

Thyatira: Condemned for Tolerance
Revelation 2:18-29

Will you take your Bibles and turn with this morning to the book of Revelation chapter two. We have come to verse 18 and we will be looking at the Church of Thyatira, the one that was condemned for its tolerance.

And while you are turning there I was thinking of the psalmist's words in Psalm 119:33 where he said, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end."¹ And that is our prayer this morning; that the Lord will teach us the way of his statutes, the truth of his Word.

Follow along as I read beginning in verse 18, Revelation chapter two.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."²

We come now to the fourth letter the Lord wrote to the churches in Asia minor, letters not only describing the unique characteristics of each of these churches, but also those characteristics of every church in the church age.

And you will recall that despite its admirable qualities, the Church of Ephesus allowed itself to fall into a cold and dead orthodoxy because it left its first and passionate love for the Lord Jesus Christ and for others.

The Church at Smyrna received only praise because of their steadfast, faithful love for Christ and dedication to him even in the face of enormous persecution and suffering.

¹ Psalm 119:33.

² Revelation 2:18-29.

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And the last time we were together we studied the Church at Pergamum. And despite its faithful witness and perseverance of some of the people within the church, others within the church had corrupted that church because of impurity and therefore they weakened its witness because of worldly compromise and false doctrine and, worse yet, the church failed to discipline those people who refused to repent.

And now we come to the fourth church, the Church at Thyatira, which, interestingly enough was the smallest of the seven cities and yet it receives the longest letter of the seven, a letter that is written to a church that was even more worldly than the church in Pergamum as we will see. With each letter we also discover a progressive deterioration of the five churches that the Lord rebukes, a downward spiral that culminates, ultimately into an utterly apostate church, the church at Laodicea.

Now this is a frightening progression that we want to keep in mind. Think about it, dear friends, as our love for Christ begins to wane, we begin to compromise with the world and that will seem natural. Then compromise yields the poison fruit of increasing tolerance for even worse kinds of evil which ultimately kills a church. As we will see, the Church at Sardis was a dead church and they didn't even know it. It was a church in name only. And although a dead church will reek of the stench of spiritual death, it will have grown so accustomed to its own smell that it will be greatly offended if any criticism comes its way.

And, finally, the last stage will not result in a burial of a dead church, but rather a satanically empowered *life* where the church will have the outward trappings of religiosity. In fact, they will grow and they will see themselves as rich. They will many times be huge in number. But they will be characterized—as was the Church in Laodicea—by having spiritual pride, utterly apostate, filled with unbelievers that are smug and self righteous and self satisfied, hypocrites that make God vomit.

Well, Thyatira is condemned for their tolerance of immorality. They have a false teacher here in the church teaching false doctrine. And yet isn't it interesting how tolerance is kind of the buzzword in religious circles today, where somehow if we are tolerant we are going to promote unity and love? Examples of this abound. I will give you but a couple.

I read an article the other day called “Methodist Conference to Reaffirm Church Tolerance for Homosexuality.” Now this was posted on *Christian Today*, a website. And the author said this, quote, “The Methodist Church in Great Britain is to reaffirm its commitment in embracing homosexuality within the church in its upcoming annual general meeting.” He went on to say that the British Methodists have produced a document called “Pilgrimage of Faith.” And I took the time to look that up and to read that document.

By the way, it is interesting. You hear this word “pilgrimage” a lot with many of these denominations. It is as if Christians are wandering in some unknown territory, not really sure where they are supposed to go as opposed to walking by the Spirit and submitted to

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the Lordship of Christ, the Good Shepherd that leads us on a clear path of righteousness and truth all the way to glory.

But anyway this “Pilgrimage of Faith” had this to say as just one of its positions of tolerance. Quote, “The conference recognizes, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. The conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality,” end quote.

Another clergyman from the United Kingdom which mirrors what is happening here in the United States, a man by the name of Jonathan Kerry said this, and I quote, “Even though the Church still encompasses many differing views on homosexuality, we are moving forward towards a greater understanding of each other’s opinions rather than allowing our positions to become fixed,” end quote.

I think of that statement in contrast to the psalmist’s words in Psalm 119:34 where he says, “Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, And keep it with all my heart.”³

Well, obviously if the Bible is not considered to be the inspired, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God, then you have no spiritual authority other than man. And so you just need to come together and figure out what everybody is going to believe. We see this kind of attitude in many, many liberal denominations and many churches today.

