

REVELATION 2:18-29

JEZEBEL IN THE CHURCH

“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 according to your works. 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. 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.’”¹

“Eating fly eggs, rodent hairs, mould and fecal matter may sound a lot like a challenge on Fear Factor, but it is just an episode of daily life. Unintended additives squirm, crawl, fly and plop into much of what we put in our mouths.”² These “unintended additives” are so common that the FDA has issued a handbook listing Food Defect Action Levels. As examples of such “unintended additives,” note that the FDA allows twenty or fewer maggots of any size per one hundred grams of drained mushrooms, or five or more maggots two millimeters or longer per one hundred grams. Similarly, the FDA allows the “average of mold count” up to twelve percent of apples and pears. Peanut butter can have no more than an average of one rodent hair per one hundred grams. Food products can contain a certain amount of “foreign matter,” a term that includes cigarette butts. Cinnamon bark, bay leaves and cocoa beans can all contain a specified amount of animal feces.

Tomato sauce can contain no more than fifteen fruit fly eggs and one or more maggots per one hundred grams. Peanut butter may contain up to twenty-five mg of grit per one hundred grams. Up to forty thrips, insects that are also known as thunderflies, are allowed per one hundred grams of asparagus. Fish may contain up to sixty parasitic cysts per one hundred grams of fish. The FDA allows up to 325 insect fragments, including bug feces, per ten grams of ground thyme.³ The “Yuck Factor” is significant when we begin to examine what we put into our mouth. Somehow, a child putting dirt in her mouth doesn’t seem all that terrible in light of what we consume on a daily basis.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² “Insects, Mold, and Other Legal Food Contaminants,” Chef’s Blade, <http://chefsblade.monster.com/training/articles/1407-insects-mold-and-other-legal-food-contaminants?page=1>, accessed 15 June 2018

³ “11 Revolting Things Government Lets in Your Food,” <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/11-revolting-things-government-lets-in-your-food/>, accessed 14 June 2018

Now, you will be able to go home and enjoy your lunch after services, won't you? Seriously, contamination appears to be a part of life. Perhaps the only way to avoid eating unsavoury food components is to stop eating all together. Dr. Manfred Kroger, professor of food sciences at Pennsylvania State University, says, "Let's face it, much of our food comes from nature, and nature is not perfect."⁴

While contamination is a part of daily life, even if such contaminants are usually not recognised, contamination must never be permitted to become a part of spiritual life. Spiritual contamination is a very serious issue for the Living God who demands purity in His people. Undoubtedly, each of us has read the admonition, "As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" [1 PETER 1:15-16]. In the text before us, the Risen Lord confronts a congregation that had begun to tolerate evil. God was quite specific in exposing what had become acceptable in that assembly, speaking of His reaction to Christian tolerance.

DIVINE COMMENDATION — "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first" [REVELATION 2:19]. As we read these letters to the churches of Asia, we observe a pattern, a pattern that should encourage each follower of Christ the Master. Wherever possible, the Risen Saviour commends His people. That is true in this instance, as it is in other letters to the churches in Asia. The Church in Thyatira is commended for her works, her love, her faith, her service and her patient endurance. Moreover, what the congregation had been doing was not a static work—it was increasing.

On the surface, this was a strong congregation; it was flourishing. If we visited this assembly, we would undoubtedly be impressed by their industry, especially their service that reflected positively on the cause of Christ. Four qualities are noted, and each is commended by the Saviour. The qualities noted are arranged in pairs: service arises from love; and endurance flows out of faith. The Saviour's commendation is reminiscent of the commendation recorded of the church of the Thessalonians. "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-3]. The congregation in Thyatira fulfilled godly expectations for an assembly of the Lord Jesus.

Know that God takes note of those qualities that demonstrate our divine relationship. In contemporary society, love is often reduced to a caricature. The preacher is portrayed as speaking about love with exaggerated emphasis. Pastoral statements about love are the stuff of laughter. Perhaps it is because we don't actually love that the world is amused by our emphasis on love. Nevertheless, we are assured that "God is love" [1 JOHN 4:8].

