

Thyatira: The Church That Tolerates Sin, Part 1

Scripture: Revelation 2:18-20

Code: 66-9

We're going to look tonight at the next in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. And tonight we'll look at the letter to the church in the city of Thyatira. I confess to you that we will not get through this one letter, at least, tonight. This, I suppose, notably is the longest letter of all of the seven, interestingly enough, written to the smallest city of the seven. And it will take us tonight and next Lord's day to unfold all of the richness of this wonderful letter.

It follows very closely the thought of the letter to the church at Pergamos which we studied last time. It's a letter about a church that had many good points, but also was engaged in compromising with error, compromising with sin, like the church at Pergamos. Only what was beginning to happen in Pergamos had come to full bloom in Thyatira.

If the church married the world in Pergamos, in Thyatira they were celebrating anniversaries. If compromise had begun in Pergamos, it had taken over in Thyatira. And this letter shows the depth of sin that compromise ultimately leads to...full-scale idolatry, full-scale immorality, and worst of all, tolerance of both. This is the church that has been infiltrated by the world. This is the church that tolerated sin, the church that absorbed sin, absorbed error and lived happily ever after with it. This is the kind of church that is common today, as it has been through all of the centuries, but completely inconsistent with the demands of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of the church.

Look at the letter beginning in verse 18 of Revelation 2. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and His feet are like burnished bronze says this, I know your deeds and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness," you notice that's in italics, "and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them, I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless, what you have, hold fast until I come. And he who overcomes and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also 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."

As I said, this is the longest of the seven letters, even though written to the smallest church. It is in some ways the most complex of the seven letters and demands that attention be given to a number of issues.

But let's start with the first and pervasive thought that comes to our mind as we read the letter. It is obvious that this church had tolerated sin, it had tolerated acts of immorality and certain involvement with idols, as verse 20 indicates it. And not only had it tolerated, but it had allowed the woman who was teaching that to have reached a point of prominence where she was articulating it and leading Christians astray, as well as collecting around her some false believers. The Lord promises that He's going to judge and He's going to judge that church severely, sparing only those, according to verse 24, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them. Here is a church that has been infiltrated by error and sin, a church that has done nothing about it. It then deals primarily with the church that tolerates sin. It takes us back to a very basic understanding that we have to have in regard to the church and that is that the Lord wants His church holy. He wants His church in every sense intolerant of sin. This goes all the way back to the first instruction we have about the church. The first instruction is in Matthew chapter 18, the church is mentioned in chapter 16, the Lord saying He'll build His church. But here in chapter 18 for the first time we have instruction regarding the church. And the very first instruction ever given specifically to the church is that if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private...if he listens to you you've won your brother. If he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer.

In other words, the very first instruction ever given to the church is to deal confrontively with sin. And that instruction is given to individuals in the church, not to some elite core of people who are set out to be the spies of the church, but if your brother sins you go and you reprove him. The Lord wants His church to be pure, and therefore the first instruction He gave had to do with the purity of the church. He wants it to be intolerant of sin.

In Acts 15 when the council met in Jerusalem, the church had spread out of Jerusalem and had captured some Gentiles, of course, for Christ and the church was established in Antioch and there was concern about all these Gentiles coming to Christ, there was concern about the evangelization effort that was going on through the Apostle Paul and his friends. And so the council at Jerusalem penned a letter really to be sent to all of these other Christians and all of these other churches telling them how they were to live their lives so that they could be most effective in their witness. And in verse 29 of Acts 15 we find the last little paragraph in the council's decision and it says this, "You are to abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood, from things strangled and from sexual sin. If you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

