

# The Corrupt Church

Revelation 2:18-29

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## Review: Rev 2:12-17 – The Compromising Church

- The church and Christians should stand out from the culture; if we do not, we need a spiritual check-up.
- Jesus has an issue with churches that tolerate false doctrine.
- The best way to confront false doctrine is with God's Word.
- Compromising with the culture is a sign of apostasy.

## Revelation 2:18 – To the church at Thyatira

*And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:*

### What do we know about Thyatira?

This was the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3. In history, we have no record that the Christians of **Thyatira** suffered any significant political or religious persecution.

- Still, this city was a center of *business* and *trade*. It had many active trade guilds, each having their own patron deity from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods.
- Acts 16:14-15 mentions Lydia of Thyatira, who was a *seller of purple* cloth from the city of Thyatira which was famous for purple dye.

### How does Jesus introduce Himself?

Jesus first described Himself with a title that emphasized His *deity*. In Jewish thought, to be the *son of* a thing meant you had the nature of that thing.

- The *sons of the sorceress* (Isaiah 57:3) had the nature of the sorceress.
- The *sons of thunder* (Mark 3:17) had a nature like thunder. So the **Son of God** has the divine nature, the nature of **God**.

### What does it tell us Jesus had *eyes like a flame of fire*?

Jesus chose this description of Himself from the presentation in Revelation 1:14 to emphasize the idea that His **eyes** looked with penetrating judgment.

### What does it tell us His feet were *like fine brass*?

Jesus chose this description of Himself from Revelation 1:15 to emphasize His *purity* because **brass** is pure and

highly refined in the fire. It also emphasized His *steadfastness*, because **brass** was the strongest known metal in the ancient world, and **feet like fine brass** would be strong and unmovable.

## Revelation 2:19 – What Jesus knows about Thyatira.

*I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

### What works did Jesus know about Thyatira?

*Love, service, faith, and your patience:* In many ways, the church at Thyatira was a model church. They had four great essential qualities. They had **love**, both for the Lord and for one another. They knew **service**, and had **faith** and **patience** worth mentioning.

### What does it mean that their last works were more than the first?

Not only did they *have* these **works**, but they had them in *increasing measure* — they were *growing* in **love, service, faith, and patience**.

## Revelation 2:20-21 – The problem at Thyatira.

*Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.*

### Of what did Thyatira need to repent?

*Because you allow that woman Jezebel:* The center of the corruption at the church at Thyatira was a woman Jesus called **Jezebel**. This may not have been her literal name, but a title that clearly represented a self-styled **prophetess** within the church, after the pattern of Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16-21 and 2 Kings 9:30-37).

- It was also a strong thing to call this woman **Jezebel**. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal...”

### What does it tell us that the woman called Jezebel called herself a prophetess?

This “**Jezebel**” at the church of Thyatira wasn’t really a **prophetess**, she only claimed to be one. Yet, it seems the Christians there *received* her as a **prophetess**, and that is why Jesus gave them this warning.

### What was the woman called Jezebel doing?

*To teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols:* Here, Jesus described the specific *sin* of this woman “Jezebel.”

- Mainly, she was an *immoral* and *ungodly* influence on others, leading them into immorality and idolatry.

### What was the problem with the eating of *things sacrificed to idols*?

This was probably connected with the mandatory social occasions of the guilds. Perhaps a Christian was invited to the monthly meeting of the goldsmith’s guild, and the meeting was held at the temple of Apollo.

- “Jezebel” would encourage men to go — perhaps even using a “prophetic” word — and when the men went, they fell into immorality and idolatry.
- The draw to the guilds was powerful. No merchant or trader could hope to prosper without participating.

One ancient Christian named Tertullian wrote about Christians who made their living in trades connected to pagan idolatry. They justified their involvement by saying, “This is my living, and I must live.”

- Tertullian replied, “Must you live?”

### Who was corrupted by Jezebel’s sin?

She corrupted the **servants** of Jesus, who belong to Him.

Mark 9:42 – *whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.*

### How did Jesus give this Jezebel time to repent?

Jesus’ greatest accusation was that this “Jezebel” **did not repent**. She apparently rejected the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart, calling her to repentance.

### How do we see both mercy and judgment in Jesus dealing with Jezebel?

**Time to repent** shows *mercy*. God gives us **time to repent**, we should deal with others the same way. **And she did not repent** speaks to the *judgment* of God.

- There is a time when God says, *My Spirit shall not strive with man forever* (Genesis 6:3). This means that when God gives us **time to repent**, we must *take advantage* of that time.

### What was the sin of the *church* of Thyatira?

On the outside, they were a model church, showing *works, love, service, faith, and patience*. Yet there was significant corruption *inside* the church.

- The sin of the church was that they *allowed* this corruption.
- It wasn’t necessarily a large group following Jezebel. A little leaven affects a whole lump of dough, and a few in immorality and idolatry will corrupt the whole church.

Hillary Morgan Ferrer of Mama Bear Apologetics: “What you tolerate today, you will accept tomorrow. What you accept today, you will embrace tomorrow.”

