Overcoming Misguided Tolerance — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 2:18–29 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, May 2, 2021 · *We Will Overcome*

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If you have your Bibles, you can open them to Revelation chapter 2. We're going to be in chapter 2, verse 18 and following. As you're turning there, I don't have to guess if you've ever heard the word tolerance. It's kind of a buzzword in our culture. It's a virtue in the West, and I don't think that's a bad thing. Tolerance has enabled us in the West to have a great many things that are good take place that otherwise would not have taken place had there been no tolerance. We live in a culture that is home to many cultures.

We live in a nation home to many different religions. We disagree with each other about fundamental questions of reality. Is there a God or is there not a God? If there is a God, how do you know him? If you can know him, how do you become rightly related to him? And there's all sorts of disagreements on those kinds of questions, and yet we live together in this great land in tolerance, which means that you bear with the error. That's what the word literally means. It means I disagree with you about how you answer those fundamental questions, but I'm going to bear it, meaning I'm not going to allow my disagreement with you to change the way that I relate with you.

I'm going to treat you with respect and dignity like I would treat anybody else. I'm tolerant. And it's a wonderful thing. But even though tolerance is a great thing and has helped us as a nation get down the road in ways that maybe we otherwise wouldn't have, in tribal warring and stuff like that, there are certain errors under certain circumstances that we could all say are intolerable, could we not? For example, there is the error of, say, a grown adult having sexual attraction for a young child. We would say that is intolerable.

I don't care how sincere you are. I don't care how long you felt this way. You cannot express, you cannot act on those kinds of desires for children because it will invite harm on that child and it will invite harm on you as well. It is not good, it is intolerable. In other words, I cannot

bear that error. Or, to use maybe a less serious example, children who always want to eat candy all the time. Okay, that's an intolerable error. I let you have candy after dinner, but not before. I will not tolerate this, Addy Jo.

I will not let you keep eating all this candy. We live in a culture though that even though we could all agree there are certain errors that are intolerable, our culture seems to be growing in its hostility towards people who believe there are intolerable errors. More and more we live in a culture that would say not only do you have to bear with the error, but we're shifting the meaning of tolerance to mean you bear the error, you celebrate the error, you affirm the error, even if you believe it's an error, so long as it's sincerely believed by the person holding the view.

And so for a lot of Christians who would say, I disagree with that person's opinion about expressing sexuality in that way, I disagree with their definition of marriage, I disagree with their definition of how you become rightly related to God. I disagree with them on those kind of fundamental questions. No longer is it enough for you as a Christian to bear with the error, but now you have to affirm and celebrate the other person's opinion as true. And for you to even hold the belief, to disagree with it, is itself a violation or a form of violence, or for you to not speak, to not celebrate, silence is violence to some people in our culture.

And that is a growing intolerance of the tolerant. So the tolerant people in our culture are becoming more and more intolerant of people who would say that's an intolerable error or that's not an intolerable error, but I just don't agree with that, I disagree with you. And it always seems to cut one way. It doesn't seem to go both ways. It seems as though so long as it is a violation from Christian thinking or so long as it deconstructs the Christian worldview, then that is an error that needs to be celebrated and accepted and affirmed as true.

And anything that promotes the Christian worldview, anything that advances a distinctively Christian way of doing things, we don't care how sincerely held those beliefs may be, we cannot tolerate those kinds of things in our culture because they'll end up doing violence to the people we want to express tolerance towards. And you can feel it as a Christian, you can feel it kind of increasing in the pressure of hostility towards Christians, especially on certain questions. About certain matters, to hold a view that is in opposition to the culturally accepted norm, you are inviting all sorts of punishment on yourself and time will tell how all that pans out.

Now, my purpose today is not to decry that. I don't think that we should be surprised by that. I'm not saying you should fight for your right to party— I mean, fight for your right to defend your tolerance. I'm not trying to do any of that. All I'm saying is we're not the only Christians to face that problem, all right? In fact, we're going to look at a church this morning in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, who was also facing that problem, except they got it wrong. They were a church that got a good many number of things right.

