

"The point of an open mind... (like having an open mouth)... is to close it on something solid."

Tolerance is one of today's most coveted virtues. But there are at least three different kinds of tolerance.

First... there is legal tolerance: fighting for the equal rights before the law... of all ethnic and religious minorities. ... Christians should be in the forefront of this campaign.

Second... there is social tolerance... going out of our way to make friends with adherents of other faiths... since they are God's creation who bear his image. This also is a good tolerance.

But... Third... there is intellectual tolerance. ... This is to cultivate a mind so broad and open as to accommodate all views and reject none. This is to forget G. K. Chesterton's understanding that I quoted as we began... that "the purpose of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." ... To open the mind so wide as to keep nothing in it or out of it... is **not** a virtue... it is the vice of the feebleminded. ... As we are about to discover in our passage of study today... it is also a problem that God does not want us to allow in the church.

There is a great need in our time for men and women to be people who are so gripped by the truth of God's Word... that they will challenge falsehood on the basis of what God has spoken. ... We need to be people who understand what God calls the church to do... and who do that without apology to those who want us to pretend that other religions and philosophies are equal and just as truthful.

According to one commentary that I was reading in preparation for this message... seventy-two percent of Americans in the 18-25 age bracket believe there is no such thing as absolute truth. ... This view appears to be shared by over half of those who claim to be born-again Christians. ...

Much of our society has absolutized relativism. They believe that it is an absolute truth – that there are no absolute truths. (How is that for oxymoronic thinking?) ... To them... the only nonnegotiable truth... is that everyone is right - unless someone claims to be. ... For some people today... tolerance for everybody and every thought... is the only real virtue that exists... and intolerance the only sin to exist.

Because of the popularity of tolerance... many non-Christians no longer deny the possibility of miracles... or of Jesus being a way to God. ... But to them the Christian way is only one way (among many)... They bristle at the claim that Jesus is the only true way.

The absolute necessity of faith in Christ for salvation... has become a most uncomfortable position for many Christians to hold today. ... Studies reveal that this remains "the single most socially offensive aspect of Christianity"

There has been a trend toward accepting relativism inside the church for quite some time... and it is likely to become a primary battleground of evangelicalism. ... Among students at "elite" evangelical liberal arts colleges and seminaries... one third believe that other ways of salvation may be possible for those who have never heard of Jesus Christ.

We may disagree with other believers on many issues. (You may not agree with all that I am presenting in this sermon series through the Book of Revelation)... and that is perfectly fine... if your objections are based on Scripture. But we can never be tolerant on the standard of Jesus-is-the-only-way. We must never lack a backbone on matters that directly affect people's salvation.

Here is something that the relativists (who accept Christianity as equal to all religions) never consider. "What kind of heavenly Father would send His Own Son to the cross... if the plan of salvation was actually multiple choice...? Is that a God you could love and trust...?"

We have been studying the Book of Revelation here on Sunday morning... and today we continue with a fourth letter that John was instructed... by Jesus... to write.

John was (in fact)... given a three-fold outline of the book of Revelation that he was told to write... Revelation 1:19 says... "*write therefore the things that you have seen*" (and he had seen the image of Christ standing before him)... "*the things that are*" (in other words the existing church and its entirety through the ages)... But the church will not continue to exist on earth forever... so John was also told to write)... "*and those that are to take place...*" (the events that will occur after the church age... which are the very events of the tribulation... which we will get to in chapter 4 onward...)

The church age in its entirety is represented by seven letters to seven churches. This is the first series of 7 that we come to in Revelation. The number seven represents completeness... and these seven churches

represent the complete history of the church from Pentecost... until the church's end... when we are raptured off this earth.

We have been going through these letters... (one a week)... and seeing a dual fulfillment – that John was addressing specific contemporary situations in each church... current to John's own day... when he penned them... but also (as Old Testament prophecy often did)... they clearly they relate to future events... (and in this case)... seven definite periods of church history... all the way to the final church period (Laodicea.)

