

Good Church, Bad Church (Part 3) – Rev 2:18-29

Lift – Worship. Teaching – Austin Fruits. Our group – don’t be cardboard. Not over.

Rev 2:18-29. We’re in the middle of a mini-series in our study of the book of Revelation, based on 7 messages from Jesus, to seven 1st century churches. Some of whom were good, some bad, and some both. Good church, bad church.

And this week, we turn our attention to the church in Thyatira (**Map**). The same city that Lydia was from, in Acts 16. Real people in real places. And Jesus addresses them starting in v18.

➤ Speaking to the Apostle John, he says – “*And to the angel [the pastor] of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God [God in the flesh], who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.* Describing his ability to see the darkest recesses of our soul. Eyes like fire. And his shiny, solid feet are meant to describe his splendor and strength to stand firm and overcome his enemies.

V19 – “*I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.* (ESV) That’s quite a list. They had a lot of things going for them. A characteristic of *every* good church.

A good church gets a lot of things right (v19)

They may not offer every ministry possible. Or do them all perfectly. But they sure do have a lot of the ingredients. The *qualities* necessary for a good church.

Starting with love.

- **They love.** After saying, *I know your works*, the *good* things you do, Jesus cites them. Beginning with love. *I know your . . . love.* Your love for the Lord. Your love for one another. Your love for the least of these. Good churches love.

And notice here, it’s not just a feeling, but something they do. Because Jesus lists it as one of their *works*. Implying that it’s an action; a decision; a commitment. Just like marital love. Just ask any couple who’s been *married* more than a few years.

Far more than a feeling, love in a church is something we express. Sometimes with words, sometimes actions, and sometimes both. And to the extent we *show* it, we’re a *good* church. Is that you? Does your love show? For the Lord and one another? Your neighbor?

Second, the second thing a good church gets right, is trust.

- **They trust.** I know your love, and *faith* Jesus says. Your trust. Your trust in God, and his ways, and his promises, and his Word. Their belief wasn’t just a mental *agreement* with the things of God, it was *trust* in God. Faith in God.

And just like love, it showed. It was one of their works. *I know your works . . . your . . . faith*, Jesus says.

Got faith? I hope so. It’s one of the things I pray for our church: more faith. Faith that shows. Faith that works. A *good* church gets it right.

Third, a good church serves.

- **They serve.** *I know your . . . service* Jesus says. Presumably to those inside the church *and* out. Inside, a good church serves by teaching; and leading. Facilitating, coordinating, cleaning, providing for one another. And outside, they serve by clothing, and feeding; visiting and helping. That’s what *good* churches do. How’s your serve?

4th . . .

- **They endure.** *I know your . . . patient endurance* Jesus says. The very thing he commended in the Ephesian and Pergamum churches, and encouraged in the Smyrna church. You think he’s trying to tell us something?

The days to come are going require endurance. *Patient* endurance. Waiting on the Lord to act; and relieve. Answer and provide. Protect and return. Unfortunately, we have trouble enduring *now*; in good times. Staying the course and walking our talk with *no* persecution; *little* hardship.

Don’t be swayed. Make a commitment and patiently endure for as long as it takes. Because the extent we do so as individuals, we do so as a church.

Last, a good church grows.

- **They grow.** Not necessarily numerically, but in the quality and quantity of their works. *I know your works* [Jesus said] . . . *and that your latter works exceed the first* (19). They *grew* in love and good deeds. They *grew* in trust. They *grew* in service and endurance. Because that’s what good churches do. In every way, they grow up *into him who is the head* (Eph 4:15).

How about you? Are you growing? Are you different today than you were last year? Are you getting a lot of things right? I hope so. Because if *you’re* not, chances are *we’re* not. At least not like we should.

➤ That brings us to v20, and the first critique from Jesus. *I know your works* he said . . . [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.*

A *good* church gets a lot of things right, but . . .

A bad church tolerates sexual immorality (v20-23)

Let’s start with a definition. Sexual immorality is the sin of indulging in sexual acts reserved for marriage. Things that are normally done in private. Things that most people would be *embarrassed* to do in public. Including the viewing of pornography.

And the bottom line is, it’s sin. Sexual immorality is sin. And sin-ful. **1 Thess 4:3-7.**

We ought to walk and please God Paul says . . .

[3] *For this is the will of God, your sanctification* [your godliness]: *that* [A] *you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] [B] that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, [5] not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] [and C] that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter* [his

brother or sister], *because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.* [God judges sexual immorality.] [7] *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

Sexual immorality, indulging in sexual acts outside of marriage, is wrong. There's no getting around it.

Unfortunately, bad churches *tolerate* it. They look the other way, they ignore it altogether, they fail to speak against it publicly, they fail to address it privately from one person to another, and some even say it's *okay*. Completely contrary to *Jesus*. Here in Revelation.

In fact, he holds it *against* the church in Thyatira.

- **Including those who teach it (20)**

A bad church tolerates the sin of sexual immorality, by tolerating those who teach it; those who advocate it. Whether it's from the pulpit or the parking lot. From someone in leadership, or someone who thinks they are. A self-designated teacher.

Like the woman Jesus refers to as *Jezebel*. *You tolerate that woman Jezebel*. Probably not her real name, but an indictment or condemnation, because of her similarities with the Jezebel of old. The wicked queen in 1 Kings 16, who imposed Baal worship and Asherah poles on the people of Israel. Often accompanied by sexual immorality with a priestess, as an expression of worship. Sick. And yet it was the very thing that was going on in Thyatira among some of the believers.

V20 again. *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*. Aka worship them. She was teaching it, they were doing it, and the church was tolerating it.

