

Tolerance in the Wrong Direction

Revelation 2:18-29

Intro: Tolerance

- *How would you reply if a journalist walked up to you and asked you, “Are you a tolerant person?”*
- *How would you reply if Jesus walked up to you and asked you, “Are you tolerant?”*
 - Here is a question:
 - *Is Jesus tolerant?*
 - *What did Jesus tolerate?*
 - *What didn't Jesus tolerate?*
 - *Why does Jesus have a problem with Thyatira being tolerant?*
- *The question of tolerance: what should and shouldn't be tolerated is one of the issues of our culture today.*
- *As followers of Jesus, we must know how to respond to the question of tolerance*
- *the question of tolerance is at the center of what Jesus has to say to the church in Thyatira*

Verse 18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write..”

This Week we read Jesus' message to the Church in Thyatira (map)

- unlike the costal beauty of Ephesus & Smyrna, or the important caesar worship in Pergamum, and unlike the glory of the cities to come,
- Thyatira was a small, unknown, hidden gem
 - if these other cities were like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Thyatira was Carpinteria

Physically:

- the city was strategically on the road between Pergamos and the rest of Asia
- it really served as the gates to Pergamos: a much bigger and more important city

- while it was by far the smallest and most unknown city in Revelation, it received the longest Word from Jesus
- apparently this city and church was important to Jesus, and we would do well ourselves to listen to what Jesus had to say

**and so Jesus says to this church...*

Verse 18 “...the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze”

- **Jesus is speaking, “the words of the Son of God”**
 - what is so healthy about our church is we get taught the Bible, the Word of God
 - even on a Sunday like today, when our usual pastor isn’t teaching, it’s ok because we open the Word of God, we are hearing Jesus’ words.
- **any one of us up here are only as valuable as we are faithful to the Word of God**

**and this Jesus who is speaking, his...*

Eyes like a flame of fire

- our Jesus sees all things
- later in this text he says, **“I am he who searches mind and heart”**
- nothing is ever hidden from his view
 - the servants in this church were committing and hiding many sins in the dark, and Jesus in a very vivid way is communicating, I see all things
 - *Jesus sees all of our hidden sin*
 - **we may successfully hide our sin from our spouses, from our kids, from one another at church, but Jesus is watching and seeing**

Feet are Like Burnished Bronze

- bronze is a particularly hard and strong metal, and yet also very resistant to corrosion
- Jesus is strong, immovable, unchanging: sovereign and powerful
 - this Jesus sees all things, and cannot be moved

To be Honest, this isn't the Jesus we often think about

- and yet Jesus is called the Lion and the Lamb
 - often we think of Jesus as the lamb, as gentle and kind and gracious
 - that is good
 - yet these images are helping us to see the Lion
 - God in his might, his majesty, his justice, his holiness
 - sin cannot be hidden from our Jesus
 - our Jesus will not be defeated or conquered or moved
 - He is ruling and reigning over the universe
 - like Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia
 - Beavers explaining Aslan
 - the kids: "Oh, that sounds terrible" asked, "is he safe?"
 - **Mr Beaver replied: "Safe? Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you"**
 - **listen: Jesus is not safe. You do not want to be his enemy when he comes back.**
 - **But He is Good. He's the King. He is Holy and Faithful and True.**
 - *and now, even now, His eyes are blazing, watching His bride, aware of what is going on*

**and as Jesus looks upon Thyatira with these blazing eyes, he sees both the commendable, and the sin in the church at Thyatira*

he says...

