

False Teachers & Their Followers

Not too many years ago a young man became the senior pastor of a new church. Many people joined him who had a passion for a biblically based church that taught scripture verse-by-verse. He was friendly and charismatic and had a wonderful zeal to minister to all age groups. The church had home Bible studies throughout the week (They are also called flocks, small groups, cell groups, or care groups in other churches). One day as we were talking about the church, he made it clear that he believed the Bible did not apply to him. He felt it was okay to ignore parts of the Bible when they were inconvenient. The young man's words revealed his true character. He did not honor the Bible as the words of God. God's Word did not have absolute authority over him. He would teach one thing to the people in the church and when he wanted to, he would ignore it in his own life.

CITY OF THYATIRA. The church of Thyatira had leaders very much like this young man. The young man hid his view from his congregation. But some leaders in the church at Thyatira were actively teaching things contrary to the Bible. We will see in a few minutes what was being taught.

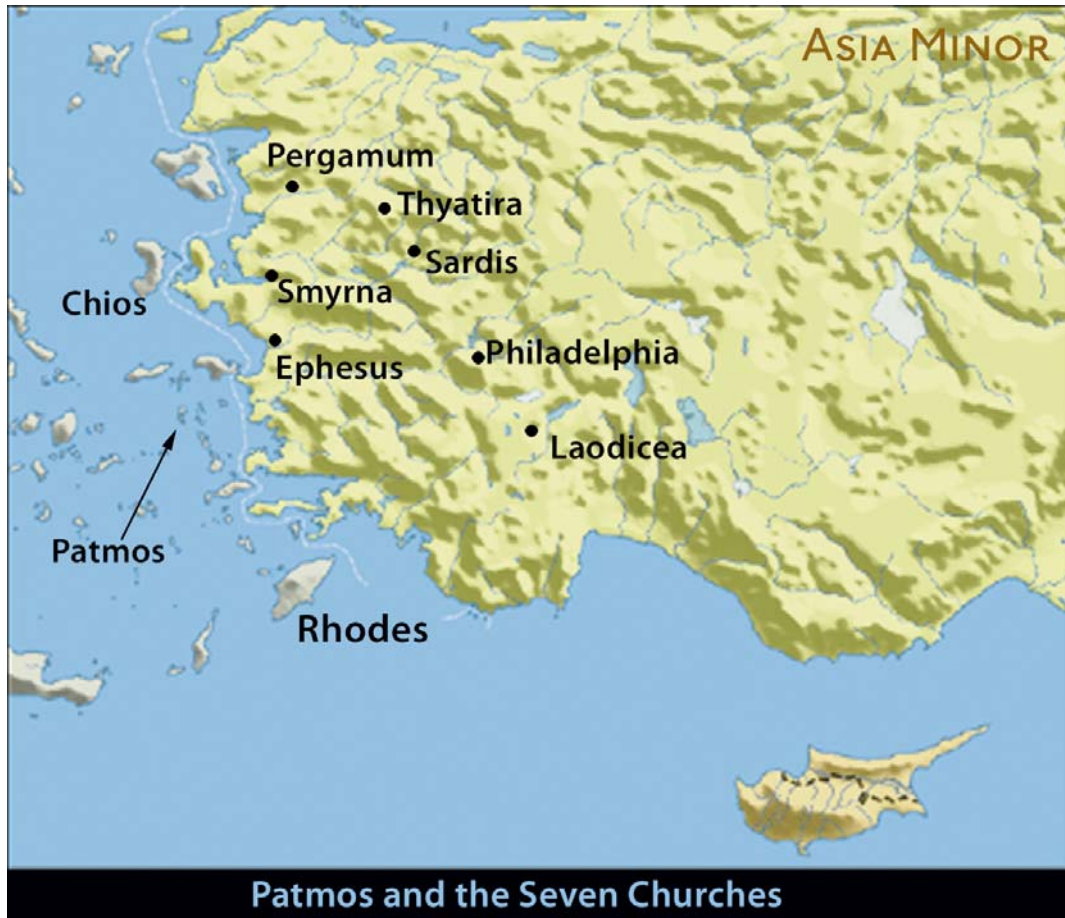
The city of Thyatira is in ruins today. The modern city of Akihiar surrounds the one square block of what is left of the ancient city. Now there is nothing left but rubble. Thyatira was famous for its many trade guilds: wood, dye,

linen, leather, bronze-smiths, tanning, coppersmiths, pottery, and slave trading. The ruins are located in a valley that has no natural defenses.

