

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Church of Wrong Tolerance **Revelation 2:18-29**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: None

SermonAudio Blurb: In this letter to the Church at Thyatira we see a church that has chosen to tolerate teachings that are not biblical. The result is that there Christians there who are being led astray into serious sin. The shame of it all is that there is much to praise this church for, but because of their tolerance they bring shame upon the name of God.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 2:18-29.
- B. Here we have the longest of letters to any of the churches and it is to the least remarkable church
- C. Thyatira Background:
 - 1. Thyatira was a relatively small town that was caught between two warring countries—Mysia and Lydia. There was a tug-of-war between these two countries over this city.
 - 2. It was a city that lacked natural defenses but was rich agriculturally.
 - 3. Taken by Rome in 190 B.C. As time went on it grew in prosperity and influence.
 - 4. There was a key road that ran from Pergamum to Thyatira, then Sardis , then Philadelphia and on to Laodicea—in other words, there was a natural travel route that coincides with the order of the letters written.
 - a. The fact that it was on a broad plain made it easy to conquer.
 - b. But it also made it a easy place to conduct commerce especially because it was situated between two major cities.
 - 5. One potentially key historical fact is that as the prosperity rose the city became a commercial center (versus Pergamum which was more like a university city).
 - a. A blue-collar town.

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- b. Many trade guilds began to rise up—much more than any other city of that day.

As a city of commerce and manufacturing Thyatira became well known for many of its trades. Inscriptions and literary references mention trade guilds working in wool, linen, leather, bronze, armor, dye, tanning, pottery, and baking. In addition artisans from Thyatira discovered how to make purple dye from the madder root without using the expensive shellfish murex. Lydia, a prominent Christian in Philippi, was from Thyatira and sold purple textiles, a vocation that fits perfectly the archaeological evidence.

(Eerdmans Dictionary of The Bible, BibleWorks Ed.)

- c. If you wanted to conduct in those specific trades then you had to belong to the guild.
 - d. This presence of the trade guilds has a close connection to their
6. Religious-wise the city was not involved in emperor worship in any formal sense.
- a. Apollo was the main deity.
 - b. Each guild had a patron god.
 - c. Part of the responsibilities of a guild member was to attend certain festivals and eat in honor to their deity (the god was assumed to be the honored guest at the meal).
 - d. Understand then the tensions that would naturally arise for those who became Christians.
- D. We have in this church a similar problem as Pergamum, where there was a mixing of good and bad theology. Specific to this church was an attitude of tolerance for false teaching in spite of much praiseworthy actions.
- E. The self-description of Jesus Christ (18b).
- 1. Son of God.
 - a. This is a simple and straight-forward way of declaring His deity.
 - b. But it also sets up the imagery that He then employs of Himself.
 - 2. Eyes of fire and feet of burnished bronze.
 - a. These are also spoken of in Revelation 1:14-15.
 - b. They are words describing judgment and we even just read of some of what that judgment looks like down in 2:23.

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II. The Church of Wrong Tolerance.

A. The praise (19)

1. The “deeds” at the first is a general term, and then the four nouns that follow are the specific deeds.
 - a. Jesus consistently, in this book, sees works/deeds as a mirror of the character of the churches and the individuals (cf. 2:2, 5, 22; 3:1, 8, 15).
 - b. Two of these “deeds” are abstract (love and faith/faithfulness).
 - c. Two are more external.
 - d. There is a parallelism that occurs here, with the abstract deeds causing the external/objective deeds.
 - (1) love ----> service (this is a voluntary service [we get deacon from this word] vs. *doulos* which is a slave).
 - (2) faith----> perseverance.
 - e. It is interesting to note that though serious sin is present in this church, the main thing is still present—love.
 - (1) Having just finished teaching through the epistles of John I find my mind constantly putting what I hear and study through those letters. And one thing that stands out in them is the utter necessity and centrality of a love for Christ and a love for other believers.
 - (2) As a result though Christ shall judge them individually there is no threat of losing their lampstand like Ephesus was threatened.
 - (3) This is a huge reminder to us as a church to constantly stoke the flames of Christian love.
 - (4) Note how this love is seen — Serving one another. I think of 1 Peter 5 where we are literally commanded to put on the apron of a slave in relation to each other.
 - (5) How are you specifically serving the church and one another?
2. Notice the state of these deeds—they have increased.
 - a. This speaks numerically.

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- b. In some way or another the church is actively seeking to grow in both love and faithfulness. (We need to learn to have a holy discontentment with where we are as a person and a church).
- c. They were not stalled but rather they were growing.
- d. It is one sign of a healthy church that these qualities are increasing rather than decreasing like Ephesus.

