

Thyatira: The Tolerant Church

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, for a short while this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. Revelation chapter 2.

Revelation chapter 2. And if we read again at verse 18. Revelation chapter 2 at verse 18. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patience, patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality, and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

I gave her time to repent, 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.

[1 : 30] And so on. What would Jesus say about our church? We mentioned before that that's a question we should be asking ourselves as we consider the contents of these letters to the seven churches in Asia.

What would Jesus say about our church? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church? You know, I always think it's a very searching and a very sobering question.

What would Jesus say about the spiritual temperament and even the spiritual temperature of our congregation, of Barba's free church? Would Jesus commend us or would he condemn us? Would Jesus comfort us or would Jesus correct us? Would Jesus console us or would Jesus critique us? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church?

Because as we said before, a healthy gospel church, it's not about figures. It's about faith. It's not about quantity. It's about quality. It's not about goals. It's about godliness.

[2 : 34] It's not about popularity. It's about preaching, pastoring, and praying. A healthy gospel church is focused and fixated with Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

And that's what John has been given, this revelation, this apocalypse, this apocalypse where God is lifting the lid and pulling back the curtain.

He's lifting the veil to reveal Jesus Christ as this risen, ruling, and reigning king who is going to return. And this revelation, this apocalypse, as we said many times before, it's for the universal church of Jesus Christ in every century.

It's for every church in every century. Whether you're in the first century when this was first written or the 21st century as we are this evening. Because that's what the seven churches in Asia symbolize.

They symbolize the universal church of Jesus Christ in every century. But the seven churches in Asia, they're not only symbolic, they're also specific. They emphasize and they exemplify to us specific sins and specific struggles and specific stresses and specific strains that the church of Jesus Christ faces and has faced throughout every century.

[3 : 51] And so this evening, as you can see, we're coming to the fourth church. The fourth of seven churches in Asia, which is Thyatira, the tolerant church.

Thyatira was the tolerant church and they were tolerant for the wrong reasons. But we're going to look at this church under our usual two headings. A word of commendation, first of all, and then a word of correction.

So a word of commendation and a word of correction. Jesus gives, first of all, a word of commendation. He says there in verse 18, You remember when we began chapter 2, that we saw that the first church which Jesus addressed was the church in Ephesus.

They were the loveless church. They were the loveless church because they had, although they had this deep history of sound and solid theology, the church in Ephesus, they had become legalistic in their head and loveless in their heart.

Then when we moved, as you can see in the map, 35 miles north from the seaport city of Ephesus up to the next seaport city of Smyrna, we saw that the church in Smyrna was the persecuted church.

[5 : 29] They were persecuted because they refused to concede and confess Kaiser Curios, that Caesar is Lord. Instead, they continued to confess Jesus ho Curios, Jesus is Lord.

Then last time we moved another 60 miles north to this Acropolis city called Pergamos. Pergamos, as we said, it was placed and perched on a high hill.

It was a summit city, but it was also a satanic city because Pergamos, as we studied, we saw that it was home to the seat of Satan or Satan's throne or the place where Satan dwells.

That's where Pergamos was. And Jesus commended the church in Pergamos to stand firm and to stay focused in Satan's city, especially because there were many Christians who were conceding to the world and compromising their Christianity in Satan's city.

But this evening we're now heading about 45 miles southeast towards the city of Thyatira. And although some would claim that Thyatira wasn't actually a city, some would say that it was just a town because Thyatira only had a population of about 25,000 people.

[6 : 50] But what's interesting is that this is the longest letter, the longest letter of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia. And even though you could say that this church or this city was the least important, it was the least important culturally and the least important politically in comparison to the other churches.

But you know, the significant thing about Thyatira was its business. It was a business. It was a business town.

Unlike Ephesus, which was a busy and bustling seaport city, and Smyrna, which boasted of beautiful buildings and this place that reflected Greek culture, or even Pergamos, as we saw before, it had these five large temples in a one-mile radius.

Thyatira was a trade town. It was full of working-class people. If you were good with your hands, you lived in Thyatira. If you were a trade, you worked in Thyatira.

If you wanted an apprenticeship, you moved to Thyatira. Thyatira was a trade town with many tradespeople, many tradesmen and many tradeswomen. There were lots of trades in the town of Thyatira.

[8 : 08] There was bakers, there was bronze workers, there was cobblers, there were weavers, there were tanners, there was dyers, and there was also potters. There were many trades in the trade town.

Of Thyatira. And so Thyatira was this trade town built upon business. It was a trade town that made its money in the marketplace.

And undoubtedly, Thyatira had prospered because of the hard work of these working-class people. But the thing about this trade town of Thyatira was that it had many trade guilds.

