

Revelation 2:18-28

Hold Fast To Truth

To avoid any confusion let me remind you that this section of Revelation concerning the seven churches is not prophetic concerning churches in the future. Back in Revelation 1:19 Jesus told John to, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

The thing which John has seen is the vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1. The things which are concern the seven churches. These were historical, real churches. And what happened to them, both their good deeds and sins could happen to any church anywhere at any time in history, even today. This is why Jesus ends each letter by saying "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches [plural]."

In other words what the Lord said to the church at Ephesus the church at Smyrna was to take note. What Christ said to Smyrna, Pergamos was to hear and take to heart and so are we. It is just like when Paul wrote to the church at Rome or Corinth or Galatia we are to read and take to heart today.

So what John had seen is the vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1. Then things which are concern the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. Then chapter 4 begins the actual prophetic portion of what will take place in the future. I hope this makes sense and clears up any misunderstandings.

If there is a word that describes the secular mind-set today it is the word "tolerance." The classical idea of tolerance is to allow someone to think and feel and behave a certain way, while at the same time having the right to reject that person's claims, beliefs and actions. Today that classical idea has been turned on its head.

Now we are to accept and allow any and all philosophies, life-styles, morals and values no matter what they are. But the funny thing is that those people who shout the loudest for tolerance will not tolerate anyone who opposes their point of view! They assert that you cannot say that your view is correct and someone else's is wrong. But that is simply ridiculous.

First, because telling someone they cannot reject an idea is of itself intolerant. And secondly, because there are things that are right and other

things that are wrong. Everyone has a morality based on a set of ideals. As Christians our sense of truth and morality is built on the Word of God.

In one sense this intolerant tolerance wasn't any different at the time of the early church. Rome allowed and tolerated any and all religions and religious practices as long as you also worshipped Rome and the emperor. The one thing Rome and the ancient world would not accept was a religion that said they alone had the truth.

This exerted a lot of pressure on Christians to compromise the truth in order to get along and not make waves. One place where the squeeze was on was Thyatira. Thyatira was a small industrial town. And it was known for its many trade unions or guilds. Inscriptions have been found in the ruins of that city that mention wool workers, bakers, potters, slave dealers, coppersmiths, tanners and those who worked in making pigments dyes for clothes. You might remember from Acts 16:14 that when Paul and Silas were in Philippi in Macedonia/Greece the first person they led to faith in Christ was a woman from Thyatira named Lydia. She was a seller of purple.

Here is where the trouble came in for the Christians at Thyatira. It was nearly impossible to work in Thyatira unless you belonged to one of these trade guilds. A baker didn't bake and shoemaker didn't make shoes unless he or she belonged to that guild. And each guild had its patron god or goddess that was worshipped with sacred meals followed by immoral sex with temple prostitutes both male and female.

Back then, just as today, some of our greatest struggles and challenges deal with work. In Thyatira the situation was dire for the Christians: join the guild and worship the pagan god or don't work. Let's read Christ's letter to this church.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,
'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a
flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:
(Revelation 2:18)

Jesus Christ identifies himself as the Son of God with eyes like a flame of fire. This means he has the divine ability to search the hearts and minds of his people. He knows all about us. He knows our attitudes and what motivates us. He knows our fears and concerns and he knows our sins.

He also has feet like fine brass, which speaks of judgment and his ability to trample down sin. Jesus reveals himself like this to the church, because they have become tolerant of gross sin.. As we will see idolatry and sexual immorality

was allowed. Christ's letter to this church is a stern warning to believers who are flirting with the world. But before the warning the Lord praises some things that are admirable.

I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience;
and as for your works, the last are more than the first.
(Revelation 2:19)

This church had some good things going for it. Their love for others led to their service to others. They were charitable and encouraging and helpful. And their faith led to their patience or more accurately their perseverance. They were believing God and being steadfast. They were growing spiritually. Furthermore their love, service, faith and perseverance were increasing. Jesus said, "as for your works the last are more than the first."