They were effective in so many ways, and yet they got the issue of tolerance wrong. And they were tolerating things that they should not be tolerating, and they were putting up with things in their church that they should have put out. And Jesus is saying, I'm glad you're accepting. I'm glad you're loving. I'm glad you have a tender heart for people no matter what they believe. But your warm-heartedness has clouded your clear thinking. Your tolerance has been perverted into a tolerance for the intolerable, and when it comes to the household of faith, there are certain errors that cannot be borne.

They have to be confronted and exposed and removed. Otherwise, you're inviting the judgment of God, not only onto your life and to their life, but onto your very church as well. And so that's the church in Thyatira. That's the church we're going to be looking at this morning as we look at all seven of these churches. It starts in Revelation chapter 2, verse 18. We'll read the whole letter and then we'll unpack it, take a few lessons for today. So Jesus says to John, I want you to write to the angel— or to the pastor— of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze: I know your works— your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance.

I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. Look, I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. And unless they repent of her works, I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the so-called secrets of Satan, as they say, I am not putting any other burden on you. Only hold on to what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations— and he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery— just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star.

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. So let's pray together. Father, we pray that we would have ears to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to our church. And it is tempting just like they were tempted to cave and tolerate things that should not be tolerated. So give us wisdom to know the difference between a warm heart and cloudy thinking. And help us to be a church that not only receives what it is that you want to say to us this morning, but who puts it into practice in a culture that is much like theirs.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. So this city, the city of Thyatira. In your notes, I call it a gateway city, kind of like marijuana is the gateway drug. It's the drug that leads to all the

other drugs, so they say. Some would disagree with that. But that was Thyatira. It was the city before you got to the real city. It's kind of like living in Roby. Has anybody ever been to Roby? People say, well, where's Roby? And you say, well it's that city before you get to Snyder on 180 going west, or it's that city before you get to Anson, you know, 180 going east.

Oh, that's Roby. That's the city before the city. So it doesn't really have a name in and of itself. It's just the city before the city. That was Thyatira. It wasn't really known for anything, wasn't big, wasn't influential, but they did have these trade guilds or what you might call labor unions. And the labor unions in that day and age were just like the labor unions in this day and age. And depending on who you ask will decide whether they think labor unions are a good thing or a bad thing.

Whether good or bad, in that labor union, if you were going to be a part of the union, they didn't just dictate your collective bargaining and what you thought about, you know, how much you were getting paid and whether or not you were okay with your boss or not okay with your boss. They kind of spoke for you in that arena for sure. But they also spoke for you in every other arena of your life. So to belong to a union dominated every aspect of your life, your politics, your economics, but also your spiritual life and your social life.

So if you're a part of a union, the way it would impact your spirituality, every union had their own patron saint— not patron saint, they had their own patron deity. So they would worship a particular Roman god. This is our union. We worship this god. So when we have a party for everybody, if you're part of the union, you better show up at the party. And if you show up at the party, you better eat the meat sacrificed to the pagan idol. And you better worship the pagan idol just like all the rest of us because if you're with us, you're part of all of us and nobody bucks the trends, nobody separates themselves from the whole.

You're part of the union. You're always going to do what the union says to do. You can imagine the kind of pressure this would put on you as a Christian who, you know, maybe you enjoyed the financial benefits of belonging to the union. I like the bigger salary, but I just feel very uncomfortable attending these parties, worshiping these Roman gods. When I'm a Christian and I don't believe there are any other gods, I believe this is idolatry, and so I feel very uncomfortable being a part of this union. And it's tempting me to kind of deny Christ and deny what I know to be true and deny what I know I ought to do and do the opposite of what I know I ought to do.

Because I'm afraid of the pressure that this organization is going to put on me or put on my children or put on my wife. So I'm just going to toe the line and kind of deny my faith in Jesus Christ. That was the pressure, that was why there was pressure. And so that's why Jesus introduces himself the way that he does. He doesn't introduce himself like he does to the other churches. He introduces himself differently to every single church because every

church was facing a different kind of problem. He reveals himself to Smyrna as the one who died and rose again.

And yet when he reveals himself to this church, he says, you better believe I'm the one who will judge you. I'm the— what does he say? Verse 18— I'm the Son of God, not the Son of Man. So he's emphasizing his deity, the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire. Fire equates to judgment, and so his eyes see it all. I see above it all and through it all. I see the true intentions of your heart. I see the true motivations of why you're caving on your convictions.

