

To The Church

Letters from the book of Revelation

Intolerant Jesus

Over the last few weeks of our study, we looked at Christ's assessment of 3 of the 7 churches mentioned in the book of Revelation. Today's assessment is of the church at Thyatira. Unlike the other cities mentioned, this was not one of the glamorous ones and yet of all the letters written to the churches, Thyatira received the longest one. Their faith was strong and they continued to endure under difficult circumstances. The one warning that was addressed was their tolerance of false teaching, which was coming from one particular person. As a church in a society that prides itself on tolerance, we can learn about how God sees this approach when it is applied to his truth (Revelation 2 - IVP New Testament Commentaries : The Message to Thyatira).

Today's Text - Revelation 2:18-29

1. You Don't Have to Have Significant Circumstances to Do Significant Things in the Eyes of Christ

- Read Revelation 2:18-19a

In our world of opportunity and wealth, we are bombarded with the idea that if our circumstances were different, we would be more satisfied with life. We buy into the fantasy and either keep pursuing the offers, or we live lives of quiet discontent, and in so doing we miss the significance in the ordinary and mundane. Though Thyatira was not the place anyone dreamed of going to, it was to the Christians there, who lived simple, unglamorous lives that Christ commended, because their focus had been on being faithful to him.

Q. Why do you think the church in Thyatira had such a grounded faith and what can learn from that?

Q. What specific lie do you and your peers in your life-stage buy into, that causes you to live for a reality that is not yet yours? (E.g. Living in a bigger house, having private schooling for your kids, being able to immigrate, being able to be financially "free", having a more senior position at work, being in a particular social group, better holidays, nicer car, a good looking partner, being single again, having children...)

2. Jesus Commends Those Who Move Forward in Faith

- Read Revelation 2:19b

Many of us get frustrated with our spiritual stagnation, and genuinely want to grow. But instead of persevering, taking steps forward and fighting the good fight of faith, we sit back hoping to be moved by an experience that will catapult us forward without any effort on our part. But the Bible speaks about our faith being an onward, step-by-step, continual journey that requires training and discipline. It is not supposed to be an easy 'skip through the park', but is rather a "long obedience in the same direction (Petersen, 1980)" all the way to the end.

Take a moment to think about the first question, before attempting to answer it.

Q. Are you in a good place spiritually, and why?

Q. What have you been (consciously or unconsciously) waiting for in order to move forward from the place you are at spiritually?

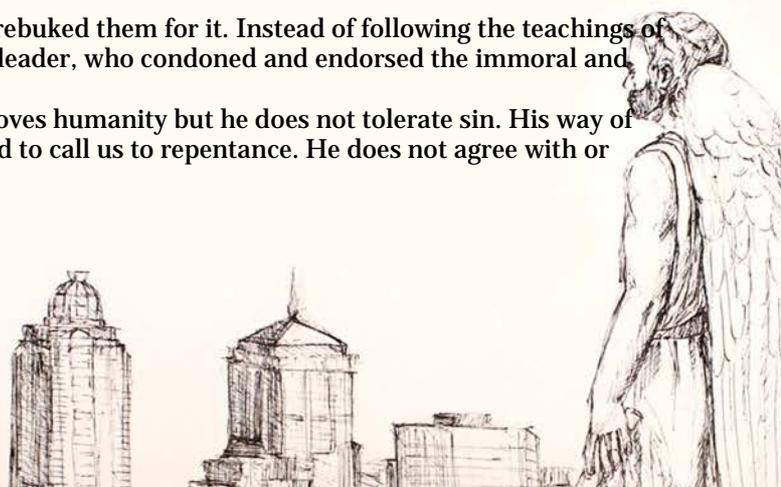
Q. What are some practical steps we can take, even in the next week, in order to move forward in our spiritual growth in Christ?

3. It Is Never a Good Idea To Be More Tolerant Than Jesus

- Read Revelation 2:20

Jesus did not commend the church for their tolerance, but rebuked them for it. Instead of following the teachings of Christ, they had been won over to the teachings of a strong leader, who condoned and endorsed the immoral and idolatrous cultural practices of the time.

We must be careful not confuse tolerance with love. Jesus loves humanity but he does not tolerate sin. His way of loving us in our fallen condition is to extend mercy to us and to call us to repentance. He does not agree with or glaze over our wrong thinking and wrong living.



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4. Jesus Calls For a More Inwardly Intolerant Church

Jesus was not expecting the church to go and make a scene against the culture because of its evil practices. He wanted them to become intolerant to the sin among themselves. The church at large has been very guilty of being against culture and soft on inward sin.

Q. Why is love and tolerance not the same thing?

Q. How do you feel when people do not tolerate your sin and instead confront you on it?

Q. What sin are we soft on in within our own faith community?

Q. Why is it so uncomfortable for us to acknowledge that Jesus is not passive/soft on/ tolerant of sin?

Q for Personal Reflection. What sin have you been personally seduced into practicing, because you feel that Jesus will be tolerant of it, and what is God asking you to do about it in light of this message?

5. Gracious Jesus Gives Time and Opportunity for Repentance

- Read Revelation 2:21-23a & Romans 1:24-26

Jesus always calls us to repent of our sin. But when we refuse him, eventually he allows us to feel the full weight of our own sin. We need to be careful not to assume that our sense of “peace” or unhindered conscience is a sign that we are living in accordance with God’s rule, as it could indicate that God has left us to our sin, which is a sign of his judgment. If we feel guilt and shame because we realize that we have chosen to slip deeper and deeper into sin, we can and should accept his mercy and turn to him in repentance and faith.

Q. Why is our conscience not a strong enough indicator that we are spiritually on the right track?

Q. Why does God leave us to our sin when we continuously reject his mercy and turn our backs on repentance?

Q. Have you ever used your sense of “peace” to justify certain actions that in hindsight were actually sinful? How do you think you convinced yourself that this was right?

6. Patient Endurance and Submission Now Leads to Co-Ruling With Christ Later

- Read Revelation 2:23b-28

God’s kingdom feels upside down. We are called to endure now, so that we can reign later with Christ. We have to persevere, even when we feel like we are totally losing out, in order to enjoy what we will have when Christ returns.

Concluding Q. What is the one big take-away that God is asking you to take home and apply to your life this week?

Bibliography

Petersen, E. (1980). *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.

Revelation 2 - IVP New Testament Commentaries : The Message to Thyatira. (n.d.). Retrieved August 27, 2015, from Biblegateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Rev/Message-Thyatira>

