

7 Letters to 7 Churches: Thyatira - Revelation 2:18-29

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[0:00] Now, how many of us in the room, when we sense that there's something kind of going wrong in our bodies, well, we just basically kind of ignore it.

We're just kind of like, well, I'll just kind of learn to tolerate that. I can live with it. No big deal. Maybe it will go away. But let's just say that your beloved spouse starts showing symptoms of serious disease.

Husband, you see your wife recognizing the symptoms, but maybe she's ignoring it. For you to love your bride.

You speak. You address these symptoms and perhaps the cause in your bride.

For not to, to ignore it would be unloving. This morning, the risen, radiant, reigning Jesus, the bridegroom of the church, deals with a cancer in the church of Thyatira.

[1:36] Now, if you have not been with us over the last few weeks, we've been working our way through the book of Revelation, and now we find ourselves in chapters 2 and 3.

And chapters 2 and 3 are a collection of letters. Letters, the risen Christ speaks to seven specific churches in what's now modern-day Turkey.

And these seven churches were on a circuitous trade route, and each letter is given to a church one at a time along this route. And this morning, we're in Thyatira.

We've looked at Ephesus, what Jesus had to say to Ephesus. We looked at Smyrna, and last week we looked at Pergamum. Thank you, Billy. And this morning, Jesus has a word to speak to the church in Thyatira.

And with all these letters, the intention is for all the other churches to be listening in and learning. They were all sent at once to these churches.

[2:42] And so Ephesus would have been hearing with interest what Jesus spoke to Thyatira. And we're listening with interest 2,000 years later.

Because the same risen, radiant, and reigning Jesus is speaking. Speaking to us. All these seven letters have a similar structure, which I'm just going to walk us through gradually this morning.

And what you're going to see is Jesus addresses a malignant, metastasized cancer in the church of Thyatira. It's one of compromise, one of spiritual adultery.

And Jesus calls this church to stop the compromise and stop tolerating the compromise and to hold fast. Hold fast.

Because He's the Son of God who sees all and is making His church holy. Holding fast is Christ's prescription for holiness.

[3:51] So would you open up your Bibles if you haven't already? And let's make our way through this ancient letter with very pronounced application today.

So we're going to start by this church that is a trust, Theatira. Now unlike Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, this church was basically kind of a nobody kind of a church.

It was the smallest and most unknown to historians. But what we do know is it wasn't a political kind of hot spot nor an intellectual bastion for the elite.

This was a blue-collar manufacturing town. They had all sorts of what's called trade guilds.

And what a trade guild was was an interesting mix between a trade union, a college fraternity, and a religious cult. So like today, our labor unions, we have carpenter unions, steam fitter unions, we have plumber unions.

[4:57] Back in the day, they had similar trade unions as well. And one scholar, Sir William Ramsey, describes, lists some of these.

Wool workers, linen workers, these are all first century trade guilds in Theatira. Wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers.

If you're familiar with Acts 16, Lydia, who God opens her heart to the gospel in Philippi, she was a trader in a particular dye from Theatira.

Leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, bronze smiths. Theatira was known for the bronze. And shoemakers. I mean, these trade guilds were basically gatherings, unions of workers in a particular craft.

Work together by day, and then party together by night. It was like a college fraternity. Now, I know that not all college fraternities are like that. But these trade guilds, they had these regular feasts and social events that guild members were expected and required to be at.

[6:17] And these things got raucous. They oftentimes culminated in all sorts of sexual immorality going on. Work together by day, party together by night, and you throw in a little worship.

These trade guilds had a god of the guild, a patron deity. And at these feasts these guilds would throw, there would be usually some kind of sacrifice made to a god, and the expectation was, if you're a loyal guild member, you're going to partake in eating of that sacrifice.

Another scholar, his name is William Barclay, writes this. These trade guilds had common meals together. The meal would begin and end with a cup of wine, poured out as a libation and an offering to the gods.

It was, in fact, the heathen grace before and after the meal. Could a Christian join in a ceremony like that? Still further, such a meal would almost certainly follow a sacrifice. The token part of an animal would be offered on the altar.

The meat of it would be given to the worshiper to make a feast for the members of his trade guild. Could a Christian sit and eat meat which had been offered to idols? Could he participate in a meal where the meat had already been offered to Apollo or Artemis or Thryminus, the local god?

[7:40] Still further, this trade guild feast not infrequently degenerated into carousals where drunkenness and immorality were the order of the day. Could a Christian participate in a feast where drunkenness and fornication were the accepted thing?