Two out of the four, you are to stay away from idol feasts, you are to stay away from engaging yourself in eating that which is offered to idols, and that was always a part of the idol feast that made up pagan religion, and you are to stay away from sexual sin which existed in itself and also as a part

of pagan religion. And again the first instruction that comes from the council of Jerusalem to the church that is beginning to grow and the gospel beginning to spread around the Gentile world is to stay away from idol activity, i-d-o-l, and stay away from sexual sin.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 we find the very same emphasis is made. Paul writes to the Corinthians and he says, "It's actually reported there is immorality among you and immorality of such a kind as doesn't exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife." Here was a church in which there was a case of incest. "And you have become arrogant about it, instead of humble and contrite and broken and repentant. You haven't mourned." And he says, "In order that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst." You haven't done anything about it. You have somebody in your church who has committed incest and you've done nothing about this. And then he goes on to say you better do something about it, it's like leaven that leavens the lump. You better deal with this issue, deal with it immediately in the name of the Lord when you're assembled together and I with you in Spirit with the power of the Lord Jesus deliver that one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Get that leaven out before you corrupt the church.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 you have another interesting statement by the apostle Paul that speaks to God's desire to have a pure church. He says, "I am jealous for you," 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." Again, the Lord wants His church pure, the Lord obviously is the bridegroom, the church is the bride and He expects not an adulterous bride, not an adulterous wife, but a chaste virgin, neither adulterous in the sense of engaging in idolatry, nor adulterous in the sense of engaging in sexual sin.

In Ephesians chapter 5 the same concept is repeated where it says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, in order that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless." He want's a blameless church, a holy church, He wants a chaste virgin, He wants sin dealt with in the church.

Now with that as a background, it isn't difficult to come to this particular text in Revelation and understand that the church at Thyatira was in direct conflict with the will of the Lord of the church. This church was tolerating sin in the very two forms that it was forbidden. It was tolerating, if you can imagine this, spiritual fornication, spiritual adultery, espousing to another deity, and it was tolerating physical adultery, sexual sin...the kind of thing the Lord does not want in His church was going on at Thyatira and not being dealt with. It was going on to such a degree that it was pervasive.

So as we come to this letter it's a very serious letter. Now to put it in its context a little bit, Charles Eerdman has a helpful perspective on the place of this letter among the seven. Listen to what he said. "This letter to the church in Thyatira begins the second group of letters to the churches of Asia Minor. In the first group, the church at Ephesus was characterized by a loyalty to Christ which was lacking in love. In the church of Smyrna, loyalty was tested by fire. In the church of Pergamos the

loyalty was lacking in moral passion. Yet all three churches were true to the faith and had not yielded to the assaults of evil." In other words, they were still fighting against them. It goes on. "In the case of the church at Thyatira, as of the churches in Sardis and Laodicea, the situation was far more serious. Here not merely a small minority was indifferent but large numbers had actually yielded to the demoralizing influence of false teaching, and I might add of sin," end quote.

So as I told you at the very outset in our overview, there is a progressive worsening of the character of these churches as they become more and more influenced by evil until finally it takes over. Into this church the evils of idolatry and immorality had pressed and penetrated deeply. They had come through a woman, a woman who here is called by the name of Jezebel, which probably wasn't her real name, no one names their child Jezebel, not if they're thinking. But this woman had influenced the church in a way that was not unlike Jezebel having influenced the people of God in the Old Testament, and so she is branded with the symbolic name Jezebel because it was Jezebel, you remember, who led Israel into idolatry and immorality, and so here is a woman doing the same in Thyatira and she deserves the same name, Jezebel. She had succeeded in corrupting the church. You will notice the depth of the corruption is indicated in verse 24 by the phrase "the deep things of Satan." It shows how the plunge had reached the depths. You remember Smyrna? The church at Smyrna was being assaulted by a synagogue of Satan. But it was coming from the outside against them. Pergamos was being confronted by the throne of Satan, the very...the very capital city as it were of satanic religion. Smyrna was being assaulted by a synagogue of Satan, that was Jewish, that was the Jews who rejected the gospel. Pergamos was being assaulted by the throne of Satan, that was Gentile religion. But Thyatira had plummeted in to the deep things of Satan. And this was not something that was attacking them from the outside, this was behavior that was going on on the inside. So you can see the flow in these three needy churches. Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Smyrna...was not having a need as we remember, they were a church that weren't condemned for anything. Ephesus had left its first love, Pergamos was engaged in compromise, and Thyatira went all the way to tolerating sin and sin that could be defined as the deep things of Satan. It's quite amazing, quite amazing that a church could tolerate that, but they did.

