

The One With Eyes of Fire and Feet of Burnished Bronze
Revelation 2:18-29

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. ¹⁹ “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 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. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² 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, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Last week, David walked us through the letter to the church in Pergamum, which included a stern warning against the sins of eating food sacrificed to idols and practicing sexual immorality. Jesus reminded them that He has a sharp two-edged sword, implying that He isn’t afraid to use it. He will strike sin and sinner alike with that sword. This dabbling in sin, especially that of idolatry and sexual immorality, will not be tolerated. Wake up and repent!

Today, in a surprisingly similar fashion, Jesus reminds the church in Thyatira, and us by extension, that He is the Son of God, the Judge with eyes like fire, and the King with feet of burnished bronze. These come from the description of Jesus John gave us in chapter 1. We saw that eyes like fire are eyes that have the ability to penetrate everything. Nothing can be hidden from those eyes. Jesus is able to judge in absolute truth and righteousness because He not only has seen all throughout the ages, but everything He has seen has been precise and just as His eyes of fire penetrate every instance. And we saw that feet of burnished bronze are those of a strong and authoritative king who is able to place things under his feet, to stamp out those who don’t submit to his rule. Jesus’ feet of bronze will stamp out all of His enemies.

Jesus is reminding all churches that He, as the Son of God, searches and knows us. He knows when we sit down and when we rise up. He discerns our thoughts from afar. Even before a word is on our tongue, or a thought comes to our mind, He knows it altogether. And, as the son of God, all of his enemies will be made a footstool for His feet. He will crush those who do not submit to Him. Lovingly, Jesus uses this language to motivate us. To push us. This is serious! Don’t mess with this. You represent my kingdom. Don’t misrepresent it. Increase the level of seriousness with which this is handled, church! I am the Son of God – terrifying and gloriously joy-producing at the same time. Difficult times are coming. The end is near. Don’t be lulled to sleep. Stand firm. Having done all, stand firm.

This letter, the longest of the 7, is essentially broken into 2 parts. The first part, after the introduction of v. 18, consists of v. 19-23. It focuses on Jesus having eyes like flames of fire, seeing all. It is a warning of judgement for committing, and tolerating, sin. The central theme – Jesus is Judge, don’t even tolerate sin. The second part is verses 24-28, focusing on those in the church who had not tolerated that sin and encouraging them to hold fast to what they have. The central theme of this – Jesus is King, hold fast what we have to the end and we will rule with him. We are going to look at each of these separately.

First, v. 19-23, Jesus is Judge, don't even tolerate sin. Somewhat surprisingly, he starts in v. 19 by commending their good works. Their love (they seemingly have not lost their first love like the church in Ephesus had), their faith (they are confident that God will do what He says He will do), their service (the tangible things they are doing that prove their faith), their patient endurance (they, like Job, have remained steadfast under trial, showing God to be good and trustworthy), and the fact that they are progressing in good works (they haven't gotten stuck in a rut or stagnate in doing the same works over and over). That's quite a list! And we need that to sink in, especially given what we read about them next. This is a good strong church, a seemingly healthy church in many respects. That perspective is important as we work through the next verses.

Then the hammer drops in v. 20. We learn the church in Thyatira has tolerated a woman named Jezebel, probably not her real name, but probably a real person nonetheless. She calls herself a prophetess, signifying she hasn't received that affirmation from the church, and is teaching and seducing people to do 2 specific things – practice sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. Let's break that up a little. First, she is teaching and seducing people to action. The teaching aspect of this is direct instruction. She seems to have taken her own initiative in teaching the members of the church. As I said before, this does not seem to be sanctioned by the church body as a whole, but she is still clearly teaching. And her teaching was incorrect, it was leading to sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols (the specifics of which we will get to in a moment).

And it begs the question, what type of unrighteous teaching could hold sway over a church that has so many positive things going on. It's hard to believe that her teaching was just blatantly wrong, or it seems this church would not have tolerated it. More likely, it was a subtle deviation from the truth couched in terms that seemed correct, and possibly even necessary. I think a little understanding of the situation in Thyatira will help us with this.

