“The Apostate Church”

INTRODUCTION: As we study the messages to the 7 churches of Asia Minor, we see a pattern emerge in Revelation 2 and 3…

1. First: a literary pattern known as a chiasmus or a chiastic pattern
   a. ABCDCBA
   b. chiasmus (Latin; from the Greek chiasma)
   c. Meaning: crossing (Latin); to shape like an X (Greek)
   d. Definition: a literary devise where the words, phrases or concepts are placed in a reversed but parallel order or structure.
   e. Example: He went to the country, but to the town went she
      i. He went...went she
      ii. To the country...to the town
      iii. ABBA order
   f. Used most often to contrast parallel ideas, or…
   g. To highlight the central, singular idea: ABCDCBA
   h. Revelation 2-3 forms a chiastic structure.

2. Second: a spiritual pattern showing a movement toward Apostasy – falling away from Christ and the Faith
   a. Ephesus and Laodicea: two root causes: lost love; lost zeal
   b. Smyrna and Philadelphia: two challenges: suffering; hardship
   c. Pergamum and Sardis: two crucial issues: compromise; deadness
   d. Thyatira: the worst case scenario: fallen away from the Faith

3. The Overall Message: When loss of our first love and loss of zeal for God encounter troubles. Bad things result.
   a. Two pathways to apostasy
   b. One: loss of first love, suffering, compromise, apostasy
   c. Two: loss of zeal for God, hardship, dead-faith, apostasy
   d. Two roads to the forfeiture of Christ, the faith, salvation.

   Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

4. Therefore: The Letter to the Church of Thyatira is the climax (and focal point) of all 7 letters. The organization of these 7 messages points to this truth.
5. I am not the only one to interpret these 7 messages in this manner.
   a. Robert Mounce: Revelation: NICNT; p. 84.
      
      The orderliness and symmetry of the seven letters betray a purpose that goes beyond ethical
      instruction to seven particular churches in the Roman province of Asia. The entire sequence is a
      literary composition designed to impress upon the church universal the necessity of patient
      endurance in the period of impending persecution. It is this motif which binds the oracles to that
      which follows. In the final conflict between Christ and Caesar, believers will need to hold fast to
      their confession of faith and stand ready for whatever sacrifice may be required.

   b. Charles R. Eerdman: Revelation; pp. 46-47
      
      The letters to the seven churches are composed in accordance with the most careful and exact
      literary scheme. Each one consists of the same seven parts. However, this is in accordance with a
      larger symmetry, noticeable elsewhere, whereby the number seven is divided into its two parts of
      three and four, or four and three.

   c. …or as I suggest: 3-1-3, with Thyatira serving as the pivotal church and climactic message.

6. We need to see something true in all 7 of these churches:
   a. There is no perfect church…none…nowhere…not ever…
   b. …until the Church arrives in heaven!
      
      There never has been a perfect Christian community. Christians have been faithful and heroic, and
      they have been frail and vacillating. It is not enough for us to find comfort in the word to
      Philadelphia; we must also hearken to the word to Laodicea.

7. We acknowledge this spiritual truth mentally, and agree; but we struggle with this truth experientially, and
   falter.

8. Why? Because even though we reject the idea of a perfect church, we wholeheartedly embrace the
    concept of a “successful” church! Both are patently false and spiritually dangerous.

9. In America – the land of capitalism, material prosperity, pleasure and business goals – our church leaders
    are addicted to the myth of success!
   a. Why? Because most of our officers are businessmen.
   b. Because all our pastors have been trained in church growth principles (a business model for
      church).
   c. Because our congregations’ three goals in life are success in career, material prosperity and
      pleasure
   d. We use business language all the time to speak about the Community of Faith: Best practices,
      metrics consultants, policies and procedures, performance evaluations, constituents, market share,
      S.O.P’s, vision statements, core values, etc. (All drawn from the Corporate World)
   e. Note: I have said, since my arrival here in 2006, that Christ Covenant is “too corporate.” I’m
      outnumbered by 30+ years of history and over 50 RE’s and 40 or 50 deacons who are good and
      godly men but businessmen nevertheless.
10. What’s the big deal? What’s the danger? What’s wrong with all this?
   a. It’s not a matter of good guys vs bad guys.
   b. It’s not an issue of right or wrong.
   c. It’s more a matter of spiritual and ministry orientation.
   d. And if that orientation goes away bad things can happen.