Verse 19 "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first"

- somewhere along the line in American Christianity we have been given the notion that because we are saved by the blood of Jesus, it doesn't matter how we live

- that because Jesus' blood alone atones for our sins, that we don't have to work anymore. that our service and love and even growing in these things aren't really that important
- the Church in Thyatira understood that is not the case
 - that Jesus doesn't just save us *from* something, but also *to* something
 - and that something is a life of works, love, faith, service, patient endurance
 - and that we should be growing in those
- that was the church in Thyatira
- Jesus is speaking to working, loving, faithful, serving, enduring, growing Christians
- **this aren't to your average joe Christians, pew potatoes as Britt likes to say**
 - **this Church was marked by great works**
 - *how are we doing on works? would Jesus commend the works of our church?*
 - **this Church was marked by love for one another**
 - *how are we doing on love? Would Jesus commend our love?*
 - **this Church was marked by great faith in Jesus**
 - *would Jesus commend our faith?*
 - **this Church was a serving Church.**
 - They understood to follow Jesus meant they were not merely on the sidelines while the *staff* did the work.
 - They were serving one another, as Jesus served them.
 - *how is our service? how many of us are serving one another in this church? would Jesus commend our service?*
 - *listen: this doesn't mean serving in some official capacity, or even some ministry in the church. (although it certainly could mean that)*
 - *the question is: are you, as a follower of the God who didn't come to be served but to serve, are you serving in any way? is your life marked by service to others?*
 - **this Church was enduring pain and suffering**
 - *how are we doing on enduring until Jesus comes?*
 - **this Church was growing, more holy than it was a year before**
 - *are we growing in holiness as a church? are we growing in these areas of love and faith and service?*

- *have you grown in your walk with Jesus this past year?*

**and Jesus commends this church in these areas! this church was getting it!*

**and yet he quickly moves on...*

Verse 20 “But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel”

- tolerate or “permit” in the NLT
 - while this church was getting it right in so many ways, Jesus has something against them
 - “You tolerate” he says
 - **this is the issue in this church. they tolerated.**

**tolerance. tolerance is such an important and yet complicated issue in our culture*

**and it also clearly matters to Jesus here. This is the one sin that the entire church is guilty of. “You” is plural, they were all guilty of tolerance*

1) What is tolerance?

- tolerance: To respect others' beliefs, practices, etc. without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing (Oxford English Dictionary)
- it is to say, “I may disagree with you, but I respect your right to believe something different than me”

2) Tolerance has Changed

- yet, D.A. Carson a Christian scholar points out that a change has been made in our society in regards to tolerance
- he says while tolerance used to be “respecting other beliefs without necessarily agreeing with them”, in our culture today it has shifted to mean “accepting all beliefs as equally valid”
- now, if you want to be tolerant you must say, “Your belief is as valid as my belief”
- This is significant for the Christian. Because Christians do not believe that all beliefs are equally valid. We believe in absolutes. We believe that other beliefs are actually wrong.

- **Yet in our culture, this belief in absolute truth has become synonymous with being intolerant.**
 - ironically, our culture's new tolerance has become very intolerant to anyone who disagrees with it's view of reality that all beliefs are equally valid
 - our culture now says the only truth that must not be tolerated is the one that says someone's belief is wrong
- **and so Christians, with our view of absolute truth, are dubbed intolerant.**

3) Christians Must Hold Absolutes

- and yet, with a little bit of critical thinking, and logic, we can see through this relativism.

**Billy Graham helps us with this when he once pointed out that absolute, narrow truth is everywhere we look*

Science Displays Absolute Truth!

- Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level. It is never 100 degrees nor 189 degrees—but always 212. Water freezes at 32 degrees—not at 23 or 31.
- this is simply true.

Math Displays Absolute Truth!

- The sum of two plus two is four—not three-and-a-half. That seems very narrow

Navigation Displays Absolute Truth!

- If you should ask a man the direction to Los Angeles and he said, "Oh, just take any road you wish, they all lead there," you would question either his sanity or his truthfulness.
- A compass will always point to the magnetic north. It seems that is a very narrow view, but a compass is not very "broad-minded." If it were, all the ships at sea, and all the planes in the air would be in danger.

**and so the point is this:*

-How much more so, would truth about God, who created all science, math, the world and it's ways, be absolute?

-How much more so would truth revealed by God in the Bible, be absolute?

- if God has said it, we can count on it to be true.