Any church should be proud to hear this from the Lord. This was a church on the rise. What could possibly be wrong in a church like this? I mean, after all isn't love all you need? Well, a Jesus inspects this church that he gave his life for and deeply loves he describes it warts and all. And he said in effect, "I love you but I hate your sin."

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.
²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.
(Revelation 2:20, 21)

Following swiftly on the words of praise there comes a scathing rebuke. He said "You allow, you tolerate that woman Jezebel and her false doctrine. Apparently there was some effort to get this woman to repent, but she refused. And the faithful of the church were not doing anything about it.

Doctrine always affects how we think, feel and act. This church had love but not sound biblical doctrine. If you'll recall the church at Ephesus was just the opposite. They had truth, but their hearts were cold. A church, any church, can be lopsided in one of these two directions. Our heads can be empty and our hearts full. Or our heads can be full and our hearts empty.

As Ephesians 4:15 tells us we are to "speak the truth in love." These things are to be in balance. And Philippians 1:9 says our love is to "abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment" that "we may approve the things that are excellent."

Doctrine and love are like the two chemical ingredients in salt. Salt is good, but it is composed of two poisonous ingredients: sodium and chloride. If we were to eat one without the other we would die. But when they are combined together we have salt which gives flavor to food and health to our bodies. In the same way truth and love must be forever bound together. One without the other is dangerous. And the church at Thyatira was in mortal danger.

Their lack of concern for sound doctrine allowed a woman called Jezebel to teach a lie. I don't think Jezebel was this woman's real name. Jezebel was the most evil woman mentioned in the Old Testament. I doubt anyone would name their daughter Jezebel, which would be like naming your son Judas. But there was a Jezebel like woman in this church. She was a prominent, influential, evil person. She was like a worm in a shiny apple.

In order to understand her false teaching we need to know about the Jezebel of the Old Testament.¹ This wicked woman was the daughter of the King of Sidon a people infamous for their worship of the god Baal. Baal was a fertility god and the temple of Baal was staffed with temple prostitutes both male and female. And the worship of Baal involved the basest and most obscene of sexual practices.

Jezebel married the evil, spineless and whining Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, who tolerated her idolatry. She seduced Israel into worshipping Baal, killed many of God's prophets and personally provided for hundreds of false prophets. Ahab was king but Jezebel was the power behind the throne pulling the strings. She was ruthless, ungodly, scheming and seductive.

The spirit of Jezebel possessed a woman in the church at Thyatira. She called herself a prophetess claiming to speak for God, but she was leading people in the church into idolatry and sexual immorality.

Here is what was going on. As I mentioned earlier Thyatira was a business center filled with trade guilds. In order to have a good job you had to belong to one of these trade unions or guilds. All of these guilds had their gods. And it was not only important for you to do your work well, but you also had to participate in the sacred means and the sexual frenzy in the worship of the gods.

Obviously this put the Christians into a difficult situation. But to the rescue along comes Jezebel. Jezebel taught that you could join the guild and worship

¹ 1 Kings 16:31ff

the pagan deities. After all, business is business. God will overlook it. Who are we to judge how other people worship. Go ahead eat and praise the idol, indulge in the sex. This could be a great way to introduce your friends to the good news of Jesus Christ. I mean, you don't want to stand out like some puritanical wierdo. Let them see that you're just like everyone else. You don't want to be made fun of do you?

This is probably why some of the believers got caught up in Jezebel's doctrine and sin. Others tried to get her to repent, but now they just want to get along and they don't want to look stupid. This was a problem elsewhere too and the apostle Peter wrote about it.

For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.
(1 Peter 4:3, 4)

A few things stand out here. First, Peter said that you used to party with the unbelievers. You thought like them about life and you acted like them. But, secondly, now since you follow Christ you don't indulge in what you used to do. You have new desires and priorities. And so thirdly, your old friends think you are strange. They think you are a wierdo. And they make fun of you and speak evil of you.

We've all faced these fears. We have not spoken up; we have not done the right thing, because we did not want to be maligned. But there comes a time when you have to choose. Will I follow the world or Christ?