In fact, you could say that Thyatira was a trade town that was run or even overrun by trade guilds or trade associations or trade unions. And we've heard a lot about trade unions over the past while, with so many people in the UK going on strike.

Whether it was posties or train and tube drivers or airport staff or doctors or paramedics or teachers. We've heard a lot about trade unions. There have been lots of strikes because of, as you know, the disputes over pay.

[9 : 18] And trade unions are calling for wage rises. They're calling for wage rises to keep up with the rise of inflation. But whether you agree with strikes or not, if you're part of a union that is called a strike, you have to adhere to the rules of the strike.

But that was a problem in the trade town of Thyatira. Because the rules of the trade unions in Thyatira weren't about strikes, but about sexual immorality and idolatry.

In order to trade as a business in the trade town of Thyatira, you had to be part of a trade union. But the trade union always insisted that in order to remain part of the trade union and trade your business, all businesses and all trades in the town of Thyatira must practice sexual immorality and participate in pagan festivals.

All businesses and all trades in the town of Thyatira were to practice sexual immorality and participate in pagan festivals.

And of course, on the surface, for anyone looking in who wasn't part of the business trade, on the surface, being associated with a trade union in the trade town of Thyatira, it seemed something important.

[10 : 49] It seemed something maybe innocent. But all members of these trade unions, they knew that they had to participate in pagan festivals. They had to feast with all the pomp and ceremony.

They had to feast upon food that was sacrificed to idols. And they also had to worship these idols. What was worse was that there were unwritten rules of these trade unions that claimed that in order to attract business to your trade, whether you were a cobbler or a weaver, in order to attract business to your trade and even advance your business, in order to get transactions done and in order to make headway with your business, you had to sleep around.

You had to sleep around with different people in different trades. You had to practice and participate in sexual immorality. And to be honest, you know, in many ways there's nothing new under the sun because it still goes on to this day.

But the issue the church in Thyatira had was that there were Christian tradesmen and Christian tradeswomen. There were Christian businessmen and Christian businesswomen who were being challenged to concede and to compromise their Christianity in order to build their business and to further their cause.

And of course, we know of one particular businesswoman from Thyatira. She built her business selling purple dye. That was Lydia.

[12 : 27] Lydia, as we're told in the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 16, she was a seller of purple dye. And Lydia, as you know, she was converted in Philippi while listening to the apostle Paul.

But when she went back to her hometown of Thyatira, this trade town, she went back with the gospel. And it's often said that Lydia was this influential and instrumental figure who helped to plant the church in Thyatira.

And inevitably, as a businesswoman, Lydia would have been challenged by these trade unions. She would have been confronted by these trade unions.

She would have been told to concede and compromise her Christian witness in order to further her business as this seller of purple.

Now, as far as we know, she didn't compromise. She didn't concede in her Christian witness, which is why Jesus actually commends the church in verse 19. He says, I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

[13 : 44] But as you know, not everyone was as strong and secure in their faith as Lydia was. Because Jesus also knew that there were many Christians in the trade town of Thyatira who were conceding and who were compromising their Christian witness in order to attract custom and in order to advance their business.

Which is why, secondly, Jesus gives this word of correction. So he gives a word of commendation and then a word of correction. A word of correction.

He says there in verse 20, as he said to every other church, but I have this against you. I have this against you that you tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Jesus says, I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman, Jezebel.

As you know, tolerance is a burning issue in our day and generation. With many people, they're often commanding and they're calling for a more tolerant society.

[15 : 12] We need to be a more tolerant society. In fact, there are many businesses and companies who have introduced and implemented what they've called a zero tolerance policy.

A zero tolerance policy when it comes to abuse or hate crime. And these companies, these businesses, they assert and affirm that everyone has the right to live without fear of abuse or hate because of their disability, their gender, their gender identity, their race, their sexuality, their religion, or for any other reason.

Which is completely true. No one should receive hurtful or harmful abuse for any reason. And yet, as you know, is often the case, those who shout the loudest for people to tolerate their views and their lifestyle are often the most intolerant of those who don't tolerate sin.

Those who shout the loudest for people to tolerate their views and lifestyles are often the most intolerant of those who don't tolerate sin. We've seen that over the past few weeks with the race for the position of first minister in Scotland.

Although many of the LGBT plus community push and promote a more tolerant society in Scotland, none of them could tolerate the possibility of a Christian as first minister in Scotland.

[16:44] It is the intolerance of tolerance. And you know, it's this intolerance in a society that seeks and shouts for a tolerant society.

That's what led the American theologian D.A. Carson. He's written a brilliant commentary on John, but D.A. Carson, he wrote a book called *The Intolerance of Tolerance*.

The Intolerance of Tolerance. And you know, it's an interesting book because D.A. Carson, he makes this distinction between the old tolerance and the new tolerance.