Another article in *Time* magazine entitled “Christians: No One Path to Salvation” we find this. And I quote, “Americans of every religious stripe are considerably more tolerant of the beliefs of others than most of us might have assumed according to a new poll. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life last year surveyed 35,000 Americans and found that 70% of respondents agreed with the statement, quote, ‘Many religions can lead to eternal life,’” end quote. The article went on to say, “Even more remarkable was the fact that 57% of evangelical Christians were willing to accept that theirs might not be the only path to salvation since most Christians historically have embraced the words of Jesus in the gospel of John that, quote, “No one comes to the Father except through me,”⁴ end quote.

He went on to add, “Even as mainline churches have become more tolerant, the exclusivity of Christianity’s path to heaven has long been one of the evangelical, fundamental tenets. But the new poll suggests a major shift at least in the pews.”

And, indeed, there has been a shift and I would also argue that anybody that believes that there is another way apart from Jesus is not a Christian, much less an evangelical. Contrast those words to 1 Timothy six where the apostle tells us, “If anyone advocates a

³ Psalm 133:34.

⁴ See John 14:6.

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different doctrine,”⁵ in verse three, “and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing.”⁶ And certainly this is an apt description of the vast majority of ostensibly Christian churches in the world today. And certainly this describes the church in Thyatira.

Let me give you a little history of this church that will provide us with some helpful context. Thyatira, which is modern day Akisar, in Turkey was about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. Seleucus, a successor of Alexander the Great founded it as a military outpost, a very strategic place. It was nestled in the rich agricultural valley that connected the valleys of the Caicus and Hermus Rivers. And because of its location it was crucial in the protection of Pergamum. Therefore the city of Thyatira and Pergamum were very united.

In 190 BC the Romans gained control of the city. As a result it began to thrive as a commercial city in that region, famous for its production of woolens and linen products, especially outer garment wear. They also produced leather goods. They had numerous tanners, tailors, potters, bakers, copper and bronze smiths and slave dealers.

And it was especially famous for its ability to manufacture various kinds of dyes, in particular a purple dye that was used to create the color purple. In fact, in Acts 16 you will remember reading of a woman name Lydia who came to Christ who was a seller of purple fabrics and she was from Thyatira and she was doing business in Philippi at that time.

So this was a city of great prosperity. It is fascinating that as we read ancient secular historical literature we find it filled with references to the trade guilds that existed in Thyatira. These would be tantamount to our labor unions today. These trade guilds controlled all of the industry in that city. There was a guild for each industry, especially the cloth manufacturing industry and each guild paid homage to one of the pantheon of Roman or Greek gods or goddesses, especially Apollo, the Greek sun God and Artemis the supposed sister of Apollo, the goddess of fertility in man and in beast and in vegetation and so forth.

Now these guilds had monthly feasts in dedication to their patron deities. And people who worked in these guilds were obligated to attend. If you were to refuse you would be isolated socially and even economically because you would probably lose your job.

And in these feasts that were held in pagan temples they would eat meat that they sacrificed a portion of to the idols, something that God had forbidden. Worse yet, they would also indulge in sexual orgies.

Now, this would be an especially difficult place to live if you were a Christian, unless you refused to submit to your master the Lord Jesus Christ, unless you somehow allowed

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:3.

⁶ 1 Timothy 6:3-4.

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your flesh in combination with the teaching of certain false teachers to justify your participation in such wickedness. Well, this is precisely what happened.

As we examine the text more closely, I want you to remember something. These messengers, that were probably the pastors of these churches, had received these letters from the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, and the apostle John was known very well by all of these churches. Moreover, they would have anticipated the letter that would be coming. They would have heard about the previous letters that had been read to some of the other churches, so they knew that something was going to be said specifically from the Lord through his apostle John to them. And so now it is their turn.

Imagine, now, that you are the pastor at the Church at Thyatira, and you stand up and begin to read this letter publicly.

Notice beginning at verse 18. “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this.”⁷

My, what a startling introduction. He doesn’t refer to himself as the Son of Man, a term that he often used emphasizing his humanity, his humiliation, his suffering, his sympathy as our great high priest. But he begins with a self-identification of himself as the Son of God. Please understand, this is a title. It is not merely a figurative description of his character as in the introductions to the other churches. Think of the contrast here. This is not Apollo, the son of Zeus. This is not Caesar as Lord. This is the Son of God writing to you, emphasizing the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, was this not the confession of Peter in Matthew 16 in response to the Lord’s question to the disciples when the Lord said “But who do you say that I am?”⁸ And Simon Peter had answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”⁹

Is this not the confession of all true believers? In Romans 10 and verse nine we read, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”¹⁰

This title would leave absolutely no question as to the divine nature of the one who now addresses them, the one who they had supposedly confessed as Lord.

