

The largest of the seven letters

- A command (i) and description (ii) speaking of purity and strength

- Commendation (iii)

- For their faithfulness steadfastness and loving service to others

- A complaint (iv) – a 'prophetess' was corrupting them with her teaching, leading them to join in with temple activities

The fourth letter of Jesus to one of his churches is the longest. It begins with (i) a **command** to John. ¹⁸*'To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and who has feet that resemble bronze that has been refined.'* (ii) The **description** again refers back to the vision that John has seen. Jesus has piercing vision and knows the realities of the lives of his people. His feet are like strong shining bronze; the symbolism speaks of his purity and strength.

As we now expect, next comes (iii) a word of **commendation**. ¹⁹*'I know your works, and your love and your faithfulness. I know your ministry of serving others and your steadfastness, and your recent actions are more than what you were doing at first.'* This is a powerful commendation. These Christians were very active people, obviously. They did a lot for other people and for the community around them. Maybe they were zealous in spreading their faith. Maybe they were famous for their works of kindness for the community nearby. They showed great love. They persisted in what they were doing, without losing heart. And they were constantly improving in all of these things. They were growing more zealous in serving God every day. The Christians at Thyatira were moving forward.

Yet our Lord Jesus Christ has (iv) one **complaint** against them. ²⁰*'But I have one complaint against you. You are tolerating that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. Yet by her teaching she is corrupting my servants, leading them into taking part in sexual sins, to eat things sacrificed to idols.'* The worship at the local pagan temples caused great difficulty for early Christians. They were not only places of worship but they were also centres of friendship and social life. If Christians wanted to have friends in the local community they were tempted to join in what was happening at the local temple. Yet when you ate food at the temple you were joining in religious worship. And the pagan worship was full of immoralities. Evidently there was a woman in Thyatira who claimed to be a Christian 'prophetess' but whose teaching encouraged the Christians to join in what was happening at the temple. 'God has given me a prophecy', she would say. 'Thus says the Lord!' And she would give prophecies which told the Christians that it was all right for them to join in whatever was happening at the temple. We can learn a lot from what was happening.

1. The devil always attacks the church in one way or another

- Unless it is dead!

1. **The devil always attacks the church in one way or another.** If it is zealous in serving God, Satan will find another way of attacking the fellowship. In one place it will be a matter of lost love. In another place it will be violent persecution or a loose attitude towards God's Word. In Thyatira there was such a desire to have non-Christian friends that it led into idolatry and loose-living. But one thing is sure: the devil never leaves a congregation alone unless it is dead!

2. Prophecies have to be weighed and tested

- By the Scriptures
- Allowed but with some definite cautions

2. **Prophecies have to be weighed and tested.** Self-appointed prophets are always ready to give words from God – and yet they never expound the **abiding** Word of God, the Scriptures. There can still be ‘prophecies’ in the church. A Christian may well be given a word from God that is directly given to him or her by the Holy Spirit. If it could not happen, there would be no need to weigh and test the prophecies. A bank employee examines a bank note because some are genuine, some are counterfeit. If they were all counterfeit there would be no need to do any examining! ‘Prophecies’ should still be allowed in the churches but with some definite cautions. One should be watchful for anything that displaces the Scriptures. When people love prophecies more than they love the Scriptures, they will soon be led into eccentricity. One should be careful not to allow things week by week that are trivial, boring and repetitive. The churches need strong meat, not packets of sweets.

3. Any ‘prophecy’ which encourages sin is to be rejected firmly and publicly refused

- There must be a call to repentance

3. **Any ‘prophecy’ which encourages sin is to be rejected firmly and publicly refused.** When a ‘prophet’ or ‘prophetess’ encourages compromise and damages holiness, he or she must be called to repentance. A sincere person may be led astray. Or unconverted false teachers may slip into the church and get themselves some kind of position within its teaching-ministry. Either way, when the problem is discovered, action must be taken. At Thyatira nothing was being done about the influence of this woman Jezebel. The name is almost certainly symbolic. We recall how Queen Jezebel of the Old Testament was zealous in promoting in Israel the immoral ways of pagan worship.

4. When we are overtaken by sin God calls us to do something about it

- God gives us time to repent
- If there is no response then He will act

4. **When we are overtaken by sin God calls us to do something about it.** God has allowed the situation to go on for some time. Perhaps the woman would come to see the bad mistake she was making and would drop her ‘prophecies’. Jesus says, ²¹‘I gave her time enough for her to repent; but she does not wish to change her mind so as to leave her immorality.’ God wanted the woman to repent willingly and voluntarily. God takes his time in dealing with us. Often he does not chasten us severely at first. He speaks to us and waits for us to act, giving us plenty of time. He takes no pleasure in dealing with us more forcefully. But then – if we are truly his people – he will act. He might abandon the unsaved altogether, but against his own people he takes stronger action. But if we act first, we shall find he is gracious and does not deal with us as our sins deserve.



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