

# The Church of Tolerance

Revelation 2:18–29

*Studies in Revelation #9*

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Danny Hyde believes Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, the ultimate truth, and source of eternal life. Danny Hyde believes hell is real and that most people are going there, unless they repent of sin and believe in Jesus. Danny Hyde believes that any president, prince, or parliament that doesn't acknowledge God is disobedient to God. Danny Hyde believes, worst of all, that a homosexual lifestyle is sinful in the sight of God. Danny Hyde is intolerant. How about you?

We live in an age of tolerance. That should be obvious to all. Of course, the devotees of tolerance are intolerant towards those who tolerate their views but disagree with them! Children, good tolerance means that we need to respect other people's opinions and beliefs although we won't agree with all their opinions and beliefs. Yet many people today mistakenly think tolerance is acceptance. And this spirit of the age infects and affects the church of Jesus Christ. And not just now, but it was this way in the first century. The church in Thyatira was *The Church of Tolerance*.

1. ***Christ's Identification (v. 18)***
2. ***Christ's Commendation (v. 19)***
3. ***Christ's Warning (vv. 20–23)***
4. ***Christ's Promise (v. 24–29)***

## **Christ's Identification (v. 18)**

Jesus begins with his self-*identification*, calling himself “**the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.**” Imagine that! Back in the vision of chapter 1, John saw “one like a son of man” (1:13), which was an allusion to Daniel’s prophecy. That son of man is also **the Son of God**, alluding to the royal figure of Psalm 2 . And as the Son of God notice that his eyes are like fire and his feet like burnished bronze. Again, this comes from chapter 1 (vv. 14, 15). As you imagine that vision you have to ask yourself, “What does this teach about Jesus Christ?”

The overall image is one of magnificent majesty and resplendent royalty. King Jesus has **eyes like a flame of fire**, meaning, because his eyes are too pure to even look upon sin he sees through us and sees all. Turn back to Psalm 139. King Jesus has **feet...like burnished bronze**, again, pointing to the reality of his holiness as not only sees through the veneer of our sins but he himself does not sin. As Psalm 1 says, he does not walk in counsel of wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, not sit in the seat of scoffers. Instead, his delight is in the law of the Lord.

Now recognize that this truth about Jesus is who he is right now. It’s not just some ancient artists’ rendition. This should rock us to the core of our being. This should cut right through the façade we are trying to put up in front of him right now as we sit in his presence—as if he doesn’t know what’s going on! Jesus knows who you are right now. Jesus knows that you are thinking about a game, a store, or an event you have to be at. Jesus knows what you want to say to that

person on your mind, who may even be here this morning.

### **Christ's Commendation (v. 19)**

We'll come back to this image, but notice that Jesus transitions his *commendation* of the Thyatiran church in verse 19. What was this church doing well? **"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."** In contrast to the church in Ephesus' first works being greater than its latter works as it was growing cold in Christ, the church in Thyatira was an energetic, vibrant, zealous church whose **latter works exceed the first**. What a testimony to the grace and power of the Spirit of Christ in sanctification! This was a church that was growing in sanctification because of the influence of the Holy Spirit among them. Can we say of our congregation today that our passion for the Lord is greater now than when we first believed? Are our good works now more than those we did at first? We must evaluate and examine ourselves today, brothers and sisters. Can Jesus say this of the OURC today? What are these **latter works**?

Notice there are four of them. **Love** of the self-sacrificing *agape* kind. This church loved one another in their struggles; they were there for each other; they bore one another's burdens. **Faith**. They gave themselves to Jesus and despite being insignificant in the world their faith overcame the world. **Service**. This is the same root as the word for a minister, for ministry, and even for a deacon. Here it speaks of the overall character of the church in volunteering and serving in whatever capacity to make sure everything is done. **Patient endurance** or

perseverance. The church is a body of pilgrims in this world who need to endure the constant onslaughts of the Ogs and Bashans, Balaks and Balaams of the world.

