The slide into death and corruption for the church always begins with forgetting our first love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Its corrective then, is the opposite – remembering who is the head and cornerstone of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and returning to Him. In His 7 Letters to the 7 Churches Jesus has a definite progression – The persecution and the push back of the church by the world (letter to Smyrna), causes the church to lose its first love, Jesus Christ (letter to Ephesus). And the loss of its first love, Jesus Christ, causes the church to slide into first COMPROMISE (letter to Pergamum) and then CORRUPTION (letter to Thyatira). And a church will continue this slide until it repents and returns to its first love once again. Lent is the season to return to our first love. Lent is a season of repentance, leading to new life and renewal of Easter and resurrection. O Christian, would you return to your first love, Jesus Christ, today???

The church at Thyatira is the church which has embraced corruption. It not only is corrupt but it justifies its corruption. It applauds it. There is a theological basis, it would claim, for being corrupt and not repenting. The references to Jezebel in this letter are references to a particular person who is proclaiming a seducing doctrine that undermines the church in its witness and causes it to slide ever more deeply into sexual sin and idolatry. Idolatry precedes corruption. Worshipping something other than Jesus is where it always starts. Commentators on this passage note that the particular doctrine this Thyatirian Jezebel is espousing is referenced as “Antinomianism”; this is the false teaching and the false doctrine that Christians are somehow released from the duties and obligations of following the moral law in the Old Testament because of GRACE (The Book of Revelation, Robert L. Mounce, p. 103). According to this heresy, Grace allows all manner of sin and moral failure. It is not so. Jesus is clear in the Sermon on the Mount: “Ye must be perfect.” “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees..” “Not one jot nor tittle of the law will pass away.” “I have come”, says Jesus, “not that the law might pass away, but that the law might be fulfilled in me.” But the Thyatirian Jezebel is proclaiming that Christians should be in the world and of the world; Christians should engage in all manner of practices of the surrounding culture that grace might abound all the more; the more we sin, the greater the forgiveness. Be happy. Be self-actualized. Do what makes you feel good. Do whatever you want to do because God has to forgive you. So continue in your pagan ways, worship the gods of success and excess, because God has to forgive you anyway because of Jesus. Antinomianism has been deemed a dark heresy from the very beginning of all heresy. Yes, Christianity is all about GRACE...ah, but it is GRACE that leads us to HOLINESS. Justification and Sanctification always go hand in hand. A false Grace leads us to sin; a true Grace leads us to Jesus. We are saved by God in order to be made good by God. Anything less is a lying Jezebel spirit. That’s the church at Thyatira.

I will not go into the significant troubles in the Roman Catholic Church; hardly a week goes by that there is not some other sordid revelation of some additional corruption. I will not go into the sin of the great TV Evangelists, they in their $25 million mansions and private jet airplanes
costing more than $250,000 per year just to maintain, proclaiming the name of the man, Jesus, who told His followers not to have more than one cloak for the journey. But I will focus on the Presbyterian Church, for in varying ways and degrees we are just as bad. In another Presbytery a long time before coming back to Washington County I served as the Clerk of the Permanent Judicial Commission. The PJC is sort of the disciplinary court in the Presbyterian Church. Over my tenure there were a series of 13 cases over three years where male ministers in congregations had affairs with women members of their churches. Obviously, I cannot comment specifically about these cases. But every one of them hurt a lot of people. They brutalized 13 women; it destroyed 13 ministerial careers; they harmed terribly each of these pastor’s families, their spouses and their children; the churches they served were decimated, many people left not only the church but their faith as a result; it caused a scandal in the community and the witness of the church was greatly harmed; the saddest thing when I reflected on it is the harm that it caused to Jesus, our Lord was diminished by His servants, betrayed by a kiss. Each one was found guilty and removed from ministry. The pastor who follows a pastor who has committed adultery is referred to as an “after-pastor”; a friend of mine was one of those after-pastors and he said that no one in that church could trust anyone any more. I have such a love, a naïve love for the church, a church filled with all-too-human people, it harmed my heart for a long time. It opened my eyes in a way that I wish it hadn’t. Sin is very real. And it is sent to harm and destroy the church and inflict wounds upon Jesus.

Right now in the American Church there is a great deal of light being shined into dark and troubling corners. Our scripture says: “I will give them the morning star.” (Revelation 2: 28) Morning star is a reference to Jesus; “Jesus Christ is the bright morning star” (2 Peter 1: 19) The word in the Greek is “phosphorus” it is light and it is bright, O but it is hot and it burns with a searing fire. Like white hot phosphorus it also burns with unquenchable fire. Jesus Christ is described earlier in Revelation as having eyes with burning coals in them, as it says: “his eyes were like a flame of fire” (Revelation 1: 14) He has come to purify His church. He has come to bring to light all that is hidden and done in darkness; all that is secret will be revealed; all that is corrupt will be exposed to His light of truth. That’s what “revelation” means—that which is hidden is now revealed. The bright and morning star has come to refine His church, to reclaim His people, to reveal the idols we truly worship, to make everything that is corrupt transparent by the unvarnished truth of His Word. If you haven’t figured it out yet that’s what’s going on in the American Church today. It is unfolding before our very eyes. It is frightening and exhilarating, all at once.

But in the end it really is about GRACE. In the Presbyterian Church discipline is never about punishment it always has as its goal, restoration. That Grace can take someone who has fallen and raise them up again. That Grace can come and reveal darkness; but ultimately Grace has come to save and to reveal light, the bright morning star. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Beloved, let us return to our first love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not wait but come to Him today. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!