And I might add there can be much that is good, much that on the surface is effective. There can even be numerical growth. There can even be a certain warmth of fellowship. And at the same time, evil can have established itself in the very deep things of Satan into the life of the church. And we're going to see how these things co-existed and how the Lord dealt with them in the church at Thyatira. Let's begin with the correspondent. We flow through the text, as you know, with basically the same outline each time which unfolds it to us. The correspondent is always identified at the beginning, as we noted for you. When people in ancient times wrote letters they said who was writing at the beginning, not at the end like we do. To the angel, or the messenger, that is the one sent by the church in Thyatira to go to John who is now taking this letter back to the church at Thyatira. You remember, seven letters from seven churches...to seven churches, each of the churches had a messenger there, angelos, and it's translated angel, it's angelos, best translated messenger here. These messengers were taking back the letters to these seven churches that had been literally

authored by Christ and penned by John. And as they moved along through the seven churches, the man who delivered his letter would stay and the group would diminish from seven to six to five to four. So one of these messengers, probably one of the elders or pastors from the church at Thyatira, is the one who gets the letter.

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:," and here is the author identifying Himself. "The Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and His feet are like burnished bronze says this..." So that the real author is identified there as the Son of God, first of all...secondly, as the one who has the eyes like a flame of fire...and thirdly, the one who has feet like burnished bronze. Now Jesus Christ is the author. He is introduced as the author and that part of His character, that part of His nature which best describes His relationship to this church is noted here...or emphasized. Now remember, the descriptive terminology that is used in these seven letters is drawn, for the most part, from the picture of Christ in chapter 1. If you go back to chapter 1 verse 11 and following, you're going to see the vision of Christ. And there are a number of things that describe Christ there. And when these seven letters are written, He picks out of that description that part of the description which best fits His approach to the given church. Here He chooses to describe Himself with the imagery of the Son of God with the eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze.

Those last two indications, eyes like flaming fire and feet like burnished bronze, speak of penetrating judgment. His eyes are like fire. They are like a divine laser. They can see through to the fatal flaws in the church. There's no good veiling it in a lot of activity. There's no good veiling it in a lot of superficiality because His penetrating eyes can see right through it. And then His feet like blazing bronze are ready to trample in judgment, to stomp out the sinner and the sin.

You will notice, first of all, He is identified as the Son of God. That's His messianic title. That means that He is deity. He is one with God in essence. He is the Son of God.

Go back to chapter 1 and you must note that in chapter 1 He is not described in that way. In verse 13 He is described as the Son of Man, or a son of man. And here John chooses to deviate a bit as the Lord dictate, and not really John, the Lord chooses to deviate and dictates it such to John. From that title Son of Man in the image in chapter 1, or the vision, and He chooses Son of God. Son of Man is the name of His humiliation. Son of Man is the name that emphasizes His sympathetic identification with believers as He walks among the churches. You remember in the vision of chapter 1 He moves among the churches trimming the lamps, holding the pastors or the leaders in His hand, ministering, serving the people. And when He introduces Himself as a Son of Man, it introduces Him in His humiliation, in His sympathy as the merciful faithful high priest, it emphasizes His comfort, His encouragement to the persecuted Christians, He's there tending to them, lovingly, sensitively, sympathetically because He too was a man and understands. Whenever He is designated Son of Man it is emphasizing His humanness and that makes Him so able to be the sympathizer, to know the trials of His church, the needs of His church, the temptations of His church.

But very specifically here John identifies Him as He wants to be identified, not as the Son of Man but in verse 18 as the Son of God because He's not emphasizing Him in His humility, He's emphasizing Him in His divine power. He's emphasizing Him in deity. His sympathy is over. When it comes to this

particular church and what is going on, He is not coming as the sympathizer, He is coming as the judge. He is not coming as the man who understands, He is coming as the God who does not tolerate. He is coming in severe judgment.

