

The Lord's Word to His Church: Thyatira

Now you can open your Bible to Revelation, chapter 2, if you will. We are looking at Revelation, chapter 1, 2, and 3, under the heading "The Lord Speaks to His Church in a Hostile World."

We live in a hostile world. The church always lives in a hostile world because, as we saw this morning, the world is always hostile toward the church. And that is the context for the letters that we read in chapters 2 and 3. There are seven letters here contained in the book of Revelation in these two chapters that our Lord Himself wrote to seven actual churches in Asia Minor – which would be today, Turkey, the area of Turkey.

To each of those churches, the Lord wrote a specific letter based upon that church's condition and need. These churches are actual churches, historic churches, but they also demonstrate to us the various kinds of churches that exist in all ages, so that the Lord's message to these churches transcends them and must be given to churches in all ages of church history. Each of these letters marks out a uniqueness of the church. Five out of the seven identify serious problems that the Lord addresses, and serious warnings, and even threats that come from Him.

For certain, not all churches are alike. They differ in denominational background, they differ in form of worship, they differ in style, they differ in doctrinal conviction and emphasis, they differ in various programs. But they ought to unite on many things, and one of those things is the pursuit of holiness. If the church is to be anything in the world, it is to be heaven's representative. It is to be the place where God is honoured.

If the church is anything in the world, it is God's holy people. Churches should be known by how they exalt righteousness and how they condemn unrighteousness. Churches should be known for confronting sin and pursuing holiness. But in our time, as in every other time, that is not necessarily the case; and it wasn't the case in the church in Thyatira that our Lord wrote the letter to that begins in verse 18.

The church should be the place where the Lord Jesus is lifted up. And we know from the apostle Paul that He wants a holy bride, chaste and pure. The church is to be intolerant of sin. The first instruction ever given to the church in Matthew, chapter 18, was to confront sin. Still, churches throughout history have defied the will of the Lord and tolerated sin in many forms; and that is the case even now. It was the case with the church at Thyatira.

Now the church in Thyatira was the only church in town. People were stuck with whatever it was, and it was not what it should have been. There are still churches like that. In fact, there are countless churches like Thyatira, churches that tolerate sin. And tolerating sin to any degree is a serious issue with our Holy Lord.

In this church at Thyatira, as we will see, the evils of idolatry and sexual immorality were not only accepted and tolerated, they were even advocated. This church had gone so far as not just to allow sin, but even to encourage it. The seriousness of the situation will be seen when I read the text, and a particular statement in verse 24, about the deep things of Satan. This church is typical of churches that tolerate sin. With that church in Thyatira, there was much that was commendable, but there was this fatal flaw, and this letter is driven primarily at addressing that fatal flaw, not just for them, but for all churches. Let me read this to you starting in verse 18. This is the letter the Lord sent to Thyatira, given to John on the Isle of Patmos, and then handed off to a messenger to be delivered to that church.

"And to the messenger 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 – ' and now the Lord Himself dictates the letter, ' – 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 bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, 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. 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.”

If the church married the world in Pergamos, the last letter we looked at, they’re now celebrating anniversaries with vigour. This letter shows what compromise with the world leads to. It leads to full-scale idolatry and immorality. This is not just a church infiltrated by the world, such as Pergamos was, this is a church that has absorbed sin and error, and lived happily with it. This kind of church is common today, as it has been through all centuries, but completely, completely disobedient to the demands of the Lord of the church Himself.

As I said at the outset, He commands that His church be pure and holy. This church is in direct, overt violation of that command, as would be any church that tolerated sin. There’s a helpful perspective, just to kind of give you a bit of an overview. The letter to the church in Thyatira begins the second group of messages to the churches of Asia.

In the first group, the church of Ephesus was characterised by loyalty to Christ and sound teaching, but was lacking in love. In the church of Smyrna, loyalty was tested by fire and proven true. In the church of Pergamos, the loyalty was lacking in moral passion, yet all three of those churches – Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos – were true to the faith and had not yielded themselves to the assaults of sin. Not so for the church of Thyatira and the churches to come of Sardis and Laodicea. The situation there is far worse. Here, not merely a small minority, had become indifferent to the will of the Lord, but large numbers were actually giving in to the demoralising influences of false teaching and immorality.