And then it says he has feet that are like burnished bronze. This is all from Revelation chapter 1, verses 14 and 15, but if you go to Revelation 1:15, he talks about his feet burnished with bronze. It says as though they were fired in a furnace. So you also have this imagery of fire, talking about the judgment of God. And so Jesus is introducing himself as the true and righteous judge. Not little Jesus, meek and mild, not Jesus full of grace and compassion, not Jesus who died and rose again, who will also give you life, but Jesus who sees through your bluff.

He sees through your justifications and your twisted logic and all of your things that you're using to justify why you're caving on your convictions. I see it all. I see through it all. I see above it all. And you will give an account to me as the Son of God, not just a man, the Son of God, and I will be your judge. In other words, you're denying me so that you escape the you'll escape these consequences of rejecting the union, but you need to know in denying me to escape their consequences, you're actually inviting a deeper and more terrible consequence on yourself from me as your judge.

And it's just a reminder, I don't know that we like to hear this reminder, but it's a reminder for us today that for us to believe in Jesus as Savior, for us to believe that Jesus is full of grace, who will forgive us of our sins, we also have to embrace in that, because he's a package deal, that he's also a Jesus who stands over us as judge. And we will one day stand before him and give an account. One of the things we'll see in this journey through the book of Revelation is this great white throne judgment, where every idle word you've ever spoken and every offhanded comment and every sin of omission, every sin of commission— you'll give an account for your works on that day.

Because Jesus is a judge, and we can't submit to him as Savior if we don't also submit to him as judge. And as judge, he has some good things to say and some bad things to say. He gives them some good things in verse 19. He says, you've got a great reputation in the city. I know about your works, and they're legit. Like, you are a going church. You are full of love and faithfulness and service and endurance. You're a growing church. Your last works were greater than the first. Adrian Rogers, who was an old school preacher back in the day, he said this was a going church, a glowing church, and a growing church.

I like that. They were a going church, a glowing church, and they were a growing church. So they were going in their works and their service. In other words, that's the kind of reputation we want, right? As Broadview Baptist Church, we don't want to just be known as the church on South 27th that's got the bricks and the bushes and the parking lot, and they just kind of sit there, frozen chosen, and they go there on Sundays and the parking lot's full and they fill up the restaurants after their church lets out.

We don't want to be known for that. We want to be known for our works and our service, that we are active, that we are engaged, that we are blessing the city, that we are meeting the practical daily needs of people, that when you bump into the random person in Abilene, Texas, and you ask them, what do you think about Broadview Baptist Church, they say things like, oh, that's the church that did X, Y, or Z, or my friend actually goes to that church, or I have a friend that doesn't go to that church, but their church was in their school system blessing their teachers or blessing the prison or whatever the case may be.

We want to be a going church, mission-minded, glowing, full of love, full of kindness, full of faithfulness, if you want to use their words. That was agape love, self-sacrificing, self-giving, a love that's a servant of the will, not a victim of the emotion. In other words, this was a church who didn't just love the lovely, they didn't just love the people who were like them. They loved the people who were marginalized, who were outcast, who were unlovable; they loved the marginalized and they loved the people who other churches did not love.

And then they were growing, which you would imagine they should be growing as a result of loving people in that way. And being that active, of course they're going to grow. But as they grew in attendance and finances, Jesus says, the true works, the works that matter, they also grew in that. So your faithfulness, your love, you're growing in love and faithfulness even as you're growing in size and power. And so this was a church that did a lot of things right. This is the kind of church— I would want our church to have the same kind of reputation that they had.

The problem is one of their strengths, something that probably enabled them to grow and enabled them to make a difference in their community, had been perverted into a weakness. And the strength was their love, it was their tolerance, it was their ability to see an individual and not see their sin, but to see them as created in the image of God, valuable; they had inherent worth because of being created in the image of God, but that love for people got perverted into a tolerance for sin. We've all heard the old saying, you should love the sinner but hate the sin.