By the way, just for your own reference, it is the only place "Son of God" is used in the book of Revelation. He is coming as Son of God, He is coming in angry deity, if we might say so. In fact, to see His anger you need only look at verse 23 where He says, "I will kill her children with pestilence." Verse 27 He speaks about ruling with a rod of iron and the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces with a crushing kind of authority.

And so, He comes as Son of God and it speaks to us of the severity of His action against this church. Then that phrase "who has eyes like a flame of fire," we went in to that in the study of the vision in chapter 1. Suffice it to say that it means He has piercing vision, like a laser, as I said. Everything yields to His vision, everything melts before His gaze. Nothing is hidden to Him. He penetrates it all. You cannot disguise it, you cannot cover it. Again, in chapter 19 when you see the Lord Jesus Christ in Second Coming glory, verse 12 it says, "His eyes are a flame of fire." This is the penetrating vision, penetrating all things. And after having penetrating, consuming all opposition, sweeping down all obstructions, pressing its way with invincible power.

This must have reminded John of Daniel chapter 10 where it says of God that He eyes like torches of fire. And it's speaking of God in the fierceness of His judgment. Such are the eyes of the Son of God. They look through everything. They pierce all masks. They pierce all coverings. They search the remotest recesses. They behold the hidden things of the soul and of the church. The church may have had a good reputation. It may have had a community reputation. It may even have had something of notoriety among other churches. They may not have known everything that was going on there, though it is sure, as we'll note later, that they knew some of the things going on, but certainly whatever the people around them or the other churches knew or didn't know, the Lord's penetrating eyes uncovered everything.

Then along with that, His feet are described as like burnished bronze, polished to the hilt with light flashing off of them...the picture of pure metal reflecting brilliance trampling out impurity. It reminds us again of Revelation 19 the vision of Christ, verse 15, "He treads the winepress of the fierceness and the wrath of Almighty God." So here He comes in trampling judgment. It's a frightening thing to see Jesus Christ coming toward His church in this way.

This is how He's introduced. He's introduced with His judgment character. It's a threatening picture. It's frankly a terrifying picture. And can you imagine what happened in the church at Thyatira when the letter was delivered and read on the next Sunday? This is a real city. This is a real church and a real letter that was read to those people. Hebrews says that God comes in judgment with the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. This is the church that the Lord comes to judge. And God is no petty tyrant. God is no sentimental ruler. He has the power to do devastating judgment and He has the holiness to not tolerate sin. And if something doesn't change in Thyatira, they're going to be caught in severe judgment. That verse alone having been read in the congregation on a Sunday morning must have brought shock before the rest of the letter was even penned.

Let's talk about the city, the city of Thyatira. Half way between Pergamos and Sardis, about 30 or 40 miles each way, and you remember we're kind of moving from Ephesus on up, circling around that area of the western, northwestern part of Asia Minor. This had become a Roman occupied city since about 190 B.C., so for nearly three centuries now it has been under Roman rule. The city was in a very long valley, a valley that swept all the way down to Pergamos. And it was not a well fortified city, in fact it had no natural defense at all. And so its history, if you look into it, was this long, long history, even before the Romans got there and even afterwards, up until fairly modern times, it is a history of conquerings and destructions and rebuildings. Every enemy that came in to Asia Minor came down through that valley, swept through and devastated this small city of Thyatira. It is infiltrated by every army that came along. And even since the first century, the time of Christ, that continued to be its history, destruction/rebuilding, destruction/rebuilding. They were always seemingly in the danger of marching armies.