Into this church, in Thyatira, the evils of idolatry had pressed from the culture and penetrated very deeply. This had come through the influence of apparently a woman who was a preacher or teacher who had succeeded in leading the corruption of this church. The mention, as I noted in verse 24, of the deep things of Satan shows how the plunge has continued. Smyrna was assaulted by a synagogue of Satan, Pergamos was literally in the throne of Satan, but Thyatira had plummeted into the deep things of Satan. There is a flow in that progression. When love is left behind, compromise follows and leads to toleration of sin. When you love your Lord less, you love the world more, and it infiltrates your life and you tolerate sin.

This letter, by the way, is the longest of the seven letters. It is the longest letter written to the smallest city of all seven, but it needs to be read again and again in every time period, and especially today, as tolerating sin is common. Tolerating false teaching is common. False teaching is the idolatry, sin is the immorality. And there can be many good things in a church like that, effective things, numerical growth. There is a statement about that.

There has been, in this church, a growth, an increase in deeds, at the end of verse 19: “Your deeds of late are greater than at first.” In other words, you’re doing more things. But, sadly, evil has established itself; and, consequently, this church is in some serious trouble.

Now let’s look at the elements of the letter and see if we can’t get a glimpse of this. First of all, the write identifies Himself, as He does in every letter, and identifies Himself by borrowing from the vision in chapter 1. In chapter 1, there’s a vision of Christ. That vision, that glorious first vision that John saw is a picture of Christ. The elements of that are then used by Christ Himself at the head of these letters when those elements of his vision correspond to what he wants to say, and so we begin with the perspective that our Lord wants Thyatira to have.

“To the messenger 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.” Now we saw that picture in the first chapter: eyes like fire, like a divine laser, seeing down into the fatal flaws of the church. His feet like burnished, blazing bronze, ready to trample out judgment. We saw in chapter 1 that that’s a picture of judgment.

But there’s a single difference between the picture in chapter 1 and what our Lord says here. In chapter 1, the one identified there is identified as the Son of Man, the Son of Man. Here He is identified as the Son of God. What is the difference? Being identified as the Son of Man speaks to the issue of His humanness, and it speaks, therefore, to the issue of His compassion, and His care, and His intercession, and His interest in us, and His understanding of our weaknesses and failures and struggles.

But now all of a sudden, the language is the same about His laser knowledge, omniscience, and judgment, but He's identified as the Son of God. This emphasises His holiness, this emphasises His transcendence, this emphasises His deity, and consequently His judgment. This is not an encouraging beginning. Divine power is about to be launched against an immoral, idolatrous congregation. His sympathy is over. The Saviour has become the judge; the Intercessor has become the executioner. This is not comforting. This is threatening; this is fearful.

Now look. When it says "His eyes are like a flame of fire," we saw that in chapter 1 and we see it again in chapter 19 and verse 12. His eyes, again, are like a flame of fire, and this is at His second coming in judgment. His omniscience, His laser vision penetrates everything, consumes every opposition, sweeps down all obstructions, presses its way with invincible power to bring judgment. The same imagery is given in the 10th chapter of Daniel, and verse 6, and it's a picture of God whose eyes are like torches of fire. Now you know you're in trouble when the Lord sends you a letter and begins it like that. Such are the eyes of the Son of God that pierce all masks and all coverings, that search the remotest recesses of the corners of every heart and see the hidden things of every soul from which there is no escape.

And His feet are like fine bronze. Chapter 19 and verse 15 says that when He comes with His feet, He will "tread the wind press of the fierceness and the wrath of God." It's a picture of devastating judgment. And as in the other letters, the introduction of the author, the language borrowed from chapter 1 to introduce the author fits the character of the letter.

This is a letter no church would want to receive. This is judgment on a church that has literally begun to tolerate the deep things of Satan. It's a terrifying text. God will not tolerate sin in His church. "Judgment must begin – " 1 Peter 4 says, " – at the house of God."

Now, just exactly what was going on there that brought that immorality, that idolatry that allowed them to traffic in the deep things of Satan? Let's back up a little bit and understand something about that city.