And they were loving the sinner, certainly, but they were not hating the sin. They're kind of excusing it, dismissing it, kind of like the church in Corinth. Look how open-minded we are. Look how tolerant we are. We've got this member of our church who's sleeping with his mother-in-law[1] and we're like full of grace. We're like Jesus. We're not holding him to

account. And Paul says, no, that's actually not what you're supposed to be doing. If this is a brother, if this is someone who says I'm committed to Jesus Christ, then he needs to adhere to the designs of Jesus Christ, and purge the guy from your midst if he's not going to repent of this sin.

That was the problem that this church had. Their love for people had been perverted into a misguided tolerance of sin. And so here's what Jesus says in verse 20: I've got this against you. You tolerate the woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she doesn't want to repent of her sexual immorality. Now, when you hear the word Jezebel, it probably rings a bell, right? Even if you don't have any knowledge of the Old Testament, I promise you, none of you had a baby girl and thought to yourself, Jezebel sounds good.

Nobody says that, right? It's just kind of built into our culture. Jezebel's not good. Like if you want to insult a woman, you call her Jezebel, right? That's bad. So who is Jezebel? Well, you got to go back to the Old Testament, 1 Kings. I think I put in your notes where it's at. Basically, Jezebel was a wicked, idolatrous, mean, mean woman. She married King Ahab. King Ahab was the king of Israel. He had a reputation for being the king who angered the Lord more than any other king before him, which is the reputation every king, you know, wants to have.

You anger the Lord more than any other king before him. And the reason that Ahab angered the Lord more than any other king before him is because he married Jezebel. And Jezebel—her dad was a priest in basically the worship of Baal. It was technically the worship of Ashtoreth, which was some kind of weird mistress of Baal. Baal was the fertility god of the Old Testament. The god of the Moabites,[2] the god of all the people who were not Jewish, who didn't believe in the true God. Many of them worshipped Baal.

They would sacrifice children to Baal in order to get his fertility goodness into their life. They had a temple with— they called them priestesses, but they were really temple prostitutes. And the way that you would worship Baal to get his fertility goodness into your life is to have sex with a temple prostitute, and it would channel his blessing into your soul. Which all the men signed up for that, as you can imagine. Even Jewish men, even men who were worshiping the true God, they said to themselves, well, I can worship God and have a little bit of fertility goodness on my life as well.

I can worship God and have sex with the temple prostitutes. I can have a little bit of Yahweh and a little bit of Baal at the same time. That's what Ahab basically argued to himself. So he married Jezebel, and not only did he marry Jezebel, he allowed Baal worship in Israel to continue, and not only did he allow it to continue, even though God said it's clearly a violation, he, through the beckoning of Jezebel, built a temple to Baal in Samaria. And when

they built that temple to Baal in Samaria, Jezebel killed every single Jewish prophet she could find.

If you read this in the book of 1 Kings, around chapter 20, 20 something, 15 to 20, Elisha was one of those prophets,[3] and Elijah is running for his life afraid of Jezebel because she is killing every Jewish prophet she can find, and she's replacing them with her prophetesses, who were basically temple prostitutes. So now you have a temple to Baal in Samaria. It had just grieved the Lord beyond all doubt. Now this king, who was supposed to be a good and righteous king, leading Israel to holiness and obedience, had led them to the opposite.

And that compromise is the compromise that's taking place in Thyatira. Okay, her name's not Jezebel. It's that spirit. It's that spirit of I can worship God and do whatever I want with the rest of my life. I can worship God on Sunday and do whatever I want to do with my body Monday through Saturday. And Isaiah's[4] response to Jezebel is a fitting question, I think, for Thyatira. It's a fitting question for us today. It's in 1 Kings chapter 18, verse 21. This is what he says. Elijah approached all the people.

This is during Jezebel's reign. So he's talking to Jezebel, to Ahab, to all the people who were under her sway. And he says, how long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord, if Yahweh is God, then follow him, but if Baal is God, follow him. And the people didn't say a word. In other words, you can't have your cake and eat it too. If you're going to be a Christian, Christianity always boils down to a choice. You can either love God or you can love the world. You can follow Jesus or you can not follow Jesus.