Thyatira was not a great city, but it was a very important trade city, with a market for things like wool, linen, clothing, leather and bronze work. Associated with this commerce was an extensive network of trade and labor unions which maintained considerable influence over the social, political, economic, and religious culture of the city. These unions handled a lot of cash, which brought a lot of influence. And, much like today, they all had parties and festivals that included things that God would certainly consider unrighteous. BUT, because of the influence they held, there was great pressure to be part of them, at least to the extent necessary for one to earn a living for one's family. Real pressure existed here. Real pressure that could be subtly brought to bear upon those in the church by someone with charisma. Possibly in the following ways.

We are saved by grace, and not by works, so God will certainly forgive us for taking part in some of these parties for the sake of earning a living. I mean, what we are doing is really not that bad. We can be part of the festivities without actually engaging in the unrighteous acts. After all, what is truly sexually immoral anyway? Where is that specific line drawn? Is it unrighteous to watch acts like that? Is it unrighteous to condone acts like that with our presence? I mean, we are just in a bad spot. To fully stand against these things would be too costly. How would we feed our families or maintain a home?

It's fair to say that in that type of situation, we would all be more susceptible to "tolerating" sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. And it's easy to see why the term "seducing" is used. It's enticement with a promise of gratification, namely the promise of food on the table and bills being paid. We, those who have food on the table, and certainly for the most part, have our bills paid, need to be very careful about being judgmental towards those in this church. We need to try to feel what they felt, to try to understand how easy it would be to be swept up in this. Remember, this church was doing lots of good things.

Jesus knew their works, praised their works, affirmed their works. May we not prematurely judge them. But may we also understand, Jesus is judging them, very harshly.

v. 21-23. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² 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, ²³ 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. Given their situation, why the harsh response? We can genuinely understand their predicament. Why would God punish with such a heavy hand? Because of the nature of sexual immorality and idolatry.

In saving the nation of Israel, and in saving us, God enters into a covenant relationship with us – He enters into a wedding union with us. Ezekiel 16:8 – *When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.* What we know as marriage is simply a reflection of that. That means, as the bride of Christ, the one He made a covenant relationship with, any relationship we have with another (anything we value more than God, anything we put more of a priority on than God – idolatry) is considered us being unfaithful to God and thereby committing sexual immorality. Every time we sin, we are valuing the sin more than God. We are devaluing Him. And God takes that very seriously. To devalue God in any way is the greatest evil in the universe – even if done to put food on the table and keep a roof over our head. It shows that God can't take care of us, that we have to do it ourselves. It shows him to be a bad father, a bad husband, not capable of taking care of us.

And all sexual immorality and idolatry is an example of that. So God says, in Exodus 34:14 – *for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.* He won't tolerate that. He is jealous of our affections in the same way a husband is jealous for his wife. The reason sexual immorality and idolatry are spoken of at times in weightier terms than "other" sins is because sexual immorality and idolatry are pictures of every sin. Choosing something else over God. Not being satisfied with God alone. Having to look elsewhere for satisfaction and fulfillment. Sharing the bed with another for a cheap thrill. That is precisely how God views all sin, but especially sexual immorality and idolatry.

Ask yourself, if you were married to someone that daily shared the bed with another. If your spouse was unfaithful to you every day of your life, what would you consider to be a just punishment for that? What would be a righteous response to daily unfaithfulness? Would your righteous anger be lessened if your spouse said, "Honey, you don't understand, I simply tolerate her/him. I'm not taking the initiative, I'm simply tolerating what he/she wants to do." All idolatry is a form of sexual sin. God is righteously angry when we tolerate it at any level, when we compromise our devotion and commitment to Him. Angry to the point of throwing Jezebel on a sickbed, calling great tribulation to fall upon her followers, and striking her children dead.

Brothers and sisters, the words in v. 23 should be chilling to a certain extent – *I will give each of you according to your works.* Jesus is a righteous judge. He judges according to our works. We cannot hide behind grace on this. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We must not tolerate sin. We must not let those we love tolerate sin. Romans 2:11–13. *For God shows no partiality. 12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.* Fear that judge in a healthy way.