–BUT–

- B. The negative is tolerating an openly false teacher (20).
 - 1. To tolerate here is not to endure something from the outside, but to allow something wrong from the inside. It is not merely having a problem, it is permitting the problem to exist—turning a blind eye.
 - 2. Why Jezebel?
 - a. Was the hated wife of Ahab who tried to lead the 10 tribes of Israel into Baal worship. Remember Elijah and the Mt. Carmel. 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah. All due to Jezebel's influence. (1 Kings 18)
 - b. Probably not this woman's real name, but one to describe who and what she really was. No reason in the text to take her as a symbol of some religion or synagogue like some do.
 - 3. What was her claim? [Prophetess].
 - a. Lesson: Beware of those who come with self-proclamations—examine them carefully.
 - b. Her prophecies were such that they were leading some into serious sin (20b). If they followed the commands of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:29ff this would not have been an issue.
 - c. This also brings us a reminder of our Lord when He said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good

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fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:15-20)

4. Notice the incredible influence that she had.
 - a. Here we see how a church can begin to falter. It is in the leadership and the teaching. Frankly beloved this is almost always where a church begins to decline.
 - b. A church must have a high standard for both and wherever either is lacking sin is sure to enter.
 - c. A simple, but unpopular answer to their dilemma was 1 Timothy 2:12ff. [walk them through that text].
 - d. “Leads” is to seduce and cause to wander.
5. What is the result of her teaching?
 - a. Immorality.
 - b. Eating things sacrificed to idols.
 - c. Both of these probably were in relation to pagan worship. Remember the guilds and their gods. Also sex was a common element in pagan worship there.
 - d. Notice vs 24 how she called these things “deep things” but they were really of Satan.
 - (1) False teachers are always finding deep things.
 - (2) Consider the NAR gathering for Todd Bentley and the horrid reality that it unveiled and yet is still ignored by so many.
 - e. For us, a lesson to be seen is that where false teachers exist the direction is always into some form of worldliness.
6. Doctrine matters.
 - a. We are not truly free to believe whatever we want.
 - b. Doctrine is not something that we treat like a buffet meal, taking what we like and passing on what we don’t.
 - c. Doctrine is the engine to our actions.

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- C. The warnings.
 - 1. Grace given to her (21a). Refusal to repent (21b).
 - 2. There is an important lesson in this. Our punishment is not out of ignorance but due to wilful rebellion.
 - 3. She will be punished and those who follow here will suffer as well.
 - 4. But notice the purpose of this (23b)—so that all the churches know that Jesus knows what goes on (cf. Deut 13:4-11).
 - a. Ezekiel 33:29-32
 - (1) Note how YHWH manifests himself.
 - (2) vss 30-32 show how the people who should hear Ezekiel as a true prophet merely find him something to humor them.
- D. The rewards.
 - 1. In vss 23c on he gives them encouragement that those who reject this woman and her teachings shall ultimately be rewarded.
 - 2. Notice that the reward is NOT upon what you believe but what you do with that belief.
 - 3. Notice also verse 25 and what actually says.
 - a. We are responsible for what we know, not what is not known.
 - b. Some people keep waiting to do something when they “know enough” but that is wrong. Act on what you know.
 - c. One thing that usually happens is that it drives you to know more as your ignorance is revealed.
- E. The overcomer:
 - 1. Shall have authority over the nations.
 - a. Notice that Jesus gives this authority in the same manner that His Father gave it to him (cf. Matt 28:18).
 - b. How would this fit in the scheme of Amil or post-mil? It doesn't. In most commentaries it simply is noted and ignored. Sometimes it is just stated as something that happens but that there is no way to know what it means.

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c. This means that we are to be practicing what ruling will look like now with the expectation of ruling on a greater level in the earthly kingdom of the Lord.

(1) 1 Corinthians 6:1ff.

2. Also they will be given the morning star—what is that?

a. Could be Christ (22:16) but it is a strange way for Jesus to refer to Himself.

b. Or it is in relation to shining with glory such as Matt 13:43 speaks.

(1) "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:3) This is what Matthew 13:43 is speaking of.

(2) Colossians 3 tells us that we will be revealed in the same glory as our Savior when He returns.

III. Conclusion.

A. By and large the churches that we are studying are not showing themselves to be great. With the exception of Smyrna, who was suffering greatly, the others are in need of repentance and some of those to come are in even greater trouble.

1. But what we see nonetheless is that Jesus Christ is king and lord over them all. He knows their good and He knows their bad. But He also is the One who shall deal righteously with all of it.

2. And in all of this we are being set up to then enter into the very throne-room of God in chapters 4-5 and then we see things so much clearer. We will see how God sits above all this mess and yet also how through His Son He is resolving this entire mess to His glory.

B. Summary of things to learn for MDF.

1. Keep growing in Christ.

2. Do not tolerate those professing Christ to live or teach contrary to sound doctrine.

3. Be faithful in church discipline.

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4. Be alert to problems before they become problems. Too often things are discovered looking backwards.
 5. Those who are recognized as teachers need to model faithfulness to both life and doctrine. They are to be examined.
 6. We should pay attention to those who seek to teach and influence others in the church.
- C. Summary of things we learn about our Lord in this letter:
1. He judges.
 2. He knows His church's works, love, faithfulness, and patience/perseverance.
 3. He knows His church's problems.
 4. He gives even false teachers time to repent.
 5. He will make His church know that He searches minds and hearts.
 6. He rewards each according to their works.
 7. He will establish His rule over all nations.

IV. Benediction/Doxology.

May my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- Early on in the sermon I mentioned how Thyatira, though having problems, still loved. From there I spoke on 1, 2, 3 John and how central a love for Christ and the brethren is to our Lord. How can your group grow in this? What are practical steps you take to keep your love both real and sincere? How do you show your professed love in service?
- If you have experienced the effects of false teaching in your life as a Christian share how it affected both you and the church.