Tolerance: The Church at Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

MPS Jesus the Son of God commands His followers to hold fast the gospel by His authority and for His reward.

OBJ Every person should hold fast by faith to Jesus Christ because of THREE Gospel PATTERNS.

READ Revelation 2:18-29

*“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.*

*19“ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20But 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. 21I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22Behold, 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, 23and I will strike her children dead. 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. 24But 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, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. 25Only hold fast what you have until I come. 26The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27and 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. 28And I will give him the morning star. 29He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’* **Revelation 2:18-29**

INTRO We live in an age that deceives by telling us that tolerance is a virtue. But Jesus tells us something very different, hold fast to what I have given you.

Jesus the Son of God commands His followers to hold fast the gospel by His authority and for His reward.

**Thyatira was not like the first three cities of Asia Minor**. Some 50 miles Southeast of Pergamum, Thyatira was the smallest and least important town of all the seven churches in Revelation. Commentator Leon Morris states, “The longest of the seven letters is written to the church in the smallest and least important town!”[[1]](#footnote-1) This is the most significant introduction to Thyatira. Known for its large number of trade guilds[[2]](#footnote-2), Thyatira’s “economy seems to have emphasized trades and crafts.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Trade guilds were like business networks that functioned to strengthen and expand trade. Guilds, or networks, met regularly for common meals. These meals were probably dedicated to pagan deities, serving meat sacrificed to idols, and even followed by pagan rituals which were almost always an indulgence in some form of sexual immorality. “It would be nearly impossible for a citizen to participate in trade and industry without membership in the appropriate guild, and the question naturally arose whether a Christian could properly participate in such meals.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Guilds controlled the trade, and anyone that wanted to do well had to be part of a guild, so it is not difficult to understand the pressure people were under.

**The church at Thyatira is praised for good works**. Deeds of love, faith, service, and with patient endurance, they knew how to work. And through their good works there was obvious growth in the church. But their good works do not dismiss Jesus’ charge against them. They tolerate a woman that calls herself a prophetess and taught and seduced people into immorality and idolatry. John’s reference to “Jezebel” was not to identify the woman by name, but remind the church that her tactics were already known to them, from King Ahab’s queen in the Old Testament.(1 Kings 16:31) So, the problem was very similar as in the other cities, but the distinctive guilt is how they were introduced to it; the church tolerated this lady among them and did nothing about it. She refused to repent, even though Jesus gave her time and opportunity. So instead of her bed of sexual immorality, Jesus says he will throw her onto a sickbed. For those who indulge with her, instead of pleasure they will have great tribulation. And finally, for her “children”, a reference to her most loyal followers, they will be struck dead. The Son of God will not tolerate false worship, immorality nor idolatry, and He warns His people that they are to not tolerate it either.

Jesus tells the church who are facing severe pressure, “*Only hold fast what you have until I come*.”.25 What do they have? This is not a reference to possessions, but to faith in Jesus that possesses them and faithfulness in the way they live for Him. Not everyone in the church has tolerated to indulge immorality and idolatry to learn the “deep things of Satan”. And for any who had, they could and should repent. To those who hold fast, Jesus promises His authority to rule over the nations. Jesus quotes from Psalm 2(.8-9) to declare that the One in whom they trust is the eternal King, and He will conquer. In His conquering, they will overcome to rule with Him by His authority. Those who hold fast will be eternally rewarded with the morning star[[5]](#footnote-5), who is Jesus, to rule with Him.

God is not impressed with size nor wowed by what we accomplish for Him. Jesus calls His people to faithfulness, no matter where you live, no matter what you are faced with, and no matter how your setting is measured by worldly standards. Jesus cares about all His people, and about their holding fast to the gospel for faithfulness in witness to His Kingdom.

Jesus the Son of God commands His followers to hold fast the gospel by His authority and for His reward.

TRANS Whereas the church at Pergamum was losing itself by compromise with the culture, the Church at Thyatira was giving itself over by tolerance to false teaching among the church that seduced to immorality and idolatry.