And he says, he explains the old tolerance. The old tolerance was, it was when people would tolerate one another's different beliefs and different opinions even after they had a heated discussion and debate.

At the end of it all, they would shake their hands and agree to disagree. But in this age of new tolerance, he says, if someone even questions someone else's belief or opinion, regardless of discussion or debate, then that person is automatically declared intolerant and guilty of hate crimes.

[18:00] That's the world we live in today. We are intolerant of tolerance. It's the intolerance of tolerance. And sadly, the church in Thyatira, they were intolerant.

They were too tolerant. They were too tolerant, too tolerant in this trade town. Because the church in Thyatira didn't discuss, they didn't debate, they didn't even distance themselves from these trade unions.

Instead, they just succumbed to the seduction of sexual immorality and the tolerant teaching of this woman, Jezebel.

They succumbed to the seduction of sexual immorality and the tolerant teaching of Jezebel. And of course, the name Jezebel there, it's mentioned there in verse 20, it's a synonym for someone in the community or in the congregation of Thyatira.

But you know, Jezebel, it's not really the nickname you would want to be given in any town, never mind the trade town of Thyatira. Jezebel, as you know, she was this evil and wicked woman.

[19:13] She was an evil and wicked queen. She's mentioned in the Old Testament. She was married to King Ahab during the period of the prophet Elijah. It's recorded for us in 1 Kings.

But the thing is, when you read the books of Kings, the thing is, as king in Israel, or the role for every king in Israel, but mainly Ahab, he was married to Jezebel.

Ahab's role and Ahab's responsibility as the king in Israel was to exhort and to encourage the people of Israel to worship the Lord. It was Ahab's role and Ahab's responsibility to make sure all of the Lord's people worshipped the one living and through God.

But while being married to this pagan queen Jezebel, that was an impossibility because as soon as they got married, as soon as Ahab and Jezebel got hitched, Jezebel moved in all her idols into Ahab's palace to the point that like it was for the trade town of Thyatira, Jezebel commanded and she made it compulsory that everyone worships Baal.

Everyone was to worship Baal just like this Jezebel commanded and made it compulsory that you practice sexual immorality and you worship the pagan gods.

[20:42] You know in his commentary Joel Beakey he explains this Jezebel figure. He writes as the latter-day Jezebel in Thyatira tried to corrupt the church with the devilish doctrine of the toleration of evil.

Being the spokeswoman history tells us that she taught that the gospel sets us absolutely free from all obligation to keep the law of God.

Jezebel he says had a very long list of things that were non-essential to the law of God whereby you could freely transgress moral boundaries of sexual immorality as well as eat and drink things sacrificed to idols.

Jezebel argued that since we have been saved by grace we can live as we desire. Jezebel argued, this woman Jezebel, that they were tolerating.

She argued that since we have been saved by grace we can live as we desire. And you know this devilish doctrine of Jezebel was similar to the devilish doctrine of the Nicolaitans that the other churches were struggling with because the Nicolaitans they claimed that grace abounds so love

God and live as you please.

[22 : 01] Grace abounds so love God and live as you please. And of course this devilish doctrine of a compromised Christianity it has a theological name.

We call it antinomianism. Antinomianism like many words in the English language it originates from Greek anti without anti means without nomianism from the Greek nomos meaning law so therefore antinomianism is someone who is without law.

They live their life without the law of God having an impact or an influence upon them. They're lawless they're antinomian and as our Bible asserts and affirms lawlessness is sin.

Lawlessness is sin. And we've repeatedly said in our study of the Ten Commandments without rules there's recklessness without laws there's lawlessness without commandments there's chaos. And the thing about this Jezebel woman in Thyatira is that she was reckless she was lawless and she was causing absolute chaos.

[23 : 11] in the church. She was causing chaos in the church. I have this against you says Jesus. You tolerate that woman Jezebel.

But do you know what's worse? That's what really challenged me. What's worse is that some have suggested that this Jezebel figure in the trade town of Thyatira was actually the pastor's wife. was the pastor's wife. Jezebel was married to the minister. We don't know who the pastor in the church of Thyatira was.

We know that the apostle John was the pastor in Ephesus. We know that Polycarp when we studied that church, he was the pastor in Smyrna. Antipas was the pastor in Pergamos.

But we're not told who was the pastor in Thyatira. But we are told who the minister's wife was. this figure, Jezebel. And Jesus says, I have this against you.

[24 : 16] You tolerate that woman, Jezebel. And you know, that description that Jesus gives of Jezebel, it actually explains and emphasizes what Jesus is saying.

Because, as we said, in the Old Testament, the role and responsibility of the king, the role and responsibility of the king in Israel was to pastor the people.

He was the leader of the people. He was to pastor the people. The king was to lead the Lord's people to worship the Lord. And that was King Ahab's pastoral role and responsibility.