We have already studied the letter to the church at Ephesus. This letter parallels the literal church in Ephesus during John's day AND the church period from Pentecost to around 100 A.D. (when the next church age began.) ... Both had patiently endured hardship... defended God's truth against false teachers... worked sacrificially... but eventually only did ministry out of a sense of duty. They had lost their first love for Jesus... and were warned that if they did not repent... Jesus would remove the lampstand (their witness to the world) from among them. ... Today... when we look to the entire region where this church had once thrived... their testimony has been extinguished. It is a Muslim land today.

Last week we studied the letter to the church at Smyrna... which amazingly paralleled the period of church history from 100 A.D. to 312 A.D. ... The Church of Smyrna is the church under persecution. The letter said there would be ten periods of testing... and when the time came from 100 A.D. through 312 A.D. the church had never known (previously... or since then...) such severe persecution. During that time period... 10 separate Roman Emperors tried to extinguish the church. But it eventually ended.

In 312 A.D. Constantine became Emperor... He not only stopped the persecution... he made Christianity very popular... and married the church to the Roman Empire... or the world. John's letter to the church at Pergamum shows an incredible resemblance to the events of church history from 312 to 590 A.D. We studied that last week. ... Pergamum means "married" and this period of church history was a time of unifying itself to world government. The letter to Pergamum addressed an existing sin of accepting the Nicolaitans – those who ruled over the people in the church. During the time of 312 to 590 A.D. the ruling class of priests and bishops was solidified in the church.

In the letter that we come to this morning – the letter to the church at Thyatira... we see even more parallels between this letter and the period of church history that stretches from 590 to 1517.

Thyatira portrays the Church in the Dark Ages... as it was then filled with corruption. The word **Thyatira** comes from two words meaning sacrifice and continual. ... It was during this time that the Church of Rome took off.

There can be little doubt that the Roman sacrifice of the mass is foretold in the name Thyatira... among many other parallels of this letter to this period of church history. ... As the name of each of these seven churches... this is remarkable prophecy. ... (Thyatira means continual sacrifice... and during this period of church history the mass was developed. Every time a Roman Catholic priest celebrates the mass... according to its theology... the Lord Jesus Christ is sacrificed **again**... and not only for the sins of the living... but also for the dead. The doctrine of transubstantiation teaches that priests have the power to turn bread into the actual body of Christ... and

wine into the actual blood of Christ. Therefore, every time mass is kept, the actual body of Christ is offered in sacrifice.

We will see some more incredible matches as we go... but now let's read the letter in its entirety.

### **Revelation 2:18-29**

Thyatira was named by Alexander the Great in commemoration of the birth of his little girl. ... This place is smaller than the first three cities, yet, received the longest letter of all the churches.

It was the headquarters for many ancient guilds... the potters'... tanners'... weavers'... robe makers'... and dyers' guilds. It was the center of the dyeing industry. ... Lydia, the seller of purple... (who in Philippi became Paul's first convert in Europe)... came from here. ... Thyatira was also known for bronze workers... Manufacturers exported brass armor from Thyatira. A coin of Thyatira shows Heph-aes-tus... the divine smith... hammering a helmet on an anvil... with the word "*colibanos*" which means "fine brass."

### **Revelation 2:18**

Our Lord introduced Himself to this church as "*the Son of God*". "As 'the Son of God' He rebukes the church that would degrade Him and keep Him the son of a human mother while exalting *her* above Him as 'the mother of God' and 'the queen of heaven.'" ... Our Lord knows exactly when and where to insist upon His divine prerogative as the Son of God. He would have all usurpers, with their queenly assumptions, know that He is the very

Son of God who alone speaks with supreme and final authority. He would have all men know that they are not dealing with prophets like Moses and Elijah, nor with apostles like Paul and Peter. They are dealing with Deity, with the divine Son of God Himself.

The rise of Roman Catholicism made Jesus popular as "the son of Mary," a position that robs Him of His essential deity and thereby degrades Him. But God had a Son, coeternal and coequal with the Father.

