

**Garrison. Pastor.** Revelation 2:18-29. **Pray.**

We are continuing on in our series this morning through the first few chapters of Revelation. John, the last living apostle of Jesus, is in exile on the island of Patmos and he has a vision, where Jesus tells Him to send **7 letters to 7 churches in 7 cities** that make up the ancient Roman postal route.

And with each week we've landed with sort of a gut-check question for us to consider for our hearts and our lives.

- Week 1 – Ephesus – “Have you abandoned your love for Christ?”
- Week 2 – Smyrna – “Are you willing to suffer for Jesus?”
- Week 3 – Pergamum – “Where are you compromising with your sin?”



This week we're continuing with the church very close to where we were last week in Pergamum, with a letter to the church in Thyatira.

Now before we get into the text let's do what we've done each week and chat about the city.

**Thyatira.** Out of the 7 cities, Thyatira was the smallest and least important. It wasn't some political powerhouse, nor did it have any marvels of architecture. It was a trade city. It was a blue collar town. I heard it described as, if Ephesus was like a NYC or LA, then Thyatira is like Detroit but way smaller. Not the place you're going to for vacation.

It was a trade city known for its trading guilds. At the time if you were a tradesman/woman, someone who worked with metals or building or clothwork, you'd have to join one of these guilds in order to work. Membership was required in order to actually do any sort of work/make money.

Now these guilds were not just labor unions. They also functioned as a place of worship. All of these guild meetings took place in pagan temples. Temples of the Greek and Roman gods. Which were mandatory meetings for all members.

So as a tradesman in Thyatira, you'd have to show up to the temple to participate in these guild meetings. The agenda was usually the same. There would be a massive feast, where the meat would be sacrificed to the god. Lots of wine and drunkenness. And then the core part of the worship at these temples would be orgies.

6 weeks into this series it's worth noting, this is just what the church was up against in the ancient world. Each church has really similar themes. In a city steeped with idol worship. Each church pushed to worship the pagan gods or suffer. Each church was pressed by the city to conform or else.

And this church in Thyatira was no different. Thyatira was a blue collar city steeped in sexual sin and idol worship. Let's see what Jesus had to say for them:

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, <sup>4</sup>who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 <sup>3</sup>" 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

These are some really big compliments. This church is full of love, faith, service and endurance. And that they're getting better as they go! Thyatira sounds like the opposite of the church in Ephesus. They'd abandoned their love. That's not this church. Full of love! It sort of seems like they're killing it. I'd love for this verse to be written about us.

Jesus says, Your works are good. You love one another. You love me. You have faith in me. You pray. You're spiritually disciplined. You serve each other and the poor. You endure when things are hard. You're growing in maturity.

But as we know from each of the letters so far, Jesus loves giving the good news to these churches first. Here's the bad:

20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman <sup>4</sup>Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants <sup>4</sup>to practice sexual immorality and <sup>4</sup>to eat food sacrificed to idols.

So here's what's up with the church in Thyatira. An ungodly influence has infiltrated the church. We don't know the specifics but we do know there was a woman who is a false teacher and is labeling herself a prophetess.

Important to note: Jezebel isn't this woman's real name. Jezebel is a symbolic name. And at the time, if you heard someone called Jezebel you'd think this person is controlling, manipulative, seductive and dangerous. It's a reference back to the Book of Kings. She's introduced in 1 Kings 16 as King Ahab's wife.

King Ahab was one of the worst kings in the history of Israel. While married to her, he outlawed worship of God. And instituted worship of Baal. Baal worship was constantly an issue for the Israelites.

To put this simply, Baal worship is one of the most egregious things that happens in the OT. The priests of Baal were perverse. They introduced prostitution into the temples of God. And child sacrifices. Baal was partly seen as the god of fertility. So to have good luck and fertility, you'd often have to sacrifice your first born son as an act of worship.

Jezebel's influence was a horrific time in Israel. And Jesus is saying what this woman is doing in the church is like what Jezebel did in Israel. Teaching that idol worship is okay. Teaching that sexual immorality is okay. Let's see what Jesus is going to do about it:

21 I gave her time to repent, but <sup>2</sup>she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 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, 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he <sup>4</sup>who searches mind and heart, and <sup>2</sup>I will give to each of you according to your works. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call <sup>2</sup>the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I <sup>2</sup>do not lay on you any other burden. 25 Only hold fast <sup>2</sup>what you have until I come.

