

June 4, 2023 by Steve Brandon



Don't be too Tolerant

Revelation 2:18-29

1. Christ (verse 18)
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I invite you to open in your Bibles to the book of Revelation. For the past month or so, we have focused our attention upon this marvelous and intriguing book. This morning, we will finish our exposition of the second chapter. We are going to be looking at the church in Thyatira.

As you are turning there, I want for you to see what I noticed on my calendar a few days ago. I noticed the following calendar item on my iPhone: "June 1, 2023 Thursday All-day First Day of LGBTQ+ Pride Month." Now, obviously, I didn't put that on my calendar. With a few clicks, I figured out pretty quickly where the source of this came from. It came from the "Holidays in the United States" shared calendar that I have on my iPhone. Now, there are enough benefits from such a calendar, that I'm not planning on deleting this shared calendar.

The inclusion of such an event on a list of "Holidays in the United States" shows where we are as a nation. There are enough enthusiastic supporters of this lifestyle in our nation that this month arises to the celebrate this month as a "holiday." There are many, pushing a majority of people in our nation that see this as a good thing. That we would take pride in our inclusion as a nation. That we would celebrate those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Lest you think that this only takes place in our most liberal of cities, like New York, or San Francisco, or Las Vegas, I have here a picture of some books that are in the Rockford Public Library system.

One book in our library is entitled, "A is for Acceptance! B is for Belonging! C is for Celebrate!" The Amazon review says, "ABC Pride introduces young readers to the alphabet through the colourful world of Pride. Children can discover letters and words in a fun and engaging way, while also learning more about the LGBTQIA+ community and how to be inclusive. Every letter of the alphabet is paired with bold illustrations to support language learning, and a handy list of discussion points at the end gives adults the appropriate tools to spark further conversations and discussion around the topic. ABC Pride offers a simple yet powerful way to explain gender, identity, and ability to young children, while introducing and supporting diverse family units. An ideal book for little learners to explore together with a caregiver, as well as in a classroom environment."

Another book in our library is entitled, "A Quick & Easy Guide to Queer & Trans Identities." Here's Amazon's description of this book: "A great starting point for anyone curious about queer and trans life, and helpful for those already on their own journeys! In this quick and easy guide to queer and trans identities, cartoonists Mady G and Jules Zuckerberg guide you through the basics of the LGBT+ world! Covering essential topics like sexuality, gender identity, coming out, and navigating relationships, this guide explains the spectrum of human experience through informative comics, interviews, worksheets, and imaginative examples. A great starting point for anyone curious about queer and trans life, and helpful for those already on their own journeys!" Though this book is said to be for "anyone," it is aimed at children. With 233 reviews on Amazon, the average rating was 4.8 stars. there was only one review given three stars or less, and the reason for the poor rating is that "The art was not my style. I didn't like the choice to have the information imparted by talking snails. but the information in this book is undeniably good."

Here is a final book, "Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens." That title alone ought to send shivers up your spine. First of all, it's taken from Psalm 139:14, which says that we all are "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made." Not "Queerfully and Wonderfully Made." Second, the subtitle, "A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens." There is nothing Christian about being LGBTQ+. Here is the Amazon description of this book: "Are you LGBTQ+? Not sure? Whether you're queer or questioning, understanding sexuality and gender identity can be confusing. And if you're a Christian, questions of identity can be even scarier. Is there something wrong with you? Will your friends accept you? When should you tell your family? What about church? Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens has answers to all these questions and more. You'll get insight and support from an amazing group of LGBTQ+ professionals, as well as testimonies from young adult queer Christians who've recently been exactly where you are. You'll walk away with a lot of answers, prepared with tools to help. But most importantly, you'll hear the good news: God loves you exactly as you are. No matter your identity or where in your journey of self-discovery you find yourself, you got this."

Now, I say all this to set up for you a bit what the church in Thyatira was facing. It was facing a sexualized culture, that had come into the church. And in the name of tolerance, many had welcomed the immorality right into the church.

Now, I'm all for tolerance, our society can't work if we aren't tolerant of one another. Further, I'm for tolerance in the church. For us to live in harmony with each other, we need to tolerate each other. We need to bear one another's burdens. We need to patiently endure with one another. Yet, toleration can go too far: when normalizing deviant sexual behavior in the church. When the church in Thyatira was doing this, Jesus wasn't pleased. Let's hear what Jesus said to such a church.