Roman Catholicism teaches those under its power that they must pray to Mary in order to get through to God. This theology is nowhere hinted at in the Scriptures. On the contrary, our Lord taught that the Father was to be approached in the Son's name. ... In Thyatira conditions were foreshadowing Catholicism's efforts to lower the dignity of His name.

"...The Son of God Who has eyes like a flame of fire..." "There is nothing more piercing than flaming fire. Everything yields and melts before it. It penetrates all things, consumes every opposition, sweeps down all obstructions, and presses its way with invincible power. And of this sort are the eyes of Jesus. They look through everything; they pierce through all masks and coverings; they search the remotest recesses; they behold the most hidden things of the soul; and there is no escape from them.

God is not fooled by outer appearances, He sees the inward man. His eyes will search in judgment. They pierce, they penetrate, they commend or condemn. There is absolutely no person or thing that will escape the examination of his eyes of fire.

His feet are like brass, (an image familiar to the citizens of Thyatira)... and brass speaks of Judgment. The brazen altar in the Tabernacle was the place where the sin offering was sacrificed (Ex. 38), and the lever, also of brass, spoke of self-judgment, for here the priests washed their hands and feet as they went in and out of the Holy place. Brass in the Bible is many times seen as a symbol of judgment. The Brazen serpent was a type of the cross where Christ received the judgment of God for our sin. (Num. 21) In judgment He will be victorious over all.

The Lord having just established Himself as a Judge of holiness and judgment now gives His assessment of the work of this church. Thyatira was a working Church.

Jesus commends the church in Thyatira for five good things: (1) "works," (2) "love," (3) "faith," (4) "service," and (5) "patient endurance." And what's more, he tells them, "your latter works exceed the first". They are doing good things, and they're apparently getting better and better in doing good things.

### **Revelation 2:19**

This church was a loving church. Ephesus had left its first love, Thyatira had not. These saints were dependable, reliable. ... They were a dedicated people who did not quit if things got tiring and difficult and inconvenient. They didn't just get involved, they stayed involved, and accomplished their purpose. Patience is needed if we are to be successful. Patience speaks of constancy and continuance. Our Lord praises their patience and determination to continue steadfast in service. They weren't



quitters. They would not look back even in days of severe persecution. The word for "patience" is hupomone. It means "to abide under." We are to abide in Christ when under tribulation. Trials cause our patience to grow and help us mature in Christian character. We are to run our race for Christ with patience.

Their last works were more than the first. ... As a pastor I have observed quite often that type of person who begins a task or a ministry with cheerfulness and enthusiasm... and then comes to a standstill... offering weak excuses for his/her failure. ... But there were believers in Thyatira who were known for their continued progress and increased usefulness. They were neither slipping backward nor standing still... but they were advancing steadily in their Christian course.

How is it with *you*? Is your last state worse than your first? Is your latter end worse than the beginning? Or is your faith growing and your love increasing?

The believers in Thyatira were commended for growing in good deeds. ... We should not only take comfort in gathering for worship... or rejoice when people give their lives to Christ in our church. ... We should also seek to grow in love, faith, and acts of service. ... Because the times are critical, we must spend our days wisely and faithfully.

Have you run out of gas spiritually speaking? Are you really serving the Lord or stuck in the swamp of apathy and unconcern in your Christian life?

Dr. Earl Radmacher (who was president of the Seminary that I attended) would often say, "The person I am becoming today is preparing me for the

person I shall be for all eternity." The person you are today will determine the rewards and responsibilities of tomorrow. Your life now will impact your responsibilities in eternity.

Even though this letter parallels the church period of the Dark Ages... I am certain there will many from that church... who will be in Heaven with us... and because of their dedicated service here on earth... will have great responsibilities...

