crucial points to remember in the issue of Authority.

First, only the overcomer is promised this reward and there are some very good reasons why it has to be this way.

God's original purpose for man was, and is, dominion - to reign with God's Son over all creation in perfect expression of God's will, demonstrating God's thought in everything.

Authority requires knowing the mind of Christ. Royalty in character is not bestowed - it's developed within through training and discipline.

Even the Son was "made perfect through suffering." Royal integrity must be tested and perfected before the right to rule is granted. As one author put it,

"It is not just a matter of Pedigree; of being born in a royal family - spiritual character is required as well. This is the way all of creation works and the training of God's sons for positions of authority is no

exception. There is a mystic air of royalty and nobility that was known in God's greatest servants. The ultimate of this is seen in Christ Who, even on the cross, shown forth in glorious nobility of character. It was His inner character and integrity that determined Royalty, not simply an outward status."

Not all Christians are overcomers, and not all will reign over the nations, because not all Christians, during this time of testing on earth, develop the character of those prepared to rule.

So, the lesson we learn from Thyatira is this;

God will absolutely hold to the original intent for His people - a single purpose throughout this age.

The enemy will consistently try to pull us away from that purpose into a myriad of alternatives - whether that's through immorality or religion.

The characteristic of the overcomer is to keep a single-minded devotion to the Lord Himself; to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying; to be open to moving as God moves and avoid locking into any system or lifestyle that is stagnant and lifeless.

So, as Paul exhorts us in 1 Cor. 9:26, we must run to win, not uncertainly or hesitantly, and we must fight, but not as those who pound the air - we fight with purpose and with the knowledge that "greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world".

We can win this fight because the all the power of heaven is granted us in God's Spirit who lives in us and will never leave us. Our dependence for all things that matters has to increasingly shift from us to Him, so that He becomes our sufficiency as we decrease and He increases.