What gave it its significance was simply that it was the gateway to Thyatira...to Pergamos. Thyatira was the gateway to Pergamos. In order to get to Pergamos, down that Caicus valley, you had to go through Thyatira. So all it was good for was to put up a fight so that the troops in Pergamos could get their act together and be ready when the enemy arrived. They were like bait. They got eaten. It was originally populated by soldiers of Alexander the Great as about a 30- or 40-mile buffer line of defense so that the troops in Pergamos, which was the greater city and the more desirable one, could defend themselves. It was little more than a military garrison to guard Pergamos. It provided nothing but delaying action. So it was destined to go through a history of destruction and rebuilding many times.

But now since the Romans took over in 190 B.C. and they brought in what's called the Pax Romana, or the Roman Peace, they ruled the world and there was a certain amount of peace. And during that time this little city of Thyatira sort of flourished. And it turned from a military place to becoming a commercial city. In fact, it became the center of wool and dyeing of cloth. Historians tell us it became the center of guilds, trade guilds which would be much like unions today. There were people who had the same trade who banded together. And it had more trade guilds in this city than of the other cities in these seven letters. One of the very prominent things there was the dyeing of cloth.

And there's a very interesting note to make at this point. We know in Acts chapter 16 about a certain lady by the name of Lydia. It tells us in Acts 16:14, "A certain woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God was listening and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." At the time she was in Philippi, probably on business. But her home was Thyatira. She was a seller of purple. She was in the textile industry there. Acts 16 tells us that she heard the Apostle Paul and was converted. It also tells us that some of her household were converted and it is not impossible that she, listen to me, being the first convert in Europe went back with those of her household who were saved and were responsible for starting the church in Thyatira. She dealt with the sale of purple. The purple dye that was used there was world famous. It came from two sources. One source was a root called the madder-root which grew around Thyatira and from that root they could extract purple dye.

The other was a little sea shell fish called murex. And from the throat of that tiny little sea animal came one drop of precious purple dye. And so they would catch these little fish and extract from them this dye.

Because it was difficult to get it out of the madder-root and even more difficult to get it out of the little murex, it was very costly. And so this little city flourished as a commercial center for purple dye and for the garments that would go along with that.

Today Thyatira is a little city, has about 25,000 people living in it. And you'd be interested to know that the main means of life today is weaving oriental rugs. So they're still in the textile business.

One of the curiosities of this town was the guilds, the people banded together for the various trades they were engaged in. But more interesting than that was each guild had a god. Each guild had come to define a guardian god that particularly gave himself to taking care of them. And they worshiped that god. If you were associated with a guild, you were in a religious group. And there was a god over that group that you had to worship. Associated with that worship was immorality, as in almost all the pagan systems. And so there would be idols, idol feasts and celebrations, immoral orgies. And that could be very difficult for a Christian because now if you were in a guild, let's say you were a weaver of cloth, or you were involved in the wool industry and you were working with sheep, or you were someone who processed purple dye, you would belong to a guild. In order to have good standing in the guild you would need to engage yourself in the guild activities. If you did not engage yourself in the guild activities, you could easily be dispossessed. Here is a Christian. The guild has a god. The guild has routine activities which involve sacrifices to that god, feasts to that god, along with immoral orgies. You're a Christian, you say, "I can't do any of that," you could lose your job.

By the way, that's not unlike some unions today. I remember when I was in a union for a brief time when I was working in school as a kid. I went down to the union hall because they said I had to be sworn in to the union. And so a man got up in front of about 600 people who were all there for this union meeting and he said, "I want all of the new people to stand up," and I stood up and he said, "Now I want you to raise your right hand and swear..." Well, I don't swear to anybody but the Lord. So I didn't raise my hand and I didn't say anything, I just stood there. And they said, "Do you swear to have allegiance to local 770, it was, the retail clerk's union? Do you..." And it went on and on throughout all of this stuff and I didn't put my hand up because in my simple understanding of my Christianity, I don't swear by anything. My word is good. My yea is yea and my nay is nay. And I just felt that my conscience wouldn't let me put my hand up and I didn't want to swear allegiance to anybody but Jesus Christ and I had no idea what I was getting in to and what I'd have to be held to if I did swear. So while I was standing there without my hand in the air, a man grabbed me by the neck and threw me out of the building...and asked me why I didn't put my hand up. And I explained to him that I was a Christian and my allegiance was to Jesus Christ and that I would be a faithful and dutiful employee and do everything that I was told, but I wouldn't swear my allegiance to anyone other than Christ. So I was a little bit of a taste of maybe what it was like in a severer way in this little city of Thyatira for a Christian who didn't want to go along with the system because the system here involved false gods.