If our emphasis on love is caricatured, it must be because we emphasise *our* love, failing to recognise our dependence on God's love. Whatever true love we manifest finds its origin in God Himself. John testifies, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" [1 JOHN 4:9-12].

⁴ "How Many Insect Parts and Rodent Hairs are Allowed in Your Food? More Than You Think ... and Maybe Than You Want to Know!" SixWise.com, http://www.sixwise.com/newsletters/05/06/29/how_many_insect_parts_and_rodent_hairs_are_allowed_in_your_food.htm/, accessed 15 June 2018

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Our world sullies the ideal of love, so that it is transmogrified into a feeling. Love is not a feeling—love is a choice. God is love; therefore, God chose to love. This is the basis for the justly notable statement, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16]. In the same way, we don’t love the brotherhood of believers because they are loveable, “We love because He first loved us” [1 JOHN 4:19].

Here is the essential truth each member of this congregation must always hold in mind—when a congregation reflects the love of God, that assembly will be characterised by faith. The congregation will believe the Word of God, seeking to know and to do what God wills. The congregation will walk in confidence, knowing that they are doing the will of the Living Saviour. The congregation that loves Christ and that loves His Word will endeavour to do great deeds because they are confident that the One who redeemed them now stands with them in every situation. The Risen Saviour promised, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:20b]. Love gives those who follow the Saviour confidence—they experience what it is to walk with the Saviour and to see His power working among them. This is faith!

As noted earlier, faith flows out of love as surely as smoke rises upward from the fire. This is the reason the Master charged disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34-35].

Jesus emphasised the need for love to be prominent in the lives of His followers when He said soon after this, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” [JOHN 15:12].

This requirement to love becomes an emphasis for the follower of Christ throughout the New Testament. Consider a few portions of the Word so that you will witness the mind of the Master. Paul urges Christians, “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” [ROMANS 12:10].

Penning a prayer for the saints in Salonica, the Apostle wrote, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” [1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13].

The unknown writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians understood the essential nature of choosing to love when he wrote, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” [HEBREWS 10:24].

Permit me to point to just a few additional instances of the emphasis on love that is included in the Word of God. Peter writes, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” [1 PETER 1:22-23].

John is rightly known as “the Apostle of Love.” Listen again to his emphatic plea for love in the life of the follower of the Christ. “This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” [1 JOHN 3:11].

Seizing upon the Master’s admonition, John wrote, “This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us” [1 JOHN 3:23].

John also wrote, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God” [1 JOHN 4:7].

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Just as love produces faith—faith that endures, so endurance ensures service. The Saviour, through His servant John, notes the patient endurance of the congregation in Thyatira. “Patient endurance” is the translation of a single Greek word, *hupomoné*. The word may be variously translated, “patience,” “steadfastness” or “endurance.” Any of these words convey the concept intended through use of the Greek term. The Risen Lord is commending this assembly for standing firm, despite opposition. Though the opposition may not have been as pronounced as that faced and endured by the congregation in Smyrna, the refusal of the Thyatiran assembly to quit was noted and commended by the Saviour. This should be a source of encouragement for any congregation—God does not call us to go seeking intense opposition, but when we do face opposition, He expects that His people will stand firm.

It is an axiom of the Faith that new believers tend to begin well. New Christians experience a burst of enthusiasm when they come to faith. As has been frequently noted, newly saved saints are prepared to charge hell with a squirt gun. However, endurance—the power to last, the power to stay the course—is much rarer in the characteristics marking the lives of the saints. Too often, modern Christianity revolves around the individual rather than understanding the concept of the Body of Christ. We join the church of *our* choice, rather than accepting appointment as the Spirit desires. We carry our western ideals into the assembly rather than seeking a biblical overview of life as a follower of the Christ. Because we join where our desires lead us, when our desires are no longer fulfilled, we leave under our own terms. We have so exalted “self” that the will of the Lord is no longer essential in the life of many congregations.