Now, because the Lord quotes Psalm chapter two and verses seven through nine here in verses 26 and 27 of this text, undoubtedly his use of the phrase, “The Son of God,” here in verse 18 is an allusion to that great messianic psalm in Psalm two. You will recall there in that psalm in verse two, “The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers

⁷ Revelation 2:18.

⁸ Matthew 16:15.

⁹ See Matthew 16:16.

¹⁰ Romans 10:9.

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take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed,”¹¹ there a reference to Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then later the psalmist says in verse 12, “Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”¹²

I have to think as a pastor, as I read this letter and knew that I would have to read it to my church, even with this very first phrase, “the Son of God,” especially knowing all the rest that is going to come in this letter from the Lord; I would be thinking, “I know where I am going to go for my text after I read this letter. I am going to go to Psalm two among other passages.” I would also take them to Luke 6:46. Jesus says, “And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”¹³

So the Lord is going to confront them on this very issue, on the issue of the Lordship of Christ. Are you a slave of the master or not? Jesus said in Luke 16:13, “No [slave] can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other.”¹⁴

You see, dear friends, right from the get go the Lord is going to confront them at the very core of their wickedness, namely, a failure to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is basically going to say to them, “Are you going to serve Christ or your flesh? Are you going to serve Christ or self? Are you going to fear God or are you going to fear man?” That is the core here.

So the Lord cuts right to the chase by reminding them of who he is, the Son of God, a frightening and solemn introduction. I think of Peter’s words in 1 Peter 4:17, “It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God.”¹⁵

But he doesn’t stop there. Notice in verse 18 he goes on to describe himself, “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire.”¹⁶

Now, this description reaches back to chapter one verse 14 when the glorified Lord appeared to John. This is a figurative expression rooted in Daniel 10 and verse six, one that conveys the fierceness of his wrath against his enemies, one that conveys the idea of his penetrating eyes being able to see everything, the eyes of divine omniscience that like a laser is able to see through every lie and expose every sin. This is who is writing now, the Son of God who can see all things. As Hebrews 4:13 says, “There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”¹⁷

¹¹ Psalm 2:2.

¹² Psalm 2:12.

¹³ Luke 6:46.

¹⁴ Luke 16:13.

¹⁵ 1 Peter 4:17.

¹⁶ Revelation 2:18.

¹⁷ Hebrews 4:13.

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The Spirit of God goes on here and says, “And His feet are like burnished bronze.”¹⁸ You will recall that this symbolizes two things. One, the absolute authority of a king who sits upon a throne and also the idea of movement, the idea—as we have seen in other passages in the New Testament—of Christ moving, his oversight, his involvement in his Church.

And so here the Son of God reminds them of his deity, his omniscience, his authority to judge sin as a holy, as a sovereign king, as the Lord of the church, one who moves through the church to purify them and call them to repentance so that he can bless them. Jesus is the one who does this even in this church as in all true churches.

So this is an introduction that should sober every believer. God is serious, I hope you understand, about the spotless holy purity of his bride, the Church, that he purchased with his very blood.

Now we come to the heart of his message to them. I have divided it into four parts. We will see the praise, the problem, the punishment and the promise that the Lord gives them.

First of all the praise, verse 19: “I know your deeds,”¹⁹ he says, “and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”²⁰

Don’t you know there was a sigh of relief that went through the body there that morning that this was read, at least for some? We can see here an exemplary church in some areas. This is the first church to be commended for its love. Indeed, they somehow must have manifested the supreme love for God and for their neighbor. And also they are praised for their faith, which is typically the counterpart of love that is described in the New Testament. You see them mentioned together often.

Faith, or it could be translated, “faithfulness,” that speaks of their conviction of the truth of the gospel, their trust in Christ as Savior and an unwavering steadfast determination to trust God in the midst of persecution. So obviously there were some there that held to these things. And, of course, from the well of faith and love will inevitably flow the refreshing waters of service and perseverance. Service refers to the voluntary ministry of the people to those in need, and perseverance refers to enduring persecution in the midst of great adversity.

