

FBC POWELL, 8-25-19 AM NOTES
"The Church That Tolerated Sin"
Revelation 2:18-29
4 in Series, "Letters from Jesus"

John 17:17b (NASB) "...Your word is truth."

2 Timothy 3:16a (NASB) "All Scripture is inspired by God..."

John 14:6 (NASB), Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NASB) ⁹ "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."

Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB) ¹⁵ "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile [unbeliever] and a tax collector."

I. The Speaker (v. 18)

A. He Is the Son of God (v. 18a)

Revelation 2:18 (NASB) "...The Son of God...says this."

B. He Has Eyes Like a Flame of Fire (v. 18b)

Hebrews 4:13 (NIV) "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

C. He Has Feet Like Burnished Bronze (v. 18c)

II. The Strengths (v. 19)

A. The Strength of Their Love (v. 19a)

B. The Strength of Their Faith (v. 19b)

"Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."
—Martin Luther

C. The Strength of Their Service (v. 19c)

D. The Strength of Their Perseverance (v. 19d)

III. The Sin (vv. 20-21)

Ephesians 4:15 (NASB) "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,

A. The Source of the Heresy (v. 20)

Acts 20:29-30 (NASB) ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

James 4:4 (ESV) “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Jezebel condoned what God condemned.

B. The Stubbornness of This Heresy (v. 21)

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB) “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

IV. The Suffering (vv. 22-23)

“The mills of God’s justice grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.”

–Unknown

Proverbs 6:27 (NASB) “Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?”

Revelation 2:23 (ESV) “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.”

“Christ’s words here ought to make a compromising, sin-tolerating pastor panic. For the sake of the purity of His church, He will kill those who bring a corrupting influence. He did it when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). He struck down some of the Corinthian church who abused the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28-29).”
–John MacArthur

V. The Solution (vv. 24-25)

VI. The Success (vv. 26-28)

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

- Do you need answers? He is *The Truth* (John 14:6).
- Are you hungry for meaning in this crazy world? He is the *Bread of Life* to satisfy that hunger (John 6:35).
- Are you thirsty for more of God and God’s power? He is the *Living Water* (John 4:14).
- Are you lonely? He is the *Friend* that sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).
- Do you need strength to get through a trial? He is *The Vine*; abide in Him (John 15).
- Do you need forgiveness? He is the *Lamb of God* that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- Do you need wisdom? He is *Our Wisdom* (1 Corinthians 1:30).
- Do you need guidance? He is *The Way* (John 14:6).
- Do you need right standing with God? He is *Our Righteousness* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Conclusion (v. 29)

Sermon 4: The Church That Tolerated Sin

Revelation 2:18-29

I am convinced that the Lord’s primary concern for His churches is not their size, their methodology, or their prestige in the world. His concern is the purity, the maturity, and the spiritual health of His churches. Hear me clearly: Big is not necessarily better! Certainly, every church should be concerned with making disciples. However, when numerical growth consumes a church, that

church will drift or sometimes jump into the trap of tolerating sin for fear of offending sinners. That describes the church at Thyatira.

In a culture where we are often told the lie that there are no absolutes and that what is right and wrong is continually changing, you would expect that the number one perceived virtue would be tolerance. Your expectation would be valid. Today, intolerance, telling someone that something is wrong, is one of the few things that our culture almost universally considers to be wrong. Today, tolerance no longer means showing kindness and respect for those who are wrong (I value this kind of tolerance). Today, tolerance means that you can't tell anyone that they are wrong! For instance, to say that any religion is wrong is to commit the unpardonable sin of intolerance. To say that any moral act or lifestyle choice is wrong is to be arrogant and intolerant.

Surrounded by the belief that "tolerance is the supreme virtue", we have a Bible that claims to be absolute truth. John 17:17b: "... Your word is truth." It claims to be inspired (breathed out) by the God who is revealed in its pages. 2 Timothy 3:16a: "All Scripture is inspired by God..." We have a Savior who claims to be the ONLY WAY to God the Father and thus to Heaven. In John 14:6, Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

This God breathed Word is very blunt about the absoluteness of moral right and wrong. For instance, listen to the bluntness of the Bible in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." By the world's standards, that is *so intolerant!* But that is the Word of God!

Today in this tolerant culture, the church has been severely affected. For instance, most churches have ignored or tried to explain away a very clear command in the New Testament to practice church discipline. Church discipline is presented in the New Testament as an act of tough love toward a church member who refuses to repent of open public sin in their life that is bringing reproach on Christ and His church and the member is not willing to repent and turn from that sin. The very first instruction Jesus gave for His church dealt with church discipline. He said in Matthew 18:15-17:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that *by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed*. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile [unbeliever] and a tax collector.

We practice that in this church, but with many it is about as popular a case of the flu! The church has all too often bought in to the world's false view of tolerance.