And while it's probably not that overt in *our* day, or associated with *worship*, it's still wrong. Tolerating those who rationalize, condone, or even *ignore* sexual immorality, is bad. And makes for a bad church.

But that's not it. A bad church tolerates those who *teach* it . . .

- **And those who indulge in it (22)**

V22 – *Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation* [great trouble]. It wasn't just the *woman* who Jesus condemned, it was *everyone* who participated. Everyone who indulged.

That's *our* danger zone. We probably don't have anybody *advocating* sex outside of marriage, but we may very well have people who indulge in it. And if we're going to be a *good* church in God's eyes; a God-honoring church, a Christ-exalting church; we can't do that. Whether it's sexual immorality with another person, or sexual immorality via pornography. We can't touch it and we can't tolerate it.

Might that offend some people? Or repel them? Unfortunately yes. But I'd rather offend them and be fewer in number, than offend Jesus and risk judgment.

Because that's the result. A bad church tolerates sexual immorality . . .

- **Risking severe judgment (22-23)**

V22 again – *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. Probably referring to her followers.

They were headed toward great sickness, great tribulation, and even death as a result of tolerating sexual immorality. I'd say that qualifies as severe, wouldn't you?

And all the churches [v23b] will know that I am he who searches mind and heart [Jesus says; because he has eyes of fire], *and I will give to each of you according to your works*. Whether it's the work of *indulging* in sexual immorality, or tolerating it. There's no escaping his judgment for unrepentant sin. Judgment for all to see. *All the churches will know*.

A church that tolerates sexual immorality risks severe judgment.

- **Unless it repents (21-22)**

V21 – *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*.

Whether it's tolerating it, or indulging in it, judgment awaits if we don't repent. If we don't confess it and turn from it. If we don't stop sleeping together and living together.

Don't risk it. Come clean. Get right. Admit your sin, ask God to forgive you, make a commitment to turn from it, and stick *with* it. Do whatever it takes to pursue righteousness instead of sin. For your sake *and* ours.

➤ That brings us to v24-29 and the *last* characteristic. [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* [quite a commentary on sexual immorality], *to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. [25] Only hold fast what you have until I come*.

Thank God. Instead of adding burdens to the *righteous* because of the sin of the wicked, he simply reminds us to hold fast. Stay the course.

Indicating that . . .

- **A good church keeps the faith (24-29)**

We've heard it before and we'll hear it again. A good church holds fast to what they *have*. Namely, their faith in Jesus and the Gospel. Their faith in Jesus and his Word. They keep it and keep on. Walking, loving, and clinging to the life, capital L, they've been given. Life to the full and life forever. A good church *takes* hold of that, and *keeps* hold of it.

Not for a day, or a year, or 20; but for a lifetime.

- **Until he returns (25)**

A *good* church is comprised of people who keep the faith until Jesus *returns*, or they die; whichever comes first. They hold fast until their faith becomes sight. They persevere until the trumpet sounds.

For at least *two* reasons that Jesus gives. The first, is . . .

- **To rule and reign (26-27)**

A good church keeps the faith until he returns, to rule and reign with him one day.

V26-27 – *The one who conquers* [overcomes the temptation to throw in the towel and forsake his or her faith] *and who keeps my works until the end* [does the things Jesus wants him to do], *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.*

It's the future fulfillment of a messianic prophecy in Ps 2. That one day Jesus will break the nations with a rod of iron it says, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps 2:8-9). Then, he'll reign over them, with *us*; the ones who conquer. And Rev 20 (1-6), says it will happen during the Millennium; the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, after he returns. We will rule and reign with him in a time of glorious peace and prosperity.

Meaning, we will be given far-reaching authority to lead and make decisions. Authority to determine right from wrong and better from worse. And our authority according to this verse, will come with all the power and backing of Jesus, to carry our decisions out. Just like he received authority from God the Father. That's the idea of ruling *with a rod of iron as when earthen pots are broken*. It will be absolute and overwhelming. Not that we'll rule and reign in a *violent* sort of way; but lovingly, and winsomely, and perfectly.

That's the first reason to keep the faith. We stand to rule and reign with Christ. The one who has the authority *now*, and will give it to *us* then. Just like it was given to him.

The second reason to keep the faith, is to live forever. A *good* church keeps the faith, to rule and reign . . .

• **And live forever (28)**

That's the idea of the *morning star* in v28. To *the one who conquers* [Jesus says] . . . *I will give him the morning star*. The dawn of eternal life. Like the morning star in the sky announces the sunrise; the dawn of a new day. If we keep the faith, eternal life will dawn on us. Life forever.

It's confirmation of the prophecy in **Daniel 12:3**. Speaking of that very day, God said – *Those who are wise* [who keep the faith] *shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness* [those whose faith shows], *like the stars forever and ever*. Those who hold fast and keep the faith, will shine for Christ and live forever.

Who doesn't want that? Who doesn't want to love, trust, serve, grow, and endure until the very end? Who doesn't want to avoid sexual immorality, and repent when they indulge? Who doesn't want to rule and reign with Jesus himself?

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (29). Hold fast, Jesus said, until I come.

Prayer – Let's bow our heads. Take a minute to let the Lord impress these truths on your heart. And if you need to, get right with him. If it's sexual immorality, repent, and make a commitment to change. If you're getting too many things wrong, repent and ask for help.

God, forgive us. Forgive us of tolerating or indulging in sexual immorality. Purify our hearts and set us apart. We want to get as many things right as we possibly can. Fill us and fuel us to that end. We need you, Lord. Now, and every hour.