

Revelation 2:18-29 “Consequences of Compromise”

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Date: 13 September 2026

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! They are commendations for their good works.

That we would learn from the encouragement they get in their suffering. That we'd learn from some of the stinging rebukes and warnings that he gives to his church.

You're going to start to recognize some of the themes in this fourth letter this morning from previous ones. But then we're going to hear some new challenges. As we move this morning to the end of Revelation 2, in the church at Thyatira at verse 18.

This is God's holy word for his holy people made so by Jesus' holy blood.

[1:17] 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 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.

And 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 as your works deserve. But 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.

[2:37] Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers 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.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Imagine this morning that you're a man named Doc, a dentist who just moved to Thyatira, okay?

Imagine, imagine. Immediately you join the local dentist guild because it is the only way that you can be approved to do your job and have connections.

And shortly after you come to the city is the annual Thyatira Dentist Guild feast. It's a big deal and you're loving it. You're mixing and mingling over appetizers.

[3:43] As you talk to people, you're thinking, oh, this is the place I need to be. Everybody I need to know is here. But then you're seated and they begin offering each of the dishes that you're about to be served to Apollo, the patron god of Thyatira.

And everyone there is taking a turn, doing the sacrifices, praying to Apollo. Apollo and it's coming around the table to you. You're confused.

And so you rack your brain. You excuse yourself to use the restroom and you get, of course, your cell phone out. Of course, that's what they would have done. And you realize you have only one Thyatira number in your phone.

It's the man you met at church yesterday. He invited you to come to Bible study that he leads at his house tomorrow. And so you call him up and you tell him about the food being sacrificed to Apollo and you whisper, what do I do?

Don't worry about it, he says. Just say it. Just go along with it. You don't really mean it anyway. And man, God has you there in this city to make money, right?

[5:04] Your family needs it. Hey man, the church needs it. All right, you say. And you're about to hang up and he says, hey doc, you sound pretty uptight.

Let me just tell you, when the women come out, just relax and enjoy yourself, okay? Remember that you're not actually doing anything and your wife never needs to know.

Just have fun. Okay. You sit back down at the table. You missed the sacrifices.

You skipped out on that one. But sure enough, as dinner starts, women come out. Things start to get more debaucherous. And you're unsure. I mean, you would have said no before, but the guy from church, he said it was okay.

He seemed to know. He leads a Bible study. Now imagine you're Sally, okay? Switching stories.

[6:15] You're a freshman at Thyatira University, the fighting Jezebels. Mm-hmm. You don't want to play them next weekend. You're a little nervous.

It's your first week on campus, right? And you're dying to get in with this one sorority, this group of girls that you've always heard about.

They're really cool. They're in. But they're good girls. I mean, even the senior girl leading the college class at church this morning said they were good. And you get to the first party, and you're a little bit uncomfortable as you pass statues of Zeus on your way in.

You kind of look over, and the senior assures you they're just to make sure everyone feels welcome. That's really important, right? Yeah, I guess so. Well, as the night goes on, though, your discomfort returns.

Guys start bidding on girls like it's an auction, and then they are disappearing with them. And your blood pressure's going up. You're desperate. You turn to the senior girl from church, and you say, what do I do?

[7:29] And she says, oh, oh, no. It's just the initiation. It's really no big deal. Just go with it. Once you get in, you'll be glad you did.

It's what we all did. And, you know, it's not what you really mean in your heart. So it really, it means nothing. Plus, once you're in, you can tell them about Jesus.

Something doesn't sound quite right to you, but you're up next. And the senior from the church surely knows better than you do. She says it's okay.

Walk out now. Miss out forever. Feel that tension here? If I do what I think is right, it is definitely going to cost me.

Plus, I don't want to be thought of as judgmental. I mean, aren't we supposed to be loving to people?

Well, Jesus understands, right? Well, Jesus writes to the church in Thyatira.

[8:38] He's going to give you some direction. And he says, look, what you need to know is that I am the true ruler, the son of God.

Not the son of an emperor. I am the one who is really in charge here. In fact, I have eyes like a flame of fire. They see everything.

What you do with your bodies and what's going on in your hearts. In my bronze feet, they're secure. In that pure judgment, unmoved, firm.

I am never wrong. And I'm telling you, Jesus says, you've got some things confused there in your church.

You've allowed compromise to slip in unaddressed. The bottom line that Jesus is about to point out is that compromising our commitment to the truth of Christ is as deadly as losing our love.

[9:47] And we've heard about that. See, Jesus, here's how he does it. He starts by commending the church. This church is doing great things.

