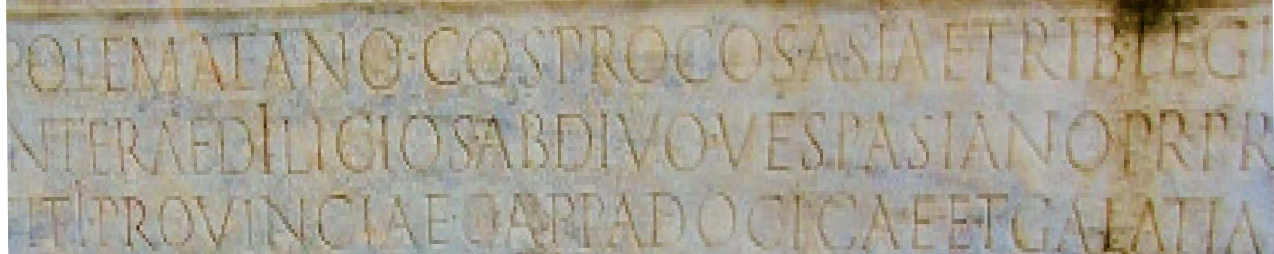




FOUNDATIONS

Lessons in Discipleship
from the New Testament Church



Study Guide



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES

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Thyatira The Tolerant Church

Bible Text: Revelation 2:18-29

The church in Thyatira was commended for their love, faith, perseverance, and service. They were doing many things right. Yet sin was permeating its way into their church body. They needed to address the issue of sin before it destroyed them completely.

The church in Thyatira had to figure out how to deal with sin. Like them, we must ask the same questions of ourselves. How do you deal with sin? How do you deal with it in your life, in the life of others, and even when you see it in the church body?

Sin is not a comfortable subject. Who enjoys being told that what they are doing is wrong or that they need to change? On top of that, fear of how a confrontation will affect personal relationships and the individual's relationship can leave some hesitant to deal with issues for fear of consequences. "Our relationship won't be same." "They might split the church," "they might leave and take their talents and volunteer hours with them!"

At times, we might be tempted to view sin in our midst and say, "It's not my problem. It's not me doing it, so I'm good."

Yet, when we look at the Book of Revelation, we find that every individual in the church has a responsibility to overcome such thoughts and fears for the sake and safety of the church body. If we do not, we risk the possibility of learning the hard way that a tolerant approach will have devastating effects. Instead, before sin grows greater, learn from examples of those who went before us—those who created a foundation and an approach to situations of active sin in their midst.

The church of Thyatira was among the staple churches of the New Testament period in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. From the outside, they appeared to have the right heart and the Spirit backing their

ministry. However, their internal actions of tolerating sin displayed a different reality. Christ directly referenced sin in the church in Thyatira in His letter to them from the Book of Revelation. He directed the church to fix the problem of sin in their midst.

WATCH THYATIRA, THE TOLERANT CHURCH VIDEO



Though the church of Thyatira was relatively new compared to churches in Jerusalem, Thessalonica, or Ephesus, the church should have recognized and acted on the growing danger in their midst.

The church of Thyatira should have known better.

They knew their history. They knew the laws of God. We know this because when looking at each of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, the church of Thyatira stands out as the most Jewish.

The letter to Thyatira in Revelation 2 uses several pieces of Old Testament imagery. It references the character of Jezebel, serving as the focal point of Christ's rebuke of the church. Due to the reference, it is safe to assume that the church was likely a Jewish-dominated church. Churches like Corinth and Thessalonica had believers who were mostly new to the belief in one God and even to some aspects of morality, severely lacking or nonexistent in their previously pagan lives.

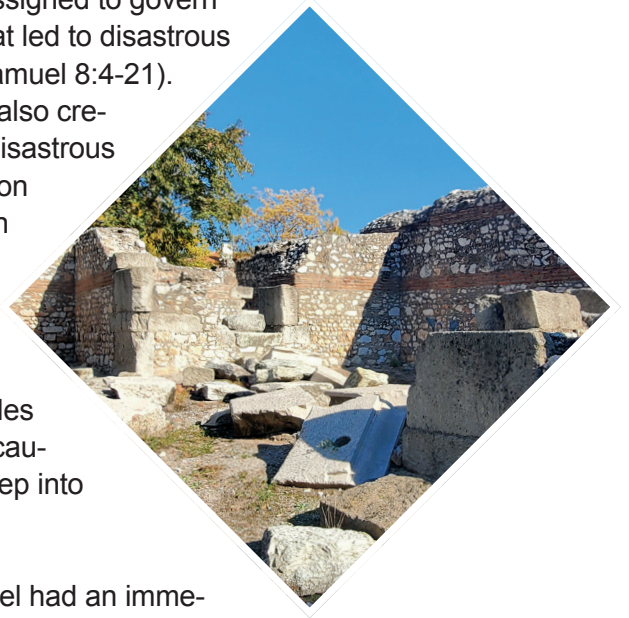
The members of Jewish-dominated churches spent their lives learning and studying the Word of God, which in turn allowed them to identify Jesus as the Messiah. And so, although one may expect such behavior out of a church like Corinth, the parallel realities of Corinth and Thyatira make their acceptance of the sinful woman and her followers that much more concerning!