So here in Thyatira, the challenge of this church was blending in. Blending into the life of the trade guilds.

I mean, it's not like today we don't experience that. I doubt those of you who are working somewhere are regularly confronted with the need to eat a piece of meat sacrificed to an idol. But we haven't changed that much since the first century. There's still gods of the guilds. Oftentimes it's money or fame, and so your business may not be serving Apollo, but it may probably, likely serving another god.

[8:44] And the question is, what are you being tempted to sacrifice on that altar? Maybe it's your family. Maybe it is your morality to compromise in order to blend in.

This church in Thyatira was regularly facing this external challenge to compromise by conforming, by becoming like those around them who did not know Jesus and were living like it.

But Jesus has something to say. We're not to blend in. We're to stand out. We're in the world but not of the world. And now Jesus wants this church at the beginning of this letter to see something about Him.

We're still in verse 18, and we read this. The words of the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. We've looked at the church.

Now look at the Christ. He's the Son of God. This is the only time in the book of Revelation that little phrase is used. The Son of God. And it's interesting because Emperor Domitian would claim that he was the son of Zeus, Son of God.

[10:06] This local god, Therimnus, also claimed to be the son of Zeus. What Jesus is saying is, I am the real Son of God. And these words have bearing on your life.

But there's more. This appeal to this particular title, Son of God, it shows up in Psalm 2.

It's what Eric read this morning to open up our service. It's this son being talked about who has been given the nations as an inheritance. This is the authority of the all-reigning king. And he's going to come back to this in verses 26 and 27. Its book ends this letter. But what you need to see is what else is said, Jesus says.

He has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. These point back to the vision from chapter 1 and verse 14 where Jesus shows himself to John in his brilliant splendor and John drops as though dead.

[11:18] Remember Jesus puts his hand on him and says, Fear not. Well those bronze glowing feet, well they are the feet that will trample down every enemy of the Son of God.

It's just a matter of time. Bronze was connotated with weapons of warfare at this time. He's a warrior king. But what captures me and I'm guessing captures you is those eyes.

Those eyes of flaming fire. Those eyes see all things.

And what this represents is the omniscience of Jesus. He sees all. He knows all. And these eyes just aren't perceptive.

They are purposed to purify. When his eyes fall upon his own, they're intent to bring purity to his own. Fire purifies.

[12:30] And so what we see at the start of this letter is Jesus wanting this church to be very aware that he's the Son of God, burnished bronze feet, eyes of fire, and he's about to speak into this church.

Because there's something wrong with this church. He's going to purify it in his love for this church. Now for us, both individually and corporately, we've got to live in the reality of what we're reading here.

There is nothing that we can hide from our Lord Jesus. There's nothing that we can keep so far away of him that he does not see. His purifying sight is as accurate in penetrating today as it was then.

He has purposed for us as a church to share in his holiness. He wants to purify us out of love for us. He wants us to experience a holy health. Have you ever thought about it this way that God Most High, he is the Holy One in all of the universe and has it ever occurred to you he is also the happiest being in all of the universe?

[13:55] Holiness isn't a drudgery, it is joy. And our God experiences that all the time and he wants us to share in his holiness.

Have you ever been to an eye doctor and you're sitting in her eye doctor chair and she takes a light with that little refracting lens and she shoots her light through that and it goes and shines into the back in the very back of your eyeball, the very back of your retina.

That light penetrates and pierces for your health. Those fire eyes, they're loving eyes.

the fire eyes of Jesus penetrate right now into the depths of the deepest recesses of your being. He sees all. Look at verse 23. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart.

[15:10] It's Jeremiah 17, 9 and 10. It actually starts as I, I am. Ego, Ego. It's a claim to be God.

I search, I see. And he knows something is going on in this particular church. He sees the cancer and he's going to purify it.

We've looked at the church. We've looked at the Christ. Now let's look at his claim. We see that in verse 19. He says, I know. He knows because of those eyes.

He sees all. And that phrase, I know, shows up at the beginning of every one of these seven letters to these seven churches. He knows everything going on in every church including our church.

And notice, he says, I know your works. That would apply to both the God-pleasing good works they're doing as well as the God-grieving works that they're doing.

[16:21] And both are present in this particular church. Now for those of us who hear this and for those of us who are seeking to be obedient to Jesus and all that he's called us to because of who he is, this is actually a comfort to us.