It was halfway between Pergamos, or Pergamum and Sardis – about 30 to 40 miles from each. It had been a Roman town for a few hundred years. Its history is a history of conquering and destructions and rebuilding. It was really just the gateway to Pergamos, which was the capital of the area. It had become something of a military garrison to sort of guard Pergamos. It provided some kind of delaying tactic for attacks on Pergamos; they would have to go through Thyatira. So it was destined to be destroyed and rebuilt, and destroyed and rebuilt; and it was.

It became commercially viable because of the dye that was developed there that came from two sources – a root and a small seashell fish called Murex, and out of that they developed a purple dye: that purple dye identified in the book of Acts with a lady named Lydia who was a seller of purple in Thyatira. She was the first convert on European soil; she was dealing in precious goods. Today, if you go to that location, you'll find a small town of about 25,000 people, and apparently the main craft there is weaving oriental rugs.

Religiously, Pergamos wasn't the centre of anything in particular. There were some fortune-telling shrines there presided over by a female oracle called Sambathe, an evil, powerful priestess. There was a temple to Apollo; he was considered the chief god. But it wasn't a particularly important place. Into that place, the Lord had come and the church had been established.

How did it start? Well, in Acts 19, you remember that it says in verse 10 that "all Asia heard the gospel." So we don't know exactly how it started, but the gospel was spreading all over Asia, starting from Ephesus. And maybe Lydia, who had come to Philippi and Macedonia on business and heard Paul and been saved, maybe she went back, and she, being the first Christian, maybe she told everybody. Luke 16 tells us that she was not the only one in her family saved, but others in her family were saved. And, perhaps, that's the nucleus of the church. But this church is severely mixed.

Now, I understand that all churches in all ages are a mixture of true believers and false believers, I understand that. All churches are a mixture of the real and the false. But in this case, there was a tolerance of the behaviour of sinners. There was something beyond the rather mysterious reality that believers and non-believers exist together in a church and we can't tell them apart. In this church, there were people who literally were living in the same kind of sinful patterns that they had before they came to church and professed Christ. As far as we can tell in history, this church disappeared sometime toward the end of the 2nd century, maybe even before. The problem was this woman, this woman who had brought in idolatry and immorality.

Before we look at the problem, it's wonder to read verse 19: "I know your deeds, your love, faith, service, perseverance, and your deeds of late are greater than at first." That's a very wonder commendation. "I know your deeds, your works," *erga*. "I know your works, they're works of love. You maybe have what Ephesus needed."

There's no mention here, by the way, of sound doctrine, as there was in Ephesus. They had love, they had faith; that might be an indication that they had fidelity to the truth. There was a certain loyalty there, a certain dependability, a certain reliability. They were characterised by service. That's the word *diakonia*, voluntary meeting of needs.

There was a certain perseverance there, *hupomon* meaning steadfast endurance that springs from faith. These are all virtues, worthy virtues. And they were doing things at a greater extent than they had done before. The church was growing and their deeds were greater. There was life there. There were good things there.

You might say Ephesus was going down and Thyatira was actually coming up, growing. But here, sin was tolerated apparently by the majority. Love wasn't their problem; they had love. Faith wasn't their problem. Ministry wasn't their problem. Endurance wasn't their problem. Their problem was they were tolerating sin. They were an active, flourishing, busy, growing church, but they were in danger, severe danger, and that danger came from sin. We would all understand this, wouldn't we?

Some people think that we're a little legalistic because of the emphasis we have on the pursuit of holiness and the confrontation of sin, but this is just what our Lord asks of us, nothing more. And in spite of all that was indicative of life there, the condemnation is devastating, starting in verse 20: "I have this against you, you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. My slaves, my slaves, you have lead astray into idolatry and immorality because you tolerate this woman Jezebel."

We have to say that churches must be intolerant, intolerant of false teaching, intolerant of immorality. The church tolerated this woman. I don't know why – how in the world this church would even think of having a woman preacher. We're still in the 1st century. Had they succumbed to some kind of feminism? And not only a woman preacher, but an immoral one, an idolatrous one, one into the deep things of Satan. But, evidentially, the church did. It's shocking. It's absolutely shocking: "You tolerate the woman Jezebel."

The danger to this church wasn't external. External dangers came on the church of Smyrna, as we saw in verses 8 to 11, and that church was pure, and the Lord says nothing against that church. This is not an external assault of persecution, this is internal. And this is not the worship of some outside god, but the tolerance of some inside false teacher who's literally bringing in false gods. We don't know who she was obviously. So if you're looking in a MacArthur Study Bible and you're looking at the footnote for an identification of Jezebel, all I can tell you is what the text says.