The church at Thyatira was sternly rebuked by the Lord because they were being tolerant of some things that the Lord saw as being intolerable. Sadly, the church at Thyatira was being influenced by the world more than they were influencing the world around them. Could that be true of our church? Let's learn some things about our church by looking at the church at Thyatira.

I. The Speaker (v. 18)

To each church, Jesus, the founder and Lord of the church reveals some things about Himself that are relevant to what is going on in that specific church. In verse 18, Jesus reveals three things about Himself for this church.

A. He Is the Son of God (v. 18a)

There are many who deny the deity of Christ and say that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus Christ is speaking of Himself in Revelation 2:18, and He says: “The Son of God... says this.”

B. He Has Eyes like a Flame of Fire (v. 18b)

Even today when we speak of someone angry, we say, “Their eyes were flashing.” The Lord was angry with this church that was tolerating what He saw as intolerable. The “eyes like a flame of fire” also pictures His piercing gaze that sees into the secret places of our hearts. Hebrews 4:13 (NIV): “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” His eyes like a flame of fire see what no one else can see. They see our true motives and our secret thoughts. Everything in the individual and in a church is laid open before the piercing eyes of the Savior which are like a flame of fire.

C. He Has Feet Like Burnished Bronze (v. 18c)

Bronze is often a symbol of judgment. Jesus identifies Himself as the one who is coming to this tolerant church to bring judgment. When any church – this church – begins tolerating that which Christ deems intolerable, they will experience the chastisement, the painful discipline of the Son of God. This letter was meant to be a “wake-up” call to any church that is taking sin lightly.

II. The Strengths (V. 19)

As with the first three churches, Jesus focuses on some things this church was doing right. This was not a spiritually dead church. The Lord Jesus commends them in four areas.

A. The Strength of Their Love (v. 19a)

This is the only one of the seven churches that is singled out for their love. I believe that we can assume that it was a very fragile and immature love because it did not have a strong doctrinal foundation. Nevertheless, this church did have a faithful minority who had a genuine love for God and one another that seems to have worked its way out into practical deeds for one another.

B. The Strength of Their Faith (v. 19b)

There were some in the church at Thyatira who loved the Lord, loved people and trusted the Lord to guide them and provide for them. Their faith was not a dead thing; it flowed out of their love for God and others.

C. The Strength of Their Service (v. 19c)

Genuine love always leads to practical acts of service. The word translated “service” is the Greek word that we get “deacon” from. They were serving one another by doing deacon acts – acts of practical help in common needs of life. Their service was genuine, and the Lord commended it.

D. The Strength of Their Perseverance (v. 19d)

Faithfulness produces perseverance. Perseverance is endurance that bears up even under stress and growing pressures. Not only was this faithful minority commended for their love, faith, and service, all these virtues were growing in them (“your deeds of late are greater than at first”). They had refused to become stagnant. No church can afford to be satisfied with their level of love, faithfulness, service, and endurance; there must be a concerted effort to grow in these areas.

III. The Sin (vv. 20-21)

When Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) who served as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland was having his official portrait done that would show his appearance to future generations, he instructed the artist to paint him “warts and all”. As Jesus paints this portrait of the church at Thyatira, He paints it “warts and all”.

What we are going to see is that this church had a weakness in the area of doctrine. They were *tolerating* false doctrine [heresy] that was leading many of the members into idolatry and immorality. Before we look at the specifics of the Lord’s rebuke, let me share some very important general principles. It is interesting to contrast this church at Thyatira and the church at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus had sound doctrine but they had a love that had grown cold. The church at Thyatira had love but lacked sound doctrine and believed heretical teachings. Most every church even today will tend toward one of these extremes and we must battle constantly to keep a biblical balance between the two. Unloving orthodoxy (correct doctrine) and loving compromising (heresy) when it comes to biblical truth are both repugnant to the Lord of the church. Love and doctrine are like the two chemical ingredients of salt. Salt is actually composed of two poisons – sodium and chloride. If we ingested one without the other, we would become sick and if we ingested enough, we would die. However, if we properly combine them, we have sodium chloride, which is common table salt that adds flavor to bland food. In a church, the proper mixture of love and doctrine reflects a healthy church and gives a good testimony to the world and receives approval from God. We see that balance in Ephesians 4:15: “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ.”

Here is the truth we will see from what Jesus Christ wrote to the church at Thyatira: no amount of loving and sacrificial works can compensate for tolerating the evil that Christ finds intolerable. Let’s look more in-depth at the evil in this church at Thyatira.