With this shared belief that Thyatira represents the Roman Catholic Church... Dr. Harry Ironside wrote:

"The Lord gave Rome credit for a great deal that is good. Remember from the seventh century to the present there has been a great deal in the way of good works in the Roman Catholic church that cannot be overlooked. There have been Roman Catholic nuns and monks who have been ready to lay down their lives for the needy and the sick. Centuries before Luther every hospital in western Europe was simply a Roman Catholic monastery or convent. The Lord does not forget all that. Where there is a bit of faith, His love takes note of it all. If there are hearts in the church of Rome that, amid the superstition, reach out to the blessed Lord Himself, He meets them in grace and demonstrates His love to them."

### **Revelation 2:20**

What was wrong at Thyatira...? They were so concerned and thoughtful for the temporal good of others... that they became foolishly tolerant toward matters that are eternal. They developed an optimistic positive thinking that blinded them toward absolute truth.

Nathan did not act this way... he confronted King David ("You are that man!")... Joshua did not act that way... he confronted Achan (and the

ground opened up and swallowed him.) Paul confronted the Apostle Peter publically for not wanting to eat with the Gentiles... and he confronted the church at Corinth – repeatedly for their worldliness. ... But Thyatira was an era of “sweet tolerance.”

The people tolerated evil in the church. That is done so often today. It is often done in the name of love. But you cannot tolerate evil. When evil becomes strong, it will not tolerate righteousness.

Thyatira tolerated a woman who is called Jezebel. ... A good woman is the best thing on earth. Women were last at the cross and first at the open tomb. The church owes a debt to her faithful women which she can never estimate, to say nothing of the debt we owe in our homes to godly wives and mothers. But an evil woman is the most dangerous thing on earth. It is highly significant that so many false religions and modern delusions were begun by prophetesses.

Whoever this Jezebel of Thyatira was, our Lord says that she was a prophetess, she claimed inspiration and some new revelation; she “taught and seduced” Christians to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed unto idols; and she dealt in “deep things of Satan,” some highbrow philosophy from the world of darkness, some “ism” of the devil.

In Thyatira there was something mysterious and high-sounding about it and it appealed to some of the Thyatira Christians just as some present-day isms attract some church members. We have a lot of people who will not believe the plain Word of God but who will fall for any ism with double-jointed words that nobody can pronounce, much less understand.

Jezebel was the heathen wife of Ahab. Ahab under the influence of his wicked wife “*did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.*” (1 Kings 16:33) ) He was an ungodly Jewish king married to an ungodly pagan woman. It was Jezebel who was essentially responsible for establishing pagan worship in Israel. Jezebel led Israel to commit spiritual fornication by worshipping Baal instead of the true God.

Jesus uses Ahab and Jezebel's union as a picture to point out what was happening at Thyatira. Such is the Church that is involved with the pagan practices of false religion and this world. The church, with its rites, its forms, and its ceremonies had formed an ungodly alliance with the pagan world. This is one of the darkest periods of the church's history from the time of Christ to the present time. Jezebel is a symbol of all that is evil and ungodly to this day.

There is no question that, whether Jezebel was a real person or not, she typified an ism (which was a complete "System")... and that "System," I believe... was the "Catholic Church with it's Papal system. (For starters...)

#1. When the "Papal Church" introduced images and pictures into its churches for the people to bow down to... it became idolatrous. ... #2. When it set up its claim that the teaching of the church is equal (and in some cases, superior)... to the Word of God... it assumed the role of "Prophetess." #3. As Jezebel encouraged Israel to practice immorality... the “Catholic Church System” gives encouragement that immorality is permissible... as long as you were baptized as an infant... went to confessional with a priest... say enough “our Father and Hail Mary

prayers... were married in the Catholic church... and had a priest administer last rights over you at your death.

Jezebel was permitted to teach in the church. How often churches have appointed teachers that should never to be allowed to be in the position of a teacher. Unholy character will produce unholy creed and will corrupt people.

Jezebel was crafty and deceived the people in her teaching and by crafty methods built up a following. Sin makes itself attractive to deceive and defile. But no amount of loving and sacrificial works can compensate for tolerance of evil. The church was permitting a false prophetess to influence the people and lead them into compromise.