**Now what we have to see is that there's really 2 groups that Jesus is addressing. And it's really key to see who is who in order to understand what this letter is about:**

1. Jezebel and her followers. She's a false teacher. Has apparently seduced a portion of this church into practicing sexual immorality and idol worship. Similar to what we talked about last week in Pergamum, it seems that she's enticing these Christians into a life of compromise. You can have Jesus + anything. Some scholars speculate that she might have been a Nicolaitan too. But Jesus says judgment is coming for her and her followers, as they refuse to repent. That group matters, it's important, but it's what we covered last week. This week we're focusing on this other group:
2. The rest of the church. It's a little confusing how the letter is written, but it's clear there's a side of the church who have not gone along with Jezebel. The language is different. Jezebel and her followers are referred to with 'her' or 'them' or 'they'. But this group is the 'you' that Jesus keeps referencing. These are the believers addressed at the beginning of the letter. Who are loving, faithful, and growing. Who do not hold to the 'deep things of Satan' and aren't going along with Jezebel.

It would seem this group is doing awesome! They haven't compromised and given in to sin, they haven't believed the false teaching. They're great. Right? Wrong.

**Look back at verse 20**

*But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel,*

**The core issue Jesus has with the church in Thyatira is their tolerance.**

Thyatira's issue is that they're the tolerant church. They tolerate that woman Jezebel. They tolerate the false teaching. The idolatry.

Now that doesn't really sound like a problem right? Tolerance? Being tolerant is an issue? Isn't tolerance good? Tolerance is talked about often as a good thing in our culture. Like it's a good thing to be tolerant. Tolerant gets defined a lot as loving or open minded.

To not be tolerant is to be what every Christian is afraid of being labeled as right now: A bigot. If you're not tolerant that's what you are, a close minded bigot. So to be tolerant means you accept and approve of anyone and anything. And our culture loves this.

**But according to Jesus, tolerance in the church isn't a good thing at all.** And if you don't believe me, let's talk about the language.

That word 'tolerate' comes from the Greek word- **aphiemi**. It's a compound word of the words **apo**(means from) and **hiemi** (send). When you put the two together it means 'to send from' or to 'let go'. **Aphiemi** was

often used to describe the release of a prisoner. Where they're being released and no more control is being exercised over them. They're no longer being hindered to do what they want.

So when Jesus says to this church 'you tolerate Jezebel' **He means 'You're letting this false teacher go unchecked.'**

They've let her go and allowed her to teach falsely. To rally her a group of Christians and lead them into worshipping idols and engaging in sexual sin. Meanwhile the church is just standing by. They're not stepping in.

**If I had to sum it up. This church, in the face of sin and false teaching, is just holding their hands up saying 'Not really my problem.'**

Now a question I think comes up next is, "What would it have looked like for them to do the right thing?" So if you're telling me that this whole tolerance thing was 'bad', then what should they have done? Seems like you're telling us to be really mean and judgmental. Let's talk about it. How is the church supposed to deal with stuff like this? Let me give you few verses:

- **2 Tim 2:16-18** 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.
- **2 John 10** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,
- **Ephesians 5: 11** 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

These are just a handful of verses among a major theme in the NT. So what do we do with unrepentant sin in the church? Or false teaching? In the church, We deal with it. In the church. We address it. There's a huge emphasis that the church is to hate sin and false teaching so much we avoid those who are unrepentant and unwilling to change. We're called to expose it, because of how dangerous it is. To not, is to be tolerant of sin and false teaching.

**When the church fails to follow what the Bible commands on how to deal with sin and false teaching, the church will be a tolerant church.**

Now in my study for this sermon I would read over and over again different pastors and theologians talk about why this was happening in the church at Thyatira. And they admit it's all speculation, we don't know the exact reason why. Compromise. 'Too loving', some say. We don't know.

But here's the thing: the problem of tolerance hasn't gone away in the church. And we may not know why they weren't calling out the false teacher and deal with the unrepentant. But we can talk about why we might struggle to do so. I'd love to talk about 3 reasons why tolerance grows in our church and let this be sort of a pastoral charge to you:

## 1. We lack discernment.

We can handle sin incorrectly. We can handle false teaching incorrectly. And we do it because we don't know what's wrong and what's right. We lack discernment.

For this to make sense in our day to day I want to get specific. How does false teaching pop up in 2023? Thus far, we have yet to have a false teacher rise to prominence in our church. Unless there's a second gathering going down in the basement afterwards and some of y'all stick around. Idk. But to my knowledge, nothing prominent. But that's not how it really infiltrates. There's tons of ways.