Moreover, notice, the Lord acknowledges that these virtues have actually grown over time. He says, “Your deeds of late are greater than at first.”²¹ So this was an exemplary church in some areas.

¹⁸ Revelation 2:18.

¹⁹ Revelation 2:19.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

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Verse 20: “But I have this against you...”²²

Now I can just imagine, suddenly the heads stop nodding. The smiles begin to melt away and some, no doubt, hold their breath, bracing themselves for what is about to come.

If I can pause here for a minute, folks, it occurs to me that we would all do well to use this word “but” more often when we examine ourselves. You know, it is easy to allow our virtues to utterly eclipse our vices. We all have 20/20 vision when it comes to assessing our strengths, but we, typically, are blind as bats when it comes to seeing our weaknesses.

Beloved, learn to be suspect of your own spirituality. View your life through the lens of Scripture, not through your own biased, myopic spiritual vision. And, if I can put it this way, learn to measure your life by the standard of the Word of God, not your own standard, not the standard of the culture or of even your church, but God’s standard.

If you can think of it this way, stand often in the presence of a holy God as you submit yourself to the blazing light of his Word, and in that holy light you will say as Isaiah did in Isaiah six, “Woe is me for I am disintegrating, for I am a man of unclean lips.”²³

So we move from the *praise* to the *problem*.

Verse 20: “But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray.”²⁴ Literally, my *doulos* (doo’-los), my slaves, the ones that I have chosen and purchased with my blood. She is leading them away. And you are tolerating her, “so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”²⁵

Well, so much for the virtue of tolerance in such a situation.

And I have to smile. So much for being seeker sensitive. If there were any seekers in that service that day, they were suddenly looking for an exit. They suddenly realized that they need to be excused. They left the stove on or something. They want to get out of there. You could have heard a pin drop by now.

He says, “You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess.”²⁶

Now, everyone in that church knew who this woman was including, obviously, this lady and her followers. She was the resident prophetess. And Jezebel would have not been her literal name, but a pseudonym that the Lord uses to describe this woman who had such

²² Revelation 2:20.

²³ See Isaiah 6:5.

²⁴ Revelation 2:20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

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influence on the church, the same kind of influence as her Old Testament counterpart Jezebel.

May I remind you of who Jezebel was? In the Old Testament she was the Phoenician wife of King Ahab the daughter of Ehtbaal, King of the Sidonians. Scripture records that as a result of her evil influences over her spineless, pathetic husband, Ahab, according to 1 Kings 16:33, “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”²⁷

As you read the history of Jezebel you will quickly discover that she tried to mix the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the pagan idol Baal and the goddess Asherah, worship that included engaging in immorality as well as sorcery. And ultimately she wanted to eliminate the worship of the Lord altogether. And that is always the ultimate goal of any kind of ecumenical movement because, dear friends, Christianity mixes with absolutely nothing.

In 2 Kings 9:22 we read how Jezebel was described as a harlot as well as a witch because she consulted with demonic forces. And throughout Scripture we see the figure of harlotry used to express religious infidelity. We read in the Old Testament that she killed most of the prophets of Israel. She tried to kill Elijah and because of her pernicious influence in Israel, idolatry spread through the land like a brushfire.

She was so exceedingly evil that God through the prophet Elijah prophesied that her vile life would come to an end in a very violent manner and that the dogs would eat her body. And eventually, if you read in 2 Kings nine, you will read that she was cast down from an upper story window and that her blood splattered against the wall and against the horses that were below, and that the horses trampled her body, the dogs ate her flesh and they found only her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands. And then, consistent with the prophecy, in verse 37 of 2 Kings nine we read, “the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel, so they cannot say, ‘This is Jezebel.’”²⁸

So, friends, the name Jezebel became the symbol for cunning corruption and the personification of immorality and idolatry. That is why you don’t find too many little girls named Jezebel.

In verse 20 we read, “But... you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess.”²⁹

Now, you must understand. Here we have a prominent, influential, self-appointed “prophetess,” who would claim that she received special revelation from God, a woman who had obviously elevated herself to a position of authority in the church as a divinely appointed teacher.

²⁷ 1 Kings 16:33.

²⁸ 2 Kings 9:37.

²⁹ Revelation 2:20.