As the Saviour commends the congregation in Thyatira, He appends what should be understood as a powerful observation concerning this church, laudatory for any congregation. The congregation was noted for love growing out of faith, and for service that arose from patient endurance; then, the Master declares, “Your latter works exceed the first” [REVELATION 2:19b]. Underscore that thought: *Your latter works exceed the first*. This congregation in Thyatira was not static—they were not just marking time; the assembly was growing in the areas where growth is essential! Love was becoming increasingly evident in the life of the congregation. Faith—confidence in the Lord Jesus and confidence in His grace—was growing stronger as time moved forward. Service to one another and service in the cause of Christ was more pronounced within the congregation with each passing year. Defying any opposition that might arise, the congregation stood firm.

Let’s clarify something that can be confusing to many people—the number of attendees is not a measure of spiritual vitality. A mob can include large numbers, but size does not make it right. Remember the warning Moses wrote, “You are not to follow the majority in doing wrong” [EXODUS 23:2a ISV]. Just because an action is popular does not make it right, and just because a majority agrees with some sinful action does not make the error legitimate. If numbers do not determine whether a congregation is spiritual or blessed, what should be our criterion for spiritual vitality? How do we determine whether a congregation is blessed by God or not? For that matter, how do we determine whether an individual has been blessed by God?

One indicator of blessing is that the person so blessed is equipped to act righteously, to be godly. God does not bless one so that one can do what is evil. Perhaps the crooners will sing that adultery is good because it feels so right; but how one feels never justifies the action. Despite the efforts of the world to frame arguments that deny the Word of God on the basis of feelings, truth is never verified, never authenticated, by how one feels. Truth emanates from “God Who never lies” [see TITUS 1:2]. Pleading for those who would believe in Him, the Master prayed, “Sanctify [those who follow Me] in the truth; Your word is truth” [JOHN 17:17].

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We would imagine that divine blessing should lead the one who is thus blessed to seek God's excellent glory, though this is not always the case. The one seeking God's glory is responsible to determine the will of God and then boldly do what is pleasing to God. There is a strict correlation between continued blessing and obedience. Those who obey the will of the Lord will be blessed. We do not necessarily obey in order to be blessed, however, when we are blessed we will obey. Failure to seek God's will can lead to withdrawal of His blessing.

DIVINE CENSURE — "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 according to your works" [**REVELATION 2:20-23**].

We live in a strange, new world. For people of a certain age, it seems incredible that we have lost the gift of humour in this present day. We marvel as we witness genuine, rollicking laughter reduced to vicious, raucous ridicule, if laughter should even be permitted. The individual who holds convictions is called a fanatic by the denizens of this brave, new world. Taking a stand will ensure that the stalwart one is labelled a "hater," and the one who demonstrates even a modicum of firmness will be hounded until her life is reduced to rubble by the self-appointed titans of tolerance that besmirch the contemporary landscape. Any disagreement with the tolerance embraced by the inhabitants of this dying age will be transformed into a "phobia." If such a phobia does not now exist, these mavens of mayhem will fashion a new term to indict us as violators of their novel virtue while creating a new class of victims. We are pushed to mindlessly adopt a strange garb of "bland" that agrees with evil and condemns righteousness. Acting in this fashion is agreeable to the world because most of those identified as earth-dwellers have adopted a novel definition of righteousness and of good.

I remind you that there is no such thing as "a little bit of sin." If requesting a glass of water, how much strychnine would you tolerate and still drink the water when it was offered? How much arsenic would you tolerate in a meal prepared for your family? A friend in California was distressed by a growing coarseness in his daughters' language. When confronted about their manner of speech, the teens defended their growing crudity with all the standard arguments that parents have heard for millennia. "Everyone talks that way." "They're not really 'bad' words." "It's only a little bit of strong language." And, of course, "It doesn't hurt anything."

One day when the girls came home from school, their dad had a plate of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies waiting on the kitchen bar. He told the girls they could have some of the cookies with a glass of milk as an afterschool snack. The girls were enjoying the cookies, commenting that they were really good.