It infiltrates through this (hold up a phone). With social media and instant info you're told 1000 different ways on how to live and be. You're taught 1000 different things that are good. This is how to treat people. This is how to spend your money. This is how to spend your time. And there's all sorts of stuff that are contrary to Jesus. Add in your time in front of a tv show or whatever other media, you're constantly getting messages. And much of it is false teaching.

It can be the messages you get about how to live. But it can also be false teaching about the Bible and theology. Here's popular ones the church is wrestling with.

- There's more than 2 genders. You *are* what you identify with. That's false teaching.
- Two women or men can be together or be married and God's okay with that. That's false teaching.
- You can have sex before marriage. You can date whoever you want. You can live together with a partner you're not married to, in fact it's like a tryout. Very good idea! It's okay as long as you love each other. That's false teaching.
- God will bless you with health and wealth as long as you give and try your best. That's the prosperity gospel. It's false teaching.

Now, I want to clarify, all of those topics need to be addressed in length when they come up and with lots and lots of compassion. But we also have to call a spade a spade. They're all lies. All false. And the correct way to deal with them is to call it out, albeit with grace and kindness.

## 2. We think judging is bad.

"Don't judge me man." "Christians shouldn't judge. We should love." "Who are you to judge?" You've heard something like this before right? Maybe even said it yourself before. Well that's only partly right. We actually get more perspective than just 'don't judge' from the Scriptures:

**1 Cor 5: 9-13** 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church[b] whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Paul writing to the church in Corinth. There's a believer that's been living in sexual sin with his father's wife—step mother. Paul says he needs to be removed from the church. That we shouldn't be associated with those living in unrepentant sin. That the church is to judge and remove those living contrary to the ways of Jesus. Now he's not talking about non-believers. But those inside of the church. And he says it clearly, we DO judge those inside.

Sooooo what in the world do we make of that. Didn't Jesus himself say judge not, lest you not be judged? We all know that verse. Is that a contradiction?

Well no. Biblically, there's a right and a wrong way to judge. Wrong judgment is self righteous judgment. Judgment according to man made standards, hypocritical judgment. Superficial judgment made out of what's only seen on the surface. And harsh, unforgiving judgment. That's what we're warned against.

But that's not what Paul is calling us to when He says judge. He saying, judge other Christians according to the standards that the Scriptures establish for the people of God. And to do it with a heart that desires repentance on the behalf of the person being judged.

**In other words, Christians are called to judge explicitly sinful behavior and false teaching in other Christians by calling it out and calling them to repentance.**

And that's where the church in Thyatira got it wrong. They weren't addressing the false teaching and sin in the church. Don't get it twisted, the problem wasn't that they weren't angry enough with the temple worship or guilds. The issue is not that they're "tolerating" pagan worship "out there", it's that they're tolerating it "in here". In the church. And part of the way they could have avoided this is by judging other Christians.

Part of the way we can start doing this is in our groups.

- If someone has confessed the same thing for months without taking any steps of repentance, well let's call that out. Let's check ourselves first. Not self righteously, but with concern for their soul.
- If someone tends to minimize the gravity of their sin, maybe labeling it as a 'struggle', well let's remind them of what the Scriptures say. Our sin isn't a struggle. It's a rebellion against God. It's replacing Him as God. I want you to feel the weight of that out of love.

We have to be willing to judge and to call out sin.. To know what's right and wrong and tell someone where they're off. We are called to judge other believers.

### **3. We tolerate our own sin.**

Maybe the biggest reason we tolerate sin. So we tolerate the sin of others because, who are we to say? I don't want to call you out for your lust, anger, anxiety, apathy, because I'm doing the same things. That's for sure true. We're absolutely afraid of hypocrisy.

But I'd argue the biggest sin that we tolerate is our sin of approval and comfort. And that's what let's tolerance in our church run rampant. We don't want to say the things. We don't want to push. We don't want to confront. Cause what if it goes bad?

Here's something I see in us. Over the years in ministry I've experience a lot of conversations that go like this. Hey I just wanted to come talk to you because I noticed that this person is off in this way... this is the thing that this person is doing wrong. This is how they've hurt me. This is how they've hurt this person. This is where they've sinned. They said this and I don't think it's line with the Scriptures. They're theologically off in this way. And we'll always say the same thing. Have you talked to them? NOPE. Okay. Check back after 6 months. Gotten better? No. You talk? No.

