

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY SEVEN

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29

It's easy to think tolerance of sin happens only in large places and sprawling megalopolises like New York City or Los Angeles. And it's easy to think it would never happen in a local church. Wrong, wrong, wrong! It even happened in a first-century church, of all places. The church at Thyatira was guilty of tolerance that had gone to seed.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY garden has its weeds. These unwelcome intruders often appear harmless, especially at first, when the soil is speckled with little green sprouts. Some weeds even look nice and occasionally blossom with an eye-catching bloom or two. Yet any experienced gardener knows that weeds cause major problems for the rest of the plants.

If weeds linger too long, they will grow far faster than the planted seeds, and in a matter of weeks, they can completely overtake the plot of land. Their roots will invade the soil and steal nutrients from the rest of the plants. Ultimately, weeds halt the garden from producing a healthy, beautiful, and nourishing harvest.

Many local churches are like gardens filled with both healthy plants and dangerous weeds. Those who follow false teachers, who neglect Scripture, and who love the world's enticements more than Christ's presence cause major problems for the community and hinder its fruitfulness.

Thankfully, Jesus, like a master gardener, helps the church identify these intruders and prevent them from causing too much damage. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores Jesus' words to a church that let the weeds of tolerance take root. His rebuke is every bit as urgent for us right now as it was back then.



The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sin always saps the life of a spiritual community. Likewise, sin always harms the follower of Christ. So Christ calls us to examine our own lives before scrutinizing others. Remember His question in [Matthew 7:3](#)? “Why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own?” Use this time for a prayer of confession as you open your heart to receive His Word.

Father, I confess that I have sinned against You. My thoughts, words, and actions have not honored You and have harmed others. Please, forgive me. Spur me on to repentance as I study and embrace Your Word today. In Jesus’ merciful name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus continued His series of messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#) by addressing a church that might look remarkably similar to many churches across the world today. According to [Revelation 2:18](#), which church did Jesus address *fourth*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Thyatira was not as impressive as other cities in Asia Minor, but people from across the region still came through it because local trade guilds specialized in producing impressive textiles, leather, and metal goods. If you want explore these details further, you can read about [Thyatira](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at biblegateway.com.

How might living in a city like Thyatira—one that saw so many people coming and going—have created problems for Christians who lived and worshiped there permanently?

In a city known for producing impressive works of bronze, the one “whose feet are like polished bronze” stepped down from His heavenly throne to address a community that had grown far too comfortable with sin’s impurities ([2:18](#)).

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29



Observation: The Church in Thyatira

Each of Jesus' letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor roughly follow the same basic outline:

- Commendation
- Complaint
- Correction

Read [Revelation 2:19–29](#) and, as you read, mentally separate the passage into these three sections to guide you as you make observations.¹

Commendation—Revelation 2:19

According to [Revelation 2:19](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Thyatira? What kinds of behavior had He “seen”?

Concern—Revelation 2:20–23

By using the transition word *but*, Jesus moved to discussing His concern with these believers. According to [Revelation 2:20a](#), what was Jesus' central “complaint” against the church in Thyatira?

What two things did “Jezebel” teach these believers to do, according to [Revelation 2:20b](#)?

1. _____
2. _____

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29

According to [Revelation 2:22–23](#), what consequences did Jesus say awaited Jezebel and “those who commit adultery with her”?

Correction—Revelation 2:24–29

According to [Revelation 2:24–25](#), what message of exhortation did Jesus offer to those who had “not followed this false teaching”?

According to [2:26–29](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

Salvation is always according to faith. Judgment is always according to works.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Tolerance in the Church

Jesus confronted the church in Thyatira because it tolerated wickedness within its walls ([Revelation 2:20](#) NASB). Look up the word *tolerate* in a dictionary. How does the technical definition of this term differ from its more conventional usage today? Why is tolerance of sin problematic for believers?

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29

What does it mean that Jesus would give “authority” to those who are victorious (see [Revelation 2:26–28](#))? Who will receive this authority? What kind of authority will they receive? When will they receive it? For help answering these questions, look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² For a free resource, look at [Constable’s Notes](#), available at [netbible.org](#).

Why is it significant that Jesus opened this letter describing Himself as one “whose eyes are like flames of fire” ([2:18](#))? How does this description help us understand the broader message of the whole letter? Reference especially [Revelation 2:19 and 23](#).

Jesus sees what others don’t see, and He reveals what others don’t reveal. Some shrug their shoulders and—if you will—tolerate evil teaching and behavior. He doesn’t tolerate it. He calls it what it is: sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Old and New Jezebels

The central problem with the believers in Thyatira was that they allowed the weeds of “that woman—that Jezebel” to spread in the garden of their church ([Revelation 2:20](#)). Most likely, Jesus is describing a particular person who had a far-reaching negative effect on the local church, just as the Jezebel in the Old Testament led the people of Israel into idolatry and debauchery.

In the era of the kingdom of Israel, King Ahab “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him” ([1 Kings 16:30](#)). Perhaps the most wicked thing he did was marry the Gentile Baal worshiper Jezebel. [First Kings 21:25–26](#) describes the problems with this union. Summarize why marrying Jezebel was so problematic for King Ahab.

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29

Now, let's look at some of the specific details of Jezebel's wickedness. Read [1 Kings 18:4](#) and [19:1–3](#) and summarize what she did. Pay special attention to her actions toward God's prophets.

At one point, Ahab decided he wanted to purchase a vineyard beside his palace. When the owner refused to sell, Jezebel tricked him and ultimately murdered him so her husband could claim the land. When the prophet Elijah heard about this wicked act, he proclaimed God's judgment against Ahab and Jezebel in [21:21–24](#). What did God say He would do in response to their evil?

Like an adulterer, Jezebel-like figures lure people into the bed of idolatry. Yet that bed of idolatry also is a “bed of suffering” ([Revelation 2:22](#)). Jezebel's victims condemn themselves to the judgment of Christ. These strong words shout a warning to any church today that tolerates the weeds of sin.



Application: A No-Tolerance Policy

Tolerance isn't always bad. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. However, accepting sin as good is *never* right. Pastor Chuck offers four guidelines on how to handle the weeds of sin in the church.

- Big problems can occur in small, obscure places. *Don't be surprised!*
- Timely words can encourage demoralized people. *Don't be hesitant!*
- Wrong teaching can come from gifted people. *Don't be misled!*
- Deceptive actions can injure innocent people. *Don't be naïve!*

The Church Where Tolerance Went to Seed

Revelation 2:18–29

Through your reflections in this study, did the Holy Spirit reveal any weeds in your own life that need to be uprooted? Remember, weeds often start off as small sprouts. Take a moment to confess to God those specific sins—whether big or small—and claim the forgiveness that He has freely given you through Jesus’ sacrifice.

Now that you’ve examined your own life, take a look at the garden of your Christian community. Is there a demoralized person who needs encouragement? Is there someone who has been misled and needs direction? Is there someone who has been injured by deceptive actions? In what ways can you spread the truth of Christ to meet the needs of these people?

False teaching often sounds good . . . and feels even better. So, stay alert and handle the weeds carefully as you pull them from the ground. Water the soil with grace and truth, and your community will grow and flourish and teem with life like never before.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to live a flourishing life for Your glory. Though it may be painful, please uproot the weeds of sin in my soul. I also want to belong to a community of faith that serves You well. Give me the courage to confront sin with both grace and truth—just as Your Son exemplified in His life, death, and resurrection. It’s in His name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Study 7 • Page 7

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