

4

Strong in Purity



QUESTION 1:

When has ignoring a warning been a mistake?

THE POINT

Purity in all things impacts
your service for Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Warnings come to us in a variety of forms.

- ▶ Some fall in the category of obvious or unnecessary. Do we really need a printed warning telling us not to use a hair dryer in the shower?
- ▶ Some warnings come with a sigh of relief. You understand this one if, instead of a speeding ticket, a police officer ever let you go with a warning.
- ▶ Some warnings catch our attention immediately. When the highway sign says, “Bridge out ahead,” or the doctor tells you

your current health habits are leading to heart disease, we certainly change direction—or at least we should.

How seriously we take such warnings can depend on who is giving us the warning. We may heed the warning from a neighbor about our health, but when it's our doctor, we listen more carefully. When a warning comes from God, we should definitely take notice! That was the experience of the church in Thyatira. They needed a course correction, and Jesus warned them what would happen if they failed to change.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

REVELATION 2:18-19

¹⁸ “Write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: Thus says the Son of God, the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze: ¹⁹ I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first.”

Thyatira was not a large city in comparison with the other cities Jesus addressed in Revelation 2–3. It was poorly defended and often overrun, but what Thyatira had going for it was its variety of merchants and manufacturing trades. It was probably best known for its purple cloth—the same purple cloth that Lydia sold (Acts 16:14)—which is still produced and sold in that area. Like the city, the church in Thyatira may have been small, but it was an active church.

Jesus addressed this church by first identifying Himself as “the Son of God.” Jesus stressed His deity. Jesus also described Himself as a warrior “whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze.” As the Son of God, His eyes are able to pierce through any façade that people put up and get right to the heart of what is happening—and that’s what Jesus did in this letter. With feet . . . like fine bronze—a

term the local bronze workers would have identified with—He is able to trample any sin under His mighty foot.

Jesus commended the church in Thyatira for four specific things they were doing right—their “love, faithfulness, service, and endurance.” The church’s love wasn’t just the casual expression of love we often use to describe our love for certain foods. It was agape love, a selfless love that spoke highly of what these believers had for Christ and as a result was being lived out in their actions to those around them. Love was the motivation behind their service, just as their faithfulness was the motivation behind their endurance.

QUESTION 2:

How does our church exhibit love, faithfulness, service, and endurance?

Jesus told them their current works, those things they were doing to expand the kingdom of God, were “greater than the first” things they did. In other words, their love and faithfulness were growing, and their service and endurance were increasing! When we

have that same kind of love for Christ these believers had, others will see it through our service to Him in every aspect of our lives. We would be wise to learn from this early church on the way they loved and served others.

REVELATION 2:20-23

²⁰ “But I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Look, I will throw her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction. Unless they repent of her works, ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.”

Here was a church that was doing well in its love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. In fact, they were increasing in these things, yet Jesus still called them out. In spite of their love for Christ, they were tolerating immorality and idolatry in the church.

The key player behind these sins was a woman Jesus identified as Jezebel. Jezebel was likely not her name but a reflection of her character. This woman was behaving just like wicked Queen Jezebel in the Old Testament who actively promoted the worship of Baal among God’s people (1 Kings 16:31ff).

In His grace, Christ “gave her time to repent” (v. 21), but she refused to do so. Therefore, His judgment was coming against her—and

it would be severe. But Jesus’ condemnation wasn’t just against the false prophetess Jezebel. His condemnation was also against those in the church at Thyatira who had tolerated her teachings.

We are encouraged today to tolerate a lot of things that go against the clear teachings of God’s Word. Consequently, many churches today could be condemned for the same thing for which the church at Thyatira had been condemned. They allow teachings that contradict God’s Word when it comes to sexual immorality and idolatry. Many teach, for example, that homosexuality is OK. Others teach that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, so it’s acceptable to chase after as

PURSUIING PURITY

*How would you respond if a friend made the following statements?
Choose one and record your answer in the space below.*

“The world has moved on from the Bible’s old-fashioned views of sex and sexuality.”

“Whatever happens between consenting adults should always be OK.”

“Nobody has the right to tell another person what they should think about their own bodies.”

My response:

*“Whatever your heart clings to and confides in,
that is really your God, your functional savior.”*

MARTIN LUTHER

many material possessions as possible. Many have tolerated the teachings of the world long enough that those teachings have now deceived many followers of Christ.

It's interesting that the Lord links sexual immorality with idolatry. He does so because one ultimately and unfailingly leads to the other. Whatever it is you are living for becomes your god. Those who choose to engage in sexual immorality are making the choice not to follow God, and as a result they become idolaters.

When God's judgment comes against such sins—and it will!—it sends a clear message to the other churches. “Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines

minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works” (v. 23).

We belong wholly to God, who is a just God. He is the one who will judge our minds as well as our hearts. He is the one who knows everything we think and sees everything we do. It is by our discernment and choices that we will receive our rewards or our condemnation. As followers of Christ, we must not allow immorality or idolatry anywhere near the church.

QUESTION 3:

What are some characteristics of a person who lives a pure life?

REVELATION 2:24-29

²⁴ “I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who haven’t known ‘the so-called secrets of Satan’—as they say—I am not putting any other burden on you. ²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—²⁷ and he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery—²⁸ just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹ Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”



Cults and mystery religions flourished in the first century. A common feature was the promise that after a person was initiated, they would gain “deep secrets” or “special wisdom.” The irony was that Jezebel claimed to be God’s prophetess and claimed to bring a word from God, but all she supplied was knowledge and lies from hell. So, these “deeper secrets” for those special enough to receive them were nothing more than “the so-called secrets of Satan” (v. 24).

QUESTION 4:

What are some ways our church is like the church at Thyatira?

Thankfully, not everyone in Thyatira had been deceived by the teachings of Jezebel or captivated by her evil secrets. To these faithful believers, Jesus gave them only one charge: “Only hold on to what you have until I come” (v. 25). These believers were encouraged to hold on to the truths they learned from God’s Word.

How do we avoid the deception of a Jezebel? We must stick to the gospel. We must “keep our noses” in God’s Word. His Word is truth, and by it we can discern what is not true. I mean more than just casually reading Scripture; we need to be diligent in our study to ensure we are “correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Satan is the master deceiver, and although his lies can sound believable, anything that veers the slightest from God’s Word is not from God.

To the church in Thyatira, Jesus promised two things to those who stay the course, holding on to the truth in Christ: authority over the nations and the morning star. Jesus is the morning star and He has promised us all authority as we follow Him. Nothing is greater than a personal relationship with Christ.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another remain faithful to the gospel?



LIVE IT OUT

How can we remain pure in Christ? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Commit.** As you wake every day, even before you get out of bed, pray and ask the Lord to give you the strength to live for Him and by His standards as you go through the day.
- ▶ **Contrast.** Make a list of things the world says are perfectly OK to do. Contrast those things with what the Bible says about them. Dig into the Scripture and find verses that address those things
- ▶ **Witness.** If you have a friend who has embraced the world's practices of idolatry and immorality, schedule time to visit. Prayerfully share with this friend the truth of the gospel and the benefits it offers over sin's deceptiveness.

The church in Thyatira had great faith and they kept on growing in that faith. Let's strive to grow in our faith and service as well.