There's no question. They have the love, the right heart. They're serving others. Even when it costs them, they are bearing up under suffering.

And y'all, they're growing. They're getting better as it goes. Not getting complacent with what's been done in the past. They're not resting on their laurels.

This is a great church. Remember, the church in Ephesus had done many good things, but they had left their first love. That was Jesus' serious indictment.

In Thyatira, they have the love and the good works. They've kept them both. If you moved to Thyatira for college or to open a dental practice, you would have shown up here on Sunday morning for sure, and you probably would have loved it.

[10:53] In fact, they probably would have invited you back to their Wednesday night church family dinner. They really loved one another. And they loved Jesus.

Praise the Lord, right? We don't get many churches like this. But you see, many churches are known either for their passion for love or for their passion for truth.

And Jesus is reminding us that this is not an either-or situation for His church. It must be a both-and. Jesus is not pleased when we go serve everyone in our community but have no commitment to the good news of Jesus in His Word.

And you know churches like this. At the same time, Jesus is not pleased when we defend the truth vigorously and teach it consistently but never live it for those around us.

And you know churches like that. We need to have both a deep care, love for people and a devoted clarity on truth.

[12:14] In fact, we don't even need to balance. I hate that idea. Balance those two into this more mushy middle. No. No, we must have a passion for both, not a balance of either.

Otherwise, your lack of truth will actually mean you love people very poorly. Or your lack of love will mean no one will listen to your true message.

When you tolerate lack of love or lack of truth in your church, you undermine both of them. That's tough.

Late Pastor Tim Keller says it this way, love without truth is sentimentality. It supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws.

On the other hand, truth without love is harshness. It gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. In contrast to those two, God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are, even calls our sin, sin, and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us.

[13:32] He loves and rescues sinners, right? Right, both of those. The merciful commitment strengthens us to see the truth about ourselves and repent. The conviction and repentance moves us to cling to and rest in God's mercy and grace.

That's how it's supposed to work in Christ's church that's reflecting Him, right? Full of grace and truth. As Paul says to the Ephesians, it's speaking the truth in love that we grow up into Jesus. That's how it happens. But in Thyatira, they've compromised on the truth. How have they done that?

What's going on? Well, there's a woman, Jezebel, almost certainly not her name, who is being tolerated, who's being left alone, who's being allowed a platform in the church.

Jezebel, it's important to know that she's not just everyone who disagrees with you on the color of the carpet, okay? It's not like that. Jezebel comes from the name of a wicked queen in the Old Testament.

[14:53] She married King Ahab, the king of Israel, and she brought with her into God's people the god Baal and the fertility goddess Asherah.

They did, the Bible says, more evil than any other royal couple, and they suffered the consequences. You may recall in their battle with the prophet Elijah, they did not like Elijah, they had God's people famously limping between two opinions, wavering back and forth, worshiping Yahweh, but also bowing down to Baal for their crops and Asherah for their families.

See, Jezebel preached divided loyalties, compromise, selfish idolatry, and she was torn apart by wild beasts as she tore apart God's people.

You do not want to be referred to as Jezebel. Nonetheless, here in Thyatira, they're just allowing such a woman to tear God's people apart again.

Just listen to the description of her. Jezebel calls herself a prophetess. She does that. And she's teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality, to eat food sacrificed to idols.

[16:34] I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Jezebel is self-appointed, right?

She's unrepentant in her false teaching, in her idolatrous living. Wow.

I mean, awful. awful. You might wonder, how did she ever slip by the elders? Well, that's the subtlety of compromise within the church sometimes, isn't it?

Jezebel is all of those awful things that are easy to see, but she's also church-going. She's there. She's Jesus-affirming.

I mean, she affirms everyone. She's culture-engaging. All those good things until in an effort to engage and affirm and love, you throw out the window truth and you compromise the primacy of Jesus.

[17:46] See, one compromise on the truth of God's Word, one step to do what seems right in your own eyes to decide that should be the standard and pretty soon sin drags us away and we didn't start there but here we are now at an idolatrous orgy and we didn't even mean to.

We can miss things like that too. Worldliness sneaks into the church because it's the air we breathe in our culture because it makes sense.

It seems right. Christian author David Wells writes in losing our virtue, worldliness is that system of values which displaces God and His truth from the world and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange.

It starts to make sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. I mean, everybody's doing it even on Sunday even on tests even church people it seems normal but that's not Jesus you're worshipping and bowing down to.