You can't follow Jesus and also love the world. Friendship with the world is enmity against God. 1 John chapter 2, don't love the world or the things that are in the world, because the things of the world are passing away. Rather, have love for God; that kind of love lasts forever. It always boils down to a choice. And even though I think deep down all of us know that, there is a temptation in every Christian and in every church to say, yeah, but on these issues, we can kind of have our cake and eat it too.

On these questions, because they're nuanced and complicated and culturally sensitive, we'll just kind of budge and maybe not talk about those, and maybe we'll just kind of be a little bit shady and ambiguous in our answers because we don't want to offend anybody and we'll just allow people to kind of have their cake and eat it too. And that's the spirit of Jezebel, all right? You say, well, theirs was sexual immorality and eating meat sacrificed to idols. What is it today? Well, certainly sexual immorality is part of it today, right?

There's all manner, even in the church. Maybe even some of you right now are engaged in sexual immorality. All that means is you're doing sex in a way that's outside of God's design. And God's design for sex is one man, one woman, and a thing called marriage for one lifetime. So anything outside of that, premarital sex, extramarital sex, same-sex sex, any of

those kinds of things violate God's design for sexuality. And there's obviously the sin, that is sexual immorality, but there's also the mindset that says, well, it's not really that bad of a sin because it's complicated and X, Y, and Z, and you can really love Jesus and do that sin and not be a problem.

That's the spirit of Jezebel. The spirit of Jezebel is not the sin itself, it's that mindset of twisting scripture and twisting your logic and justifying every which way to say this isn't really that big of a deal to the Lord. And the question is, how long are you going to waver between two opinions? How long can you live like this when you clearly know this to be a violation of God's design for your life and you keep rejecting it because you've been doing it that way for so long, or because if you stop doing it, then you're going to lose that person.

Or if I stop allowing this kind of thing to take place, I may lose my son, I may lose my daughter. I don't want to lose my son or my daughter, they mean the world to me. It's a difficult, difficult predicament, and that tolerance was ruining the church in Thyatira. And Jesus writes to them and says, the spirit of Jezebel is incompatible with the spirit of Jesus Christ. It's incompatible. So you have a choice. You can either tolerate it and invite the judgment of God on her, on them, and on your church.

Or you can remove those things which compromise your allegiance to Jesus. Start with her, start with Jezebel, kick her out of the church. She cannot keep leading people astray. And then exercise discipline on those who are under her sway. Call them to repentance. Do not continue to allow them to live in this way. Now it's easy to point to their problems and say, well, you shouldn't eat meat sacrificed to idols. Okay, that's pretty clear and easy to do. And you shouldn't have sexual immorality. But what about all the other forms of worldliness that are at play today that churches tolerate?

You know, what is worldliness? Worldliness, according to David Wells, is that spirit that makes righteousness look strange and sin look normal. You know what I'm talking about? That it's just that kind of that attitude of Christians sure are weird and righteousness sure is strange, but sin is normal. It's kind of like the standard. It's the status quo. Everybody's doing it this way. For you to kind of do things differently makes you kind of weird. That spirit, that spirit of Jezebel is in the church today. There's a whole branch of Christianity called progressive Christianity.

You can go to a church that's kind of in that vein. They would sing the same kind of songs that we sang today, but the preacher would get up here, and instead of preaching a sermon like what I'm preaching, he would get the Bible, he would open it up, and he would twist it and take a little kernel of truth and then put all sorts of deception around it. And he would justify all manner of sin that is a clear violation of God's design, and he would make you feel good about doing it.

If you don't believe me, just YouTube progressive Christianity and see what happens. Actually, probably you shouldn't, but go ahead, do it, and see what happens. I watched a guy, I'm not joking, I watched a guy this last week basically say that Jesus was a racist. That he got it— no, he was a racist, he got it wrong because he was a victim of his time, but Jesus was also a third-order feminist. And he used twisted logic and a faulty hermeneutic to justify it to make the Bible say almost the opposite of what it says.