"Wonderful," said the dad. "I put in a secret ingredient to make them just for you." Of course, the girls began to ask what the secret ingredient was. The dad ruefully admitted after a rather long and deliberate pause, "I put in just a little dog poop that I scooped up in the yard." Well, that definitely destroyed whatever pleasure the girls had been experiencing to that point. "Oh, don't worry," said the father, "it was only a little bit. It won't hurt anything." For those who are wondering if that really happened, the answer is "yes." However, I seriously doubt that the dad in question actually put in such an unpleasant additive. The take away is, in reality, there is no such thing as "a little bit of sin."

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Though some of the saints may have felt a twinge of discomfort when witnessing the antics of the woman the Lord identifies as “Jezebel” or when they heard what the woman was teaching, it is nevertheless true that the Church of Thyatira was tolerating evil. Now, the Risen Lord confronted them with this sin! Make no mistake, tolerating evil is sin—heinous sin! What is worse, when a congregation tolerates evil, it means that all within the assembly must share in the condemnation when it is pronounced.

Have we forgotten the stern warning issued by the Apostle Paul? You will recall that he wrote, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
Therefore, go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.’”

[2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18]

Light shares nothing in common with darkness! Life has nothing in common with death!

No doubt, many within the assembly at Thyatira would have justified their tolerance by minimising what the evil woman was doing within the congregation. Perhaps these saints would even have said that their tolerance was a virtue! For a brief period, Canada had a Prime Minister who considered tolerance to be the greatest virtue. Her position was shared by many within the nation. Perhaps even many professing Christians would have agreed with her. The Risen Saviour seems to indicate that Jezebel was at least superficially a follower when he says He gave her time to repent. However, whether she was a believer or merely one of the ubiquitous pretenders that have always sought to invade the churches, this woman refused to repent. Specifically, this woman refused to repent of her sexual immorality.

Moreover, the immorality of this woman had eventuated in the birth of children. It is not possible to say with any degree of certainty that God is not speaking of physical children, however, I doubt that He is speaking of physical children. Because the Saviour is addressing a spiritual entity, the Body of Christ gathered in Thyatira, it seems apparent to me that the Saviour has in view spiritual children, spawn that adopted Jezebel’s attitudes, spiritual seed that had embraced the rebellious evil she embodied. Rather than policing their ranks, the congregation accepted the intrusion of wickedness, thus diluting the righteousness that should have marked them. The Puritans were certain that one of the marks of a true New Testament church was discipline. They were undoubtedly correct in this assessment. One of the dark marks against the churches of this new age is that we are unwilling to discipline errant believers. Consequently, we Christians at the end of this Church Age love evil through our neglect. We are more enamoured of the absence of conflict—real or potential—than we are in love with the Saviour.

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When David's army had put down the rebellion instigated by Absalom, he mourned the death of his son. Though David's grief was understandable, in mourning as he did, he was neglecting to commend those who had risked their lives to preserve the kingdom and his reign. In fact, it seems fair to suggest that David mourned his own failure to be a father to his son, realising that the price of his neglect was the death of the young man and an indelible stain on his legacy. As he mourned, his army was confused, uncertain whether they might have acted dishonourably or done something wrong. As he mourned, Joab spoke wise words of counsel to the king. "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you" [2 SAMUEL 19:5-6a]. David failed to discern who hated him and who loved him. The same thing could have been said to the Church at Thyatira.

The Risen Lord had commended the congregation at Thyatira for their love, for their service and for their patient endurance, each of which characteristic qualifies as commendable. As is true with every facet of life, these qualities, noble though they are, are separated from negative connotations by a very thin line. Love for the good can become tolerance of what is wicked if we fail to exercise discernment. Faith can be transformed into neglect if that faith is allowed to atrophy or if we take our eyes off the legitimate object of our faith, Christ the Lord. Endurance is separated from laziness by a very narrow margin if the one called upon to endure fails to remain focused on the goal of victory. The very qualities that merit commendation can become evil, if we are not careful.