He knows. But for those of us in this room who are walking in disobedience and you know it, these words should not be a comfort. These should make you a little uncomfortable because he sees

everything.

He knows what's going on. But what I want to remind you of is that knowledge is a loving knowledge. His penetrating and purifying gaze is one of love.

He wants good for us and he wants us to share in his holiness. This claim, I know, should ring in your soul.

He sees. And this knowledge turns to commendation.

[17:33] He has something to commend of this church in Theotira. Those eyes see the good in this church. What's God pleasing in them?

And we see that with the words, I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance. Four things. And you can split it into two couples.

Love for Jesus, faith in Jesus and how they get demonstrated. Service to others and the patient endurance of hardship.

I know, Jesus says. I know your love for me. I know your faith in me. I know how you're caring for others. I know you're holding up under pressure.

I know it. I see it. I commend you for it. And then he says in that your latter works exceed the first. Do you see that in verse 19 at the end?

[18:31] Do you know what Jesus is saying? Hey, I'm seeing your growth. You're further down the line than when you started. We don't know how this church was planted. Maybe it was Lydia who came back from Philippi, shared the gospel.

Or maybe it was Paul when he was in Ephesus in the mid-60s. He was there for two years. Maybe he made the trip to Theotira and preached Christ then. We don't know. But what we do know is that they've made progress.

This church is growing. There's a degree of health in this church. Now contrast that with Ephesus in 2.4. But I have this against you that you've abandoned the love you had at first.

Ephesus regressed in their love for Jesus. Theotira was progressing in their love for Jesus. Isn't it good to know that this penetrating and purifying gaze of Jesus, he sees the progress in his people. And may we be like that. May we be a people who are growing in our love for Jesus. May we be a people growing our faith in him.

[19:47] And this works out in our serving of others, in our enduring of hardship. May that be true. That's the commendation. And now the criticism.

Jesus critiques this church. It's in verses 20-23. And it's the hot spot of this letter. He says something really strong to them.

He addresses the cancer in them. He calls them to address it themselves. In verses, verse 20 he says, but I have this against you.

Could you just imagine being in the church and receiving this letter from him? You guys are doing great in these areas, but I've got this against you. And what is it? That you tolerate the woman Jezebel.

That you tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. Self-appointed prophetess.

[20:53] It's not that she was a woman. It's that she was self-appointed. And you tolerate this woman who's a self-appointed prophetess and is teaching.

Doctrine. What Jesus later says, it's the deep things of Satan at the end of verse 24. And not only is she teaching this doctrine, and seducing my servants.

It's misleading. And not just any kind of misleading. It's a seductive misleading. And in that, you've got to hear this. This woman was leading the servants of Jesus away from loving Jesus exclusively with an all-encompassing devotion and leading them away to worshiping other things.

The Bible calls that spiritual adultery. That's the seductive language. She's leading them away. Now, you see the internal problem going on.

Now, you put that in the context of the external problem, these trade guilds, and now you have a woman in the church who is actually permitting Christians to compromise within the trade guilds.

[22:13] That's the problem. She said, it's okay. Okay. It was some kind of distortion of God's grace. It was something in which she was saying, you know what?

In order for you to really experience all that God would have for you, you need to participate in the guilds. It's okay. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He says in Matthew 16, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

It's either or. It's either live for Him or live for everything else. And what this Jezebel was teaching is that you can have it both.

Not either or, both and. You can blend in. He'll be okay. It was cancer to this church.

And Jesus calls this woman Jezebel for a reason. It probably wasn't her first name, really, but this was a real woman in this church. Jezebel refers to a woman back in 1 Kings 16 who married King Ahab who was a major loser king to the nation of Israel.

[23:28] And she caused Israel to follow after Baal and Asherah, foreign gods of the time who were not the true God. This Jezebel in 1 Kings seduced God's people away from their devotion to Yahweh into spiritual adultery with Baal and Asherah.

And so what Jesus is saying, this Jezebel in Theatira is doing pretty much the same thing. She's seducing my people away from me.

Jesus is jealous for our hearts. He's to be our first love. First place.

God's designed us, our hearts uniquely. Each of our hearts has the capacity to live for one thing in an all-encompassing way. One thing.

And Jesus says, that's to be me. We see the seriousness with which our risen Christ deals with this Jezebel in verse 21.

[24:42] I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. It's like he's called her to repent. We're not told how, but he does. And what's striking is she refuses it.

She won't change. She won't turn around, change course. She's going to persist in what she's doing. And so in verse 22, he says, behold.