And you can go to those churches and they'll preach their sermons and you feel so good about living in sin. That's why it's so appealing. That's why it's so attractive. And Jesus is saying, it is a dangerous, dangerous poison in the church. So you need to ask yourself, is that spirit alive in me? Is there anything in my life that is hindering my allegiance to Jesus? Is there anything where I'm caving into the culture? Any area where I refuse to stand strong because of the consequences that are at play? Any arena in our life together as a church where we're kind of turning down the volume on those offensive parts and turning up the volume on the non-offensive parts and we're getting squishy where the Bible is firm and we're getting firm where the Bible is squishy— all that's the spirit of Jezebel, and Jesus is saying you cannot tolerate it in the church or it'll invite the judgment of God.

So in your life, ask the question. Is that alive in me? And if you want to know how do I know, how do I know if that spirit's alive in me, all you have to do is think about that thing that the Lord won't leave you alone about. Because in verse 22,[5] Jesus says, I have given her time to repent, and she does not want to repent. Which to me means Jesus had been wrestling with this woman about this matter. He had been wrestling with the people who were buying her nonsense, who were having sex with temple prostitutes, who were eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Every Sunday they would go into church. It didn't matter what the preacher was preaching on, they felt conviction over that arena of their life. Whatever that is in your life, that's the spirit of Jezebel. You don't have to guess because Jesus has already been wrestling with you about it. And every Sunday you come in here and you feel conviction. And sometimes you don't even want to come to church because I know I'm going to feel guilty about this issue in my life. That area is the area where Jesus is saying repent.

Repent because it is going to destroy you. And if left unchecked, if your church doesn't do anything to speak against it, it's going to actually spread and destroy the whole church. You're inviting the judgment of God onto your life. Misguided tolerance can usually be found where the spirit's conviction has been most continually resisted. And so all of us need to ask that question. The judgment that Jesus promises is in verses 22 and 23. It looks like it's inevitable for Jezebel, but the rest, Jesus is giving them a way out. He says in verse 22, I'm going to throw her, Jezebel, into a sick bed.

The original language just says bed. I'm going to throw her into bed. And those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. This is Jesus' way of saying the bed of pleasure is going to become a bed of affliction. The thing that she's using to draw people out, the pleasure of sin, the pleasurableness of sin is going to become not pleasurable. It's going to become painful. And you talk to anybody who's lived in sin long enough, they'll tell you, yeah, the sin was fun for a time and it was pleasurable for a time, but now the very arena where I was rebelling against God is the arena, is the source of my pain.

It's the source of my affliction. I wish I could get free. I wish I wasn't addicted to this thing. I wish I wasn't addicted to pornography. I wish I could get free. All I feel is shame and regret and agony. That pain is part of the judgment of God on sin. You live in sin long enough, you'll know that the bed of adultery is soon replaced with a bed of affliction. And then he says, unless they repent of her works, I will strike her children dead, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

So the bed of pleasure will not always be a bed of pleasure in your life or my life. And in the church, this misguided tolerance of kind of not saying of sin that it is sin— Jesus would say it may help you escape from some social pressure. It may help you escape from some of the economic consequences of being faithful to Christ, but it will not keep you from my judgment. It will not keep you from the ultimate judgment, which I will visit on you if you do not repent. If you're not getting rid of those things in your life that undermine your ability to remain faithful to Christ, then don't be surprised when those same things bring about a great deal of pain and misery in your life.

God is not mocked. Whatever a person sows, that will he also reap. It's like the laws of gravity, what goes up must come down. If you don't believe me, just try jumping off our roof and see what happens, right? The laws of gravity— it doesn't matter what you believe, it doesn't matter how sincerely you believe, it doesn't matter if you watched a YouTube video on the foolishness of gravity and the new laws of nature, you're going to fall down and break your crown, right? The same is true with the ethical rules of the universe and the moral laws of the universe.

God has created our universe to operate according to those laws, and when God has a design and says do it my way or else it's going to hurt and you say, no, I don't have to do it your way. I can do it my way because of this new teaching that I found that makes me feel justified in doing it my way. And the Lord Jesus would say, you can do it that way, but it's going to hurt. And eventually you will feel the consequences of doing life outside of God's design.

It's not because he's mad at you. It's not because you're some kind of special evil or special sinful. It's not because he is delighting in your punishment or your judgment. He loves you. He wants to rescue you from that. That's why he's pleading with these people, please repent.