One of the grievous charges that can be levied against the churches of our Lord in this day is that we professing Christians love other people and even things more than we love the Risen Saviour. That may be a shocking charge, but doesn't it seem that we are more concerned with being liked by the world than we are concerned that we are loved by the Master? Consequently, modern church-goers are driven to ensure that we are liked on our Facebook page even if it means that in striving for this status we dishonour the Lord Christ. Thus, our churches will tolerate a Jezebel in the church because to hold her to account and throw her out might cause us to lose stature in the eyes of the world. We will tolerate a little bit of evil in our midst because we don't want the world to think ill of us. We want comfort more than character, especially if character will prove costly. We want ease more than endurance, especially since endurance is revealed only during testing. It is difficult to dispute that the average church goer spends more time seeking affirmation from virtual friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter than they spend in study of the Word or in time spent in the presence of the Lord.

From time-to-time articles are posted on news sites that speak of community outrage because a church has disciplined wayward members, or because a congregation openly stands for biblical morality. Such "news" items are so drafted as to make it appear that the action reported is bigoted, biased, narrow-minded, the product of small minds incapable of seeing the world in broader terms such as most people view life. What is especially tragic is that such negative reporting is sufficiently powerful to compel most churches to remain silent concerning wickedness in the faith community.

Make no mistake, many actions that are tolerated, or even celebrated, in our world are sinful and should never be found among the faithful. To tolerate evil is to participate in the wickedness that is named. Perhaps we have forgotten the instruction provided in the Word of God concerning the need for righteous living. Consider the following portions of the Word.

Writing the Christians of the Diaspora, Peter admonishes the followers of the Christ, “You spent enough time in the past doing what the gentiles like to do, living in sensuality, sinful desires, drunkenness, wild celebrations, drinking parties, and detestable idolatry. They insult you now because they are surprised that you are no longer joining them in the same excesses of wild living”⁵ [1 PETER 4:3-4]. There are some actions that are not simply unbecoming in the life of a child of God, rather, these actions mark that believer as an outsider! Peter writes as though he understood the tendency of Christians to want to appear “normal” by the standards of the world, even if that “normal” dishonours the Lord.

Writing the saints in Colossae, Paul instructs us as believers in the Risen Saviour, “Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, God’s wrath is coming upon the disobedient, and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth”⁶ [COLOSSIANS 3:5-8]. Some actions and attitudes need not only to be put away, they need to be slain in the lives of those who follow the Master. The list Paul provides is to ensure that we know how to honour the Saviour by recognising what dishonours Him.

In EPHESIANS 5:1-7 Paul writes, “Be imitators of God, as his dear children. Live lovingly, just as the Messiah also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God. Do not let sexual sin, impurity of any kind, or greed even be mentioned among you, as is proper for saints. Obscene, flippant, or vulgar talk is totally inappropriate. Instead, let there be thanksgiving. For you know very well that no immoral or impure person, or anyone who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.

“Do not let anyone deceive you with meaningless words, for it is because of these things that God becomes angry with those who disobey. So, do not be partners with them.”⁷ This list is similar to that provided in the Letter to Colossian Christians, but is somewhat more pointed in detailing what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for those approved by the Saviour.

Because we live in an era marked by wild confusion concerning what is righteous and holy, we need to hear the words recorded for the benefit of the saints in Corinth. The Apostle Paul warns, “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom”⁸ [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10]. Our tendency is to rank these sins which the Apostle named, categorising them, making some more heinous than others. However, each of these sins alike is condemned as abominable, nefarious, outrageous. As an aside of no small significance, I note that one serious weakness of the modern pulpit is that preachers have ceased naming sin. We no longer see transgressions against the Living God as “sinful beyond measure” [see ROMANS 7:13].

The clear import of what is written in the verses cited is that sin is precisely that—*sin*! Because the actions and attitudes listed are sin—transgression against Holy God, we must always remember that Christ died because of sin. Therefore, none of these listed actions, nor any violation of the holiness of God, must be practised by those who profess to follow Him. Because no sin should be practised by those who follow the Saviour, neither must any of these sins be tolerated as normal for the followers of the Master. Sin is sinful!

⁵ International Standard Version

⁶ Christian Standard Bible

⁷ International Standard Version

⁸ Christian Standard Bible

DIVINE COMMITMENT — “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. 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” [**REVELATION 2:24-29**].