**listen to just two absolute truths God declares in the Bible:*

- **One God**

- “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;” Isaiah 45:5
- again, logic helps us:
 - it simply cannot be true that there is One God, and at the same time, Many Gods. You have to chose.
 - And God has said there is only One God.

- **One Way to God: Jesus**

- “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6
- if you are logical,
- as there cannot be 100 different cell phone numbers you can dial to reach me,
- there cannot be 100 different ways to reach God.
 - and Jesus has spoken: the only way to God is to trust in the sacrificial blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins

**there are countless absolute truth claims in the Bible, that as Christians, we believe.*

- *in a world that get's tolerance so backwards, and where Christians are clearly seen as bigoted and crazy and intolerant...*
- *a very natural and easy response would be to spend our time arguing with this world, proving ourselves through our good logical apologetics, and even getting frustrated with the society we live in.*
- *Yet in a world that has made a fatal error in regards to tolerance, the Church too has made an even greater error. **And that error is Jesus' charge against Thyatira.***
- *He says this, “You tolerate that woman Jezebel”*
 - when we think about the question and issues of tolerance, we can often think about how our own world is intolerant towards us
 - we can spend more of our time critiquing the world, the government, and even unbelieving people living in sin

- **and as we are busy having something against the world, Jesus says, “I have this against you, you tolerate sin within your own church”**
- no wonder the Church is so often distasteful to the world!
- even the world knows this is not what Jesus was like!

Christians must never get the issue of tolerance backwards. We must be tolerant of the world. And yet have zero tolerance for our own sin.

- ***Jesus calls Christians to be far more tolerant with the world, and far less tolerant within the Church.***
 - **Jesus himself not only tolerated sinners, he loved them and spent time with them. Yet he was far less tolerant of his own people, of those who knew God and yet lived and permitted much sin in their lives**
 - **Jesus’ tolerance was in the right direction: tolerance toward the world, but not towards sin in the church**

We Are Called to Be Like Jesus

- like Jesus, we should not only tolerate the world, we should love it. We should serve it. We should be going after the broken, the rejected, the “sinners”
- we should be tolerant of other religions. while we disagree, we should allow them space to coexist and worship freely
- we should especially be tolerant of people *outside the church!* Think about the kind of grace and tolerance Jesus’ exuded to people!
- **and, like Jesus, we should be far less tolerant towards ourselves, towards sin and hypocrisy within the Church itself**

**and that leads us to Jesus’ word to Thyatira: what sin was it that this church was tolerating?*

Verse 20 “But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching...”

• **Who was this Jezebel?**

- It seems Jesus is talking about a literal woman in that church, and yet by calling her Jezebel, he is also making a reference to the Old Testament queen Jezebel
 - This OT Jezebel was the daughter of a foreign king, and married to king Ahab of Israel
 - she was infamous for worshipping idols, and influencing the King, and then all of Israel to practice idol worship and abandon God
 - she was the queen who supported the prophets of Baal, who faced Elijah on the mountain top Mount Carmel
- **there is apparently a woman in the church of Thyatira, who is likewise leading the church away from the worship of the true God, and so Jesus calls her “that woman Jezebel”**
- note also:
 - “calls herself a prophetess”
 - Satan’s strategies are not always blatant, but disguise themselves as things the Lord would do
 - Satan has always used the truth, yet a slightly skewed version of the truth to deceive God’s people
 - From the garden, to false prophets in the OT, to the NT churches, to even this day, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and uses false teachers to teach not outright blatant heresy, but subtly skewing the truth of God to lead God’s people astray

**what is Jezebel doing?*

Verse 20 “...and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”

- *do you know how you can tell a true prophet from a false one?*
 - look at the fruit.
 - if a prophet is speaking the words of God, it should lead the people of God towards holiness and righteousness

- if a prophet is speaking words that are leading people to sin, then you know they are false!
- we see the fruit of Jezebel's teaching was sexual immorality and idolatry

So What Was Going On? How Did This Happen?