11. **Eugene Peterson** has made this observation (?source?)

   The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and given a designated responsibility in the community. The pastor’s responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God.

12. There are no “successful” churches, just **faithful** ones!
   a. Faith – therein lies the key
   b. Faith – full = faithful = full of faith
   c. God commends faithfulness not success!
      i. I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.  (Revelation 2:13)
      ii. “my faith...my faithful witness...”
      iii. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.  (Revelation 2:10b)
      iv. ...be faithful unto death...

13. In fact, whenever the Bible speaks of success, it measures that success in terms of **faithfulness** –
   a. When God spoke to Joshua…

      Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.  (Joshua 1:6-9)

   b. Nehemiah’s understanding of success…

      And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and
Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 2:18-20)

c. Daniel’s legacy of obeying God in faith…

So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Daniel 6:28 NASB)

d. i.e., “enjoyed success” = “prospered” in the ESV

e. Success is being faithful to Christ and the Faith.

14. The New Testament Church in Thyatira was a congregation ruined by the pursuit of “success.” Here’s what Jesus said to them: (Revelation 2:18-29)

And 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 whose feet are like burnished bronze. ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself 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.’ (Revelation 2:18-29)

I. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18-29)

1. Note: the longest, most detailed and most “strident” of the 7 letters! (the climax)

2. Here is its 7 parts (classic format)

   a. The Identity of Christ: The Son of God (2:18)

      i. And 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 whose feet are like burnished bronze. (Rev. 2:18)

      ii. Only place in all of John’s Revelation where Jesus is referred to as the Son of God!

      iii. Eyes aflame…feet glowing…

      iv. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. (Rev. 1:14-15)
v. A picture of the Majestic Christ: *Son of God* (divine)

vi. And the *Holy Christ* = sinless perfection

vii. Daniels’ vision of the Preincarnate Christ (*Son of God*)

> I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. (Daniel 10:5-6)

viii. The holy gaze (*fiery eyes*) and the holy walk (*feet of burnished bronze*); The Jesus who sees, pursues and purifies and will ultimately destroy all that is unholy.

b. The Commendation: *A Church Growing in Good Deeds* (2:19)

i. A 4th time “I know your works…”

ii. Four “good works”…

> I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. (Revelation 2:19)

iii. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

iv. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. (Titus 3:1, 8, 14)

> I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. (Titus 3:8)

> And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)

v. A church where the **essential virtues** were growing, developing and yielding greater fruit.

> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

vi. But, this church was doing good works for the wrong reason!

vii. So, something else was growing in Thyatira: *Apostasy*!

c. The Rebuke or Admonition: *Worldly pursuits leading to unholy lives* (2:20)

i. **But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.** (Revelation 2:20)

ii. **Nicolaitans: a Gnostic Heresy; a false Christianity that taught that a Christian could sin with his body (immorality) and it would not affect his soul (holiness)**
• Hated by Ephesus
• Tolerated by Pergamum
• Taught and embraced in Thyatira

iii. Two Greek sins: eating meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality.

iv. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (Revelation 2:14-15)

v. “Jezebel” was leading this heretical teaching that was corrupting the Thyatiran Christians’ lives.