A. The Source of the Heresy (v. 20)

The problem at Thyatira was not external persecution; it was internal compromise and error that was being tolerated. The Apostle Paul warned that the greatest danger facing a church is false teaching from within. He said in Acts 20:29-30: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” The strongest language in the Bible is reserved for those who depart from the truth and then seek to lead those in the church to follow them in their error. The source of the error at Thyatira was a woman named Jezebel. While it is possible that Jezebel was really this woman’s name, it is highly unlikely. The point is that she was a “Jezebel-like woman”. The woman who was the source of this heresy in the church at Thyatira was like the Jezebel in the Old Testament. In order to understand what this woman was doing, we need to go back to the Old Testament Jezebel and see her sin.

The Old Testament Jezebel was the daughter of the King of Sidon – a people known for their Baal worship. Baal was a pagan fertility god, and the worship of Baal involved “worshippers” committing the grossest sexual immoralities imaginable. The temples of Baal were filled with prostitutes – both male and female who enabled the worshippers to participate in unspeakable practices. Jezebel married Ahab, the King of Israel’s Northern Kingdom. When Jezebel moved into the King of Israel’s palace, she brought Baal worship with her. She financially supported 850 prophets of Baal. Ahab was a weak man who lacked conviction and Jezebel controlled him like a puppet on a string. There was a woman in the church at Thyatira like Jezebel.

Perhaps this Thyatira Jezebel’s line of reasoning was, “You must participate in the eating of the meat offered to idols and take part in the immorality in the temple in order to keep your job. God expects you to take care of your family. Business is business. After all, an idol is nothing and God understands.

We are under grace! This might even give you an opportunity to witness and invite others to church. This is a great bridge to those in the world.” We don’t know if the immorality was literal or symbolic of being friends with the world.

In short, this Jezebel condoned what God condemned. Learn this: you don’t have to keep your job! You don’t have to survive. The compromising of God’s moral commands is not better than poverty or even physical death.

B. The Stubbornness of This Heresy (v. 21)

We are told often of the Lord’s patience and longsuffering because of His great mercy and compassion. Even this first century Jezebel was given opportunity to repent, but she refused. Because God doesn’t immediately strike a false prophet down doesn’t mean that He approves of their message. 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” The opportunity to repent is a gift from God.

IV. The Suffering (vv. 22-23)

Divine judgment was coming for Jezebel! There is an end to God’s longsuffering. I think it was one of the Puritans who said, “The mills of God’s justice grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.” The judgment of God was coming upon Jezebel and those who had followed her false teaching. Just as the Old Testament Jezebel met a horrible end, even so this first century Jezebel and her followers would meet an awful end. I see no reason not to take this judgment of God literally. It is likely that the worship of this Jezebel involved sexual immorality. Many of the varieties of pagan (satanic) worship involved temple prostitutes. “Her children” is not referring to biological children but those who have followed and propagated her teaching. There would be suffering and even physical death. This is undoubtedly a reference to sexually transmitted diseases which was very common in that area in that time. There is a payday to this kind of sin. Proverbs 6:27: “Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?” In the Bible, salvation is always according to faith, but judgment is always according to works (Romans 2:1-16). Notice that God’s judgment is both disciplinary and exemplary. Revelation 2:23 (ESV): “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.”

V. The Solution (vv. 24-25)

The Lord’s command to those who had been seduced is “repent!” Have you ever noticed that this is God’s command for every sin? To those who had not listened to and followed this Jezebel, the Lord says, in Revelation 2:25: “Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.” The Greek word translated “hold fast” is a strong word and indicates that holding fast would not be easy. He is saying, “Get a bulldog grip on the truth and hold fast to it whatever you have to go through.” How do they do that? Look at the next point.

VI. The Success (vv. 26-28)

He has already encouraged them in verse 25 to look to His coming. The second coming of Christ is most precious to those who suffer the most here. Now in verses 26-27 Jesus pulls from Psalms 2. This Psalm takes us into the future after Christ returns and we will reign with Him. The Lord’s rule then will be absolute, and sin will be dealt with immediately. There will be no Jezebels to contend with!

What is the morning star? Let’s let the book of Revelation tell us! Revelation 22:16: “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” To the true believers, Jesus has given Himself. Don’t miss this glorious truth! In times of trial, temptation, need, loneliness, fear, or perplexity, whatever you truly need, He is!

- Do you need answers? He is the truth (John 14:6)
- Are you hungry for meaning in this crazy world? He is the bread of life to satisfy that hunger (John 6:35)
- Are you thirsty for more of God and God's power? He is the Living water (John 4:14).
- Are you lonely? He is the friend that sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24)
- Do you need strength to get through a trial? He is the vine; abide in Him (John 15)
- Do you need forgiveness? He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)
- Do you need wisdom? He is our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- Do you need guidance? He is the way (John 14:6)
- Do you need right standing with God? He is our righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Whatever you truly need, He is! He is sufficient. And in this world of trials and temptations to compromise to get by, He says "I am the morning star." No matter how dark your night may be, He is sufficient for you.

Conclusion (v. 29)

Revelation 2: 29: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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