Look what I'm going to do. Mark this, church. I am going to throw her on a sick bed. That's consequential language.

It's punishment for what she's doing in her lack, her unwilling to repent. You mark it because when it happens, you'll know what's happening.

It's me doing that. And then he says of her lovers, those who commit adultery with her, those who are propagating whatever trash that she's teaching, and those who commit adultery with her, I will throw into great tribulation.

[25:52] I will throw. I will throw. It will make you think of when Jesus throws death and the devil into the lake of fire, judgment. And I will strike her children dead unless they repent of her works.

I mean, these children were those who held onto this teaching, who bought in. Now this isn't a picture of the Jesus who is carrying a little lamb around on his shoulders, is it?

Why is Jesus being so hard? Jesus, what are you doing?

Why are you punishing this Jezebel? Why are you going to cause suffering to her lovers? Why are you going to strike dead those who have embraced this and don't repent?

That seems really strong. Here's why. He loves his church. He loves his church. He loves his church and insists on her exclusive devotion to him.

[27:06] He loves his church so much that he wants her to share in his holiness and so he's addressing a metastasized cancer in this church.

If Pergamum had a little tumor spot, Theatira has a spreading cancer. And what Jesus is doing here is putting to a stop on its spread and then cutting it out because he loves this church.

And you know what's probably almost for me just completely striking is that all those who are trying to seduce his own, he's giving them opportunity to repent.

How's that for mercy? Now let me bring this back to verse 20. Jesus says to this church, but I have this against you that you tolerate that woman Jezebel.

That's the criticism. This church was just standing by indifferent to what this woman is doing. They are permitting this self-appointed prophetess to seduce Christ's bride away from him and he holds the entire church responsible for it.

[28:27] So here we have a church seeing growth in one hand but having a major blind spot in another. And Jesus addresses it. Now, excuse the

mixed metaphor but this entire church he holds responsible for ignoring the cancer of spiritual adultery.

You all tolerate this Jezebel. now what should they have done? What would have been the thing for this church to do instead of tolerating it?

What should they have do? Well, Jesus has words in another part of the Bible in Matthew 18 where Jesus explains the process of how to go about loving someone and confronting them when they sin against you.

And this false teaching is sin against them. She is trying to seduce them away from Jesus. And so if we were in the attire of the time you heard this lady kind of espousing compromise you go up to her and you say privately you know what I don't think that what you're saying is right.

It doesn't sound right. It's not the right response to who Jesus is. And she's like yes so what I'm going to keep on doing it. So then you come back with somebody else and the two of you maybe three say you know what what you're doing is not right.

[29:59] This is hurting the church not helping the church and she says well I don't care I'm going to keep on preaching and then you go and bring in the church bring in the elders and at that point if she's unwilling to repent you kick her out for the health of the church for the good of the church.

we are seeking to safeguard and encourage an exclusive devotion to Jesus at this church and we can't tolerate things that are drawing our focus off him not in anger in love now this raises another kind of a question what are the contemporary cancers of false teaching today that may have infiltrated the church I like to call them false gospels false good news and let me just point to two one briefly another a little bit more there's the false gospel of the prosperity gospel it's the belief that God's will is for everybody to be experiencing growing measures of health and wealth it's not true and it's cancerous it doesn't call us to a sacrificial living for

Jesus but the one I want to encourage you to think about is probably a little bit more delicate it's the false gospel of the therapeutic gospel the therapeutic good news and it's this gospel that is propagated in a lot of therapist offices and pulpits throughout our country here's what this gospel does it seeks to comfort and help people by cutting out words and concepts like sin and disobedience and wrongdoing and the need to repent you can smell it first and what it ends up training people in is self esteem more than self denial now I'll be the first to admit there's a place for counseling a very helpful place for it in so far as that counseling is calling you to follow

Jesus identifying sin as sin calling you to repent where you need to repent helping you live in the good of the gospel this therapeutic gospel is very dangerous if it goes on unidentified it actually trains people in insisting in their own way the question you need to ask is this what does Jesus think about that kind of stuff what does he think about this therapeutic gospel I know it's not necessarily easy to talk about but you must be aware of it because it's seductive it can tickle your ears and lead you away so we must be vigilant about these things now we can't be a church who ignores this kind of stuff or is permissive of these things thinking that they're not a big deal when Jesus sees them as big deals as seductions away from him we must be vigilant now this is quite a criticism of this church that they tolerate this woman

