

Letter to the Church in Thyatira **Sermon February 17, 2019**

This congregation received the longest letter of any of the seven churches in Revelation, even though they were the smallest congregation in a small town. People from Thyatira worked very hard making textiles. They manufactured purple cloth, which was in high demand by the Romans. They worked hard, as Christians, for their society.

Christ commended the church in Thyatira for its love, faithfulness, service, and endurance (Revelation 2:19). Not only had the work of the church in Thyatira been an example for others, but it had also significantly increased its activity over time.

Today I would say: they did all kinds of good social works; they were acting as good Christians: they cut their neighbours' grass, handed out food for those who were hungry, and they did everything that you and I would do to help others.

However, Jesus had something against them, and it was a **BIG** something.

They were working hard but they did not care how or what some people worshipped in the congregation.

They did not pay enough attention to what God was expecting from them about their spiritual lives and their beliefs.

Jesus talked about a member of the congregation in Thyatira, called Jezebel, and her disgusting behavior, named **ADULTERY**. Whenever God complained about His people turning towards other pagan gods, and worshipping them, God said that His people committed spiritual adultery.

In the Old Testament, there was a Jewish King called King Ahab. God was very upset with him because he married a pagan, an extremely wicked woman, Jezebel, who worshiped the pagan god, Baal. She had a tremendous influence in ruling Israel. She highly supported the pagan Baal's priests and killed 450 prophets of God Almighty.

In Thyatira, there was a similar situation. There was a person who spread false teachings and gossip, confused the believers, and killed their faith in God. This way, the person weakened, verbally killed, the congregation. Also, the person, gossiped about others, talked behind others, slandered others and magnified their mistakes.

Sadly, the congregation **“tolerated”** this libelous behavior, and they did not do ANYTHING to stop that person. The faithful Christians noticed that person’s behaviour, but they did not do ANYTHING to stop this person. They tolerated this behaviour.

According to Jesus Christ, **their tolerance was a huge sin. When we tolerate bad behaviour, we ALLOW, PERMIT, a person to do what they want to do.** If we remain quiet and do not stop a person who is libelous or slanders others, it means that we agree with him and are ONE with him.

I do not think that Canada is still a Christian country, as we proudly said for a long time. I think we live in a western democracy, with a Christian history, which was destroyed because of our weak faith and great tolerance.

TOLERANCE is a great value in our society. Being “politically correct” is expected. However, **when we face a destructive behaviour and we still tolerate it, it is like we are allowing, accommodating and approving their wrong behaviour and wrong ideology.**

Let me ask you kindly: **Where is the border of tolerance?** Should I say to another person:

- Oh, do you want to destroy my life? Come, do it. I tolerate your behaviour.
- Do you want to destroy my culture, my faith, and my traditions? Come, do it. I tolerate you.
- Do you want to harm my family, my children? Do you want to force them to do something else, or wear something else? Sure, force them, harm them. I am a good Canadian, a good Christian and I tolerate you.
- Do you want to destroy our congregation with your uncontrolled behaviour? Sure, do it. I will remain quiet. I will tolerate you.

When are we going to stand up for ourselves, for our Christian faith, for our Church, saying: “I love you, but this is enough”? You need to change your behaviour and respect me and who I am, who we are, or you can leave.

We are wrong and irresponsible when we tolerate the situation when somebody wants to destroy our church with words or actions. As we see, Jesus warns against tolerance and assimilation with pagan culture.

There is another similar problem between the church in Thyatira and Calvin, between their problems and our problems, here and now.

Today we often hear people saying that **faith is a private business. You believe what you want and what makes you comfortable.**

This is NOT RIGHT!

You can believe what you want, but you should NOT believe what YOU want. You cannot shape or change God's commandment, but His commandments have to shape your faith. You cannot tell God what YOU want to believe, but God is telling you what you HAVE to believe.

Often, we hear people saying: "Your spiritual life does not have anything to do with your physical life, your faith does not have to do anything with your actions." In other words, they say that you can live like you want to live and still you can call yourself a good Christian. And this is **TOTALLY WRONG**. If we love God and we fear God's commandments, then that has to shape our faith and our actions.

Dear beloved, the CHURCH has a responsibility, and I, as a minister, have a responsibility given by God. In Jeremiah, God said to His servant:

"You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

(Jeremiah 1:7-9)

Jesus, out of His immeasurable grace, love and mercy, told these people how they should change. If you love your children, as a parent or grandparent, you feel obligated to tell them your concern about their actions and behaviour. If you don't protect them with your advice or observations, your love is questionable.

God loves us and this is why He is teaching us today in order to protect us and to save our lives. The Lord told them that they had to **repent**. He gave them a great opportunity to clearly hear His Word and His expectation, and He gave them time to repent and to change. However, they refused to repent and to change.

The Lord gives us plenty of time to make those changes. He gives each of us enough space to repent. He is offering His forgiveness and His love, saying: "If you repent, I will never remember your sin." My question is: Do we accept God's grace when He offers it?

If you are feeling the conviction of God's Spirit this morning, it is not too late. You are still in that space. However, the space will not last forever.

Jesus gave this Jezebel space to repent, and she did not. Now, it seems the opportunity is gone.

Respond to the Spirit today. Turn to God again today, and He will give you the strength to turn away from things that He does not like in you.

There was also a small group in the Thyatira church who were faithful to the Lord in their faith and their actions. Jesus says: **“Hold fast what you have until I come.”** Hold fast to your faith. Persevere. Be faithful. Do not fall for the lies.

Let us pray for a stronger faith that we all might endure and hold on to what we have in Christ Jesus. Let us pray for strength and faith in those moments when our faith is challenged, and when we are pressured to tolerate and to approve what is against God. May our faith and our Christian actions shine and lead people to God the Christ with love and patience. Amen