If they don't repent, I'm going to kill them. I think that's God's way of saying, I'm not going to let them lose their salvation. If they're going to continue to run from me before they fall from grace, I'm going to end their life.

A sickness unto death, a sin unto death. That shows you the heart of God, that he's pleading with you, please come back home. And then to the rest of you in verse 24 who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the so-called secrets of Satan, as they say, I'm not putting any other burden on you, only hold on to what you have. Which I think is such a comforting reminder that for those who were holding fast, Jesus does not say, well, you need to do better and you need to try harder, and there are certain heights you haven't reached and your church isn't quite big enough yet and there's still people in your city who haven't come to know Jesus so you're just not quite good enough in my eyes yet.

He doesn't say any of those things. He just says hold on to me. Hold on. I know it's hard. I know it's tough. I know there's all kinds of pressure. I know there's all kinds of threats. Just hold on. Keep doing what you're doing. It's a reminder that the way to please the Lord in the Christian life is not by what you do or how morally blameless you may be, the way to please the Lord in the Christian life is to just abide in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's to become aware I can't, but he can, and so I'm going to rest in him.

I'm going to minister from a place of abiding in him. As a church, we got a lot of problems, we got a lot of pressures, we got a lot of challenges that are out there, and it requires a great deal of wisdom and discernment on how to answer all of those questions. But the way to please the Lord is to abide in Him. And we may get it right and we may get it wrong, and that's really irrelevant when it comes to pleasing the Lord. What pleases the Lord is a dependency on the Holy Spirit, a dependency on God, and a matter of resting in Him in and out of every season.

Hold on to what you have. And you'll overcome. Rest in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you continue to abide, Jesus says I'll give you rewards. And the rewards are authority over the nations and the morning star. Verse 26, the one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations, and he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery. Just as I have received this from my Father, I will also give him the morning star.

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Now some of that language makes us uncomfortable, right? At least it makes some of us uncomfortable who are not very type A. Authority over the nations. Ooh, I don't know if I want that. You know, smashing people like pottery, I don't know if I like that idea. But I think the only reason some of us think that way is because our lifestyles have not been such that it invites any kind of persecution. In other words, our Christian testimony is so quiet that we've never felt trampled upon.

We've always just kind of toed the line, and whatever the culture says and whatever the culture does, that's just kind of the way I'm going to go, and yes, I'm going to go to church on Sunday, and I'm not going to kind of buck the trends there either, but when it comes to my workplace, when it comes to my social sphere, when it comes to what my girlfriend or boyfriend wants me to do, when it comes to what my spouse wants me to do, I'm just going to kind of go along to get along.

And of course you would not want the vindication of the Lord, because you've never suffered for your faith. But for those who've suffered for their faith, those who've taken a stand and said, no, this is what God says, this is God's design for this arena, I'm going to stand strong and then it cost you. You lose your job, you lose your promotion, you lose your marriage, you lose your children, you lose your social circle, you lose your house, you lose all of those things, then you will be happy when Jesus says, don't worry, I'm coming back, I'll make it right.

Don't worry, I'm coming back, and when I come back, righteousness will rule. This injustice and this persecution will not stand in my kingdom. And that's what he's talking about. When Jesus returns, he's going to establish a kingdom on this earth, and when he is ruling and reigning on this earth, he's saying to Christians, you're going to join me in that reign. You're going to have authority over the nations. So hold fast. Be counter-cultural until that day comes. And then this language of the morning star, I think that's a reference to last week.

You remember last week in Pergamum, there were people who were falling for the same sort of thing, except it wasn't Jezebel, it was the teachings of Balaam. Balaam was a prophet in the Old Testament. He actually gives a prophecy about the morning star in Numbers chapter 24, verse 17, where he's trying to curse Israel, but he can't curse Israel. Instead he keeps blessing them, and he says of Jesus on that day when he returns, he says, I see him— I see the Lord returning— but not now. I perceive him, but not near.

