

“The Tolerant Church”

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Revelation 2:18-29 18 *"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, '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."*

The Church in Thyatira existed for roughly 1000 years in what we know as the “Dark Ages.” It was...*for all practical purposes...* a continuation of what we saw in the last church, the church in Pergamum. It expanded on the premise of mixing pagan and false religious aspects with traditional and historical Christianity, and such a practice has not ceased even unto our present day.

Many of these practices came through the back door of what is today the Roman Catholic church. The power of the pope arose in this period...a position that was literally “sold” to the highest bidder. Doctrines such as transubstantiation, praying to saints, the deification of Mary, as well as the construction of countless statues all came about during this period. Worse of all, it was then that the bible was taken away from the average man, and only the leaders...the priests...could read it, for they taught that a real understanding of scripture required them to explain it to you!

During this period, people steadily moved away from the things of God. The commitment and advancement of the kingdom of God became less and less important and soon faded into the fringes of culture and society. Oh...people still attended church, they just generally didn't have anything to do with Jesus or His directives. For sure, the catholic church today cannot be singled out for such practices...the “slide” away from biblical

foundations. No, the protestant church...even the *evangelistic church*, are carrying enough of the guilt themselves in this area today.

In Acts 16, we read of a woman that Paul met while on his missionary journeys, a woman by the name of Lydia. Despite the wicked, pagan culture in Thyatira, there was, as always, a godly remnant, and Lydia was one of them. In divine providence, Paul met this woman in Philippi as she and other women gathered by the riverbank to pray and worship. This seemingly serendipitous encounter would go on to literally change the world.

18 “To the angel of the assembly in Thyatira write: “The Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished brass, says these things:

In each of these letters, Jesus begins with a self-presentation that seemed to fit the message He would give that particular church. This letter...to this church, was no exception. Here He presents Himself unabashedly as the “Son of God,” but also with “eyes like a flame of fire”...and “feet like brass.” Clearly He was presenting Himself...amongst other things, certainly as the One in charge. That seems like a simple and obvious premise, *and yet...*

We had better “sit up and pay attention” to what He HAS said and IS saying, because He will eventually judge every man and every church. There will be no escape. That is a “date written in stone.” Our behavior is often quite inexplicable and nonsensical in light of such clear warnings! It's not like any one of us will dodge that bullet! We must get it through our heads that God isn't running the show on a “point system,” where we get a little gold star for coming to church. Our personal day of judgment WILL come! Maybe tomorrow!

We can pretend to be something we are not around the people in our lives. But His “eyes like flames of fire” see everything. Nothing can be hidden from God. Before Him, we are an “open book.” His feet...depicted herein as made of brass, present a picture of judgment. That's the biblical symbolism of brass.

19 “I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first.

Christ began this letter with some good to say about this church. They indeed had a record of good works, service, faith, love and patience. In fact, the text says these practices were *increasing*.

We cannot miss the fact that many of these churches, if not *all* of them, have *good attributes*. That matters when we look at each one, and when we look at ourselves in light of them. For we can tend to think that *problem* churches would be as obvious as can be, and their sins would be evident at first glance! We isolate what we see as the heretical churches...we seek to paint a “scarlet letter” on them and park them way out in the furthest parking lot, far from us! But sadly, it's just not that clear-cut! A church can be ninety-nine percent “on,” yet still be amiss on a very crucial one percent, and that one percent will be their eventual undoing. A small amount of sin still makes a sinner, and the same still makes a corrupt church.

Christ is calling His church...He is calling *us*, to purity and total commitment. And especially in these last days, ninety-nine percent will not suffice. Like these churches of Revelation, we will not win the battle if we hold back even one percent. And that one fact will be the undoing of untold millions of souls. Good people...moral people...serving people...that will eventually be lost for eternity, because they were never in *all the way*.

20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate your woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

The picture and presentation of this character, “Jezebel,” is symbolic for sure, but also quite literal. We have every reason to understand that this Jezebel was a real person involved in *real* sin! The mistakes that this church made were, firstly, that they let her into a place that gave her voice and clout, and then having corrupted them, they followed her into the practices that she promoted.

Thus, while they...*while we*, may want to point the finger of guilt at this woman, there is no escaping the fact that this church is guilty also of her sin. They may desire to wash their hands of such guilt and pass the buck, but *no*...they were more than complicit. They followed her down the rabbit hole of sexual immorality and idolatry. They began by tolerating her amongst them. They finished by joining her in her sin. That’s the way it works.

The church had given her the limelight...the stage...the clout. Clearly, this church did not ‘vet’ their teachers and leaders, to say the least! Who knows why. Maybe she was important in town, or had a lot of money. But it would be this church's undoing. Like a cancer in their midst, she would corrupt the body and the church would fall. In this case...*though it really matters little what specific sin it was that brought everyone down*, it was her idolatry via sexual sin, as well as the *spiritual adultery* of overt idol worship. Again...it wasn’t that this sin was worse than others...or that this sin was so toxic to be terminal. No, their undoing was not a particular sin, but rather by *allowing it to exist in their midst*, and moreover, allowing *her* in their midst.