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Not only is this a clear violation of Scripture that prohibits women from preaching and teaching and having authority in the church, as we read in 1 Timothy 2:12 and other passages, but, worse yet, she was teaching blatant heresy. Also, it is fascinating as we study the Lord's rebuke to the Church at Pergamum, we see here that at Thyatira it is even worse. At Pergamum the Lord said, "*You have there* some who hold to false doctrine."³⁰ But the verb is much stronger here at Thyatira. It says, "*You tolerate* the woman Jezebel."³¹ This implies a settled acceptance, a tolerance of evil that would allow it to actually flourish in the church. This is incomprehensible.

He goes on in verse 20: "And she teaches and leads My bond-servants,"³² again, literally my slaves, "astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."³³

Now we don't know specifically what we... what she taught, but given the context of the history and some of the things that are said and the close relationship that Thyatira had with Pergamum, no doubt she was teaching some variation of what the Nicolaitans taught, and perhaps she also espoused some of the popular Greek philosophy of that day. We call it philosophical dualism. You will recall that that is where the Greeks thought that there was a difference between the material and the immaterial part of the body, the immaterial (or spirit) was good, the material part of the body was evil. And so the material part (the flesh or what would be called the body) was something that you just go ahead and put up with. It didn't matter what you did with your body because what was really important was the immaterial part or the spirit.

Of course we know as we read earlier today our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So what she taught would have gone something like this: "Listen, my fellow Christians, God understands what we are dealing with here and he understands the types of passions that we have within our body. I mean, after all, he gave us those passions. And he doesn't want us to be some kind of outcast and be offensive to the people that we live with and that we work with. And so it is ok to participate with them as you come together in the festivals at the guild feasts. After all, you don't want to lose your job. If you did that, how could we support the church? You don't want to be ridiculed and be considered as an outcast of society because if we did that we would never have an effective witness for Christ. And so it is ok to participate in these things. God understands all of this. Moreover, grace covers it all."

Well, this should be appalling to any Christian, but to think that somebody would actually claim divine authority and lead God's people into sin, that is frightening. And yet we see it all the time. All you have to do is turn on the television. You will see it on most every station, self-appointed teachers and preaches, both men and women, claiming that they

³⁰ See Revelation 2:14.

³¹ Revelation 2:20.

³² Revelation 2:20.

³³ Ibid.

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received special revelation from God, charlatans that lead people into all manner of deception.

Did you ever wonder what God thinks of this? Well, there are many passages that describe what he thinks. And I think especially of Matthew 18 and verse six where Jesus said:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”³⁴

Now go with me, once again, to that service where this letter is read. Imagine the look on this woman’s face. You would think that there would be a look of brokenness. But, friends, I assure you—based on what we are about to read and study—that was not the case. There was not brokenness, but bitterness.

Over the years I have confronted a number of false teachers and very, very, very seldom have I ever experienced any of them broken over their sin. Instead, they become bitter and even violent.

Verse 21: “And I gave her time to repent,”³⁵ the Lord says, “and she does not want to repent of her immorality.”³⁶ She does not want to repent. I gave her time. She does not want to repent of her immorality.

As we look at this grammatically we see that the durative force of the present tense verb conveys the idea that she *still* does not wish to repent of her immorality. It is a continuous thing, immorality, *porneias* (por-ni’-as) in the original language. We get our word pornography from that. And this describes her personal, her own personal fornication as she participated in the immoral excesses of these guild festivals.

But, friends, notice the mercy and grace of God. He says, “I gave her time to repent.”³⁷

No doubt the apostle John was the one who had confronted her during his ministry in that region just prior to his exile to Patmos. But she refused to repent. She was not repentant. She was indignant.

So we move from the *praise* and the *problem*, thirdly, to the *punishment*, verse 22. “Behold, I will cast her upon a bed...”³⁸ And then in italics, “of sickness.”³⁹ The reason

³⁴ Matthew 17:6-7.

³⁵ Revelation 2:21.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Revelation 2:22.

³⁹ Ibid.

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it is in italics is because it is not in the original manuscript, but it is a phrase that was supplied as conjecture by the translators.

But this describes far more than the punishment of physical sickness that God at times uses to chasten believers, because obviously this woman was not a believer. In fact, the term *klinen* (klee'-nayn) translated "bed" should be understood, I believe, figuratively here as it is in numerous other passages in Scripture where it is emblematic of death and even hell, the final resting place of all those who refuse to repent.

