

## The Church at Thyatira (4)

### Revelation 2:18-29

*'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations 27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" NKJV*

### LOCATION

Thyatira is about sixty miles from Pergamum. The modern city of Akhisar is on the site of the ancient city of Thyatira. The city is on the main road between Izmir (Smyrna) and Bursa.



This map shows the Seven Churches of Revelation, other biblical towns and the Isle of Patmos.



Street in the modern Turkish town of Akhisar on the site of ancient Thyatira.

This ancient town is that the modern town is built upon the ancient one so very little is left of the problem in visiting the original Thyatira.

## HISTORY

The first we hear of this city was as an armed garrison, manned by a company of Macedonian troops, placed as an outpost to protect Pergamum. The difficulty being that Thyatira being in a valley offered little protection to itself from invading forces so that it could not mount a prolonged defence. All it could do was to fight a delaying action and buy time for Pergamum defend itself.

Thyatira was a commercial centre located inland, halfway between Pergamum and Smyrna (modern Izmir), The oldest information on the city is that it may have been one of several strongholds founded by Antiochus I (269-197 BC) controlling possible invasion routes from central Anatolia (the ancient name for Turkey). Pliny the Elder mentions the town in his writings under the name Pelopia. In the 3rd century BC, Seleucus I Nicator, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, took control of the city and renamed it Thyatira after he was informed of the birth of his daughter (daughter in Greek is thugater). In 133 BC, it came under Roman control. Thyatira means 'the citadel or castle of Thya'

Thyatira occupied an important position in a long north-south valley connecting the Hermus and Caisus river valleys. All trade between Pergamum and Smyrna passed through the city, so that when John wrote his letter it was enjoying a considerable amount of prosperity. Despite its strategic importance, Thyatira lay on flat land and it had no acropolis from which to mount a defence in case of a prolonged attack.

The gospel probably reached Thyatira at the time of Paul's third missionary journey, when Ephesus was the base of his missionary activities (Acts 19:10). He may not have visited it personally, however we read in Acts 16:14 that when Paul was in Macedonia he met Lydia who was a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira.

Of all the seven cities, Thyatira was the least important. None the less, the church there received the longest of the letters in Revelation, undoubtedly because of the city's large Christian population, and because the church there faced a problem that has troubled many churches through history; a strong internal movement advocating compromise with worldly interests.

The chief deity of the city was the sun god Apollo-Tyrimnos who was often depicted as a warrior mounted on a horse and wielding a battle axe with which to subdue his enemies. Apollo is the son of Zeus. Coins have been found with this embossed.



Photos of the last remnants of the old city of Thyatira.



Arches that once spanned the portico at the end of a street.



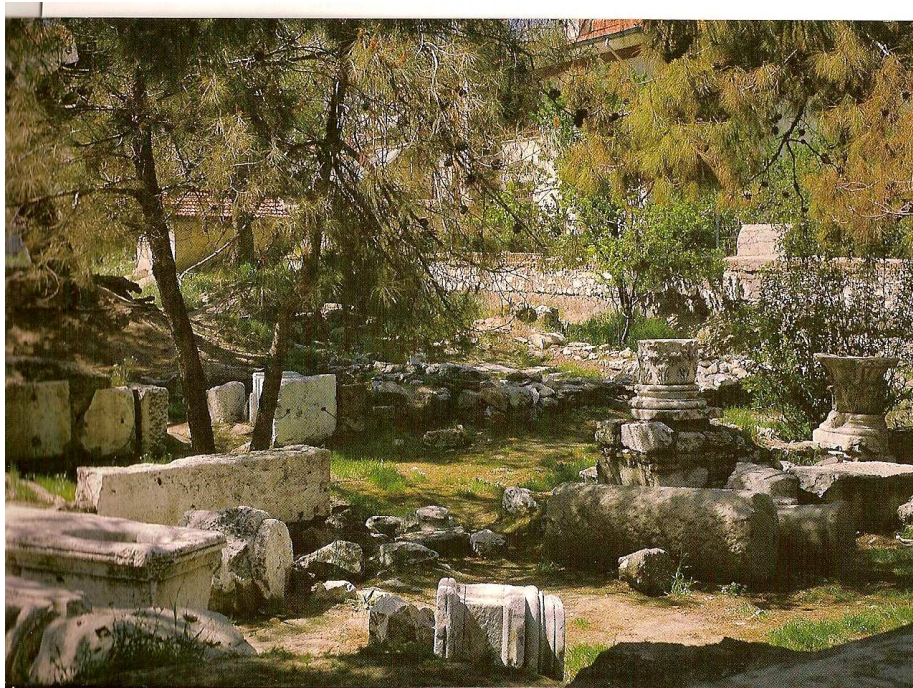
Remains of colonnade; once part of a covered columns of the portico.