- **how does a group of maturing, loving, and working Christians end up tolerating a false teacher like this?**
- *when we study the context and city of this church, there are actually huge clues as to how this Jezebel gained a foothold in this church*

Economically:

- it's one strength as a city was economic
- because it was a city that everyone had to pass through, it became a center for commerce, trading, and production
- it produced much bronze, wool, linen, leather, pottery, coins, slavery
 - Lydia, the seller of Purple cloth that we meet in Acts, was from Thyatira

Thyatira's Guilds

- because of Thyatira existed largely as an economic center, it had **more trade guilds than any other Asian city**
 - in that day, people didn't have insurance or social security. They had what was known as a trade guild.
 - This was a group of workers in a similar craft, and they would all contribute to the guild, and if someone was sick or needed assistance, your guild would be there for you. It was like a union, insurance, and your community all in one
 - essential to survive and make a living
- however, the guilds commonly held gatherings
 - **and during these gatherings they would eat and drink meat that had been sacrificed to that specific trade's idol, related to whatever trade they were in**
 - and so as an act of worship, they would eat and drink to these gods
 - it was then common practice for these gatherings, after they had feasted and been drinking as an act of idol worship, to quickly lead to all sorts of sexual immorality

And So Imagine You Lived in that Day. And Imagine you were a seller of Purple Cloth

- you meet Lydia, who introduces you to Jesus
- you become a Christian
 - and next week is your guild gathering, where you will be invited to practice idolatry, and sexual immorality
 - what do you do?
 - do you go?
 - do you not go and lose your guild membership?
 - if so, you will be very hard pressed to even survive financially
 - **in fact, one commentator writes, “It was economic suicide to reject the minimum requirements for guild membership” (Bruce Metzger, Breaking the Code, 37)**

Now For Us: (Apply: Economic Suicide?)

- I’m certain none of your jobs are requiring you to sacrifice to an idol, or commit sexual immorality to continue to keep your job
- but I will ask us this: *how often do you consider the way in which you go about your work will honor or dishonor the name of Jesus?*
 - because, as we all know, how you spend your time at work is as important to God as how you spend your time at church
 - and if for some reason, following Jesus meant you could lose much, even your job....

Would you be willing to face economic ruin to honor and follow Jesus?

- that was what was facing the church in Thyatira

**and so imagine you are facing these questions.*

Enter Jezebel

- *then, on Sunday at church, you are sharing your troubles with some Christians*
 - *and they ask you if you’ve met Jezebel yet?*
 - *you say no, why? who is she?*

- Jezebel is a prophetess, they tell you, and God has told her that because we are free in Christ, we can actually still worship Jesus, and be a part of a guild!
- she essentially says, **“you can have both.”**
 - you think, “wow, that’s great!”
 - in fact, she’s having a meeting soon at her house, to teach more about this
 - and when you show up to hear Jezebel teach, she not only tells you that you can stay in your guild, you can practice idolatry and immorality there too! In fact, because you are forgiven by Jesus, you can also practice these things with her!
- this is what the Church in Thyatira was tolerating.
- **and its not hard to see why.**
 - who doesn’t want the blessings of Jesus, and their sin at the same time?

**what’s worse, is we may think this was a few, isolated individuals who were on the fringes of the church. Yet look at what is next in verse 20...*

Verse 20 “...and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”

- this word is to Jesus’ servants!
- this word from Jesus was to the mature, serving, loving, growing Christians!
- this was not to a few isolated individuals
 - apparently, being a good, serving, faithful church member does not make you exempt from tolerating, and even participating in such acts...

And so let me ask you servants, those who have been walking with Jesus for years, who are growing and loving and working for Jesus

- what are you tolerating?
- are there people, habits, that you know are a constant temptation?
- yet do you still even tolerate them around in your life?
- are you ok with even just a little bit of sin in your life?
- are you ok with even flirting with the boundaries with a coworker?