Revelation 2:18-29

And 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.'"

The core of the message to the church in Thyatira comes in verse 20, "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." The church in Thyatira was rebuked for their "tolerance." Not of their "tolerance" in the public square, but of their "tolerance" in the church. They were not rebuked for their "tolerance" over people struggling in their sin, but of the "tolerance" of the teaching and promotion of sexual immorality in the church.

Thus, my message this morning is entitled, "Don't be too Tolerant."

Again, this letter was written to a real church in Asia minor. John was a political prisoner on the island of Patmos. He was writing to the church in Thyatira. Again, this letter begins like every other letter in the book of Revelation begins, with a description of Jesus, picked up from chapter 1. If you are looking for a hook to hang your thoughts from verse 18 on something, here is my first point:

1. Christ (verse 18)

Verse 18 gives us a description of Jesus.

Revelation 2:18

And 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.

This is exactly how Jesus is described back in chapter 1 and verses 14 and 15, "His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace." The question, then, is what does this mean? Why did Jesus pick out these characteristics to those in Thyatira? Ultimately, we can't be sure. But my guess is that it has to do with the coming authority and judgment of Jesus. Jesus isn't playing games here. He is coming with his blazing authority. Let us beware of the wrath of Christ.

Now, in verse 19, we the church in Thyatira being commended. This is my second point.

2. Commendation (verse 19)

Revelation 2:19

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

From what Jesus said about this church, it sounded amazing! It was a church filled with life and activity. It was a church filled with committed members, with nobody was sitting on the side. The church was active and vibrant and alive!

Let's just walk through the things Jesus mentions in verse 19.

- This church had works. That is, those in the church are doing good things. They were caring for the poor and weak among them. They were being witnesses for Christ in their community.

- This church had love. They had a genuine affection for one another. They were self-sacrificing in their service to one another. This church had faith. They were trusting in God. They were believing in Jesus.

- This church had service. They were committed to giving of themselves to others. They were meeting the needs of each other.

- This church had patient endurance. They were in it for the long haul. They tolerated one another in love.

- This church was growing! They were increasing in all of these virtues. Jesus said, "your latter works exceed the first" (Revelation 2:19). More and more, they were caring for the needy. More and more, they sharing the gospel of Jesus with those in Thyatira. More and more, their love for one another was growing. More and more, they were stirred deep and deeper in their hearts with affection toward one another. More and more, they were trusting in the Jesus, even through their hard times More and more, they were believing in the promises of God. More and more, they were giving of their time and energy to serve others. More and more, they were proving that Jesus was worth their sacrifice and suffering.

What a great church, this church in Thyatira! It was filled with energy and enthusiasm and work and effort and sweat and tears and labor. They sound like Paul's description of the church in Thessalonica, "[We remember your] work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

If this verse represented all that we knew about the church in Thyatira, we would all be amazed at this church! But then comes the “but” of verse 20. This introduces a contrast. As much and as highly as Jesus commends the church, Jesus also condemns the church. This is my third point this morning:

3. Condemnation (verses 20-23)

Revelation 2:20

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.

This is the heart of Jesus’ concern for the church. Yes, they are alive. Yes, they have much activity. Yes, they are displaying the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. But, they are tolerating false teaching. They are tolerating the teaching that says, “sexual immorality” is OK for those who believe in Jesus. They are teaching that mixing with “idolatry” is OK for those who believe in Jesus.

This teaching was coming from a woman, whom Jesus calls, “Jezebel.” She was a self-appointed prophetess. That is, one who said, “I am the mouthpiece of God, says me!” She was leading people into sin. Now, I don’t think that this is her real name was “Jezebel.” People in the days of the New Testament didn’t name themselves “Jezebel,” any more than people today name their sons, “Judas.”

“Jezebel” was the name that Jesus gave to this particular woman, because she was like the Jezebel of the Old Testament. This is a little bit like when the LORD called Judah, “Sodom” and “Gomorrah” to give a vivid imagery of their sin. “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!” (Isaiah 1:10).

