

## SESSION 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 PASSAGE

Revelation 2:18-29

## 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 directions—or at least we should.

How seriously we take such warnings can also depend on who is giving us the warning. We may or may not heed the warning from a neighbor about our health, but when it’s our doctor, we listen more carefully. Certainly, when a warning comes from God Himself, we should definitely sit up and 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.

## 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 compared 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.

**“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”**

AUGUSTINE

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 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*.

Jesus told them their current works—the 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 the 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 the example of this early church of the way they loved and served others. They had great faith and they kept on growing in that faith. Let’s strive to grow in our faith and service as well.

### Thyatira

#### COMMENDED FOR:

1. DEMONSTRATING LOVE, FAITH, SERVICE, AND ENDURANCE

#### REBUKED FOR:

1. TOLERATING FALSE PROPHETESS WHO MISLED SOME TO EAT FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS AND TO COMMIT SEXUAL IMMORALITY

### QUESTION 2:

***What are some things for which our church is known by people in our community?***

**ENGAGE**

Where would you identify your spiritual life on the chart below?

**1****10**

Stagnating \_\_\_\_\_ Growing

*Ask the Holy Spirit to help you increase in your love for Christ, so that He can say, “Your last works are greater than the first.”*

**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.

**KEY WORD:** **Jezebel** (v. 20)—The infamous wife of King Ahab of Israel (ruled 874–853 BC) and daughter of King Ethbaal, the king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31), who brought Baal worship into Israel.

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 on the carpet.” In spite of all their love and faithfulness to Christ, they were tolerating

immorality and idolatry in the church. The key player behind these sins was a woman Jesus identified by the name “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). Although the woman in Thyatira called herself a prophetess, she was not speaking for God. Like the Old Testament Jezebel, she was teaching that it was all right for God’s people to indulge in sexual immorality and idolatry. Unbelievers in Thyatira thought immorality and idolatry were acceptable practices, and her teaching communicated that it would be OK for Christians too. Unfortunately, the church at Thyatira began to tolerate her message that one could serve God and still do things that were contrary to His Word and purpose.

In His grace, Christ “gave her time to repent,” 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 Jesus condemned the church at Thyatira. They allow teachings that contradict God’s Word when it comes to sexual immorality and idolatry. Some teach that homosexuality is OK. Others teach that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, so it’s acceptable to chase after as many material possessions as possible. Many have tolerated the teachings of the world so that those teachings have now infiltrated the church and 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.”

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 choices and discernment that we will receive our rewards or our condemnation. As followers of Christ, we must not allow immorality or idolatry anywhere near the church. Let's seek to be recipients of His rewards and not His condemnation.

**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.”

**KEY WORDS:** “**The so-called secrets of Satan**” (v. 24)—An ambiguous phrase that may refer to the idea that in order to fully understand the grace of God one needed to experience the depths of sin.

**Morning star** (v. 28)—A reward promised to those who triumph and are faithful to the end. It symbolizes God’s presence which they will enjoy forever in heaven.

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 were 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.”

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.” This group of believers was encouraged to hold on to the truths they learned from God’s Word.

Jesus told the believers at Thyatira to hold on to the truth and not give in to the lies and deception of Satan. He told them to continue holding on until He comes again and returns to earth. We in the church today need to adhere to that same message. We are to stand strong. We are to hold on to the truth regardless of popular opinion or what is “politically correct.” We are to remain faithful until the day Jesus calls us to our eternal home with Him.

How do we avoid the deception of a Jezebel? We must stick to the gospel. 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). His Word is truth, and by it we can discern what is not true. Satan is the master deceiver, and although his lies can sound believable, anything that veers in the slightest way from God’s Word is not from God.



**QUESTION 4:**

***What can we do to encourage faithfulness and purity in others?***

To the church in Thyatira, Jesus promised two things to those who stay the course, holding on to the truth in Christ.

1. **Authority over the nations.** Jesus is given all authority and power over the nations (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11), and He will share this rule with those who persevere and overcome (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2). God has given Christ ultimate authority over all the nations, and Christ will share that same authority with the church.
2. **The morning star.** We know from astronomy that Venus is the brightest object in the sky after the moon. The planet is often called the morning star because we can see it right before the sun rises, signaling the new day ahead. But the true morning star is Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16). He is the morning star that appears the brightest just before the dawn, when the night is darkest. That means the greatest thing Christ promises to give us is Himself. Nothing is greater—and we need nothing more—than a personal, abiding relationship with Jesus Himself!

This is a message our world needs to hear. As dark as the world is today, we can remain faithful to Christ and reflect the light of Christ to those around us. We must remain faithful to the gospel of Christ and to sharing it faithfully with those who are walking in darkness.

**QUESTION 5:**

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

---

## LIVE IT OUT

- ▶ **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 to 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 the deceptiveness of sin.

