

Thyatira Rev. 2:18-29:

Navy Admiral 'Turns a Blind Eye' to Order

Perhaps you've heard the phrase "turn a blind eye," which means to ignore undesirable information. The saying comes from a 19th century British naval battle. On April 2, 1801, during the Battle of Copenhagen, the British fleet was attacking the combined navies of Denmark and Norway. Three British ships ran aground, so the admiral, Hyde Parker, decided that the fire of battle was "too hot for Nelson to oppose." So Parker sent an order, through signal flags, that the younger admiral Horatio Nelson should "Discontinue Action" and withdraw.

When Nelson heard his own signalman relay the order, he pretended not to hear him. Mesmerized by the thrill of battle, Nelson had no intention of obeying the order. He turned to his captain and said, "This day may be the last for us at any moment," even as a Danish cannonball struck his ship's mainmast, scattering splinters all around him. This was typical of Nelson's stubborn and aggressive approach to war. In fact, he'd already lost sight in his right eye in a previous battle. So when he pressed again to respond to Parker's order, Nelson told his flag captain Thomas Foley, "You know, Foley, I only have one eye—I have the right to be blind sometimes," and then Nelson held up his telescope to his right eye and said, "I really do not see the signal!"

Sometimes we are all like Nelson, with one good eye and one blind eye, and when an order comes through from God, we hold up the telescope to the blind eye. As a result, we willfully ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit.¹

That is exactly what happens in our churches and that is exactly what happened in the church at Thyatira. They were commended by Jesus for doing many good things, but they overlooked certain belief issues. They condoned sin in their church. They tolerated EVIL!

We all know that Jesus exists in 3 manifestations, right? We all know that Jesus was the Arch Angel Michael in the Old Testament, right? We all know that we can be re-incarnated to a better life if we live good enough. We all know that we can earn our way to heaven. Also, the New World Translation is the only authentic translation. Hopefully, you know by now that I am sharing views from different cults.

T.D. Jakes says that God eternally exists in three manifestations, not three persons. Greg Boyd says God knows some aspects of the future, but that other future events are outside of his knowledge. Creflo Dollar says because we are created in the image of God, we are little gods. Mormonism says God revealed new scripture to Joseph Smith that supersedes the Bible. Roman Catholicism says we are justified by faith, but not by faith alone. This world is a murky madness of true and false. For every doctrine we know to be true, there seems to be a hundred pretenders.

No wonder, then, that John tells us to "test the spirits" and Paul says, "test everything" (1 John 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is our sacred responsibility to examine every doctrine to determine if it is true or false. But how can we distinguish sound doctrine from false? How can we distinguish teachers of truth from teachers of error? In our opening article, I said that putting a doctrine to the test is the best way to determine if it is true or false. As we test the doctrine, we learn our responsibility toward it: We either hold to it or we reject it. I am returning to those

¹ Submitted by Kevin Miller, Wheaton, Illinois; source: Christopher Hibbert, Nelson: A Personal History (Basic Books, 1994), pp. 260-261

tests today to explain them in greater detail. They provide a grid that is useful for testing any doctrine.²

My theme today: The Letter to the Church at Thyatira (2:18–29): Thyatira: Keep doing good, but don't tolerate evil.

The application: We must make sure we do not overlook or condone sin as a church.

Let's read Revelation 2:18-29. Please turn in your Bibles to the passage.

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give that one the morning star. 29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This church is divided into 3 parts:

1. Jezebel and followers (verses 20-22)
2. Those who do not participate in the activity but tolerate (verse 22 and notice the word “tolerate”)
3. Those who do not tolerate this teaching (Verse 24)

I. The church is commended, notice that in verse 19: *I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.*

- a. Thyatira: The ESV Study Bible shares: Thyatira was a politically and culturally marginalized city, finding its identity **economically, with guilds dealing in metals and fabric (Acts 16:14). Guilds celebrated their patron deities in periodic festivities, so Christians may have been tempted toward the message of a “prophetess”** who advocated participation in illicit sex and food sacrificed to idols,

² <https://www.challies.com/articles/test-every-doctrine-test-every-teacher/>

both staples of the social scene. Archaeological soundings at modern Ak-Hissar have yielded evidence of a few ancient architectural elements from Thyatira. Coins point to the ongoing NT-era worship of Apollo, who had been assimilated with the Lydian sun-god Tyrimnos.

- b. Dr. Mulholland (Asbury shares:
- c. this is a more inland city as opposed to the other cities
- d. this is a center for trade city
- e. textiles were one of the industry as is true in Laodicea
- f. Apollo one of the major deities in the Roman world
- g. Imperial court as scene in most of these cities
- h. Worship of the emperor or king as a deity was something long gone
- i. Judaism in Thyatira was strong
- j. Eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze: Apollo was a sun god
- k. Jesus uses imagery to contrast Himself to Apollo, the deity
 - i. “I know your works”
 - ii. love
 - iii. faith
 - iv. service
 - v. perseverance
 - vi. last were greater than the first
- l. Once again, notice that Jesus knows. He knows that bad and the good that we are involved in.
- m. They are commended for their love, faith, service, perseverance. They are also growing in these ways.
- n. However, it appears that they are still not quite right. They “tolerate” Jezebel (verse 20).