Some believers live life well and have little issue with sin in their life, yet a problem may lie in their tolerance of sin in others.

Some of the most righteous men in the biblical narrative did amazing things for the kingdom of God. However, their tolerance of sin in their midst left a stain on their legacy. Eli, the priest had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were wicked and took advantage of their role and father and that of their father in the tabernacle. They took advantage of people. Eli knew their actions, yet did not put a stop to it (1 Samuel 2:12-26). The prophet Samuel, a young boy living under Eli's care, witnessed their actions. Samuel did not take heed of Eli's example. Samuel's sons

treated the offices of the Lord with the same contempt (1 Samuel 8:2-3).

King David, the hero king of the Old Testament, tolerated the sins of his sons Amnon and Absalom to the point they committed rape and murder (2 Samuel 13). These biblical characters show a truth that remained constant with their toleration of sin. The tolerance of sin never ends well. Eli's sons were eventually killed in battle. An act specifically ordained by the Lord resulting in Eli's death and the loss of the ark of the covenant to Israel's mortal enemies, the Philistines! Samuel's lack of action against the sin of his sons was the final straw of Israel losing faith in the prophets and judges whom God had assigned to govern Israel. The people called for a king. An act that led to disastrous results over the next five hundred years (1 Samuel 8:4-21). King David was one of the kings. King David also created, permitted, and tolerated sin leading to disastrous results. His toleration of sin led the entire nation of Israel into a full-fledged civil war resulting in the death of the crowned prince (2 Samuel 14-19.)



Like the church of Thyatira, we, too, have no excuse for the toleration of sin. These examples are a reminder to strive for holiness. We are cautioned to be on guard and not allow sin to creep into our lives, families, and churches.

It is doubtful that the woman likened to Jezebel had an immediate negative impact on the church in Thyatira. From Christ's commendation of the church, a church who worked for "constant improvement" (Revelation 2:19), it seems unrealistic that the church would allow immediate sinful behavior in their midst. Instead, her sin was like yeast in a batch of fresh dough, which Paul referenced in 1 Corinthians 5:6, "Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough?" It grew and grew, corrupting more and more until it was seemingly out of control.

Even with the church's failure in Thyatira, we see the most powerful attributes of God on full display His mercy and His grace. Not only did Christ offer the church a plan and a path, but even the woman also likened to Jezebel was offered grace!

No matter the sin, no matter how many she had influenced to drift away from the truth, Christ's love for her as part of His creation was so great that she still had value in His eyes. Paul touched upon the reality of this beautiful exchange a year earlier when writing to the church of Rome. He spoke of those who similarly fell into sin in the generations prior, stating, "But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant." (Romans 5:20).

Though the woman likened to Jezebel rejected the offering of grace, we are constantly reminded that no matter how far we might fall into sin, God is always displaying to us His grace and His mercy.

God is always calling us back into a right relationship with Him.

Likewise, we must seek to show the same grace and mercy that we have been shown, all the while not tolerating sin in our midst. Our desire should always be the reconciliation of all believers for the glorification of Christ.





DIG DEEPER

Love, faith, service, and perseverance, are positive qualities attributed to the church in Thyatira. What positive qualities would you attribute to your church? To your family? To you personally?



DIG DEEPER

Is there sin in your midst? If so, is it you who needs to speak against it? List some godly ways to respond to sin in your life or in the life of others. Do you tolerate it? Do you turn a blind eye and pretend it does not exist? What consequences may happen if sin is not confronted?

DIG DEEPER



How do you respond to sin? You can be strong in your faith in God and still show grace and mercy. Jesus was the master in this regard. Jesus went out to the sinners. He healed them, spent time with them, and told them to correct their behavior. He told them to sin no more, to turn from their ways, and to live a life of righteousness. How can you practice grace and mercy, and yet stand for holiness in your church, your family, and with yourself?

PERSONAL REFLECTION