The first Christian from Thyatira appears to be a woman, Lydia, who had come to the city of Philippi to sell purple fabrics (Acts 16:14). There the apostle Paul introduced her to Jesus, and she responded positively to the wonderful news. From there the church grew. We do not know how many became Christians; but by the time God speaks to them



Tyatira Ruins



through the apostle John, the church is having serious problems.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." (NASB) Rev. 2:18-20

IMPORTANT TRUTH. We saw in our last study that God had rebuked the church of Pergamum for sexual sin. Some of the Christians in that church believed their sin was okay. Now the church at Thyatira is doing the same thing; but they have gone one step farther. Someone is actively teaching the Christians in this church that sexual freedom is acceptable

to God. There is an important truth in this passage that we do not want to forget. The truth is very simply this - if you twist the meaning of the Bible enough, you can make it say anything that you want. God has never approved of sexual sin - adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, or any other behavior except for sex between a husband and wife.

God either names the woman in the church or at least says this woman teacher is as wicked as the Old Testament queen known as Jezebel. The Old Testament Jezebel is found in the book of 1 Kings. She killed many Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 18:4), brought the worship of the god Baal and the goddess Asherah to Israel, and installed prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19). God knew who she was. She did not escape God's eyes.

And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. (NASB) Rev. 2:21

JUDGING. The leadership and some of the people in this New Testament church 'tolerated' her. The Greek word for

“tolerate” is *aphiemi* meaning to “not forbid.” This means the leadership of the church and some of the people were not willing to stop her. Does this sound as though they did not want to “judge her” or “not show her love” by hurting her feelings? Some Christians are more concerned about a person’s feelings than about God’s feelings. God is treated as a second class citizen in some churches. What God wants seems to be unimportant. Whatever their reason, God said this was sin and it will stop.

God had been working on this woman, but she ignored Him. God may have already brought pain and suffering into her life. It might have been financial difficulty or illness. God does not tell us, but He gave her time to stop and change.

ing. But this is not true. Listen.

Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. (NASB) Rev. 2:22-23

God is going to discipline the false teacher and her followers unless they stop. God will even take their lives in order to send a message to all the churches that He is serious about this sin. Pergamum indulged in sex, but Thyatira taught that

False Teachers

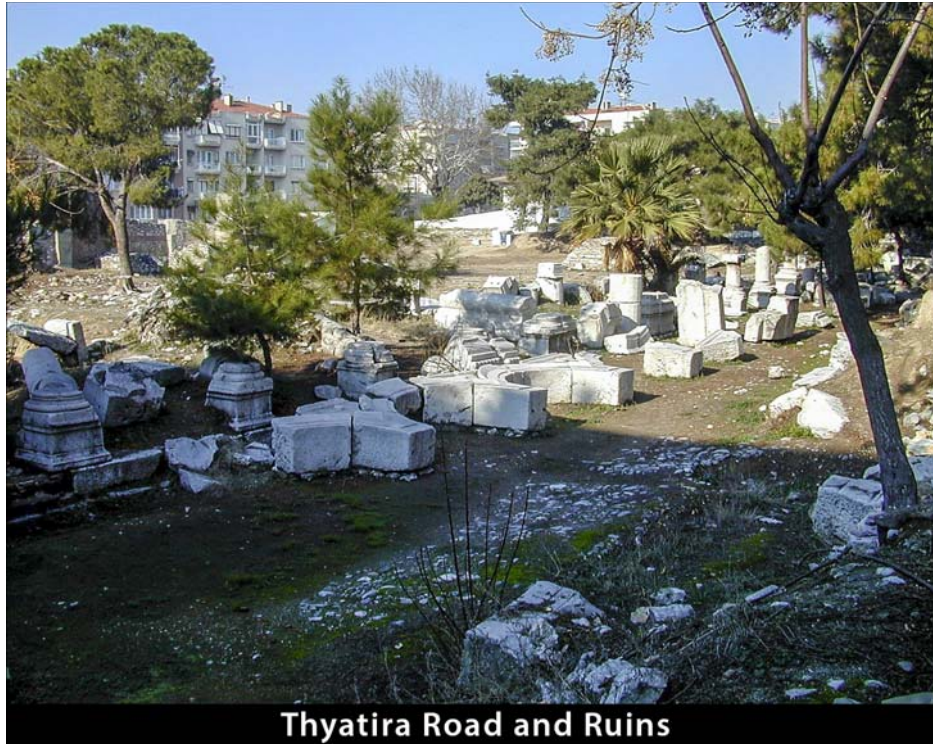
<p>What They Say,</p> <p>God sent me . . . Jer. 14:14</p> <p>I am the Christ . . . Matt. 24:5</p> <p>Do not marry . . . 1 Tim. 4:1-3</p> <p>Jesus is not God . . . 1 John 2:23</p> <p>They teach error . . . 2 Pet. 2:1-3</p>	<p>They want . . .</p> <p>- people to follow them. Acts 20:30</p> <p>- to argue about the Bible Rom. 16:17-18</p> <p>- to live as they want. 2 Pet. 2:13-14</p>
<p>They . . .</p> <p>- do not know God. Jer. 2:8</p> <p>- reject biblical truth. Hosea 4:6-8</p> <p>- do not understand. 1 Tim. 1:7</p> <p>- do not study the Bible. 2 Tim. 2:15-18</p> <p>- appear to know. 2 Pet. 2:12</p> <p>- are untaught. 2 Pet. 3:16</p>	<p>How To Respond.</p> <p>Do not follow them. Jer. 5:31</p> <p>Pursue sound doctrine. 2 Tim. 4:3-4</p> <p>Guard against them. Rom. 16:17</p> <p>Do not entertain them. 2 John 10</p>