That's not a personality quirk my friends. That's sin. That is idolatry. The same thing that Jezebel was leading these people to worship. You're bowing down to approval and comfort rather than to King Jesus.

Which I get. One thing you need to know about me is I love being liked. Nothing better. And I'd rather not wade into the conflict. But we have to see that Jesus is writing a letter to this church and this is the thing.

I mean He might as well have said, "Your works are good. You give. You show up on sundays. You serve. You show up to group. And you confess your own stuff. You ask questions. You're spiritually disciplined and you love me. You pray and believe in what I'm doing. **BUT** I have this against you. You're sitting back and letting things go that should not be let go. I have this against you. You care more about your own comfort than my glory and my church. You care more about being approved of than obeying me and God's people."

Do you see this in you? Do you understand that if Jesus could write this letter to this church then He is saying the same exact things to all of us who would claim 'I'm doing really well' but tolerate sin both in our hearts and in our church family.

So sure, we may not have a Jezebel running around and people running off the guild parties. But we're still tolerant in our own way. And every bit of tolerance is dishonoring to Jesus. That's the bad news. Let's end with the good though. Just like every week. Jesus shows what He's got against them, and holds out a hand to invite towards redemption.

*26 <sup>b</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works <sup>c</sup>until the end, <sup>d</sup>to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and <sup>e</sup>he will <sup>f</sup>rule<sup>3</sup> them with a rod of iron, <sup>g</sup>as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him <sup>h</sup>the morning star. 29 <sup>i</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

2 amazing promises. The tolerant church is invited to repent by keeping with the works of Jesus. And those who do, will first be given authority from Jesus.

The language about a rod of iron and broken pots is a direct quote from Psalm 2, a prophecy that the Messiah will be given authority to rule the nations. So this first promise is that we're going to rule with Jesus.

If we want to rule with Jesus in the future we've got to be faithful to Him in the present. Somehow part of the preparation for us being co rulers with Christ is us actually participating in church discipline and confrontation. The conquerers will rule with Jesus.

Second 'they'll receive the morning star'. Another reference to a prophecy in **Numbers 24:17**. I see him, but not now: I behold him, but not near. a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

**The conquerors will be given Jesus.** It's imagery that we will have access to the presence of Jesus. That we'll live and reign with Him forever. But it also means that we'll have the highest reward possible. The acceptance of Jesus. That'll look at us and like He said in Matthew 25, say "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

What amazing news. Which I just want us to see clearly, this is the hope for the tolerant church and for us who are tolerant. Jesus is offering us exactly what we're after!

This is what we're truly after when we're tolerant. We tolerate sin because we're afraid. We don't want someone to not like us or be offended. We love comfort and approval. But it's a shallow comfort and a shallow, unsatisfying approval.

But Jesus offers real approval! The real comfort in His embrace. And He offers it as a future reward as we see in these verses but also a present reality.

The wonder of the Gospel is that right now, because of Jesus the Bible calls us 'more than conquerors.' The Scriptures say we're called 'son or daughter, with whom God is well pleased.' Not because we're actually the conquerors or because we're pleasing, but because of Jesus, who was all those things and more.

And when you see that He's already made those things true about you in the Gospel, well, you can lay down your idols, embrace Him and repent. To become a conqueror by keeping His ways. That one day we'll wake up in glory and He'll say, Well done! You did it! You were faithful. You pressed in when it was hard. You didn't just let sin go in your life and your heart. You didn't just let whatever teaching sounded good into your life. You fought. Well done.

**So let me end as we have every week. Are you tolerating sin and false teaching?**

Where have you lacked discernment with this? Where have you been unwilling to judge? And where do you tolerate your own sin? Have you found yourself avoiding conflict because of this? Have you convinced yourself it's more loving to not obey the commands of Jesus? Lets be specific

- Have you let another believer in your biological family get away with racist comments?
- Have you been afraid to press into that person you know who's been apathetic/not reading their bible for months, because you're sort of in a similar place?
- Have you let that person in your CG go on another week confessing that they slept with their boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Have you let your roommate gossip about their coworkers or person in their CG again?



Well let's repent together. Let's together this week look to Jesus who already approves of you perfectly and invites you back, to 'keep His works' and follow Him as we repent of our tolerance. And let's fight to not be a tolerant church, but one that follows the commands of Jesus with joy.

**Pray.**