II. Let’s talk about Jezebel and her followers.

- a. Jezebel was a real woman in the Old Testament. She was the queen of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and she led King Ahab and many others astray. She killed many prophets and set up worship of baal (1 Kings 16:30-33; 19:1-2; 2 Kings 9).
- b. It seems that in this case there may be a real woman or group who are metaphorically called Jezebel.
- c. We do know what they are doing. Verse 20: *Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.*
- d. She is misleading them into sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols.
- e. These likely went together. It seems that they would participate in sexual immorality at the pagan temples while they ate the food which was sacrificed to idols. This likely happened while being in a trade guild.
- f. It could be likely that the Jezebel group would tell the others that something was okay when God’s Word already spoke to the issue.
 - 1. Does this sound familiar?
 - 2. Do you know anyone or group saying something is okay when God’s Word says otherwise?
 - 3. We must listen to the Bible over the other voices.

4. We have the same issue, sexual immorality is not okay, God speaks to it through the whole Bible. Try 1 Cor. 5:1 and 1 Cor. 6:13 for instance.
 5. The Word of God is our foundation and it topples every world system. We have that theme in Revelation, we must believe that today.
- III. There are also those who are not a part of the Jezebel group but tolerate them (verse 20).
- a. Notice how verse 20 specifies that they “tolerate.”
 - b. We are not to condone sin in the church, whether in belief or in action.
 - c. This is not talking about a simple error or a mistake, this is talking about a condoned behavior.
 - d. These people are not all participating in the sin and/or the belief, but they are guilty by condoning.
 - e. We, as a church, must watch our doctrine closely in order to make sure it is correct.
 - f. We, as a church, must not condone behaviors or inappropriate beliefs.
 - g. Verse 21: Jesus gave her time to repent:
 - h. Sick bed; I would strike her children dead;
 - i. In the Greek: Her children, I will strike with death
 - j. Is Jesus saying that He will literally strike them dead or will they back into the spiritual death. This is like the church in Ephesus that Jesus will remove their lampstand. **This is not physical death, but spiritual death.** This is Romans 8: If Christ is in you your spirit is alive because of righteousness, if Christ is not in you...
 - k. This is a spiritual reality
 - l. They go back into the spiritual death, out of which they had been redeemed
 - m. Verse 23: All of the churches will know that Jesus is the One who searches minds and hearts
 - n. Notice all of the churches
 - o. Minds and hearts: Not outward appearance but inward condition or state
 - p. In verse 24 Jesus says, “The rest of you...” This letter is expanded, this is a central letter
- IV. Then we see that there people who are pure, they are not condoning this behavior or belief system.
- a. In verse 24 it reads: *24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you...*
 - b. I hope our goal is that we are like that group.
 - c. They are encouraged to hold fast, Jesus is coming again. (verse 25)
 - d. Verse 26: They will receive authority over the nations, I am thinking this is in the new Kingdom.
 - e. Verse 27 has a Jewish image. The rod of iron is a Jewish image of the way Jesus is to rule. Psalm 2:9: *‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’*³
 - f. Everyone thought Rome was solid, but Jesus, in this passage is saying that He will break Rome, like clay pots it will shatter.

³ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Ps 2:9.

- g. Every fallen system, including the U.S., will someday shatter because Jesus is the ultimate ruler. Dr. Mulholland of Asbury Theological Seminary was teaching Revelation in the Soviet Union in the 80's and he would tell them that their fallen Babylon was the Soviet Union, he had people in his group who were arrested and who lost loved ones as they disappeared being taken by the Communist. He would say that the Soviet Union would crumble, but they did not believe it. They thought that it would never happen, but it did. During this time, no one would think Rome would crumble, but it has.
- h. Jesus will rule and if we persevere, we will rule with Him.
- i. Jesus says that those who persevere and do not participate in this Jezebel system, will receive the "Morning Star." The Morning Star is Jesus, we see that in Rev. 22:16: "*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*"
- j. It pays to persevere, eternally, it pays. It pays eternally to not condone sin and give in to the systems of this world.

So, what is our final application.

We must keep doing good as they were commended for.

We must not tolerate evil, but we also must not give in to evil with the church. We must not condone evil.

This means that we must be in the Word of God so we know truth.

Up here I have monopoly money:

Is it real?

How do you know it is not real?

Really, how do you know?

Would you know that this was not real if you never saw real money?

So, if I had a store, just pretending, if a few people, just a few people want to pay with this money at my store, should I allow it? No, of course not. If I start allowing bad money in my store, it would start affecting my store.

But I must know what real money is and not tolerate fake money.

I commend you as the Word of God commends you, know the Truth. Get in the Bible, live the Bible, do good, don't condone evil and wrong beliefs within the church. That is a church application and you are part of the church.

The application for you:

Search your heart, spend time in God's Word and in prayer asking God what you are in that is not right. Repentance is part of all of our lives, always.

Then, be encouraged: living for Jesus means reigning with Jesus.