Another view of the arches and the houses adjacent to the town square containing the ruins.



Inside a 5<sup>th</sup> Century Basilica



Ruins of Thyatira

By the time of the Romans the city was at the junction of the trade routes and the city itself became a centre of industry and trade. Its products included wool, linen cloths, clothing, leather, pottery, copper and brass. The bronze worked here was of very fine quality. It was very hard alloyed metal, used for weapons, and under proper treatment assuming a brilliant polished gleam looking like gold.

*"His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;"* Rev 1:15

The Risen Christ was shown with feet like burnished (polished) bronze. Rev 1:15. All those in the region would identify with Thyatira bronze. It is important to realise that John was using local customs to help make the case for what the Spirit was saying to the Church.

This "Seller of Purple" is a good indicator of the work undertaken in Thyatira. Dyeing clothing was also part of the industrial scene. The water used in dying was of such pure quality that cloth treated in Thyatira was seen as the best possible quality and much sought after. All of these industrial activities were all associated with trade guilds, each with its own pagan guardian god. To pursue a trade the tradesman or woman had to belong to a guild and honour the guild's deity. Membership was absolutely compulsory. Each guild was a corporate body exerting considerable power in the society. Every member was under strict orders to attend meetings where the nature of the rituals was completely heathen and far removed from the truths of the Christian faith.

The medieval guilds were generally one of two types: merchant guilds or craft guilds. Merchant guilds were associations of all or most of the merchants in a particular town or city; these men might be local or long-distance traders, wholesale or retail sellers, and might deal in various categories of goods. Craft guilds, on the other hand, were occupational associations that usually comprised all the artisans and craftsmen in a particular branch of industry or commerce. There were, for instance, guilds of weavers, dyers, and fullers in the wool trade and of masons and architects in the building trade; and there were guilds of painters, metal smiths, blacksmiths, bakers, butchers, leatherworkers, soap makers, and so on. We can see this city as in Birmingham England. It was stated that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Birmingham, was the place of a thousand trades.

Guilds performed a variety of important functions in the local economy. They established a monopoly of trade in their locality or within a particular branch of industry or commerce; they set and maintained standards for the quality of goods and the integrity of trading practices in that industry; they worked to maintain stable prices for their goods and commodities; and they sought to control town or city governments in order to further the interests of the guild members and achieve their economic objectives.

There have been more trade guilds identified as existing in Thyatira than in any other Asian city of its time. The dilemma that faced Christian craftsmen must have been a simple but extremely difficult one - coming to Christ meant the loss of their livelihood and financial resources for the Church if they abstained from the communal feasts, but participation would be to renounce the faith that they had come to receive and to deny the One who for them had suffered and died.

Though there is simply no way to arrive at a harmony between these two differing ways of life, nevertheless, Jezebel (as we will see later) managed to work out a theology that

compromised faith in Christ with continued participation in the trade guilds - and that meant continued financial prosperity and material wealth.

Fig 1

<u>Church</u>	<u>Words given</u>	<u>Rank of words</u>
Ephesus	187	5
Smyrna	127	7
Pergamum	198	4
Thyatira	293	2
Sardis	183	6
Philadelphia	246	3
Laodicea	321	1
	1555	

Figure 1 shows the number of words written to each Church by John. What the world finds important is not always what God thinks important. In the world's terms Ephesus would be at number 1, Smyrna at 2 and Pergamum at 3. Even what the Christian thinks may be important may not be God's idea. You may believe yourself to be small and insignificant. I wonder if God had to write to the modern Churches or individuals within it, how would we come out? Possibly better than we think!

Thyatira held no strategic position in the Roman Empire but it did hold an historic importance as the city that lay in the long valley connecting the valleys of the Hermus and Caicus rivers through which railways run today. Thyatira lay on the road which connected Pergamum with Sardis and went on to Philadelphia and to Laodicea, linking up with both Smyrna and Byzantium. This road was a main postal road linking these important cities.