So likewise to Thyatira, there was a woman that Jesus identified as “Jezebel.” Jezebel was a bad woman. You can read about her in 1 and 2 Kings. She was the wife of King Ahab of Israel. She was corrupt to her core. She was cunning and manipulative. She played a prominent role in suppressing the worship of the LORD. She brought people into worship of Baal. She opposed the prophets of God, ordering many of them to be killed (1 Kings 18:13). She hated Elijah and wanted him dead (1 Kings 19:2). Only the kindness of God kept Elijah alive by the brook. Jezebel was ultimately tossed from a tower, her blood splattered on the wall (2 Kings 9:33). horses trampled her body (2 Kings 9:33). her corpse was eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:34-37).

A woman like Jezebel was in Thyatira, doing the same thing, leading people into idolatry and immorality. And the church was tolerating it!

Note here the contrast between the church in Ephesus and the church in Thyatira. The church in Ephesus was commended for their spiritual discernment. “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false” (Revelation 2:2). Yet, the church in Ephesus lacked vibrancy in their faith. “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4).

This is the exact opposite with the church in Thyatira. Their faith was vibrant and alive and growing. “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first” (Revelation 2:19). But, the church in Thyatira, had little spiritual discernment. “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” (Revelation 2:20).

You might argue, well, which is better? Is it better to be in a church that has sound teaching, but is cold in love? Or is it better to be in a church that is filled with love and life, but tolerates false teaching? That’s a bad choice to make. Jesus says that they are both bad. Jesus wants us to be a loving church, alive in our faith, yet discerning, where we will test the prophets.

Now, while the church tolerated Jezebel, Jesus didn’t. He says in verse 21, “I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.”

Time to repent.

This is how we ought to deal with anybody who is trapped in sin. We need to give them time. If they are outside the church, unconvinced of the gospel of Christ, we love them and tell them of Jesus. We show them the joy that Jesus has given to us. We warn them of the wrath to come. We explain how our sins bring us all into condemnation, but Jesus died on the cross for sinners like us. We urge them to believe.

But we are patient with them. As Paul told Timothy, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

And if they are inside the church, we are patient with them. According to Jesus’ own words, if one is walking sinfully, We take them aside and talk with them privately (Matthew 18:15), showing them their sin, and urging them to repent. And we are patient. If they refuse to repent, then we bring along another one or two to speak with them (Matthew 18:16), showing them their sin, and urging them to repent. And we are patient. If they refuse to repent, then we bring it to the attention of the church (Matthew 18:17), and many from the church are then called to go and speak to the wayward brother or sister, showing them their sin, and urging them to repent. And we are patient. Only then, if they refuse to repent do we cast them out of the church, considering them as a Gentile or a tax collector, and in need of saving faith.

In absence of the church doing this, this is what Jesus did with this “Jezebel.” He gave her time to repent, but she refused. And so, Jesus said, “Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed.” She loved the bed of immorality. She will get the bed of sickness. And it will not go well with her. Nor will it go well with those who have followed her teaching.

Revelation 2:22-23

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.

This is how serious God takes sexual sin. He will torment those who engage in such sins, eventually striking them dead if they do not repent. Lest we think that this has only to do with LGBTQ+ pride month, this has to do with you and your computer and your phone as well. We live in a sexualized, pornographic society. It is all around us. And the Lord is calling us to live differently! He is calling us to live in purity! "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). The blessing of a pure life is a vision of God! The pure in heart shall see God.

The warning of Thyatira for us is this: We might have all of the works. We might have great love. We might have great faith and service and patient endurance. We might be growing in our zeal for God! And yet, in our hearts and minds, be drawn away after the sexual sin the world presents before us. Who are we kidding? The Lord knows. He is the one who searches the mind and hearts.

Revelation 2:23

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.

God knows what you do in secret. God knows your mind and heart better than you do. And when you walk in his ways, there is great reward! "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you" (Psalm 128:1-2). But when you walk in rebellion against the Lord, you will receive your just reward.

So, let me give you some counsel. Or, better yet, let Jesus give you some counsel.

Revelation 2:24-25

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.

4. Counsel (verses 24-25)

In other words, if your heart is pure, and if you are not walking in the ways of the immorality and idolatry of Jezebel, if you haven't followed in "the deep things of Satan." Then, hold fast. Keep pressing on!

Jesus sees the church as a whole. And Jesus sees the church as individuals as well. While Jesus may not be pleased with the church in Thyatira, he recognizes the pocket of his true and faithful people within the church.