Jezebel loved her sin and refused to repent. She was in a position of power. And a number of believers followed her teaching. Jezebel was attractive, intelligent and sophisticated. And she knew that you have to make compromises with the world to have friends and especially in Thyatira to get a job to meet your needs.

There are Jezebels in churches today² who lie, deceive and mislead. They compromise truth with error and accommodate evil to get along. Jezebel can

² 10 Characteristics of the Jezebel Spirit:

1. It seeks to gain popularity and favor with people of influential and high positions of leadership.
2. It will seek out other individuals they feel are "weaker" to become followers of them.

be found in businesses too and in organizations and in government. But there is a concrete law in God's universe: you reap what you sow.³ So Jesus Christ warns Jezebel and the rest of the church what will happen if they do not repent.

and I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.
(Revelation 2:21-23)

Jezebel played in a bed and would suffer in a sickbed not with the cold or the flu, but with some terrible disease. In verse 23 Christ states that he will kill Jezebel's children, in other words her followers. And the word translated "death" should be translated as pestilence or disease. To every action there is a reaction. Proverbs 6:27 gives us this warning: "Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?"

Jezebel refused to repent—she had a seared conscience. Was she a true Christian? It is difficult to say she was. But if the believers who followed her did not repent Jesus Christ would punish them with death.

Here is an important question with a very important answer. Would God allow a believer to suffer and die because of sin? The jolting answer is yes. There can come a time in a believer's life where sin can lead to death. Before you refuse to believe me, let's go to God's Word. Here is what the apostle John wrote.

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3. It is never humble. Whenever this spirit receives praise, it always responds in false humility.
 4. It is defensive and combative whenever confronted about anything.
 5. It loves to teach and seeks to gain control in every situation.
 6. It wants to be seen as the most spiritual and powerful one.
 7. It will not submit to authority
 8. It loves to pray and impart evil demonic spirits into others especially in the church
 9. It hates the voice of the prophet and seeks to control and destroy those who operate in the prophetic.
 10. It will never repent!

³ Galatians 6:8

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead to death*, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

(1 John 5:16)

Failure to repent of hard –hearted sin may lead to physical death. The Word of God says that sometimes the heart can be so hardened by sin that praying for that sinner will do no good, thus death is inevitable. Let me give you one more example.⁴

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul was reproofing the church for their attitude and behavior during communion when they shared the Lord's Supper. During communion the believers would actually eat a meal together. But some were stuffing their faces with food so that there was nothing left for others. And some were getting drunk.⁵ The apostle Paul said that this sin was the reason why some believers were sick and others died.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

(1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

These believers got sick and some died not because they did not know there was healing in communion. They got sick and died because they dishonored a sacred meal and all that it meant for Jesus Christ and for his church. How we respond to God when He confronts us with sin is a serious matter.

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with

⁴ In Acts 5 both Ananias and his wife Sapphira died because of being caught in sin

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:2-22

death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.
(Revelation 2:22, 23)

Jesus warned Jezebel's children and now he speaks to those who were faithful but too tolerant of sin. Jesus called the teaching and practice of Jezebel the depths of Satan. It is a scary thought that in some churches the deep things of Satan are known and allowed. But to the little remnant Christ said don't tolerate evil. Hold fast what you have. Get a good grip on truth, love, keep serving and be faithful.

Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—

as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

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

(Revelation 2:24-28)

Jesus quotes Psalm 2:8, 9 where God promised His Son that Jesus will rule and judge the nations. When Christ returns as King of kings faithful believers will rule with him. On top of this is the gift of the "morning star." Christ himself is the morning star.⁶ Plus Daniel 12:3 declares,

Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

The call to action for all of us is clear. Do not tolerate those who teach some new truth that says we can compromise with what is sin. Do not fear those who say you are narrow-minded, bigoted and discriminating. Be faithful to both

⁶ Revelation 22:16

love and truth. Do not make peace with paganism. For you are destined to judge the world.⁷

⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:2