Was her name Jezebel? I doubt it, I doubt it. Do you know anybody named Jezebel? There are reasons why you don't know anybody named Jezebel. She's an Old Testament character, the notorious daughter of Ethbaal, the pagan king of the Sidonians, a Baal worshipper. She married Ahab, you remember, and set up Baal worship in Israel that ended in disaster.

The priests of Baal were sexual perverts, wicked. Jezebel brought in orgies in worshipping Baal back in 2 Kings. And if you want to know what kind of woman she was, all you have to do is read the little paragraph about her end in chapter 9, verse 33: "He said, 'Throw her down,' so they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot. When he came in, he ate and drank; and he said, 'See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter.' They went to bury her, but they found nothing more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. Therefore they returned and told him. And he said, 'This is the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "In the property of Jezreel, the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel.'""

I can't imagine a worse end – shocking, shocking. She ended up eaten by the dogs. That's Jezebel. That's why nobody's named Jezebel. Was this actually her name? Probably not. But she was an idol worshipper. She was Jezebel-like. She introduced immorality and idolatry in the church. She is symbolically called Jezebel in the way that Jerusalem be symbolically called Sodom and Egypt in its time of iniquity.

It also says she calls herself a prophetess, a preacher. I'll just remind you that most cults, most cults originate from significant women. "She calls herself a prophetess – " which means she speaks for God, " – and she teaches, and she leads My slaves astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." It is just shocking that this woman, whoever, whatever her name was, was a Jezebel to the church in Thyatira in the way that Jezebel brought iniquity and wickedness to Israel. She literally made the people comfortable with their pagan idolatry and immorality.

How could a church succumb to that? They did. They didn't deal with sin: sin at the level of false doctrine, sin at the level of immorality. The Lord says, "I gave her time to repent." That is the graciousness and mercy of God. "I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality."

How is it possible that someone could come into a church in the 1st century and convince people that you could live an immoral life and carry on worshipping idols? How is that possible? It is possible. It continues to be possible even today.

There has always been a problem with what is called antinomianism in the church – people who want to twist the Scripture; maybe bringing in Greek dualism was what launched it here. Maybe it was part of the gnostic development that there was a higher secret knowledge, there was a dualistic world, and you didn't need to worry about the lowly things. You lived in an esoteric plane of spiritual reality, and what happened to the body was indifferent, it didn't matter. There was a dualistic view that all that was flesh and material was wicked and evil, and you couldn't do anything about it; so let it go, it doesn't matter. That is characteristic of Gnosticism and antinomianism. It doesn't matter what you do in the flesh, the spirit matters; and wherever there's sin, grace abounds. This is what has been called antinomianism, against the law, or libertinism.

Somehow she convinced the church that paganism and its developments and its experiences and its expressions, even to the point of immorality, were okay. They were okay, they were fine. We're all sinners. We can't do any better. We can't do anything about it. This is who we are. We're in the flesh, it's going to be that way.

And there's even a very popular preacher who had "peccator" tattooed on his arm, which means "sinner," celebrating his sinfulness, who recently sinned so greatly he had to leave the ministry. There will always be those people who think that the gospel and grace is license to live in sin. The Lord said to her, "I give you space to repent." She doesn't want to repent.

The next statement is pretty shocking: "I'll throw her on a bed all right. She wants a bed, the bed of immorality, I'll throw her on a bed, and I'll throw those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence." What a statement.

What do you mean, her children? "All who follow her pattern, all who follow her example, all in every age who fall into that kind of life, all the offspring of debauchery and iniquity, I will kill them." It doesn't get any stronger than that. "I will kill her children with pestilence." The word pestilence is "death." Literally compound statement: "I will kill her children with death." Christ wants His church pure and He may kill people to bring it about.

First Corinthians 11 says that the Corinthians, some of them were desecrating the Lord's Table and the Lord killed them. "Many of you are sick and some of you are dead because of how you treat the Lord's Table."

[First John 5:16](#) says there's a sin unto death, and the Lord may decide that he's going to take the life of people in the church, professed believers, and maybe even real believers, because of their sin. Ananias and Sapphira were killed on the spot in Acts for their sin. Church can't tolerate sin.