• But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. (Revelation 2:20)

• An Old Testament woman who led Israel into both idol worship and sexual immorality. (The Phoenician wife of King Ahab of Israel)

• In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:29-34)

• Baal worship (idolatry)
• Asherah: goddess of the orgy (immorality)
• Even infant sacrifice
• Killing the true prophets of God
• And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) (1 Kings 18:3-4)

• Establish Jezebel’s false prophets
• When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

(1 Kings 18:17-19)

vi. Who was this “Jezebel”? Five different views:

• Lydia from Acts 16 who was a merchant woman from Thyatira (but the New Testament never presents Lydia as a false prophetess or evil woman, but a sincere Christian)

• The wife (the Greek gune) of the pastor of Thyatira (but there is no reference to such a wife here)

• A symbolical person like the “Whore of Babylon” (but Jesus talks about her as a real person)

• The Greek soothsayer Sibyl Sambathe, who had a shrine outside Thyatira with priestesses and prophetesses (but this Jezebel is a member of the Thyatiran church)

• An actual woman in the Church of Thyatira who was the leader of the Nicolaitan heresy, who was greatly influencing the church.


• Thyatira lay 40 miles southeast of Pergamum in the Lycus Valley.

• A smaller city at the intersection of two made trade (Caravan) routes = a commercial city

• Known for wool working, linen fabric, dying cloth, pottery, leather workers and tanners, bakers, tailors, and slave-trading. All controlled by the Guilds.

• The Guilds were “trade unions” that licensed workers, set wages, controlled prices and regulated trade laws.

• No guild membership = no way to make a living or practice a trade

• Problem: The guilds all had a pagan god or goddess for whom sacrifices and rituals were required.

• Sacrifices made, prayers offered, an annual feast-day, periodic mandatory banquets, with drunken sexual orgies to follow – required participation by all in the guild!

viii. Difficult situation: How could a Christian physician live and practice in Thyatira without joining in the idolatry and immorality of the cult of Asklepios, the god of medicine and patron of all doctors?

ix. If he refused he would be banned from the practice of medicine, unemployed, cast out of his profession; lose his social standing, and possibly divorced and then exiled!
x. Jezebel found an answer: You could be successful in your work, immoral in the guilds, and idolatrous in your actions, but none of this would affect your soul’s standing with Christ!

xi. She taught this (Wm. Hendriksen: More Than Conquerors; p. 88)
   - But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. (Revelation 2:24)
   - In order to conquer satan, you must know him. You will never be able to conquer sin unless you have become thoroughly acquainted with it by experience. In brief, a Christian should learn to know “the deep things of satan.” Hence, by all means attend the guild-feasts and commit fornication...and still remain a Christian; nay rather, become a better Christian!

xii. Gist: Marry success in business with following Christ in any way you need to. Success trumps everything!

   No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Luke 16:13)

d. The Warning: Destruction due to Impenitence (2:21-23)

i. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. (Revelation 2:21-23)

ii. “Jezebel” had been given plenty of time to repent.

iii. “Repent” is used 8 times in these 7 letters!

iv. “If not...” Three catastrophic results
   - Jezebel will be struck with serious illness (if she doesn’t repent)
   - Those who live immorally by her teaching will experience great tribulation (if they don’t repent)
   - And her children will die (if they do not repent as well)

v. And everyone in all the churches of Asia Minor will know that Jesus is serious about sin, judgment and holiness.

   ...and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. (Revelation 2:23)

e. The Exhortation: Be faithful to Christ and the Faith (2:24-25)
i. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. (Revelation 2:24-25)

ii. No other burden laid upon them: just be faithful to Jesus and holy regardless of the cost.

iii. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15:28-29)

iv. Note: This is probably why Lydia moved from Thyatira to Philippi – to avoid the cult of the guilds and all its immorality!


Undoubtedly, Lydia before her conversion was a guild member and had to resolve the problem of choosing for Christ or the guild. The woman called Jezebel may have had a business interest in Thyatira.

f. The Promise of Reward: Great Reward for Faithfulness (2:26-28)

i. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. (Revelation 2:26-28)

ii. “Authority over Nations” – your status restored for following Christ

iii. “as when earthen pots are broken to pieces” – the end of the guilds

iv. “The morning star” – Jesus! God will give us the greatest of all gifts, life with Jesus in Heaven!

v. “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” (Rev. 22:16)

g. The Closing Statement: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches” (2:29)

II. THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

1. First: Apostasy is never a deliberate, planned, systematic action; it comes about, over time, when we choose the world over Christ

   a. Paul put it this way: a loss of simple and pure devotion to Jesus

      i. I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:1-3)
ii. Spiritual adultery evolves over time

iii. But Jesus is a jealous lover!

b. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

c. You can’t have two loves and be true to both!

d. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

e. And Jesus will never share His bride with another god or goddess – even the ones that drive our careers and demand our “success”

2. Second: The road to apostasy is called “compartmentalization”. God for church and home; success for day to day, weekly work and personal career.

a. You can feel this dualism all over our society –

b. Religion belongs to the private life; not in the public square

c. Faith must be checked at the door, not brought into the office

d. Who you sleep with on Friday night is no one’s business on Sunday morning! Not even Jesus’s business?

e. Porn, marijuana, drinking too much are issues of my health; they are life choices I make, but they won’t affect my soul.

f. I’ll act like your submissive wife at church, but not in front of the kids at home.

g. Can you hear the Nicolaitan Heresy here: What you do with your body won’t affect your soul!

h. What absolutely stupid theology! Absolutely stupid!

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

3. Third: The voice of Jezebel is as loud and persuasive as it has ever been. Listen to her speak…

a. It’s the law; it’s legal, so don’t talk to me about “ethics”!

b. Business is business; the Bible doesn’t tell me how much to charge my customers or bill my client!

c. Look, Preacher, this is the way life is; wake up. This is the real world! (So…the world of God, Jesus, the Bible is not real?)

d. Don’t tell me I can’t watch nudity and illicit sex on TV or at the Cinema! That’s legalism! Entertainment isn’t worship, you know!

e. Don’t be a fanatic! People just aren’t “wired” to think about God and Jesus all the time!
f. Ok…ok! I cheated on the test! Where’s the grace? I mean everybody does it! It’s no big deal! No harm done!

4. **Fourth:** The spirit of Jezebel wants you to turn from Jesus to Baal!
   
   a. *And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.* (1 Kings 16:30-32)
   
   b. *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.* (1 Kings 18:17-18)
   
   c. *Baal:* The Canaanite god of “nature” — the world as it is with all its cravings, lusts, sinful urges
   
   d. Baal was worshipped through drug-induced ecstasy, drunken orgies, and ritual prostitution…and infant sacrifice.
   
   e. **Darrell W. Johnson:** *Discipleship on the Edge;* p. 91.

   Jezebel is still very much with us. In fact, I suggest that the spirit of our age is he spirit, the spirit of her Baal worship. Baal was thought to be the god of nature—more specifically, the god of nature as it is now. The prophets of Baal get their clues about right and wrong from nature as it is instead of from what it ought to be; from nature as it was before sin and will be after sin is taken away. Basing your life on “the way things are” is the spirit of Baal worship. It is the fallacy of thinking that because I have certain desires and drives they must be right—simply because they are.

   f. Baal is the god of Hollywood, the Internet, Television, Rock Music, the Mall and corporate America.
   
   g. If it feels good do it, buy it, enjoy it; it’s only natural!

5. Jesus said, “Here is what is most important…”

   *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* (1 Corinthians 13:13)

6. Jezebel doesn’t agree: “Sure, those things are nice, but what really matters is this: success, sensuality, self. That is real life!”

   a. *Success:* doing whatever it takes to get what I want
   
   b. *Sensuality:* feeling good is the highest good in life
   
   c. *Self:* I owe it to myself to make myself happy

7. The theological word for this is **Apostasy:** falling away from Christ, the Word, the Faith. It leads to Hell.

   *Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.* (Matthew 7:13-14)
**CONCLUSION:** I am especially sensitive about this letter to the church in Thyatira. Why?

1. Because I am naturally (there’s that Baal/Jezebel word again!) wired to think and live this way: Ohio State School of Business (B.S.), two years as an officer in the Army, MBA from Miami (Ohio) University, five years in personnel management in a Fortune 500 Company, Church Growth methods for the first 20 years of my ministry, and my natural tendency to put projects over people, and “results” over godliness.