### How does our culture view toleration?

Our modern culture has elevated “toleration” to a mantra that eliminates all discretion. And discretion and the more outdated word, discrimination, has come to be regarded as judgmental and inappropriate.

### What is the prophetic significance of tolerance being a greater value than discrimination?

It is the spirit of Antichrist...

Daniel 7:25 – *He shall... intend to change times and law.*

The changing of God-infused values are well underway.

### Revelation 2:22-25 – What Thyatira should do.

*I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come.*

### What would Jesus do about Jezebel?

*I will cast her into a sickbed:* Before Jesus told the Christians in Thyatira what *they* must do, He first told them what *He* would do. Jesus would chastise this Jezebel, and **cast her into a sickbed**, along with **those who commit adultery with her**.

### What is significant about the reference to *adultery*?

It speaks of both sexual **adultery** and spiritual **adultery**.

- When these Christians honored other gods, they were unfaithful to the Lord who saved them.
- The figure of a **sickbed** is fitting: They were guilty of adultery, both sexual and spiritual. It is as if Jesus said,

“You love an unclean bed. Here, I will give you one, and **cast you into a sickbed.**”

### What was the *sickbed*?

It could simply be an image of affliction, or it could be literal sickness that Jesus allowed in the lives of Jezebel and her followers as chastisement.

- We know from passages such as 1 Cor 11:30 that God can use sickness as a way to chastise His people when they are in sin.
- The Greek word used here for **bed** is also the word for a *banqueting couch*; and if that meaning is taken, it says: ‘I will strike her down as she sits at her forbidden feasts.’

### What was the purpose in the chastening of Jesus?

First, it was to draw them to **repent of their deeds**. They wouldn’t listen to Jesus before, so He had to speak louder through the **sickbed**.

- Second, it was to give an example of holiness to other churches: **and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.**

### What is the distinction between *minds and hearts*?

This is literally “hearts and kidneys.” In the mind of the ancient Jews, the *heart* was the place of intellect, and the *kidneys* were the place of emotion. Jesus said, “I know your every thought and your every feeling.”

### What does it mean, “*I will kill her children with death*”? Isn’t this redundant?

All men die, but all are not killed with death... The second death is way worse than the first death.

### What are the depths of Satan?

It seems that this Jezebel led others in the church at Thyatira to discover *depths of Satan*.

- In the days of the New Testament, many non-Christian religions (the Ophites and various Gnostic groups) said they knew the “deep things of Satan.”
- The ancient Christian writer Tertullian said if you asked a Gnostic about their cosmic mysteries, they furrowed their brow and said, “It is deep.” It may be deep — but deep into a dangerous pit.

### How could Christians ever fall for *the depths of Satan*?

Perhaps the rationalizing went this way: “To effectively confront Satan, you must enter his strongholds, and learn his depths in order to conquer him.”

- People use similar reasoning in misguided spiritual warfare today.

### Who should *hold fast what you have till Jesus returns*?

There were many faithful, uncompromising Christians in Thyatira. To them, Jesus simply said, “**hold fast.**” They must not stop doing what is good. They must not become distracted or discouraged from what Jesus wants them to be and to do.

- We are to hang in there and stand strong for Jesus until He comes. It is only *then* that the battle will be over.

### Revelation 2:26-28 – The promise of a reward.

*And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—  
‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;  
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—  
as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.*

### Who are the overcomers?

Even when there is the immoral and idolatrous influence of a Jezebel, Christians can *overcome* and *keep Jesus’ works until the end*.

- We must not become overly discouraged at immorality and idolatry around us, even among Christians.
- God’s work will still go on through His overcomers.

### What will Jesus give the overcomers?

*power over the nations*: Jesus promised that His people who overcome the threat of immorality and idolatry will reign with Him. To them, Jesus offered a share in His own kingdom.

### Who would *rule them with a rod of iron*?

This quotation from Psalm 2 speaks of the authority of the Messiah when He rules over the earth. In that day, righteousness will be enforced, and those who rebel against Jesus will be **dashed to pieces** like a clay pot hit with an iron bar.

- Jesus includes this here to give hope to the faithful Christians of Thyatira, who felt overwhelmed by the immorality and idolatry all around them.
- Jesus reminds them, “You’re on My winning team.”

### What will the rule of Jesus over the nations be like?

The word for ‘rule’ (Gr. *poimanei*) means literally ‘to shepherd.’

- His rule will not be just executing judgment, but also that of administering mercy and direction.

### What does it mean that Jesus will give the overcomers *the morning star*?

Jesus offered them a reward greater than the kingdom. He offered them the reward of Himself, because He is the *Morning Star* (Revelation 22:16).

**Revelation 2:29 – A general exhortation**

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

**What does it mean, *he who has an ear*?**

This is a letter that applies to everyone...

- who are like Jezebel, who lead others into sin.
- who follow the Jezebels into sin.
- who permit a Jezebel to work her wickedness.

Finally, it applies to the faithful who must hold fast.

**What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- Our inclination to be tactful and accepting can cause us to fall into sin.
- The Lord will discipline those He loves allowing the consequences of sin to chasten us.
- Even as God's wrath is aroused by sin and the toleration of sin, His ultimate purpose is repentance.