The message of the antinomians, the message of the libertines, that it doesn't matter what you do in the flesh, it doesn't matter what you do in your body because your body's not redeemed yet. You have no power over it. You don't have any responsibility for it. "Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds." That is an inaccurate message, and it may bring about death. People in the church may die.

Why would the Lord do this? Verse 23: "So that 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." Now that is a fascinating

statement to me that "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."

Why did He say that "all the churches will know My reaction to the tolerance of sin"? I'll tell you what that says, that there were a whole lot of other churches like Thyatira, and there were a lot of churches moving in that direction, and killing Ananias and Sapphira was a warning to everybody else of what might happen; and killing the people in this church would be a warning to other churches of what might happen as well. "Repent, you're in danger of being executed. Repent."

I don't understand how churches can be so indifferent to sin, so indifferent to sinning. The Lord says, "I'm going to put on a public display of warning about tolerating false teaching and its accompanying immorality. I'm going to put on a public display. I'm going to kill people in Thyatira as an example to other churches who think they need to go that way. And I am the one who searches the minds and the hearts."

That sounds like [Jeremiah 17:10](#). "I have intimate knowledge, perfect knowledge. I know the depths of sin, and I will give to each one of you according to your works." That, of course, encompasses future judgment. But more than that, it's about now. "Your faith, truth faith, is expressed in righteous deeds; and for you, there will be blessing. But for those who carry on in sin, those who commit adultery will be killed, and so will false Christians."

We talk about the need for revival in the church. What would it look like? What would revival in the church look like? What would a real reformation in the church look like? What would change? I'm talking about the church across the country, across the world. The church would get very serious about holiness and very serious about dealing with sin.

That's the reformation our Lord calls for. The reformation would include a new love for Christ, the reformation would include the exclusion of compromise, and it would encompass a very serious plea for holiness and a confrontation of sin. You hear people say, you know, "Wouldn't it be great if the Lord would bring a reformation, bring a revival, do a great and mighty work." It needs to start in the church. And if the church is going to have a new reformation – and it desperately needs it – it's going to have to refresh its first love for Christ, it's going to have to stop the compromises with the world, and it's going to need to confront sin.

Now, all of that leads to a final command in verse 24: "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." The Lord knows them that are His. We read that even in the Old Testament. The Lord knows those that are His. "He holds them like jewels," the Old Testament prophet said.

"I know you, the rest of you. You have no other church to go to; there's only one in Thyatira. I know you don't hold this teaching." What's the teaching? The teaching is some kind of antinomian, libertine teaching that you can live any way you want and still be okay with God, that salvation is by grace, that you believe all of that. But reality is, you're free to sin because you can't do anything about it anyway." That's the old dualistic idea.

But there are those who don't hold this teaching, and this teaching is called the deep things of Satan. If you teach that God is indifferent to your sin, if you teach that God is indifferent to your disobedience, if you teach that God tolerates your vestiges of paganism, tolerates your immorality, you literally are into the deep things of Satan. You're teaching something that is satanic, it's deeply satanic. It's pagan.

You are saved unto holiness, unto righteousness. You have to stop the old pattern of life; and in that pagan world, it involved worship connected to immorality. There are some of you who know better than to buy into that, that you can live any way you want and call yourself a Christian. You have not bought into it. You don't know those deep things of Satan, as they call them. And why would they call them that? Because they actually were so bold as to think that because they had this elevated spirituality, they could traffic in the things of Satan and be okay. They knew they were tampering in the world of Satan, but they felt it had no consequence for them.

Again, this smacks of that dualism. "But for you who don't buy into that, I place no other burden on you. I ask nothing more. Continue to be faithful, and what you have, which is the truth, hold fast until I come. You don't have a burden beyond having to go on resisting this teaching, resisting this solicitation, this

ridicule, this pressure. Be faithful; that's all I ask. Hang on, hold fast, don't listen, don't buy in, be strong – "that's what *krate*, hold fast means. "It won't be easy, but that's all you've got. That's your church and there's no other."

And then comes a promise: "He who overcomes and keeps My deeds until the end – " in other words who demonstrates true saving faith. The overcomer, [1 John 5:5](#), "The one who overcomes is the one who has faith in Christ."