What you tolerate will determine where you set your hope, and influence the hopes of others around you. False teachings seduce the church to stain our good works and spoil our witness (influence for Christ) in the world. The gospel leads Christ-followers forth by Jesus’ authority to make disciples of all nations now, teaching the Truth of His Word to transform lives, and to rule with Him over all nations for eternity. This is the truth we teach and the hope to which Jesus calls us to hold fast!

TRANS Christian, are you tolerating false teaching or holding fast to the gospel?

OBJ **THREE Gospel Contrasts** commends every person to hold fast to Jesus.

**Contrast 1:** Progression of “Jezebel” versus Jesus.

“Jezebel” stands for Satan, and refers to any false teacher or teaching that opposes Jesus and the truth of God’s Word. The teachings of Jezebel are lies that seduce to every form of immorality and idolatry. The falsehoods that Thyatira tolerated were the same as other cities that deceived people to indulge in the practices of worship of false idols. If you want success and victory, worship Athena. If you want fame, worship Dionysus. If you want health and wellbeing, worship Asclepus. If you want power, worship Zeus. If you want peace and security, worship Caesar. Who **doesn’t** want these things? Every false idol used sexual immorality and blood sacrifice, because “sex sells” and religion makes sense to the sinful mind. The very practices of idol worship followed the progression of self-destruction by the darkening and debasing of the mind through sexual immoralityRomans1, and to satisfy the gods by self-mutilation and self-destruction.

Jezebel points to every false idol to satisfy your wants or needs. Jesus comes from God to call you to Himself. By the gospel, Jesus makes alive with God those who are dead in sin; He makes new by removing the old; He transfers to the kingdom of His light those enslaved in the Kingdom of darkness; He renews to transform those deceived by lies. Jesus is the Son of God who came to reveal truth from God as our only hope and help by the sacrifice of Himself.

Jezebel always seduces to subject her followers to eternal judgment. Jesus authorizes His followers to make disciples of all nations now, and rule the nations eternally with Him. Contrast 1 shows the progression of Jezebel who steals, kills, and destroys, versus Jesus who has come to give life abundant and everlasting!John10:10

TRANS The progression of this first pattern leads us to consider the contrast of works and teaching.

**Contrast 2:** The Pattern of works that are produced by teaching.

The trajectory of “works” in the passage reveals the importance of the teaching we believe, and that which we should not tolerate. Jesus says they did many good works, and there was growth in them(.19). This is a good, until these good works get performed absent of faith. When we forget or forsake the gospel, even good works harm our witness because we do them for wrong reasons, to earn God’s favor instead of enjoying His power. Good works done absent of the gospel become “self-righteous deeds” that always end in exhaustion, frustration, and confusion, because you did the right things, but for the wrong reason and with the wrong expected outcome. Jesus warns not to forsake the gospel as motivation in all our good works.

**Next Jesus addresses “*her works*”, referring to Jezebel.**(.22) The work of Jezebel is Satan’s work, produced when people are seduced, a word that means deceived and led astray, by false teaching / teachers. Once the false teaching is embraced, the “*work*” is produced; when people believe the lie they are deceived to practice the immorality and idolatry. Of “*her works*” Jesus says one must repent, which means to avoid the work, participation in the activity, and denounce and oppose the teaching that produces it. So, whether one has yet participated or not, to repent means to identify the work and the teaching that produces it as false and sinful. After telling what will happen to all those who indulge in immorality and idolatry, He says that each person will be judged according to their own works(.23). Jesus warns His church that He is the One who searches mind and heart; He determines by the Truth of His Word what is right and good, and by the gospel supplies the power and strength to produce true good works.

Finally, Jesus says the one who holds fast, to His teaching by the gospel, the one who conquers and keeps His “*works*”, will be given His authority to rule the nations. The work of Jesus now that we are to keep is the work we are authorized for in the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations. Jesus’ words reveal the importance of true and right teachings, and denouncing false teachers, that produce His work because only by sharing the gospel can we make disciples.