It's Apollo. It's success. It's pleasure. That's not God's design for your sexuality. It's perversion.

[19:24] It's pornography. It's self-love rather than other love. Jezebel would have you believe that you can have it both ways.

You can have both of those things. You can worship Jesus on Sunday but chase money your own way on Monday she says totally fine. You can take your phone to look at your Bible one minute and the next minute on the same phone objectify women or go to youth group but do with your boyfriend what the Bible says do only with your husband.

It seems normal. It's deadly. It's deadly and Jesus wants to warn us against it.

Jesus says that line of thinking that pattern of compromise has deadly consequences. Verse 22 Behold I'll throw her onto a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation unless they repent of her works.

And I'll strike her children dead and all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart and I'll give to each of you as your works deserve. See Jezebel has rejected her chance to repent right?

[20:51] She was no part of it. The teacher at the church has settled on going this way despite calls to repent. but notice those cooperating with her are in big trouble too.

Elders elders everyone in the family should be watching out to guard the church family from false teaching that leads to false living but it is especially our job to watch over the church of Jesus in this way.

We must take it seriously and I'm so glad that we lead with grace here as we engage people we ought to but inside the church while we do that we must also protect the truth and protect the flock from those who would attack.

how does this Jezebel get tolerated? How will we guard Southwood against being a vibrantly alive church that is dragged away to her death by compromising the truth of the gospel as is happening in churches in this city and this country every day?

see that's the second level of warning those complicit with Jezebel but then there's one more group and it's one all of us need to listen carefully to he says all of us need to be careful not to become her children not to become the next generation following her ways because it will be deadly for you too this is dentist doc with his career in the balance this is sorority Sally with her social life in the balance this is each of us considering a compromise and Jesus searches and he sees everything and he says every church should know this that's a strong warning so what do we do am I just supposed to be scared what do I do if I've been compromising if right now

[23:19] I look at my own heart and life and I'm like oh I see it the word here is repent three times that's the solution whether it's received or not in other words maybe repent sounds like a church word to you and you feel like it's a dart being thrown at you no no it's exactly the opposite repent is saying to you don't turn and run from Jesus he sees turn run to Jesus he forgives that's why you can be called to repent see see Jesus wants your heart I want to make sure that I don't miscommunicate with the stories that I told earlier trade guilds were the heart of the economy in Thyatira they were normal right everybody was in them these were everyday groups where compromise could creep in for

Christians who understandably wanted to have successful careers wanted to get along in their community so listen the Bible is not warning you specifically you don't see trade guilds in this letter it's not it's not saying that's where the evil is it's not warning you specifically against professional organizations all PTAs are evil no that's not the message it's it's not saying watch out for sororities the only young people who compromise are in those no please don't hear me saying that it's not even saying all those self appointed teachers who don't have authority you know they're online these days and it's true they quite often make biblical sexuality seem old fashioned and they go off on their own they decide they're enlightened they affirm nearly everything and everyone they're subject to no one but hear me work is good friends are good online teaching can be good it's not those things themselves that

Jesus is warning against it's the divided loyalty that they espouse it's the compromise that they require of you to participate and to get what you finally realize you really long for that that's the thing it's the compromise they sometimes ask you to make that actually reveals something it indicates that in your heart you don't actually trust God to care for you you don't actually believe that God is the one that you most need do you see that that's that's why Jesus is so concerned that's what Jezebel does he doesn't want it happening to his people it's so seductive Jezebel convinces you to follow Jesus keep going to church and something else have it your own way remember food sacrifice to idols sometimes is it's nothing they're not real gods after all right but if you act more loyal to your career than to

Jesus as Lord watch out that's the warning I don't know what following Jesus will look like for Doc the next time the food comes by and it's his turn to offer it to Apollo I mean there's more than one good answer there but keeping Jesus first may cost him when you start to commit adultery for the sake of getting what you long for advancement connections the security that you're not finding in Jesus now you know that you've left Jesus truth to compromise for your desires so I'm not sure what what Sally will do or say to her new friends there's more than one good answer but keeping Jesus first may cost her regardless Jesus is calling your heart back to him today he says repent if you have been compromising and you see that turn from the compromise come back to the one who knows it all yeah he sees it he knows it and yet he has still given his life for you because he loves you come back be forgiven and washed clean and set free to live with him and for him he's not running you off he's drawing you back what about if you're resisting compromise if you're saying pastor