Jezebel and probably some of the most impressive words in it are these 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 you can't take Jesus lightly our God is a consuming fire it's a terrible thing to fall in the hands of the living God you must take to heart what is being said here he sees into your depths and he is intent on purifying you and purifying his church we move from this word of criticism to now a word of correction in verses 24 and 25 he says but to the rest of you in the the teaching as these others hold tell to the teaching of this

[35:17] Jezebel who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan they haven't bought in to you I say I do not lay on any other burden you don't need to know anything else but this verse 25 only hold fast hold fast hold fast what you have until I come and we have to ask hold fast to what contextually we've been talking about holding to false doctrine Jesus is saying no I want you to hold fast to true healthy doctrine the teaching that was handed down from the apostles and there's no greater summary of that than in 1st Corinthians 15 verses 3 and 4 Paul

speaking to the Corinthian church summarizes that which is of first importance I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received that

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures that is what we as a church must be holding on to this is the good news of Jesus Christ revealed in the scriptures and the response is uncompromised devotion to Christ not compromise of Christ this gospel this true gospel is what we must hold fast to and the more familiar you are with this true gospel the more likely we will be able to sniff out false gospels do you know there's a division of the secret service that is devoted to detecting and exposing counterfeit currency and do you know how they train agents to recognize counterfeit currency they train them on the real stuff and so if you are an agent in this division and you are responsible for identifying fake \$100 bills you know what this is going to mean it's going to mean this you're going to know what a \$100 bill a real one tastes like you're going to know what a real \$100 bill it sounds like when you crumple you know what it smells like when it's wet and when it's dry and when it's burning you're going to know its texture its feel all throughout that bill and you're going to see and memorize the details the color the proportion the location of special features you will be so aware of the real stuff that you're able to spot the fake stuff a mile away the primary way we're going to safeguard

Christ the King Church from Jezebel teaching is by being intimately acquainted with Jesus teaching the real stuff the true gospel that's how we are going to combat this cancer that is around us in our culture today this corrective to hold fast to the true gospel we hold fast until he comes did you see that we patiently endure looking towards his promised coming and it's speaking of promise that we move from this corrective to hold fast to now the closing call we see that in verses 26 and 29 we read this the one who conquers or the one who overcomes and who keeps my works until the end to him

I will give authority over the nations and 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 and I will give him the morning star to the one who overcomes to the one who is growing in love who is growing in faith who is growing in service who is growing in the ability to endure hardship who is holding fast to the true gospel until the end to that person Jesus makes two promises to him I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron it's back to Psalm 2 it's back to Psalm 2 where Jesus is saying I am that son of God who has been given authority over all the nations by my father and what he's saying here is that those who overcome who conquer we will reign with him we will be a part of his future reign when he comes and when he conquers we are to overcome now and then we will reign with him then that's a promise for us to bank on second promise is in verse 28 and

I will give him the morning star the morning star is that last and brightest star to come out at night just before the dawn when things are darkest and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus himself calls himself the bright morning star and so what Jesus is actually promising here is himself to us you stay true to me now you don't be seduced you don't compromise or tolerate compromise and I promise myself to you I promise my presence you will see me face to face I will wipe away every tear from your eye it's a picture of hope our bright morning star to which we look forward to in this present darkness night we set our hearts on him the one who gave himself for us this morning we've been soberly reminded of the seduction and the compromise that is out there we're living in modern day trade guilds and what we've been called to is to hold fast to the true gospel and to overcome until the end which you need to think about this particular letter and all these seven letters they're love letters [42:20] Jesus is loving us through this he wants us to share in his holiness and he and he is purposed to do that by way of closing I just want to close with a word of comfort and some direction I've been praying all week that the Holy Spirit will be doing a work in us during the preaching of his word that he would be convicting us of areas of compromise in our life of blending in with the trade guilds if you have been convicted by the Holy Spirit if something very specific and concrete has been brought to your mind as compromise to Christ be encouraged by that that's his kindness to you he's wanting to help you share in his holiness and he is giving you now time to repent and so the call is to

confess to repent to confess your compromise with specificity and concreteness to the risen

Christ and he promises to forgive you if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness it's 1st John 1 9 so we're going to take a couple minutes right now and we're going to take a couple minutes to confess our sin to go before the risen Christ and say God bring to the fore whatever compromises in my heart and then confess it to him and then we'll close the service let's do that now Let menos t bow and make all down ways to come to die not

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.