In fact, this is similar to the language that God used in Isaiah 14:11. He says, "Your pomp and the music of your harps have been brought down to Sheol; Maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you, and worms are your covering."⁴⁰ This was a description of the judgment of the final Babylon at the end of the great tribulation just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom; including the judgment—according to Revelation 17:5—of, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."⁴¹

And so here I believe God promises literally to kill this woman because of the hardness of her heart. At this point I would imagine she gets up and stomps out of the service. What about her followers? If you were a follower of this woman, by now I think you would be fidgeting seriously, horrified. Here is what the Lord went on to say. "And [I will cast] those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."⁴²

Oh, thank God for that last phrase. Don't you know there was a sigh of relief? "Unless we repent of our deeds . . . otherwise he is going to cast us into great tribulation," a reference to some undisclosed form of profound misery, and yet an act of mercy designed to bring them to repentance.

Undoubtedly some that were participating in this were truly believers, but most were not. Please understand, true Christians can fall into sexual immorality. We read about that in 1 Corinthians six, for example. And they can even fall into immorality as we read in 1 Corinthians 10. But because of these things, the Lord who loves his own will bring about chastening to his children—sometimes through great and profound tribulation. Why? Because as we read in Hebrews 12:6, "Those whom the Lord loves he disciplines."⁴³

In verse 23 he says, "And I will kill her children with pestilence."⁴⁴ In other words, unless they repent I will kill her children with pestilence. Pestilence is *thanato* (than'-at-oh). It is translated "death," but also used to translate the Hebrew word for pestilence in the Septuagint. In fact, this is the same phrase that is found in Ezekiel 33 in verse 27 in

⁴⁰ Isaiah 14:11.

⁴¹ Revelation 17:5.

⁴² Revelation 2:22.

⁴³ Hebrews 12:6.

⁴⁴ Revelation 2:23.

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the Greek translation of the Old Testament. And there it conveys, again, physical death through pestilence.

And so the Lord here is no doubt referring to some undisclosed plague or disease that will fall upon these people unless they repent. What a tragic fate of Jezebel's spiritual children. These are not her biological children, but her offspring, her spiritual progeny who follow her licentious lifestyle.

And notice God's purpose in all of this. In verse 23 he goes on to say, "And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."⁴⁵

Indeed, hasn't Jesus told us that you will know them by their fruits? A sobering reminder of the danger of self-deception, those who play Christian, those who play church, those who think they belong to Christ, but don't. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew seven that "not all who call me Lord will enter the kingdom."⁴⁶

Beloved, if I can remind you, once again, it is our works, not our profession that validates the genuineness of our faith. James said, "I will show you my faith by my works"⁴⁷ James 2:18. Now this should cause the hypocrites in that church and in this church and in every church to tremble, knowing that God sees all of our works, even though others may not. But it should also bring great comfort and encouragement to true believers because even with true believers, obviously he sees all of our works. He knows our heart. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:27 that some day, "he Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then repay every man according to his deeds."⁴⁸

This whole scene is reminiscent of God's public slaying of Ananias and Sapphira, is it not? Beloved, I hope you can see how serious the Lord is regarding the purity of life and doctrine in his Church. And, again, it is no wonder that the first detailed instructions Jesus gave to the Church was that found in Matthew 18 regarding how to discipline sin.

Beloved, a church that does not discipline sin is like a body that does not have an immune system. It will soon die spiritually, though it may live on in the flesh by the power of the enemy. So the Lord does this so, "all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts"⁴⁹ Not only would the seven churches who received this revelation know of God's judgment about this woman and her unrepentant followers, but also the Church universal from that day all the way through the church age until the Lord comes and takes us to be with him.

⁴⁵ Revelation 2:23.

⁴⁶ See Matthew 7:23.

⁴⁷ James 2:18.

⁴⁸ See Matthew 16:27.

⁴⁹ Revelation 2:23.

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And, finally, we see the *promise* that he gives to the remnant of the faithful saints that are there in that church, verse 24: “But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them.”⁵⁰

Let me pause here for a second. “The deep things of Satan,”⁵¹ that would have been a reference to the Gnostics of that day and other pagan religious sects that were known to use the expression, “the deep things,” to boast of their superior knowledge of spiritual matters, especially over Christians.

You see, these people believed, as many people do today, that they knew the hidden things of God beyond the ability of man to understand, beyond mortal scrutiny, that they had the superior morality, that they had the ascended, esoteric knowledge that is reserved only for the enlightened elite. And God calls this for what it is. He says, “This is the deep things all right. It is the deep things of Satan.”