A star— that morning star— a star will come from Jacob, and a scepter— there's the iron scepter— will arise from Israel, and he will smash the forehead of Moab and strike down all the Shethites. This is Jesus in Revelation chapter 22, verse 16, saying to us, I am the bright morning star. I am the offspring of David. I am the fulfillment of Psalm chapter 2. When I come again, though the nations rage and the kingdoms plot in vain, when I come again, it puts an end to all of their hostility and opposition.

And at that day and age it will be over. And you will be justified, and you will receive the greatest gift of all, which is not wealth or houses or lands or anything. It's me. I'm the morning star, and I'm giving you the gift of myself. And it's a reminder for us today who are standing strong for Christ, who are overcoming misguided compromise— or misguided tolerance, who are suffering the consequences of standing strong for Jesus. It will cost us. It will cost us more and more as the culture continues to deteriorate.

But even as it cost you your house or your money or your family or your children, whatever it may cost you, Jesus is saying, whatever you lose, it's nothing compared to what you're going to gain in me, because when I come again, I'm going to give you the gift of myself and not like sort of kind of myself, not like ooey-gooey-feeling-on-Sunday-morning gift of myself; like an overwhelming, transformational, true, literal physical gift of myself that will so satisfy your soul. It will blow you away. And you will see on that day that all of these other things that you've been chasing, of acceptance by them, and money here and houses there and promotion there, all of those things are ultimately trying to satisfy a void in your heart that I alone can satisfy.

And on that day I will satisfy that void in a way that is unquenchable and eternally satisfying. And even though I'll be all you have, you'll discover that I've always been all you've ever needed. And so the invitation for us this morning is to take Jesus at his word, to trust him. He said to this church, you're doing a lot of things right, but there's one problem I have. And he would say to a lot of us this morning, you're doing a lot of things right, but there's one problem I have.

There is this sin in your life that you are tolerating, and it is destroying you. And the question for us this morning is, are we going to respond to Jesus' invitation to repent of that sin in our life? And I know, because I've been there, that it's complicated. And I know that doing what Jesus wants you to do has consequences. And I know they're painful. And I know you've avoided this discussion because of the pain of the consequences. But Jesus is telling you this morning, the pain of those consequences are nothing compared to the pain of my judgment if you don't repent.

And so repent. And if that sin is not in your life, then hold fast and pray for your church and pray for those people who are caught in the throes of sexual immorality or whatever sin it may be, and hold on and persevere until I come again. So here's how I want us to respond because I know this lands on everybody different. We're going to stand and sing and this altar is going to be open. If anybody wants to come and pray, I'll be here to pray with you. I think I'm just going to sit on the front row.

If you're stuck in sin and you say, I want to repent, I've tried to repent, but I can't. Wes, will you pray for me? Well, I need to get this out in the open. I need to tell somebody. Then you can do that. If you're not a Christian this morning, and this morning Jesus is calling you to faith in Jesus Christ, then I want you to respond. Come down to the front, talk to me, say, I want to give my life to Jesus Christ. I'm tired of doing it the culture's way.

I want to do it Jesus' way. I want the reward of Jesus himself. Others of you may want to pray for a loved one, son or daughter, whatever the case may be. Let's respond to the Lord in light of his word. Lord Jesus, we thank you—

1. Transcript note: spoken as "sleeping with his mother-in-law"; Paul describes "a man … sleeping with his father's wife," that is, his stepmother. Source: 1 Corinthians 5:1 (CSB). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "the god of the Moabites"; Baal was the Canaanite and Phoenician storm and fertility god Jezebel brought from Sidon, while Moab's national god was Chemosh. Source: 1 Kings 16:31–32; 11:33 (CSB). ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "around chapter 20 … Elisha was one of those prophets"; Jezebel's killing of the Lord's prophets is reported in 1 Kings 18:4, 13, and the prophet who fled from her is Elijah (1 Kings 19:1–3). Elisha is called later, in 1 Kings 19:16–21. Source: 1 Kings 18–19 (CSB). ↩
4. Transcript note: spoken as "Isaiah's response"; the challenge "How long will you waver between two opinions?" comes from Elijah, as the next sentence says. Source: 1 Kings 18:21 (CSB). ↩
5. Transcript note: spoken as "in verse 22"; "I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent" is Revelation 2:21. Source: Revelation 2:21 (CSB). ↩