Now please, as a footnote, don't run out and say that I'm saying you should never join a union. Just make sure you're very careful. You can hold your hand in the air and say whatever you want to the Lord. But don't pledge your allegiance, swear your allegiance to some institution of man unless it's conditional.

So religiously this little town wasn't really the center of anything. The chief god there was Apollo, but religiously it wasn't the center of any notable worship. Perhaps in history the most famous religious thing that came out of there was a strange sort of Cybeline priestess, which would be like a medium or a witch by the name of Sambathy(?), a female oracle people could go to and she was demon possessed and she would spout off demon stuff. But they had many false gods, so that's something about the town of Thyatira.

What about the church? Thirdly, the church. As I said, perhaps Lydia was the key to this church. She had come to Philippi in Macedonia on business and heard Paul and was saved. Luke tells us, as I noted in Acts 16:15, that others of her family were also saved and perhaps she was instrumental in the starting of the church. But again I remind you of Acts 19:10 as I have in each case where it says the Word of the Lord spread throughout all of Asia Minor from the ministry of Paul in Ephesus. So it could have just been the extension of the work in Ephesus, people going back to Thyatira. Lydia could have been a part of that, we have no way to know that.

Sadly, this letter is written at the end of the first century. By the end of the second century there was no church in Thyatira, it was gone, out of existence. The problem that faced this little church was not persecution. That isn't the thing He talks about. The problem as tough as it might have been with the guilds all wrapped up with false religion to maintain your job as a Christian, that wasn't the big issue. It wasn't what was on the outside pressuring the church, it was what was on the inside. The real problem here was not that they were being attacked. The real problem here was that they had fallen on the inside. They weren't grievous wolves from the outside, they were perverse people from the inside.

There was a woman and this woman had come along and successfully gotten Christians to compromise with the world totally. The scene may have run like this. You people are in the guilds. If you don't participate in what they do, you're going to lose your job. She may have said to them, "Now listen to me, you need your job because you need to live and you need to support the work of the church and the work of evangelism. So when they have an idol feast, go to it. And when they have one of those immoral things, it's okay, you can do that." She may have reasoned like this, "After all, we're not under law, we're under grace." It's possible she could have reasoned like that.

But I think perhaps it was this way. She probably said something like, "After all, it's the spirit that concerns God, not the flesh," and followed the path of sort of historic philosophical dualism, that it doesn't matter what you do with the material body because the material body is wicked anyway, it only matters what you do with the spiritual. So she may have said, "Fine, go do whatever you want. You can engage yourself in that, you can even plunge in to the deep things of Satan, that's only physical, that cannot effect your spiritual dimension." Why not join? You can go to the communal meals. You can go and sacrifice the things that are offered to idols. You can go and enjoy the sexual

activity, the drunkenness, the immorality. That's just your flesh. Your spirit is what God is concerned about.

She must have reasoned something like that because there would have to have been some justification to get people to buy it. You can't just walk in a church and say, "All right, everybody, you're all free to worship idols and commit sexual sin." You've got to give them some theological rationale for that and the old, age-old philosophical dualism it may have been. After all, it really doesn't matter what you do with the body, God isn't concerned about that. Philosophical dualism said the body is material, the body is dirt, the body is earthy, the body is flesh and the body is sinful and that's not going to change, and that's how it is. And the spirit is good and holy and righteous and as long as your spirit is committed to Christ and you're here worshiping Him in spirit, what you do in your body doesn't matter and so you can do both.