This is how we ought to see other churches as well. We might decry the big church in town, that preaches a false gospel, and brings in its sham healers, whose people live like the world. Oh, it's filled with activity and excitement, and outreach to the community, but it makes little heart-change for many who come.

Please realize that there can be faithful people in those churches. This is the good news to those in Thyatira, who couldn't simply switch churches for a better church. In Thyatira, it may well be that this was the only church in town.

Jesus says, "hold fast until I come" (verse 25). May I remind you that this is what Revelation is all about. It's about the coming of Jesus. We all need to "hold fast until [he] comes" (verse 25).

Finally, my last point:

5. Conquer (verses 26-29)

Revelation 2:26-29

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.

What is breathtaking about this is that these words are spoken in Psalm 2 about Jesus, and here, we join in with Jesus in conquering the nations. Psalm 2 says this:

Psalm 2:7-9

I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

This is Jesus when he comes. Yet, those who overcome and conquer, will join with Jesus in having "authority over nations."

We also see the joining in verse 28, when Jesus says, "I will give him the morning star." Jesus, identifies himself as "the morning star" in Revelation 22:16, "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." Those who overcome will receive Jesus! We will have authority with Jesus! We will reign with Jesus!

All this is not now. We don't need to deal with the sin of the world at this moment. We should deal with the sin within the church. As Jesus said to Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (John 18:36). But that doesn't mean that we sit back and ignore the culture wars of our day.

I began my message with this picture. It's a picture of an assortment of LGBTQIA+ books from our Rockford Public Library. I'm not sure if this came to your mind at all, but did you question at all how I knew that these books were in the Rockford Public Library? I have a friend, who checked them all out. He didn't check them out so that he could read them. He checked them out so that children couldn't read them during LGBTQIA+ Pride month.

He wrote me this:

Most of my better ideas, it would seem, happen because I was doing something ordinary and then thought of something extra-ordinary. That was the case when looking for a particular book for one of our kids this past week at the local library.

As I read the spines of books where my book was supposed to be located, I spotted an interesting title: "Pink, Blue, and You: Questions for Kids about Gender and Stereotypes"*, a book for 4-8 year olds published early last year.

I knew almost immediately that it was most likely a book geared to tell kids that anything goes in regards to human sexuality. As I opened the book, my assumptions were confirmed and my heart sunk. I was in the kids' section where books for kids were supposed to be. This was not a book for kids. Not just because it wasn't age appropriate but because it didn't tell the truth.

It was then that I noticed several other books in the same section intended to bring the same level of confusion to young minds who aren't old enough to know any different. I wondered in that moment what I could do to help keep these books out of the hands of kids, who need to know the truth about themselves and not be told that they get to decide how to identify and do whatever they want to do with their bodies.

The front desk certainly wouldn't take me seriously if I were to complain about the books titles. Or at best I would have to fill out a form that would be quickly placed in the nearest trash can. Then it came to me: I could check out the books and thereby disrupt the cycle of grooming that our society had now deemed as not only acceptable but even as good.

I could, at least for a time, keep them out of the hands of kids who might pick them up during Pride Month, a higher than normal traffic time for such material. In the ensuing days, I placed on hold and picked up just shy of 100 titles, both physical and digital; as many as I could with two library adult cards.

While I didn't set out to take the offensive in regards to books on a bookshelf earlier this week, I suddenly knew I could do something simple about it, and I did it. I would encourage you to think and pray how you can do, as well. Our kids are more than worth the fight.

Not that it's only about keeping evil books from being where they don't deserve to be, but what would happen if a small group of people set out to check out these book titles on an ongoing basis? The downside could be that the library buys more copies, but the upside would be worth the small effort taken.

And what might happen if this were to catch on and became a movement throughout our region, state, and eventually the entire country? We need to think more intelligently, more prayerfully, and do what we can to protect the young among us. We cannot stand by idly as sexual predators prey on unsuspecting kids, and that includes the public library.

What will you do to stand up and do something? As the old adage goes, "only dead fish float downstream".

It's time to wake up and act.

I'm not calling all of us to follow in these steps. It's an interesting strategy. It is helpful in providing some sort of a dent in the immorality of our day.

But the point is that here is someone trying to overcome, as verse 26 says. At least this person is doing something. Are you doing anything?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 4, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
