



March 13, 2022 ~ "Zero Tolerance Policy" ~ Revelation 2:18-29

OPEN

On February 15, 2022, CTV News carried this interesting news item about a "zero tolerance policy".

A Catholic priest has resigned after a church investigation found he performed invalid baptisms throughout most of his more than 20-year career, according to Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix. Father Andres Arango, who performed thousands of baptisms, would say, "We baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." But Olmsted explained the words "We baptize" should have been "I baptize" instead. "The issue with using 'We' is that it is not the community that baptizes a person, rather, it is Christ, and Him alone, who presides at all of the sacraments, and so it is Christ Jesus who baptizes. ([READ MORE](#))

We are continuing our series considering letters to seven churches of Asia Minor. Writing both **prophetically** and **pastorally**, the apostle John conveyed Jesus' message to seven churches in Asia Minor. These cities were on an ancient Roman postal route. Today we look at the longest letter which was written to Thyatira. In it, we discover that believers must have a **zero-tolerance policy** on spiritual error because of the tragic consequences it can produce. Akhisar, Turkey is built on the ruins of Thyatira. Only about one city block of ancient ruins can be viewed there.



Lydia, the first believer in Philippi was "a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14). The purple cloth she sold was product from Thyatira made with a dye from the native madder root. Thyatira had many trade guilds: wool, linen, pottery, baking, slave trade, leather, tanning, bronze work – was hard to work there without membership. Each guild had a patron deity. Membership meant attending meals where meat sacrificed to idols was served. These gatherings included idolatrous rites including sexual revelries.

DIG

Read **Revelation 2:18-29**. How would you live out your adventure with Christ in such a situation? Consider Christ's words to believers at Thyatira.

[1] Well Done – verses 18-19

Verse 18 contains the greeting. The similar part of the greeting is "*to the angel of the church in...*" The different part of the greeting is: "*The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze...*" Such an image speaks of Jesus' authority as the coming Judge.

Jesus referring to Himself as the "Son of God" is only found in this letter. This suggests a challenge to Imperial cult concept that Caesar was to be worshipped as "the son of god". Jesus commanded believers at Thyatira for five specific Christian acts: **deeds love faith service endurance**

In fact, their works (of late) were growing greater. This is a great list, but not exhaustive. Yet it is not activity alone that is good. Activity without accuracy is of no value at all. Consider archery. Send as many arrows as you want but you need to hit the target. Active believers in Thyatira missed the mark.



[2] Watch Out – verses 20-23

The message is clear: "watch out Thyatiran believers - God's standard is being compromised!" Let's consider three questions.

- a. **Who was this Jezebel?** (v.20a) She was a self-proclaimed prophetess symbolically called Jezebel. This refers to Jezebel who married King Ahab, who "*did more evil in the eye of the Lord than any of those before him*" (1 Kings 13:30). Jezebel corrupted Israel, enticing them to worship the god Baal at the Ashtaroth altar (see 1 Kings 16:33). F. F. Bruce noted of Queen Jezebel, "...*nothing in her life became her so much as the leaving of it*" (*Israel And The Nations*, W. B. Eerdmans, 1963, 51).
- b. **What had she done?** (vv.20b-21) She **compromised** God's standards. This was enticement to immorality and idolatry (could be understood as "spiritual adultery"). In Thyatira, guild gatherings would offer meat sacrificed to idols and include illicit sexual activity. Now, I Corinthians 10:23-33 sets "meat sacrificed to idols" in the context of Christian community/conscience. In Thyatira it linked believers to paganism.

This Jezebel also **subverted** God's standards. The "deep things of Satan" (v.24) meant that this Jezebel urged Christians to sinful practice by **(a)** claiming they could "playing with fire but not get burned" or **(b)** claiming that there was a disconnect between spirituality and daily life.

- c. **Why should she suffer?** (vv.22-23) Due to her un-repentant heart, Jezebel was judged. She was responsible as an influencer, and she would experience suffering and death. Was this spiritual death (continued sin on idol-feast couch/bed) or physical death? Either way, the punishment comes from Jesus whose eyes are "flames of fire" and feet are "fine brass"! In verse 23 the death of "her children" is most likely a reference to her un-repentant followers. Jesus searches hearts and minds (lit. "kidneys and hearts" – our moral center) and He will repay according to a person's deeds.

[3] What Next – verses 24-29

First was commendation...then condemnation! What was next for believers in Thyatira? Some did not follow "the deep things of Satan". God had no more burden for them (v.24) but to remain faithful.

- a. **Participation** – believers must overcome by keeping Christ's works and "will to the end" (v.26)
- b. **Promise** – "authority over nations" (vv.26-27) is Christ's to give (Psalm 2:9) and points to our current responsibility to demonstrate and declare His Kingdom. The "morning star" (v.28) points to the hope of Christ's return (see Revelation 22:16, "the bright Morning Star")

REFLECT

Gnosticism is the notion of separating spiritual and physical...as it appears Jezebel taught. She lured Christians in Thyatira into for Jesus "spiritually" while indulging the flesh. In this way, the Gospel is reduced to merely a "Christ-concept".

Since it was thought that Jesus is not fully human and divine, the Gnostic concluded that nor is there a connection between one's experience in the "spiritual realm" and day-to-day life in this physical world.

But Jesus is the God-Man who has exclusive claim on our total lives. A mere Christ concept leads to extremes. First, we can base our life in Jesus on performance (Galatians 5:1,4). This is the trap into which the older brother had fallen (see the story of the prodigal son).

Or we become captive to the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence (Jude 4,12-13). Yet all the while God wants us to have the freedom and joy of obedience!

Christ delivers you from old to new through His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. God's grace alone can take what's old and make it new. By His sacrifice, Christ takes your spiritual brokenness and introduces a new metric that says your hope isn't in your ability to improve; rather, newness comes from redeeming love. (Sarah Winebrenner, "[From Ashes To Resurrection](#)" CRU Lent Devotional, Day 5)

G. K. Chesterton once said, "Though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creatures so wild as one of his own commentators" (**Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary**, Steve Gregg editor, front flap).

There are many takes on Revelation's imagery. But don't miss the simple issue in Thyatira...and for us today. Are we going to navigate a sinful world by means of compromise and indulgence? Or will we depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit!?

Takes some time to read **Galatians 5:19-26** and ponder the trap of self-righteousness and self-indulgence compared to the freedom we can have in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Even in an honest effort to adhere to God's holy standards, we can fall into the pit of self-righteousness. Is this a challenge for you?

Writing in the CRU Lent devotional (Day 8), [From Ashes To Resurrection](#), Allison Wilson notes that we can be like the older brother and fail to experience God's grace. She encourages...

Spend some time reflecting on Luke 15. When have you felt lost, resentful or like you had to earn God's acceptance? What did the older son feel that he deserved? What did the father hope his older son would see about their relationship? How is the father's character in the story similar to or different from what you understand of God?