### **Revelation 2:21**

The Lord Jesus Christ has patiently dealt with this false system for over a thousand years, and there has been no real change down through the centuries in this system. In fact, Rome boasts that she never changes -- *semper idem* (always the same.)

When churches fail to exclude the unrepentant... they bear part of the responsibility for the sins provoked by the Jezebels in their midst. Jesus holds the fact that the Thyatiran church tolerates Jezebel against them. Is He holding the fact that we are tolerating someone like Jezebel against our church? ... If we are tolerating someone like Jezebel... we can be sure that He is holding it against us as a church.

### **Revelation 2:22-23**

I believe that these verses give strong indication that the “Jezebel System of Christianity” will experience... and suffer through the great tribulation... when it comes. The Jezebel System that characterized the Dark Ages period of Church History will still exist... and will go through the tribulation.

But look at our encouragement here... When God's time arrives this will be a just judgment upon those who have so wrongfully treated the true believers of Christ. Yes, indeed, my friends, tribulation is coming, and those who have followed the doctrines of Jezebel will suffer the wrath of God when it arrives.

Let me encourage you to apply what Jesus says here to any fellow believers whom you feel have wronged you and gotten away with it. Jesus will give to them as their works deserve. That's enough. Knowing that Jesus will judge them should enable you to pray for them that they will repent and avoid the treatment they deserve.

### **Revelation 2:24**

Praise God for His faithful servants who refused to follow the theological trends of the day! Praise God for His mercy!

The "deep things" may have been the all the extra-Biblical teachings of the church that only the class of priests were allowed to know. (The priests treated the laity as though they could not understand the deeper truths of church teaching.) ... We should hold tightly to the basics of our Christian faith and view with extreme caution any new teaching that turns us away from the Bible.

## Revelation 2:25-29

Those who are part of the Jezebel System will suffer and go through the tribulation... but those who resist it and hold fast to the basics of the Christian faith... will rule and reign with Christ in the Millennium.

This idea of the saints reigning with Christ is in keeping with the original purpose of God for man. In the Genesis account of the creation of man, the first of the divine injunctions was regal in character. God said, "*Let them have dominion... over all the earth*" (Genesis 1:26.) The failure of the first Adam with reference to his rule over the earth did not mean that man had lost forever his divinely-bestowed dominion. It is to be restored.

### **Daniel 7:18 (ESV)**

*But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'*

### **Luke 12:32 (ESV)**

*"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

### **Romans 8:17 (ESV)**

*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

### **1 Corinthians 6:2-3 (ESV)**

*Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

Jesus never intended for Christians to be losers. The believer is a creature of victory, not defeat. We have the victory because Jesus Christ won it for us.

Observe the phrase "**my works**," in verse 26... which is in contrast with "**your works**" seen in verse 19. ... The supernatural work of Christ... that only God can do... is what we are to hold on to... not the Jezebel System of our own good works... in hope that they will earn our salvation and allow us to reign with Him. ... When we introduce people to Jesus... their salvation... like ours... is totally a product of His work.

Christ pledges Himself to believers for He is the **morning star**. The promise of the morning star is a promise that the overcomers will be identified with Jesus and share in his rule.

He is not only our Rewarder, He is our Reward. We have a Star, a finished work and a finished revelation. Let us hold them fast and hold them forth till Jesus comes!

But remember - One of the primary threats against our holding on until Jesus comes... is that Jezebel still exists in many churches. Jezebel can be very charming. Sometimes she teaches a Sunday school class... sings in the choir... or gives large amounts of time and money to the church. But she commits a sin... that everyone knows is sin... but they tolerate it. And because no one does anything about it... eventually she leads the church to just accept it.

Jezebelism led to spiritual adultery and we need to beware today of any behaviors or teaching that makes God's people unfaithful to Him.



In love... we need to confront any Jezebel... so that it does not infect the whole church. There is a great need for this to be taken seriously once again... not in terms of a 'witch hunt'... but always with a view to bringing the person back to the truth and the ways of Christ.