And that kind of seduction worked. And she led them astray. In verse 20 she led bondservants astray. She led actual Christians astray. You say, "My, how could Christians buy into that?" It's amazing what Christians buy in to, absolutely amazing. But apparently they did. They bought in to that kind of foolishness. By the way, they're still buying into it. I never cease to be amazed at how many Christians today will use if they don't use philosophical dualism and they still use it some places, they'll use the law of grace thing and say it really doesn't matter what I do in the flesh, after all, I'm under grace.

I know one prominent preacher, Bible teacher, conference speaker who was even advocating sexual promiscuity and sexual immorality because he says it doesn't matter. You are two people and what the flesh is is only the flesh. You can't change it, you can't control it, so don't worry about what it does.

She must have reasoned something like that. So here's a little church caught in a very difficult trap, having to make a difficult choice because here's some Christians who could lose their job if they didn't participate in what the guild required. And like me, get grabbed by the nape of the neck and thrown on the street and told to go get a job somewhere else. And so there is this compromising woman who comes in and she appeals to their basic need for work and employment and comes up with some philosophy that seems to work, and they buy it.

And why do they buy it, you ask? And why do they allow it? And why do the leaders tolerate it? Because they probably were caught in the same thing and they're all in to the compromise. And so they show up on the Lord's day and they do their whole worship thing and then during the week, whatever their job requires, they do it. And so we meet the church and something of the pressure it was facing.

Let's look then at the commendation of this church. And this is amazing really. Verse 19, "I know your deeds," He uses the word *erga*, I know your works, I know your efforts. I know what you do.

You know, I just...just stop at that point. Do I need to remind you that if the Lord Jesus were to write a letter to Grace Community Church He might start it...I don't know how He would identify Himself, I'd sure be interested to know whether He would say the one with eyes like flaming fire and feet like burnished bronze, or whether He would say the one who is dead and is alive and lives forevermore. I

don't know how He would identify Himself. But I know one thing He would say because in each case this is true, He would say, "I know your works, I know you. I know everything you do. I'm fully apprised of it."

And then He breaks them in to four categories. I know your works, your deeds. Four categories...love, faith, service, perseverance. I know what you're doing.

First of all He says, there's love there. There are acts of love going on. You're caring for each other, you're loving each other. This is wonderful really. Love was in action. Apparently it was love divorced from sound doctrine, but love was there. That's possible. There are people who care about each other in the rankest liberal churches. You can go down into the ghettos of the cities of the world and find people who care about each other, who demonstrate love to each other, who meet needs...the milk of human kindness will do that. This church was a caring group. So He said I know you have love there. In a sense, what was waning at Ephesus was still strong here.

It's amazing to me how people will say to me, "You know, I go to a certain church and I know the teaching is really bad but, boy, they really have love there, they really care." That might be true. I would not deny that there are places where you can have leadership that is unusually sentimental or tender or compassionate. That may be their nature and so they sort of create that kind of aura in which that flourishes.

But go even beyond that, we don't want...we don't want to minimize this kind of love. He says, "I also know about your faith...your faith." I would favor again the concept of faithfulness here...faithfulness. And what He is saying there is you're reliable, basically, you're dependable, you're fairly consistent, you hang in there. He identifies the group of true Christians in verse 25 as those who need to hold on to what they have, so He's encouraging them there to continued faithfulness. But here is the core of this little church, faith and love, those two things come together all through the Scripture. It's amazing.

And out of faith and love grew the next two, service and perseverance. Love produces service, if you love you serve. Faithfulness produces perseverance, if I'm faithful I'm going to endure, I'm going to hang on. So He says I look at you and I see you loving and out of your love you serve each other and I see you faithful and dependable and reliable and out of that you persevere, you keep moving along through the difficult times.

So in a sense this is a church with some quality, a caring group, faithful, no doubt, to the basics of the gospel. And then the most amazing thing at the end of verse 19, "And your works of late are greater than at first." You're even doing better at this stuff. You're doing better at it. You're loving more consistently now and serving out of that love, your faithfulness continues now at a greater degree, and you endure and it's increasing. You're advancing.