And he says to them, “I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.”⁵² The idea here is: “I am not going to place any other burden on you than having to deal with these people through Church discipline and remain pure, despite their clever deceptions that are so incredibly appealing to your flesh that try to seduce you to do evil.”

Verse 25: “Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.”⁵³ One translator puts it this way. “I put upon you none other weighty admonition than this. Hold fast what you have.”

Then in verse 26 the Lord says, “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS.”⁵⁴ And, again, this is derived from the messianic psalm, Psalm two, verses seven through nine where we have a description of Christ’s earthly rule over the nations during the messianic kingdom. And here the promise to have authority over the nations that is ultimately the Lord’s is also extended to the followers of Messiah who will share in his millennial rule. This is a prophetic theme reiterated, for example, in chapter one and verse six of Revelation where we are described as ruling as “priests,” and other passages including 1 Corinthians 6:2 where we are told that “the saints will judge the world.”⁵⁵

So the Lord speaks to these overcomers. He says:

⁵⁰ Revelation 2:24.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Revelation 2:25.

⁵⁴ Revelation 2:26.

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:2.

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TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father.⁵⁶

What an amazing promise, to know that the Lord is someday going to rule in such a way, and that he will also delegate authority to each of us who he has saved by his grace.

But there is more in verse 28. He says, “And I will give him the morning star.”⁵⁷ The “morning star” is a title that the Lord uses of himself in Revelation 22:16 where he is described as, “the bright morning star.”⁵⁸ But, frankly, I believe it would be odd for the Lord to be referring to himself in such a way here in this context of millennial blessing.

While I can't be certain, I would not be dogmatic about what I am about to tell you, but I believe that it is better to understand “the morning star” as a symbolic reference to the promise of immortal life, the brilliant life of immortal light that will blaze forth in the messianic kingdom, because that is consistent with the context, as well as some other passages. In other words, a promise of future glory that would encourage these dear remnant of believers.

And here is why. In Daniel 12 and verse three believers are promised they will have, as part of their reward, the ability to “shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”⁵⁹ And also we know that the star, the *kochav* (ko-kawb') in Hebrew, the blazing forth of light, was a symbol of royalty; we read about this in Numbers 24 verse 17, “A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel.”⁶⁰

We also know that the Greek version of that, the *aster* (as-tare'), the blazing forth which was translated “star” (or really, the blazing forth of his shekinah) was that symbol of royalty that led the king makers from Persia, the magi, to the side of the infant King there in Matthew two.

And so when applied here in verse 28, I believe “the morning star”—which also was thought to be the brightest star, can be applied symbolically as that which blazes forth after the darkness of night, when the Messiah, the glory of the Lord explodes onto the world scene, when he establishes his kingdom in all of his glory and defeats his enemies and restores the kingdom to Israel. And we are all a part of that. In the millennial kingdom we share in this glorious reign.

In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 13 verse 43, “THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Revelation 2:26-27.

⁵⁷ Revelation 2:28.

⁵⁸ Revelation 22:16.

⁵⁹ Daniel 12:3.

⁶⁰ Numbers 24:17.

⁶¹ Matthew 13:43.

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So the Thyatiran overcomers received two promises: they are going to join Christ in defeating his enemies, and they will reign with him in the brightness of millennial glory having been given “the morning star.”

Well, what a blessing this must have been to the faithful remnant, but also what a sobering call to repentance for those who were living in rebellion.

Verse 29. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”⁶² Dear friends, may we never be guilty of being tolerant of anything that the Lord abhors.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank you for these eternal truths. We pray that by the power of your Spirit we would be able to apply them to our lives individually as well as corporately here in our church at Calvary Bible Church and, likewise, in all churches that endeavor to follow you .

Lord, again, I would pray that the convicting truths of the gospel will penetrate every heart within the range of my voice. Lord, may those who do not know you truly as Savior, who have never truly confessed you as their Lord and master, may those people today see their need to humble themselves before you, to confess their sin, to confess Christ as Savior and Lord, to believe that he died for their sins and was raised again the third day and to believe that he is coming again in judgment for those who do not believe and trust in him, but also as the Lord and Savior of those who do.

So we commit these words to you that you might be glorified in and through them. I pray all of this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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⁶² Revelation 2:29.