

## The Church of Tolerationism

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The modest city of Thyatira, smallest among the seven singled out by the Lord, somehow garnered the longest letter. Christ presents himself with a blazing and penetrating countenance. His words of commendation to a small segment within church are quickly overwhelmed by strong judgment against the sins of the majority. Christ condemns them for accepting the practices and teachings of one among them whom he calls “Jezebel.” We will take some time this week looking into the story of Jezebel in the Old Testament. We will also uncover the dark-side of taking toleration too far, a concept relevant to society and churches today.



Read Revelation 2:18-29 and answer the following questions.

What are the three descriptions of Christ in our opening scripture, and what do they tell us of about him? (See also Isaiah 63:1-4; Matthew 26:63-64; Rev 14:19-20)

- Son of God:
- Eyes like blazing fire:
- Feet of burnished bronze:

For what does Christ commend the church in Thyatira? Be specific.

What is Christ holding against the church at Thyatira?

## The Second Jezebel

In our last session we learned quite a bit about the original Jezebel. Take a few minutes to review what you have learned about her and the end of her life. While God extended her time to repent, she chose to flagrantly ignore Elijah's warnings. When God's patience came to an end, so did her life. The lives of her descendants (Ahab's offspring) would be cut off as well. He made sure that her influence died with her, and that her death was a warning to all who would follow her ways.



Returning to our passage in Revelation 2:18- 23, answer the following questions in light of what you have learned about the original Jezebel.

From where does Jezebel claim her teaching comes?

What is Jezebel doing to believers in the church and why are her actions so heinous?

How has Christ shown patience with her?

How has she responded to his patience?

Because she shows no signs of repentance, what is the judgment that will come about against her and her followers?

What do you think Christ means in verse 23 when he says, "*I will strike her children dead.*" Think about what a figurative meaning to "children" might be.

Comparing the judgment against this Jezebel with Queen Ahab's Jezebel from the lesson at our last meeting, what are the similarities in God's judgment?

Christ holds not only Jezebel accountable for the immorality that has infiltrated the church. What sin does he hold against the church? (v. 20)

In what ways can tolerance good?



Christ is obviously speaking against a negative form of toleration. Describe toleration that has gone too far.

- How is this form of toleration prevalent in our world and church today?
  
- According to the Bible, what are we to do in the face of such demands for tolerance of immorality when it attacks Biblical teaching within the church?
  - 1 Corinthians 5:9-13
  
  - Ephesians 5:11
  
  - Deuteronomy 13:1- 15

What does Deuteronomy 13:12-15 say about those who lead believers into sin?

Jesus' words in Matthew 18:5-7, while directed at leading children astray, can also signify the leading astray of adults in the church who are still young and immature in their thinking. What does Jesus say in this passage?

Look back to your first question in our homework this week. What does Christ's appearance suggest as to his attitude towards those who choose to follow Jezebel's ways?



Revelation 2:23b-29. In the last portion of our scripture passage, Christ turns his focus towards those whom he had earlier commended, and those who would overcome the extreme tolerance, immorality and idolatry of Jezebel's influence.

According to 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 what are the "*deep things of God*"?

What do you think might be the concept of "*Satan's so-called deep secrets*" and how do they work against the "*deep things of God*"?

To those who have held strong against Jezebel's ways and teachings, what does Christ tell them? What does it mean?

What is Christ's promise to those who stand firm and those who repent of the false teachings and immorality?

What is the morning star and how do you receive it? (See Rev. 22:16, Rev. 21:23-24)

By not only her example, but also her charm and persuasion Jezebel is leading the servants of God down a path of wickedness, doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord. She has subverted the "*deep things of God*" exalting her position within the church and justifying her selfish pleasures and freedom. Jezebel of the Old Testament corrupted Israel by leading God's people into the idol worship dedicated to the Canaanite fertility god Baal and goddess Asherah. Christ draws the parallel of adultery in the worship of false gods. She is teaching and leading his special and chosen people into an adulterous relationship with evil, a behavior utterly repugnant to Christ, the bridegroom of the Church. The judgment that Christ will bring against Jezebel and her followers is one brought about by their own sinful actions. Immorality spreads disease (physical suffering) and heartbreak and lack of trust (emotional suffering). A bed of suffering is a stark contrast with her bed of pleasure, and the sacred marriage bed her teaching defiles. The immorality that she condones and promotes will leave lasting effects of pain and suffering in the lives of all the families who are touched by her behavior. Sexual immorality has tremendous power to destroy families and communities as it destroys the integrity and commitment necessary to healthy relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The one whom Christ refers to as Jezebel calls herself a prophet, claiming her teachings are inspired by God. She promoted what Christ refers to as the deep secrets of Satan. These "deep secrets" may have been false teachings advocated by heretics, or possibly "insights" by so-called believers teaching deeper spiritual life. A popular misconception, still held today, is that grace can be an excuse for immorality. Grace becomes a license for immorality. The grace that saved us from the just penalty of death for our sins is abused in the idea that one can knowingly choose to participate in immorality because grace has preserved him from judgment. A possible heresy that this passage may refer to was the idea of knowing first-hand the strong holds of Satan. It was believed that if one knew and experienced such sinful activities one would know how to combat the temptations in the future. Exploring the strongholds of Satan not only promotes tolerance and participation in activities held evil in God's righteous judgment, it also opens up avenues of spiritual captivity that can lead to despair and loss of faith. In

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<sup>1</sup> NIV Life Application Study Bible Notes; Rev. 2:20

contrast, the “deep things of God” are the very things that rescue us from a life of sin, despair and death. They are the things that allow us to live in freedom and joy in a deep and abiding relationship with Christ and our Heavenly Father.

Christ commends the few in the church who not only refused to tolerate the oppressive pressure and immorality rampant in the city of Thyatira, but also the same pressures of intolerance and immorality that had flooded their church. Christ tells them he won’t burden them with any demands other than to “*only hold on to what you have until I come.*” They were to put all their strength towards standing firm and keeping a tight grasp on what Paul called “the deep things of God.” No doubt this remnant within the church faced much opposition and hatred from Jezebel’s followers. In all likelihood they were accused of being “intolerant” for not accepting new ideas, and for condemning the behaviors of others. Standing for what is righteous and true places a target on the backs of everyone who takes such a stance. God calls us to rebuke (with love) and even remove (when necessary) those among the church who are sinning and leading others astray. In doing so it is like shining a bright light in the darkness. Those in the church who would not tolerate the immoral behavior going on around them were a constant source of light illuminating the wickedness of Jezebel and her followers. Christ encourages these faithful to remain strong and steadfast until judgment comes upon the unrepentant in the church.

Those who have shown themselves to take a stand, shining light on immorality and idolatry, will be appointed positions of authority over the nations. They will rule with the justice, wisdom and knowledge of truth they have shown themselves to possess in their steadfast stand against evil. The promise of the morning star may convey the idea that those who hold forth their lamp, the light of truth and righteousness, in the darkness permeating their church will live to see a new day dawn in the New Creation.<sup>2</sup> In that new creation there is no darkness, all light comes from God Almighty and Christ is his lamp (Rev. 21:23-24).



As you think over this week’s lesson, what does it reveal to you about the dangers of extreme tolerance or “tolerationism”, the pursuit of tolerance at the expense of God’s righteous truth revealed in His Word?

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<sup>2</sup> Gregg, Steve; *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, pg. 72.