But instead, Ahab was this weak and woolly man who left leading the Lord's people to his wife, his wicked wife, Jezebel.

But as you know, Jezebel, she was leading the Lord's people away from worshipping the Lord. She was leading them to worship idols. And that's what was happening in Thyatira.

[25 : 18] It was the pastor's wife who was leading the Lord's people away, or misleading, more accurately, misleading the Lord's people to practice sexual immorality and to participate in pagan festivals.

That woman, Jezebel, was teaching them to concede and to compromise their Christianity. And you know, this is a word of warning to the church.

And it's a word of warning because it ought to remind and reaffirm to us that the pastor's wife is not an office in the church of Jesus Christ. The pastor's wife is not an office in the church of Jesus Christ.

There are only two offices. The office of elder and the office of deacon. Sadly, in a congregation, some congregations, the pastor's wife can often be put in a place of prominence or a place of influence and a place of importance, which biblically is completely wrong.

It's unbiblical, which is why Jesus emphasizes and explains this to the church in Thyatira. Because the pastor's wife is just that.

[26 : 36] She is the pastor's wife. She's not to be given a place of prominence or a place of influence or a place of importance in the church. She's the pastor's wife.

Her role and responsibility is the same as the whole congregation. Her role and responsibility is to love and support the pastor in the work of the gospel.

Her role and responsibility is to serve alongside all the other Christians. Because it's not individuals. There's no I and team. We're working together for the furtherance of God's kingdom and the glory of his name.

So she's not to lead the Lord's people like this wicked woman, Jezebel. No, that's the role and responsibility of the elders. And the deacons and the pastor. It's their responsibility to lead the people.

And you know, maybe I'm putting my head above the parapet when I say this, but you know, I'll say it in a way. I firmly believe, you know, I firmly believe that if we all loved one another and if we all looked out for one another in our congregation and in our community as we should be and if we were all passionate for the Lord and passionate for the lost as we should be and if we were all active and all attentive in our congregations and communities as we should be, then we wouldn't need places and positions of church workers and women's workers and youth workers.

[28 : 17] Personally speaking, I think church workers often cause congregations to become lazy and lethargic in their service to the Lord. And that's often how problems start.

It's certainly how the problems started in the trade town of Thyatira. Which is why Jesus concludes his letter in that closing verse.

He concludes by calling and commanding the church in Thyatira not only to repent of their wrongdoing but also to respond to his warning. He says to them all, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. As we said before, Jesus calls and commands us. He commands us to repent and he commands us to respond.

To respond to what he says. We're to respond to his message to the church because how we hear affects our heart. How we hear affects our heart.

[29 : 27] And the thing about the church in Thyatira, they were a hard-working people but they were tolerating sin. And we're not to tolerate sin.

We're to look to Jesus. We're not to tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. We're to look to the great prophet, the great preacher, the king and head of his church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon him. Therefore, says Jesus, and this is what he's reminded us, that verse was repeated with the end of every church.

He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So Thyatira was the tolerant church.

It was the tolerant church. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, that Thou wouldest teach us from Thy Word, that we might echo the words of the psalmist and say, Show me Thy ways, O Lord.

[30 : 40] Thy path so teach Thou me, and do Thou lead me in Thy truth, wherein my teacher be. We thank Thee that Thy truth is our teacher, that Thy Word comes to us powerfully and sometimes very sharp.

But Lord, we ask that Thou wouldest remind us that there are a God who is and who is in control, one who has set Jesus as the King and Head of His church, and that we are to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Him, that He is in control, He is sovereign, He loved this church and gave Himself for us. Help us then as Thy people, not only to love Jesus, but to love one another and to serve one another and to bear one another's burdens and to do all to the glory of God.

Keep us then, we pray, go before us, we ask, and do us good, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Amen. Now we're going to bring our time to a conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing in Psalm 96. Psalm 96, in the Scottish Psalter, page 358. Psalm 96, we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 6.

[32 : 07] O sing a new song to the Lord, sing all the earth to God, to God sing, bless His name show still, His saving health abroad.

Among the heathen nations, His glory do declare, and unto all the people show His works that wondrous are. Down to the verse marked 6 of Psalm 96, to God's praise.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank Jesus. O good Lord, sing all the earth to God.

To God sing, bless His name, show still His saving help abroad.

Among the heathen nations, its glory do declare.

[33 : 20] And unto all the people show His works and wonders are.

For grace the Lord, and greatly He is to be magnified.

Ye worthy to be feared is He above all God's beside.

For all the gods are idols down, which blinded nations fear.

But our God is the Lord by whom the heavens created were.

[34 : 43] Great honor is before His face, and majesty divine.

Strength is within His holy place, and there doth beauty shine.
Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Phetor Gun Eye