She did not listen. She liked the group of people who followed her. She may have even thought she was correct.

Most of us would think that God would discipline this woman and not her followers since she was doing the teach-

sexual promiscuity was okay! Just because a Christian leader says the Bible teaches something as being true does not mean it is true.

THREE CURRENT EXAMPLES. A pastor once told his



congregation that the way to win another person's heart was to walk around him or her seven times just as the Israelites walked around the city of Jericho seven times (This was a true situation). Unfortunately, a young man believed this pastor and walked around a girl seven times. The girl had heard the pastor's message and felt obligated to accept this young man's proposal of marriage. Later this couple had problems in their marriage. This was not a surprise. False teaching from false teachers causes serious problems. It is even worse when someone believes them and follows.

There is a well-known pastor in Garden Grove, California in the United States who is a false teacher. For example, he says that "Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem." (Schuller, Robert. *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, p. 14). That is, sin is defined as not feeling good about yourself. He does not agree with God who says,

... sin is lawlessness. (NASB) 1 John 3:4

This pastor goes on to say on page 68, "To be born again means that we must be changed from a negative to a positive self-image -- from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear

to love, from doubt to trust." God does not agree with him. What God has said in the Bible about salvation or being born again has not changed! The apostle Paul said that Jesus came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). The reason Jesus died was not to give us a positive image, but to forgive our sins (John 1:29). We disobey God. That is the problem.

Now for our third example of false teaching. During a major crusade in a coliseum, a well known preacher stopped preaching and claimed that the Holy Spirit was giving him new revelation. Then he told the crowd that he would share this new revelation with them and then said, "God the Father has a body, soul, and spirit. Jesus has a body, soul, and spirit. The Holy Spirit has a body, soul, and spirit. There are nine of them!" He told the audience that they needed to reject the "old denominational thinking" and accept this new revelation that "God is not a trinity - there are nine of them."

These men have people listening to them and following them. Many would say these are men of God. Just look at the crowds who come to listen. Jezebel had people following her, too, but she was still a false teacher. Jezebel was wrong. Her followers were wrong, and God was going to judge all of them. A crowd of people is no proof that the teacher is cor-

rect. Large buildings, charismatic speakers, national radio or television programs do not mean that the teachers/preachers are truly anointed of God. Even false teachers have a following. We must remember that even false teachers need a following in order to be “successful” in the world’s eyes.

CONCLUSION. False doctrine does not usually enter a church quickly. It comes slowly. God calls us to be faithful to the Bible because through it He speaks to us. He calls us to be faithful. He calls teachers to be faithful.

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (NASB) 2 Timothy 2:2

False teachers are not faithful to God, but are pursuing their own desires. God holds everyone responsible for false teaching - the teacher and followers. He does not want us tolerating false teachers. Now that is a serious warning.

But for those at Thyatira who were faithful to the Word of Truth, God encouraged them, and us, with this,

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. And 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.’ (NASB) Rev. 2:24-29.

What a wonderful reward! Be faithful, be watchful, and be a good Bereans.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. (NASB) Acts 17:11