2. Then, in 1988, I read a book that changed the Ministry for me.
   a. It shattered my presuppositions about success in ministry.
   b. It challenged my reason for going into the ministry.
   c. It questioned my motives for why I did ministry as I did.
   d. And it exposed my methods in ministry for what they really were.
   e. …**Idolatry!** I had made success my god! Period!

3. The Book? *Liberating the Ministry from the Success Syndrome* by Kent and Barbara Hughes (pp. 29-31)
   a. Pastor of the College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and his wife
   b. A book about their own personal and long term struggles with “success in ministry”
   c. Kent and Barbara wrote about their journey through the “Success Syndrome” back to joy in Christ…
   d. *When success in the ministry becomes the same as success in the world, the servant of God evaluates his success like a businessman or an athlete or a politician. Given my thinking, the only conclusion that I could come to was that I was failing. Knowing what makes a church grow and having done my very best, but having little to show for it, meant I just didn’t have it. So the logic went: God had called me to do something for which he had not given me the gifts to succeed. Thus, all my bitter resentment and recriminations. Years earlier when I began the ministry my motivation was simply to serve Christ. That was all. My heroes were people like Jim Elliot, whose motto—“he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”—was part of my life. All I wanted was the approval of God. But imperceptibly my high Christian idealism had shifted from serving to receiving, from giving to getting. I realized that what I really wanted was a growing church and “success” more than the smile of God. I realized that I had been subtly seduced by the secular thinking that places a number on everything. Instead of evaluating myself and the ministry from God’s point of view, I was using the world’s standard of quantitative analysis. Barbara and I saw the problem exactly. Each of us prayed earnestly, asking for God’s forgiveness and freshly committing ourselves to his service. We asked God to protect us from our cunning adversary who had so subtly seduced us. We made a covenant to search the Scriptures and learn what God had to say about success. We fiercely determined to evaluate our success from a biblical point of view.*

4. And the end of that intense Bible study and that soul-refreshing journey, Kent and Barbara Hughes found one thing that would reshape their souls, their lives, their marriage and family, their ministry, and their faith in Christ…**Faithfulness!**

5. Barbara Hughes summarized the life-changing results of their long but liberating journey from success to faithfulness (pp. 106-107).
That evening, I saw a new man in Kent. I sensed that he somehow had been freed. Indeed, he had been. The pressures of the success syndrome had been lifted from him, and it seemed he had eased back into the freedom we all have in Christ. We had discovered that the miserable yoke of worldly success is so crushing because it is a burden that God’s servants were never meant to bear. In our study of the Scriptures, Kent and I had learned that we are not called to success, as the world fancies it, but to faithfulness. We realized that the results are for God and eternity to reveal. This basic understanding made possible the succeeding discoveries about God’s view of success. We had simply come to see the basic plan for biblical success.

1. To be faithful (obedient to God’s Word and hardworking)
2. To serve God and others
3. To love God
4. To believe He is (to believe what we believe)
5. To pray
6. To pursue holiness
7. To develop a positive attitude

This was our liberation and, may we humbly say, our success.

6. Don’t forget or forsake what the Church of Thyatira did…

a. God loves you and no measure of success or failure can change His love for you one iota.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1)

b. Christ died for your sins and paid for all your failures. Your success is guaranteed – “a life with God”

And I will give him the morning star. (Rev. 2:28)

c. Jesus wants you to serve Him in whatever your calling in life is, not to find meaning and significance in that calling, but to experience deeper fellowship with Him as you do your work together with Him.

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:9)

d. Whatever you do for Christ is considered by Him a great success, because you did it for Him as an act of love and loyalty. And He will not fail to reward you for that love.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

e. Lastly: When life is all done, and all our work is finished, and it is time to find out how “successful” we really were in life, this will be the one thing we’ll want to hear – for everyone to see: “Well done, you good and faithful servant, you were faithful over little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master. (Matthew 25:21, 23)

7. Love God; be loyal to Jesus; enjoy your calling; be faithful in little things; this is how Christ measures success...
8. …and how we find *joy*!