In a few short words in v. 25, God shows us how to do that. To the rest of those in Thyatira who have not tolerated Jezebel, who have respected Jesus as Judge, there is only one thing that they, that we, need to do. **Hold fast to what you have.** What we have is God's Word. All we have is God's Word. All reality was spoken into existence by the Word of God. The nature of righteousness is revealed to us by God's Word. We are sustained spiritually by the Word of God alone. All we need to do is hold fast to that Word until the end. Hold fast to righteousness and grace. Hold fast to what He says is right! He is not only Judge, He is King. What He says goes. His very words are the basis upon which all reality rests, upon which all joy and satisfaction and fulfillment rests. Hold fast to them. Don't depart from them.

As the people of God, we have been granted access to the Kingdom of God. We have no ability to live righteously on our own, but as members of His Kingdom, we have access to His power and authority. If we hold fast to His Word, we will produce those works that lead to life. The only real problem is that holding fast takes work. And we don't like work. We are prone to emphasize "abiding in Christ" and to avoid the hard work that goes into abiding in Christ.

We have one means by which we abide in Christ. His Word. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us and to grant us access to His power through the written word. It's all we have. Filling our minds with His Word is hard work. He hasn't chosen to reveal Himself to us through reels and short humorous videos or through movies and tv shows. Those things can be helpful, I'm not trying to disparage them. But can we recognize that we like those things because they are easier to digest – it takes less work. We can sit in front of our phones or TVs for hours on end digesting material that is not the word of God. There is something "relaxing" about it. We can garden or craft or watch sports or do any number of "good" things while being wholly separated from the Word of God. Again, I'm not speaking ill of those things – except that they are not the Word of God. Because of our sin, they are easier to digest than the word of God. They are more "enjoyable" or relaxing. They aren't hard work. And "holding fast" is hard work. Abiding in Christ is hard work. Meditating on and memorizing God's Word is hard work. Has our dependence on grace led us to believe that hard work is not necessary, that holding fast to His Word is not necessary? Because we enjoy those things, have we slowly enabled ourselves in the church to feel good about those things at the expense of the Word of God? Does our own struggle with the the hard work of feasting on the Word of God cause us to not press our brothers and sisters in holding fast to the Word of God?

It is truly all we have. We cannot become lazy in this. Because in becoming lazy, we will tolerate sin. It will just happen. It happened to the brothers and sisters in Thyatira who exhibited great works of love and faith and patient endurance. Because they didn't hold fast to what they had, they began tolerating, if not dabbling in, sexual immorality and things outside the kingdom. In response, Jesus is encouraging us to hold fast, to erect a fortress of righteousness in our lives that comes from the Word of God. Fight with the Fighter Verses. Work hard at working out your salvation. Push one another to deeper study and deeper interaction with the very words of God. Think about them. Meditate on them. Don't just take them at surface value, the way you've always heard them, the way you are comfortable taking them. Work hard to feast on the body of Christ, the very word of God, the very bread of life.

And what will God do? Give you authority over the nations! He is King and He shares His authority. All good authority shares and brings life. We have seen authority abused to such an extent that we view it negatively. May I be so brazen as to imply that is one of the reasons we don't feast on the Word of God like we should. We have a negative view of authority implanted deeply within us that even affects the way we handle God's Word. To work hard to know and understand the Word of God is to submit ourselves to it to a greater degree – to submit ourselves to its authority in a meaningful way. And the inverse is also true. If we do not work hard to know and understand the Word of God, we aren't submitting to it. Our sinful nature does

not believe authority brings life. We think it stifles it. We think authority robs from us, but God's authority grants us life itself. We think authority controls us, but God's authority truly frees us.

Only, that is, if we submit to God's Word. It's the only way to know His authority. To experience His authority. To experience that life. We must hold fast to what we have. If we trust God's authority, we won't tolerate sin. If we know Him as judge, we will hide his word in our heart that we may not sin against Him. If we know Him as King, we will want to submit to Him and to show the world what His kingdom is like by living righteously. All of that happens when we hold fast to His Word. Abiding in Christ is the goal, but it cannot be done apart from working hard to feast upon His Word.