I've been there but I'm really I'm holding fast to Jesus then listen at verse 24 to the rest of you in Thyatira who do not hold this teaching or learned what some call the deep things of Satan to you I say I do not lay on you any other burden only hold fast what you have until I come it's a warning from love for you too hold fast keep it up don't let go of Jesus he's worth it he's coming in love for you so keep resisting hold fast even when you're called intolerant by your neighbors please make sure you're loving in your truth even when people leave your church for one that's nicer even when your kids miss out on opportunities that you can't afford to be involved in hold fast that's going to be hard

[29:36] I don't know what it's going to be in your life but Jesus says hold fast I'm holding you and as with the other letters Jesus then closes with a promise it is really really beautiful here just a couple minutes want to try to give you a picture of it and before the promise don't miss who are among those receiving them who are among those who conquer many of those who conquer are those who compromise and then repent who come back not to their own perfect record what are you coming back to when you repent you're coming back to Jesus remember in all of these letters Jesus is the conqueror and we keep his works till the end listen it's so important to me that you hear me say none of the strong words that you've heard from me or that we've read from

Jesus were meant to shame you to chase you away that's not the intention they're meant to call you home it's a gift to us that Jesus tells us the danger of our sin so that we can not despair but see how much we need our savior he says everyone who hears these words today can be one who conquers it doesn't matter what your track record is you can repent today you can turn to him and that's what it means then you trust the conqueror and you too are one who conquers and receives two great promises here first Jesus will give authority over the nations that we will rule with him the picture is from Psalm 2 of God's king the son on his holy hill you won't be trampled down forever he says even if it costs you today you may be mistreated you may be marginalized today but one day you won't be

I will set all things right and you will rule with me hold fast! then finally I will give him the morning star now the morning star is the one that comes out before dawn just before sunrise so that you know that daylight is coming even if it's still dark at the moment in Revelation chapter 22 Jesus makes it very plain and clear that he himself is the morning star the one who shines in victory so that you can know in the midst of your darkness that your day of light your triumph is coming too so listen he's saying you who suffer you who sacrifice to hold fast to Jesus to cling to his truth and love no matter what it costs you or what you give up you will get

Jesus and he will be worth it in fact you who repent today even for the first time of your compromise you will get Jesus and he will be worth it you may lose career you may lose friends you may lose money but you will never lose Jesus the morning star the first fruits of your resurrection victory the light shining in the darkness that will never be overcome you having trouble remembering that are you in one of those situations or circumstances in your life where you think that sounds good today but I'm not going to be in church tomorrow pastor and it's not going to be quite so clear to me what it looks like Jesus gives you himself today in the present so that you will remember that he has given himself for you in the past on the cross so that you will know that he will give himself to you in the future forever never to be taken away from you that's what he's doing at this table he said it to his disciples this way the night that he was betrayed and he was taken away from them he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as

I ministering in his name give this bread to you and he said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup you proclaim my death in the past now until I come because I am coming friends I want us to slow down for a minute at this table and just marvel at what we're invited to every person who has compromised who has failed who has sinned who has fallen in any way is offered hope not in his performance but in the blood of

[35 : 32] Jesus that washes and cleanses all of us from every sin as it washes us by faith as we look to him for our hope it brings us as it cleanses us into God's holy presence forever can you believe that unholy people like you and me brought clean into God's presence forever if you're willing to trust him and therefore not tolerate sin in your own heart then come and eat with him repent of sin even as you come and come to eat with him but if you're still holding tightly to your sin or maybe maybe you just really don't see any particular need that you have for Jesus you think of him more as a crutch or something that some people need don't come take these elements this morning we invite you to come observe or to stay seated where you are your choice whatever you prefer we urge you though to consider

Jesus his offer of forgiveness and relationship life and purpose and joy forever this is the Jesus who gives his life for you and now offers himself to you if you will turn from sin and trust him let's pray and then we'll celebrate with him together Jesus you sometimes give us really frightening words thank you for that because it calls my heart back to the importance of my relationship with you of living with you thank you for warning me of the dangers thank you for guarding your church because you love her and you don't want any of us to miss out on the joy of fellowship with you of holiness forever in your presence you know without that kind of holiness that we get only from you we'll never see

God so thank you thank you for warning us but Jesus thank you so much more for giving us a way out a way of escape a way of hope and life in your body and blood given for us thank you that we can celebrate that together today use very normal everyday!

elements not to drag us away into compromise but to give us the truth of a God who loves us to strengthen the faith that you've put in our hearts that we might trust you and live with you and for you and not for ourselves do that even now as you meet with us we ask in Jesus name Amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanothersermon.host)