The city has had many names, it was first known as Pelopia, then Semiramis and later Euhippia for the famous horses it produced.

The things that threatened the Thyatira Church also threatened all the other Churches in the region.

## **Bible Text**

### **Revelation 2:18**

*"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".*

**The Son of God** - A title which had not been given to Christ in the description in Rev 1:13 (The Son of man). The source of this claim is in Psalm 2: 7. "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." The attributes of the Messiah are transferred spontaneously and without modification to the Risen Jesus. This title had been claimed indirectly by Jesus. (Matthew 11: 27 and Luke 10: 22) It was also assigned to Him by Peter (Matthew 16:16) and formed the basis of the charge against Him before the Sanhedrin. (Matthew 26: 64, John 19: 7), Rom 1:3-4 declares "Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, and Rom 8 : 3 ,32

**Whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze** - The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: First time the Risen Christ names himself, the Son of God. Where there is error in the Church Christ comes as the Son of God with a mission to root out sin and unrighteousness. John would have in mind the references in Daniel Dan 3:24-25

*"Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."*

This description of Christ taken from Rev 1:14-15 represents His eyes like blazing fire. A brightness that matches and rivals the glory of the sun god, for Christ also has a face like the sun in all its brilliance. It also reveals that Christ is searching out His Church and if we look at Rev 2:23 we see that the Lord searches hearts and minds and nothing can be concealed from Him.

**His feet are like burnished bronze.** - Thyatira was famed for its bronze and brassware as shown previously. Brass was associated with military armour and weapons. Christ is thus depicted as a conqueror more powerful than the sun god. He is judging this Church though His patience is also manifested in verse 21. False religion in the form of heathen practices, enter the Church in this period through the Jezebel figure.

### **Revelation 2:19**

*"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first"*

**I know your deeds,** Love and faith produce producing service and perseverance, The Risen Christ knew all about their work, love and faith. Remember, love and faith should be motivating principles. What does it produce? It generates duty, application, industry, attention and effort. Ephesus had left its first love but Thyatira had not. In fact they had increased their love and faith. Whilst the Church in Ephesus was backsliding, this Church was moving ahead rapidly. As Christians we never stand still - we either move forwards or we move backwards. Some Christians complain that they are unable to grow in the Christian life because of the godless environment into which they have been placed, but this should not be the case. The Christians in Thyatira were surrounded by hostility, contempt and ridicule but they used the winds of adversity, in the same way that an aircraft does, by taking advantage of the opposition. They rose to new heights of opportunity. It is up to us to decide whether our environment or people in our environment make us bitter or better. Every circumstance can be used to prod us on towards growth and perfection. If we do not learn how to make our circumstances contribute to our faith then our faith will soon become subservient to our circumstances! All six virtues are produced within believers by the Holy Spirit.

In all the Seven Churches the Risen Christ gives rewards to the 'over comers'.

**Ephesus** - 'To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

**Smyrna** - 'He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'

**Pergamum** – ‘To him who overcomes, to him I will give {some} of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

**Thyatira** – ‘Power over nations, rule with a rod of iron, given the morning star’

**Sardis** - ‘He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.’

**Philadelphia** - ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem.’

**Laodicea** - ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne.’

## Revelation 2: 20

*Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

## State of the Church at Thyatira

Here the Lord presents Himself according to the state of things in the Church. Thyatira is the reverse of Ephesus. In Ephesus we have discipline without love and here in Thyatira we have love without discipline. Everything in the letter meets the approval of the Lord except one thing - their indifference to the presence among them, of the self-styled prophetess. This indifference can only be accounted for on the grounds of their ignorance of the damage that she was working in their midst. That which tended more than anything to blind their eyes was the fact that in all likelihood this woman was a person of great social influence. The history of Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, is here repeated, only in a more subtle and spiritual way. The great sin of Jezebel was turning away the heart of Israel from the worship of the true God to her idols. John had written on the subject of false spirits in the Church previously. 1 John 4:1-3

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”*

Many Churches today can be seduced by a wealthy or an influential family joining the Church. Are we so flattered by their appearance that we do not take a reference check on where they are from and what report is given about them from other Churches? Many of us can be deceived by worldly status and influence.