That's a commendation you would think would set this church apart as absolutely without flaw. Then you notice the first word of verse 20, "BUT...I have this against you, you tolerate a false teacher who teaches error and you tolerate sin." Amazing, a lot of love in that church, faithful people, enduring through the tough times, sympathetic, compassionate, caring, not strong...weak. They had a serious sin problem. And here the sin is serious because it involves apparently the majority. Why? Because

the whole church was tolerating this stuff. They weren't doing anything about it.

Love was fine. Serving people was fine. Being faithful to the gospel was fine. Enduring through the hard times, that's all well and good. But don't ask us to take a strong stand on sin. Don't ask us to take a strong stand on doctrine.

The Bible says that a woman is not to teach and preach, don't make us take a stand on that. The Scripture is very clear that there's no place in the life of a believer for idolatry, even the apostle Paul said, "When you come to the Lord's table don't you think for one moment that you can come to the table of the Lord from the table of demons." The Scripture is very clear that you are to live godly, pure, holy lives, that you are to deal with sin. They weren't dealing with it at all...very tolerant, very weak.

This is common in churches. They don't want to deal with sin. They don't want to affirm sound doctrine and say, "You can't teach, you're not qualified. You can't teach that, that's error. You can't do that, that's sin." They don't want to deal with that. Love and faithfulness and service and endurance aren't enough, there must be a commitment to sound doctrine and holy living.

Ephesus had the doctrine and missed the love. Thyatira has the love and missed the sound doctrine. We have both extremes today. We have those moral doctrinal narrow-minded perfectionists who are loveless and ruthless and offensive. We have those tolerant, sentimental sort of mushy lovey-dovey people who have no regard for holy standards, holy truth and holy living. And both poles are disastrous. The desire of God is a beautiful God-intended balance of holiness and love. Thyatira had the love, didn't have the holiness. And love without holiness descends to immorality. Love without holiness descends to immorality.

In Ephesians, do you remember Ephesians 5 verse 2? "Walk in love just as Christ also loved you," but verse 3, "But do not let immorality or any impurity be named among you." What is he saying? Don't let your love descend to immorality. Don't let your love tolerate sin. "Oh, we're such a loving church we don't want to deal with that." "We're such a loving church we don't want to make an issue out of that." "We believe correctly, our theology is right, we are faithful to that, we've endured through the tough times, we've held on to our belief, we love people, we serve their needs, we would rather not confront them about sin." "We really don't want to address the problem of women preachers, we really would rather not get in to a discussion about doctrine. We certainly don't want to run around confronting people about their sin."

And that's why the Lord is at the door with flaming eyes and burning feet, ready to stamp on the church.

Well, that sort of gets us into the letter, doesn't it? So much more to come, but that's for next time. Let's bow in prayer together.

Father, what an enlightening insight You've given us in this rich letter. And we've only begun to scratch the surface, but already, Lord, we feel that we have been duly warned. We thank You for what we've seen in this little church because it does act as a deterrent to us in our church. We want to be loving. We don't want to be like Ephesus and leave our first love, either for You or for each other. But we certainly don't want to be like Thyatira and have love that allows sin, love that allows false

doctrine, love that allows a violation of Your Word.

Lord, we ask that You would give us what we could never design, manufacture, orchestrate on our own and that is a perfect balance. May we love as Jesus loved and may we demand righteousness as He demanded it and demands it now. We pray, O God, that You will cause our church to be what You want it to be and we could only pray out of the depths of our heart that were You to write a letter to us You would say, "I know your works, I know your love and your service and your faithfulness and your perseverance and your commitment to righteousness." That would be our desire. We'd like to be like Ephesus in the sense that they would not tolerate those who did evil, but like Thyatira in having a serving love. The absence of either and the candlestick is gone. So it was in Ephesus, so it was in Thyatira.

So, Lord, give us that balance by Your Holy Spirit, we pray in the Savior's name and for His glory.
Amen.

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