Brothers and sisters, how are we doing in these four areas? Does Christ commend us or is he commissioning us to do so?

### **Christ's Warning (vv. 20–23)**

**But I have this against you.** Jesus is saying, though, “Don’t get ahead of yourselves.” And next comes his *warning*. Why does he warn them? Because, just as the Ephesians had the Nicolaitans and the Pergamese had the teaching of Balaam so to the Thyatirans had **Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess**, in their midst, and they tolerated her (v. 20). And notice the downward progression in the attitude of these three churches towards the false teaching in their midst: Ephesus *hated* the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:6), Pergamos *had* Balaam in their church (2:14), but Thyatira *tolerated* Jezebel!<sup>1</sup>

“But we need to be tolerant. Not everyone is going to agree on doctrine but everyone just needs to love the Lord.” How can you love the Lord if you don’t know who he is and what he taught? Doctrine matters, and as we saw with Pergamum, church discipline matters if you take Jesus seriously. Jesus says this false teaching was **seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols**. As we’ve already seen, in the Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, 49.

immorality and idolatry went together, whether it was literal immorality that led to literal idolatry in the days Israel married Moabite women in the wilderness or whether the prophets used this as a figure of speech to say Israel had cheated on her husband, the Lord, and worshipped false gods. The church in America is so full of idolatry and spiritual immorality today. We have left the Lord for the god of tolerance, so wanting to fit into the culture that anything goes. We have abandoned the Lord for the god of relevance, so wanting to be big as churches that we'll do anything to "get 'em in." We have cheated on the Lord for the god of success, so wanting to have the glory of eternity now and now carry the cross through the wilderness of this life.

So Jesus says, **"I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent"** (v. 21). And as with Ephesus and Pergamum Jesus calls the church to repent, but if it will not he will come in judgment: **"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"** (vv. 22–23). Children, when we don't repent of our sins it is serious with God. God tells us that there were some in the New Testament church of Corinth who did not repent of their sins. Do you know what happened to them? Some of them became sick; some of them even died (1 Cor. 11). Sin is serious and we need to repent of it.

Then Jesus links his identification of himself in verse 18 to this call to repentance and threat of impending judgment: **"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**” (v. 23). Jeremiah once prayed because of Israel’s spiritual adultery with the god Baal, “O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and mind” (Jer. 11:20). “I’m so glad I live in the New Covenant and that my God is a God of love.” No! This is Jesus who speaks to you today, Oceanside URC. He searches mind and heart and dishes out judgment. “But he’s not here today.” Yes, he is. “How?” By his Word: “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:12-13).

### **Christ’s Promise (v. 24-29)**

Jesus’ word does not only speak of law but of gospel; threat but of promise; fear but of hope. And he pronounces a *promise* at the end of this message **to the rest of those in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan** (v. 24). And to those who are repentant and who have not partaken of the immorality and the idolatry of Jezebel Jesus says, **“I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come”** (vv. 24-25).

And here’s Jesus’ promise to **the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end** (v. 26). His promises is one of authority: **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** (vv. 26–27). As Jesus received all authority (Matt. 28:18) so too his church that has suffered and even died in this age will be given a portion of his authority to participate in one day. We are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). As Paul says, “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12), and again, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2) And this authority is described in the ancient image of “**the morning star**” (v. 28). When Israel struggled with Balak of Moab and his false prophet Balaam, the Lord promised that one day a star would arise and crush Moab (Num. 24:17). That morning star is ultimately our Lord Jesus Christ, as Revelation 22:16 says. And with him we shall reign for eternity to the praise of the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

What a message to us today in our ever-increasing age and society of tolerance, but tolerance for everything except the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it’s always been this way. Christ’s kingship does not tolerate rivals. And so his kingdom has ever been rebelled against. As Psalm 2 describes it, the nations rage, the peoples plot in vain, the kings of the earth and rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed with these words: “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:1–3). But we who have kissed the Son shall share in his authority, and kingdom, and power forever and ever over the kingdoms of this world. Amen.