- *are you online where you shouldn't be?*
- *are you going further with your boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancee than the Bible allows?*
- *are you harboring sinful, lustful thoughts?*
- *are your eyes lingering?*
- *are you ok with just a little bit of sin?*
 - *none of us are beyond this. these servants of Jesus in Thyatira tolerated these sins,*
 - *are the servants at Reality tolerating these sins?*
- may we Never listen to the temptation of Satan that says because you are serving, you get a pass on sin. you get a pass on holiness.
 - we can easily think, "I just spent hours of my life pouring out and serving others, I deserve a little extra wiggle room today"
 - it's like when I run in the morning, I feel justified for the rest of the day to eat whatever I want
 - and so I end up eating more terrible food and being more unhealthy than I would have if I didn't run at all!
- **Satan will lie to you, and tell you that for a Christian, sin is like that**
 - you worked hard for God, you served and loved people well, so you can get a little extra slack
 - God certainly won't care that much, because look how much He is using me! Look how much I serve Him!

Two Fatal Flaws:

- **1) and yet the fatal flaw here is thinking that somehow our actions could ever justify our sin**
 - **not even your service to Jesus and the Church justifies your sin**
- **2) Sin is tolerable for a Christian**
 - **it is simply not!**
- ***Jesus' blood not only forgives us, it changes us: it makes us holy***

- **True Christians will always be marked by holiness.**
- **it is never ok to use the blood of Jesus as a license to sin**

**and so Jesus says...*

-Verse 21 “I gave her time to repent...”

Jesus is so gracious.

- He gives time to repent. He offered her a way out of her sin.
- This is Jesus’ heart!
- Jesus offers all of us this opportunity. He calls all of us, even the worst of us, in the worst of sins, to repent.
- There is hope for forgiveness and healing, even for a woman like Jezebel, clearly leading others astray.
- In 2 Peter it says, “**The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance**” 3:9b

Church, if this is you: repent.

-If you are tolerating far too much: repent.

-If you have been led astray into hidden sins, or even blatant sins, repent!

- repentance is changing your mind, and your behavior from a sin, and turning to the grace and forgiveness of Jesus
- it is true that sin is intolerable for Christians.
- and yet that does not mean a True Christian is perfect
- we still stumble and fall and sin
- **but what marks a True Christian is repentance**
 - Christians must be heartbroken over sin
 - we must hate our sin
 - we must hate our betrayal to God and to people

- we may fall
- we may fall many times
 - but we repent
- we turn from their sin brokenhearted

Gospel.

- repentance is for all of us
- the worst of sinners
 - not one person in this room is too sinful to turn to Jesus
- the worse of Christians
 - not one Christian in this room has blown it so bad they can no longer turn to Jesus

Let Me Remind us all of the Cross

- though all of us have sinned, though all of us have fallen short from the obedience God has called us to
- Our God is gracious. He is slow to anger. He loves us. All of us.
- And so He sent his Son, his firstborn, his only
 - Jesus came and lived perfectly obedient to all the Law
 - He never sinned. He was like a perfect and spotless lamb.
 - And yet he was led like that lamb to be slaughtered
 - And he was slaughtered and whipped and beaten and hung on a cross
 - And on that cross he suffered the wrath of God for the sins of the world
 - For the sins of all who would turn from their sin and believe and hope on Him
 - And he would forgive sinners like us, no matter how guilty we were
 - And he would cleanse us white as snow, he would give us His righteousness, and he would take our place and punishment

Gracious Call to Repentance

1) Unbeliever

- if you've never turned to Jesus, know this: he loves you so much.
- He left heaven for you.
- He loves you, even though you've sinned.
- Repent of your sin, his heart is not to crush you or punish you.
- **Believe that Jesus died** on a cross to take your punishment for you.

2) Christian

- you haven't blown it too badly
- repent of these areas of tolerance and sin
- remember the great mercy of our God towards us

Because while God is so gracious, and so slow to anger, He is also Just. And there will come a day when if we refuse to repent, He will judge sin that has not been repented of.

**we see that terrifying truth in the next verses*

Verse 21b-23a “...but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 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, and I will strike her children dead...”