Jezebel had a reputation as a teacher and prophetess, who was the counterpart of Jezebel the consort of Ahab. The name Jezebel was probably not the name of the woman concerned. The use of that name implies a stinging rebuke. The Jezebel of the Old Testament attempted to establish pagan idolatry in Israel, attacked God's faithful prophets and gained her ends by lying and murder. (1 Kings 16:29-33; 29; 19: 21; 21:1-29 2 Kings 9: 22 - 37 Jeremiah 4:30 Nahum 3:4)

The Church in Thyatira manifested a good number of Christian graces but holiness was not one of them. It is at this point that Christ now bears down upon the Church for He expects His Church to love Him, suffer for Him and uphold the truth for Him. He also expects it to be a holy Church reflecting His purity and power to all around. This disreputable woman Jezebel tried to contaminate the Church at Thyatira. The graces that flowed through the Church were being blighted by sinful behaviour. The Jezebel of the Old Testament sought to contaminate Israel as Balaam had tried to do before her and now we see what this Jezebel tries to do. Those who aim to remain faithful within the Church today must be vigilant to withstand, confront and reject anything that mars the testimony of God's people.

The clue to Jezebel's false teaching can be found in verse 20. Members of the trade-guild were expected to participate in its religious feasts. This would include eating food offered to the god of the guild and becoming involved in the immoral indulgences associated with the feasts. Non-participation would incur ridicule, persecution and exclusion from the guild. Following on from rejection, prospects of trade and livelihood would be at risk. Look at Rev 13:16-18. Jezebel's answer to the problem was "be involved, there is no harm in it. You can be a Christian and still indulge in such things". It is probable that part of Jezebel's persuasion was the subtle suggestion that Christians could enhance their effectiveness through compliance with guild practices. The argument would be that by learning Satan's deep secrets, the believers would be in a better position to understand his tactics. (Verse 24) So they would be better equipped to witness to the unsaved. What blatant deception!!

How easily Christians can be deceived. In His prayer for us Jesus made it clear (John 17 1:19) that He wants us to be active in the world, as He was, yet at the same time not part of a society corrupted by Satan. In the very midst of the Church Jezebel propounded her false teaching with authority.

### **Revelation 2: 21**

*"I have given her time to repent of her immorality but she is unwilling.*

I have given her time – How gracious is our God. Even when there is false doctrine in the Church he has time to try through the Holy Spirit to speak both to the woman concerned and to the Church leadership. Obviously none had responded. This false teaching was therefore no new thing at Thyatira. Warnings had already been given and an opportunity to repent, possibly by the apostle John himself. But, she was unwilling, so it is with strong words that the Lord attacks her and those following her false concepts. It is a major function of the oversight to protect the members from false doctrine and to do it with love but firmness, excommunicating if necessary.



Clarke<sup>1</sup> makes this interesting comment about this verse. "This alludes to the history of Jezebel. God first sent Elijah to Ahab to pronounce a severe judgment upon him; upon which Ahab showed tokens of repentance, and so God put off his punishment. By these means the like punishment pronounced against Jezebel was also put off. Thus God gave her time to repent, which she did not, but instead of that seduced her sons to the same sins. See 1 Kings 21. According to the Mosaical law, the punishment of idolatrous seducers was not to be delayed at all, but God sometimes showed mercy; and now much more under the Christian dispensation, though that mercy is often abused, and thus produces the contrary effect, as in the case of this Jezebel. See Eccl 8:11. "

### **Revelation 2:22**

*"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."*

This is not a bed of pleasure but a bed of punishment. The profession of Christianity while practising heathen rites is spiritual adultery. The door of repentance was still left open for her followers if they repented of her ways. "He is patient with you" writes Peter, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The opportunity however, will not be left open for too long and Christ warns that unless there is evidence of their repentance soon, He will take serious action. Her bed of sin will become a bed of suffering. This judgement on the prophetess, as well as that spoken of her followers is reminiscent of the judgement described in 1 Cor 11:30-31. In the judgement that fell upon the Corinthian Church for their defilement of the Lord's Supper, some were weak and sick and others died. Let us be warned!! If we judge ourselves, then we shall not be judged.