And the evidence of true faith in Christ is endurance, obedience, good works to the end. So if you demonstrate the genuineness of your salvation, the reality of your salvation, and you're not just a professor of salvation living an ungodly, immoral life, "to you over-comers – " verse 26 " – I will give authority over the nations. I will give authority over the nations." What an amazing statement. What does that mean? You will reign with Christ. You will share His millennial rule.

We actually began to see that in chapter 1, verse 6: "He made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever." We are a kingdom of priests. It's reiterated throughout the book of Revelation that we who belong to Christ will reign with Christ. We will rule with Christ. He will rule the nations and we'll rule with Him: "I will give you a place with the King in His kingdom to rule, and He shall rule them – " verse 27, taken out of Psalm 2, that great passage, verses 7 to 9, " – 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."

Now it's an amazing thing to think about the future. The world is such a mess. Christ is coming to set up His kingdom. When He comes to rule – that word "to rule" in verse 27 is, interesting enough, from *poimain*, which means to shepherd, to pastor. It's not a rule that is all judgment, it's also shepherding. It's combining the rod of iron with the role of the shepherd. The rod of iron is to beat off the attackers, and the shepherd is to care for the sheep. "If you're faithful – " He says, " – I will share My authority with you." Those of us who are glorified believers in the kingdom, when Christ sets it up on earth, will assist Him in judgment and the care of His own. Amazing promise.

But there's more. Not only will we be given the privilege of authority, but verse 28 simply says "and I'll give him the morning star." What is that? What is the morning star? Well we know the answer because in [Revelation 22:16](#) we hear this: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and descendant of David. I am the bright morning star."

What does it mean, "I will give him the morning star"? It means this: "I'll give him Christ." "If you're among the faithful, I will give you the kingdom, I will give you the King. That is to say all that God has – the kingdom and the King.

So a final word in verse 29, common in all the letters: "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Are you listening? Are you listening? If you're listening, what did you hear in this letter? You heard about a church that had activity, that was growing, greater things were going on; a church that was marked by love and faith, and a measure of activity and endurance; but a church that had invited the world in, and the world had settled.

They allowed a false teacher to bring in pagan idolatry. And pagan idolatry could never be divorced from pagan immorality, and so this is a church full of iniquity and doing nothing to eliminate it. This is a church that is under judgment. This is a church that the Lord says, "I may need to come and kill some of your members," to send a message to other churches about righteousness and holiness and sin.

If you're listening, do you hear the seriousness of tolerating sin in the church? If you're listening, do you also notice that the evidence of being a true believer is not succumbing to false doctrine, not succumbing to immorality, but holding fast. And did you hear also that for those who are the true believers holding fast, the promise of God is "the kingdom and the King will be yours." That's His message to the church.

In our day, the churches across the world need to take a look at themselves – our own church, all of churches – and ask, "Are we at all tolerating sin? Do we have any room for false teaching, immorality?" If we do, the Lord is at the door with penetrating, sovereign gaze, ready to activate judgment, and even death. It's not how it should be in the church. The church should be a place of life and joy and holiness.

The prayer for a church today, if that church wanted to be what Christ wanted it to be, would be that, like Ephesus: it'd take a look at itself and see if the love for Christ was what it should be; and like Pergamos, it takes a look at itself to see if there's any compromise with the world; and like Thyatira, to check its

attitude towards sin, if there's any tolerance there. There'll never be a reformation there, there'll only be judgment; and there's more yet to come.

Father, we thank You tonight for the opportunity to, again, open Your Word. And these are very, very strong things that You've said, and we have to proclaim them because this is Your Word. And we delight to do that, on the one hand; but it's a painful burden on the other, like John in the book of Revelation who said that the truth was both sweet and bitter. It has to be proclaimed even though it's painful.

We know what You want the church to be in a pagan, hostile world. You want it to be marked by love for You, love for Christ – fiery, passionate, zealous love for the Saviour – by complete separation from the world, and by the love of holiness and intolerance for sin. We would pray, Lord, that You would grant us the grace and the power to be that kind of church that the Lord commends, those kinds of saints who collectively together as a congregation can claim the promise that one day we will receive the kingdom and the King. The kingdom will be ours and we will reign with Him; and the King will be ours forever. We thank You for these promises. Help us to be faithful. We give You praise, in Christ's name. Amen.