- the justice Jesus' gives fits the crime
- he is essentially saying, “You want to be in a bed all the time? I'll put you in a bed, but a bed of sickness.”
 - **The very place she was leading herself and others to sin, becomes the place of judgment: she will be thrown onto a bed in sickness.**
 - God judges sin. He hates sin.

then...

- Jesus will strike her children dead
 - this is a pretty difficult statement

- commentators aren't 100% sure what this means, but this we do know
 - 1) God is just. He never punishes the innocent
 - 2) Her children here probably refers to her disciples, her "spiritual" children in a sense, those who are following her teaching
 - 3) All will be held accountable for their sin, including her spiritual children.
 - 4) Sin is a big deal. Big enough that Jesus said he would kill her children because of it.

Verse 23b "...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"

- Jesus sees all sin. His eyes pierce to the intentions of our minds and hearts
- **Yet, the very fact that Jesus is speaking to these churches, and to us, shows his great love and care for these churches**
- He searches mind and heart, for their good
- He is willing to use hard words and warnings for the good of His bride

**and He's not done yet...Jesus goes on to say...*

Verse 23 "...I will *give to each of you according to your works*"

- This is a difficult verse
- The question here may be: are we saved by our works?
 - no, salvation by grace alone, justification by grace alone
 - remember, only by the blood of Jesus that we are saved, forgiven, made clean
 - **yet salvation will lead to works**
 - **Jesus' blood not only forgives us, it changes us: it makes us holy**
- clarify: works *prove* our salvation, but they don't *earn* our salvation
- and so Jesus says based on our works, our fruitfulness, our faithfulness in this life, we will be rewarded in heaven

- if your life is full of works because you have been saved, Jesus will reward you greatly

**and then Jesus moves on to address the rest of the church..*

Verse 24 “But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan”

- There is hope!
 - many in this church weren't following this teaching, and practicing it

To them he says...

Verse 24-25 “...to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come.”

- this is the call
- You can be a Christian in the presence of a broken world and even a broken church. Simply hold fast to Christ
- the battle is won
- Jesus defeated Satan, Sin, and Death on the cross
- Our call is to simply hold fast to Jesus
 - **Lord of the Rings**
 - at the very end of their journey, Sam and Frodo have reached Mt Doom...
 - Sam holding onto Frodo, “Don't you let go”
 - the victory is won
 - but Frodo is tired, it's been exhausting
 - he is tempted, even though they succeeded, to just let go at the end
 - the call, “Don't you let go”
 - that is the call

- the battle is won
- we simply are called to hold on, hold fast, the end is coming

**if we do hold fast, we are offered 2 great promises:*

-Verse 26-27 “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father”

- we will rule with Jesus, on His throne

Verse 28 “And I will give him the morning star.”

- **Jesus himself is the morning star**
 - Jesus himself is our ultimate reward
 - more than heaven with it’s perfection, lack of suffering, being reunited with friends and family who have died, more than all the rewards offered there
 - **Jesus himself is the fountainhead, from which all the blessings and gifts flow.**
 - **He is the source, He is our reward**

Verse 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”

Hard Words:

- these have not been easy Words from our Savior
- and yet Jesus is willing to use hard words and warnings for the good of His bride
 - Like the surgeon’s scalpel that cuts and hurts, yet when its work is finished has saved a life,
 - **are you willing to let Jesus take the sword of his mouth, His Words, to you, to your own heart, to your life?**
 - The question is: *are we willing to listen?*

- Are you willing to hear words from Jesus that may hurt, for your own good?

Call to Worship

-It is to Jesus we now turn.

-If you have been far too critical of the world, and far too tolerant of your own sin, repent.

-If you have yourself been deceived, been living in sin, using Jesus' blood as an excuse to live in this sin, repent.

-If you are walking with Jesus, hold fast. Don't quit. He is coming soon.

-For all of us, let's come to Jesus. He is gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love to all of us. He poured out his blood for us. Let's come to him now.

Ultimately: Display Jesus, by the Spirit