She claimed to be a “prophetess,” but in reality she was a wolf of the worst kind. We just can’t seem to deal with folks like that in our lily-soft culture today. A world that says “don’t offend...don’t judge...don’t call anyone out.” We let the wolves come into the sheep and the blood is on our hands for not protecting them.

I had a conversation with a young university student recently. He...like this Jezebel, claimed to have inspiration from God, while again ...like Jezebel, he at the same time promoted practices that are condemned by God. It is nothing more than spiritual “sight of hand.” He was a wolf and I called Him out, and he ran away...

21 "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

Again, it seems that no matter what the sin, God gives an opportunity to repent, to turn away from the sin. This is a must, by the way. We must allow the chance of repentance to occur. But there are indeed instances where repentance *must* occur, or you are gone. Romans 2 warns us...

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

The position that this letter takes is anything but popular. We are often persecuted and slandered because we take the positions that we do. But no one beats up on us for being missional...drilling fresh water wells in

developing countries, constructional assistance, free meals, and medical outreaches. They like that stuff. They just don't want to be told their behavior displeases God. For that we get bad reviews. But it's not like we make this stuff up. It's here in the words of God as He speaks to us. We are obliged to let Christ direct us, or we can't call ourselves Christians. They are, *of course*, those who will reject that premise, and these are the followers of Jezebel. God always prefers repentance and mercy over judgment and pain. But He will respond according to our decision.

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.

The question is often asked... "*will the church go through the tribulation?*" Well, this one will. But it is an unbelieving, apostate, idolatrous "church," not the authentic faithful body of Christ. She did *not* in fact repent, and because she did not, she became the harbinger of tribulation, and the option of repentance now passes from the "wolf" to the "sheep." They too will be the recipient of this tribulation unless they repent of *their* sin and turn back to their God. Notice the language... "*unless they repent.*" There IS a way out. There is a door of escape. But one does actually have to take that door...

The very thing that God and His true church is accused of...the lack of love...is the exact opposite of the actions of our Creator! It is *because* of His love that He moves in this way. For to ignore deception and sin would be exceedingly unloving. For the end of these rogue beliefs are pain, disaster, and ultimately *tribulation*. Why can we not accept that He is trying endlessly to "wave us off?" He will do whatever is necessary to draw us to repentance, even breaking us under His very own hand of judgment and correction.

We must know that in order to rid themselves of God's discipline, they must not only cease their *involvement* in this sin, but they must actually *rid themselves of this Jezebel*. That's the difference between being "sorry" for my sin, and actually *repenting* of that sin. Turning *away* from the old life, as well as the old life deceivers.

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.

This language may be tough for us to bear, but our God will spare no action to take care of His sheep. He is truly the master shepherd. He will deal soundly not only with this "Jezebel," but also with all who involve themselves in her sin. God *does* care how you approach Him! Aaron's sons were killed with "strange fire"...Ananias and Sapphira died at the hands of God because of their attempts to "handle" God. They tried to dictate the relationship between them and God. There is a right way to approach God, and there is a wrong way.

Whether it be the fleshly sin of physical sexual sin, or the spiritual sin of idolatry (*placing anything as more important than the true and living God*), the penalty is the same. We will indeed reap what we sow. He "searches our hearts." He knows "*that which controls us.*"

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.

But those who refuse to be a part of such activities, He continues to hold them safely in His hands. They may be few...*merely a remnant*, but it makes no difference. His care is complete towards those who remain in His graces. He is not giving them worthless "hoops" to jump through. Just the directive to "hold fast." A simple premise that we need to hear from time to time!

He gives no directions herein for us to attempt to educate or correct this unrepentant fellowship. We are rather instructed to *hold on to that which we have already*. To live out the truth ourselves. His love, His Word, His salvation, and His grace. We are called to hold fast to these things and prepare for our departure.

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

Despite the sometimes overwhelming influence of this world, we *can indeed* overcome. In order to do that, we must first be overcome by a love and passion for the Savior that exceeds all other desire.

"...and keeps my works."

While salvation is never earned through works, we manifest that true change through our works. The Word tells us that you will "know a tree by its fruit." Such a statement is a very specific and emphatic claim.

It doesn't say such position in the heavenly realm will be given to those who faithfully go to church, or who love the Lord in their heart, although both are wonderfully admirable. It is for those who *do His works* continuously, right up to the end.

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;

The place of such an overcomer in the millennium reign of Christ, will be to rule with our new King. This is not a new promise, for Matthew 19:28 speaks of us reigning with Christ. Those who reject Him, their end is that of their own making. God merely is fulfilling their wishes: *an eternity apart from God*.

28 "and I will give him the morning star.

The last chapter of Revelation tells us that this Morning Star is another name for Christ Himself.

The greatest reward for "finishing the race" that lies before us, and finishing well, is the receiving of the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst for all of eternity.

29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Are we listening? Do our ears hear?