“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...” The letter is addressed to those within the congregation who refused to give even tacit approval of wickedness. It was not just that they were obstinate or that they did not long for church harmony, it is that they recognised error and their spirits recoiled in horror at the thought of participating in evil. There were saints then, and there are saints now, who are unwilling to exchange truth for harmony. There are quite enough professed Christians who are willing to tolerate just a little bit of evil in order to avoid unpleasantness.

As followers of the Risen Son of God, we have received His Spirit, and the indwelling Spirit of Christ will keep us from error. Listen to the words of the Saviour. “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” [**JOHN 15:26-16:11**].

The Helper has come! He restrained Christ’s true followers who were found among the Congregation at Thyatira; He kept them from sin. He now works in your life in the same way. The LORD, through Isaiah, promised, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left” [**ISAIAH 30:21**]. That promised day has come; the Spirit of the Lord lives in each believer. He guides His people, directing their steps and keeping them from sin.

In a practical sense, it is easier to avoid learning some things than it is to unlearn them once they are experienced. What I mean is that error, once embraced, or even tolerated, has a way of continually insinuating itself into the life of an individual, reasserting itself and demanding that we accept the error as normal. And we are prone to accept evil as normal if we do not have the Spirit of God to guide our steps! Error that is once tolerated will always attempt to assert itself as normative, sully the life and thoughts of the child of God.

The distortion of God's good gift of sex through pornography contaminates the mind of an individual for the remainder of earthly days. This is especially tragic when the mind of a youth has been contaminated by a distorted view of God's good gift. It will only be by the Lord's grace and the love of that individual's spouse and the support of trusted friends that the vile distortion will slowly relax its terrible grip on the life of the contaminated soul. It is likely that the one so contaminated in youth will never be fully free, though that one can have victory through reliance upon the love of God.

This doesn't change the fact that we have each learned things of which we are not proud. Someone asked recently if I had done things or said things in my youth that bothered me now. The answer is, "There are many things that I did in my youth of which I will not speak." These acts will remain between God and myself. As is true of your life if you are a Christian, life is divided into two periods—lost and saved. There was that time when you were still outside of Christ. Outside of Christ, we know that we are capable of the vilest acts, the most heinous deeds. Though we are just as capable of evil after we are saved, we do have the Spirit of God restraining us and the hand of our God to discipline us when we do wrong.

For each of us who walk this pilgrim path, life has been contaminated by sin. At various times each of us will have stumbled into situations and attitudes that we knew were dishonouring to the Master. It is even possible that we have associated with people that were detrimental to our spiritual growth; perhaps we are still associated with such people and we are ashamed of these associations. It is important to remind each believer that though such may be the case, because the Saviour has made an infinite investment in us through sacrificing His life for us, His commitment to us is infinite. We need but to recall the promise that we are given in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. "[God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" [**HEBREWS 13:5b**]. Surely this is a soft pillow for a weary head.

Even that believer with the brightest reputation will have struggled with thoughts that she knows are dishonouring to the Master Who redeemed her. The gentlest child of God, the man who has never knowingly deviated from pursuing hard after the Lord, will have had those moments when he knew he had lost his sanctification if anger was any indication.

I am careful at this point to note two grievous errors that have marked far too many churches of this day—*being truthful without grace* and *loving so much that we stifle truth*. There must be a balance of truth and love in the message delivered by the assemblies of our Lord. Indeed, we must warn sinners of the consequences of sinful behaviour, but we must do so with words that reveal our grief over the sin that has stained their lives. As Jude, the brother of our Lord, has written, "You, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh" [**JUDE 20-23**].

The distortion of speaking the truth in love, that is, lying because we are fearful of what someone may think if we reveal our true estimate, insinuates itself into our lives making it ever easier to distort the truth, to engage in subterfuge, to justify lying. Soon, without even thinking of what we are doing, we begin living a lie rather than living the truth.

This, then, is the message to the people of God: Let us determine to speak the truth in love. Let us refuse to associate with evil or even to tolerate wickedness in our assemblies. Let us make every effort to honour the Saviour who redeemed us. Let us strive to live holy, honourable lives to the praise of His glory. Let us endeavour to glorify His Holy Name. Amen.