*"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."  
Rev 2: 3*

"I will strike her children dead" are strong words and they are not unique to the book of Revelation. Jezebel's two sons, being both kings were both slain; and after that, all the seventy sons of Ahab; (2 Kings 10:1). Words like this are found on the lips of our Lord in the gospels and in the letters. Look at Matthew 18: 6-9 and James 4: 4-10 as two examples. This is all part of the truth that judgement begins with the family of God as Peter teaches in 1 Peter 4:17. This teaching is foreign in most Churches today. It is all about love and forgiveness never about judgement and righteousness. There has to be a balance in teaching and action. The death mentioned here could be physical death or spiritual death. Each has its part to play in the purifying of the Church. Paul warns the saints that taking communion in an unworthy manner can lead to sickness or even premature death.

### **Revelation 2:24**

*"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."*

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.]

Satanic teaching has depths just as any Christian teaching has but Christians do not need to know the deep secrets of Satan. They are protected from such things as long as they remain innocent.

We come now to examine a most significant statement in Christ's remarks to the Church in Thyatira; "I will not impose any other burden on you" This remark was addressed to those who had not been infected by the cancerous growth that had developed in the Church. As we have seen by this study, Jezebel propounded her false teaching with authority and if that authority did not come from our Lord, then it must have come from Satan. We can see today that false teaching or/and sin did come into the Churches in Turkey as there is only one Church left and that is the Church at Smyrna. (Izmir)

### **Revelation 2:25**

*"But hold fast what you have till I come" Rev 2:25*

The evidence of true Christian faith is the kind of persistence that remains true until Christ calls us home. Scripture does not allow us the luxury of thinking that falling away from the pathway of obedience is not a serious matter and it can be put right at a later date.

The words of Jesus in this statement echo His words from the gospel; Matt 24:13 'But he who endures to the end shall be saved.' Following Jesus is a serious business. We have the assurance of his presence and the strength of His Spirit but we ourselves must continue to walk with him and draw upon the strength that He supplies to all who follow Him.

### **Revelation 2:26**

*"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."*

Revelation verse 26 and 27 offer two promises. The first promise here in this verse is derived from the familiar description of the rule of the Messiah in Psalm 2 especially verses 8-9. The enduring Disciples of Christ are to be partakers in His Messianic rule. This authority Christ will openly share with His people.

Every person with a true relationship with the Lord has power to confront and confound false doctrine and teaching. One day Kingdom rule of Jesus Christ will be established throughout the world. God has given us a mandate to make disciples everywhere and to bring them up in safe doctrine. If we learn now the promise is that we shall rule nations in the future under our head Jesus Christ Himself as the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of God and his Christ.

### **Revelation 2:27**

*"He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' as I also have received from My Father;"*

In keeping with the Jewish understanding that the Messiah will reign over all nations and although the Christian Church was going through suffering and trial, in the end they will be the victors. The great nations of the present as just like pottery about to be smashed any time the owner wishes. That is how unequal nation states are in the sight of God.

Once again, as is customary in all the seven letters, Christ concludes with a gracious promise to the over-comer. The promise in this verse is the giving of the morning star. This

power has been handed to the Lord Jesus to execute at his will. This message is that we are not alone even in the deepest trial.

**Revelation 2:28**

*“and I will give him the morning star.”*

This is the second part of Christ's promise but what does it mean? Christ Himself is described in Revelation as The Bright Morning Star. This is also mentioned in Rev 22:16, 16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." He is obviously promising them the gift of Himself. The Christian who rejects the darkness and misdeeds of Jezebel will discover the "Morning Star". The glory of the Lord is to be the glory of the saints. (2 Cor 3:18) See Rev 22:16 "Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

**Revelation 2:29**

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

As with the other Churches, is the modern Church having their spiritual ears tuned to what the Spirit is saying today not just living on what he said many years ago. Many Churches live on the tradition of the past. Over thirty years ago I went to take the morning service in a Methodist Chapel in the middle of County Durham. I felt led to preach a simple gospel message. As I progressed in my sermon some began to weep. Rather confused I asked at the end of the meeting why everyone was so disturbed. They replied that the last convert in the Church was over thirty years ago. It was the drunk of the village who got remarkably saved in an evening meeting. There was not one convert after that. They were not listening to what the Spirit was saying to the Church.

The principal message of this letter concerns the toleration of evil. The saints are warmly commended for the quality of their lives and encouraged to hold on and persevere. Where valid issues of truth and morality confront us, we must make a stand for the sake of our Lord and His gospel. We need to be salt and light in a corrupt and dark world. Let us rejoice today, in this fact, that no matter what we give up for Jesus while we are on earth, it is nothing compared to the glory that we shall share with Him, when we see Him face to face.