**This second contrast highlights the importance for you and I to guard our mind and hearts by the gospel**. A teaching can be any information, lesson, or tenet set forth that invites our hope, answers a question, solves a problem, introduces something new, etc. It may begin as merely a cliché, mantra, or meme, but in whatever form it invites our hope. The problem is this: Jezebel always teaches in a way so that you don’t see the deception but are seduced because you want and desire what it offers. The Christian discerns every teaching by the truth of Jesus Christ in God’s Word, to ensure that it aligns with the gospel. We do this first by considering its progression; “does it point us to Jesus Christ or to some other hope?” We also discern the work a teaching produces in or through us: “does it facilitate or hinder the work of Jesus in us?” Where the teaching does not point us to the Word of God nor strengthen the work of Jesus in us, we denounce and repent of that teaching. Christians never tolerate teaching that is counter to, deters or distracts from, or opposes God’s Word because it always leads to Satan’s work.

This is important for this reason: The teaching you *hold fast* to forms the beliefs that hold you, to fuel the work of your labors that display the witness of your life. Where you tolerate teachings that disagree with or dispute God’s Word, that in any way diminishes or any measure dilutes God’s Word, or anything that deters or distracts from obeying God’s Word, will only serve seduce you into Satan’s work. False teachings do not have to be inherently or outwardly evil to deceive. Very few present themselves in this way. But if the activity of it entangles you such that it deters you from obeying God’s Word, then it is ultimately a false teaching, no matter how innocent or harmless it at first seems. False teaching often engages in the activity of its idea to indulge the enjoyment, and so entangle in its deception, before it divulges the tenets and what it truly produces.

Jesus reveals His whole truth from the beginning, and invites you to immerse your life in the gospel to produce the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,*

*knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain*.” **1 Corinthians 15:58**

The work of Jesus is produced in and through us when the teaching of Jesus is fully embraced by us; He bestows His authority on us to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus gives the power to obey His every command, to walk in the light of His truth, because He satisfied God’s righteous demand for us, so we invite all others to join us in this life with Jesus.

**Contrast 3:** Promised Reward

**The promised reward of “Satan’s works” is not what Jezebel says**. Jesus will judge false teachers / teachings, and all those who follow them, to condemn them to the reality of their own false promise: sickbed, great tribulation, and death. The teaching of Jezebel always promises some “secret sauce”, a secret knowledge or ultimate experience promised by deeper and more full indulgence. Jesus says these are the “*deep things of Satan*”, and those who indulge to practice them will receive the same reward as Satan, eternal punishment and damnation.

But to those who hold fast to the gospel, Jesus will reward with His authority to rule the nations in victory, and to spend eternity with Him as the Morning Star. Jesus, the eternal King, is the reward of the One who trusts in Him. Jesus’ authority now bestowed to make disciples of all nations will one day become His authority to rule all nations with Him.

Friend, what promise are willing to live your life for?

Jesus the Son of God commands His followers to hold fast the gospel by His authority and for His reward.

CLOSE Are you holding fast to the gospel, or tolerating false teaching that opposes Jesus’ work in you?

1. Leon Morris, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc87reus?ref=Bible.Re2.18-29&off=39&ctx=+Thyatira+(2:18%E2%80%9329)%0a~The+longest+of+the+s), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Leon Morris, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc87reus?ref=Bible.Re2.18-29&off=343&ctx=+commercial+centre.+~There+appear+to+have), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 73. Morris notes, “There appear to have been a large number of trade guilds in Thyatira. In fact Sir William Ramsay says ‘more trade-guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city. The inscriptions, though not specially numerous, mention the following: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers and bronze-smiths.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](https://ref.ly/logosres/bbackcom?ref=Bible.Re2.18-29&off=52&ctx=Thyatira%0aThyatira%E2%80%99s+~economy+seems+to+hav) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Re 2:18–29. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. George Eldon Ladd, [*A Commentary on the Revelation of John*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cmmntryrvltnjhn?ref=Bible.Re2.18&off=717&ctx=stians+in+Thyatira.+~It+would+be+nearly+i) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, [Revelation: A Shorter Commentary](https://ref.ly/logosres/rvltnshrtrcmm?ref=Bible.Re2.28-29&off=411&ctx=the+former+passage.+~Therefore%2c+the+morni) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 75. Beale states, “Therefore, the morning star is a symbol associated with the messianic reign which has commenced with Christ’s resurrection.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)