

## TOLERANCE

John F. Kennedy said, “Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one’s own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others.” This definition differs greatly from the attitudes of the “tolerant” over 50 years after JFK’s presidency. Today, it seems that the words “I disagree” are grounds for ruining another person’s life.

One angry tirade or joking exchange put online even as a teenage could hinder your college and career opportunities. “Cancel culture” is mainstream. And unfortunately, the fact that everyone has a video camera in their pocket and a world-wide audience on social media means that any of us could face consequences for any careless word or act.

Although the phrase “cancel culture” is somewhat new, the idea is not. Even back in Thyatira, as we’ll see in today’s letter, people were getting “canceled.”

### REVELATION 2:18–29

<sup>18</sup> “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.

<sup>19</sup> “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

<sup>22</sup> 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,

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Thyatira was conquered by Rome in 190 BC. Sitting on a heavily-traveled highway, the city prospered greatly with many industries.

In its prosperity, Thyatira had more known trade guilds (labor unions) than any other Asian city—wool and dyed goods, linen workers, outer garments, leather, tanners, potters, bakers, slave traders, and bronze smiths. Guild meetings often including offerings to pagan gods, excessive drinking, and sexual orgies. Refusing guilds or meetings risked some (or all) of a person's livelihood.

## DISCUSSION

What's the most embarrassing thing you've done that was captured on video?

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1. Describe the one who wrote the letter. (18)

2. What victory did Christ commend? (19)

3. What weaknesses did Christ mention? (20)

4. What rewards does Christ promise for obedience? (26–28)

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5. How does Christ exhibit grace before executing judgment? (21)

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6. How does the fact that believers will spend an eternity with Christ, sharing in his authority, encourage or concern you?

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Perhaps you've *known about* Christ for a long time, but in your heart you know that you don't *know him*. If you have doubts or questions about your eternity, talk to your coach today.

## STUDY NOTES

### MANN UP

Just before his first pro season, Marcus Mann turned down the NBA and over \$200,000. Instead, he chose to become a pastor. It's a choice he's never regretted. "It wasn't a popular decision, but it was something I felt led in my heart to do," said Mann.

The former Mississippi Valley State star has spent the last 25 years nurturing lives across Mississippi, including the last three years as a pastor in his hometown of Carthage. While the "What if 's..." naturally creep in, he's put at ease by recalling all the people he's encouraged along the way.

The rookie minimum salary in 1996, when Mann was drafted, was \$220,000. By comparison, in 2021, a rookie minimum salary is \$925,258. Few people would have what it takes to turn down that kind of payday.

This seems like a hypothetical question, "What amount of money would cause me to give up something that the Lord has called me to do?" However, as our culture grows increasingly intolerant of Christianity, these kinds of decisions will become increasingly real. Living for Christ may mean real consequences. The Thyatirans faced these consequences as well. Living for Christ meant their very livelihoods were on the line.

### CHRIST'S GLORY IS REVEALED BY OUR PURITY

John recorded the **words** of Jesus, **the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze**. Unlike the previous two churches, Christians in Thyatira faced no open threat for their beliefs. However, they faced a more subtle threat in that their business dealings were intertwined with idol worship. The portrait of Christ at the opening of this letter elevated Christ over any of the man-made objects of worship in Thyatira. Additionally, in a city with guilds of metal-working, the burnished bronze feet indicated strength and splendor.

Christ commended their victories, **"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance."** And not only did the Thyatirans excel in these things, but their obedience grew such **"that your latter works exceed the first."**

As with most of the other churches, Thyatira wasn't perfect. Jesus said, **"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."** Jezebel was a queen in the Old Testament who corrupted

Israel (1 Kings 16:31–33). Jesus wasn't referring to the *literal* Queen Jezebel, but her name *symbolically* refers to those would lure the faithful into corruption.

The Jezebel of Thyatira supported business owners at guild feasts worshiping the city's idols. Perhaps, as Christians refused to compromise, Jezebel twisted Christian teaching by saying, "An idol is nothing at all" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Logically, why would a person risk their income by refusing to eat meat offered to a meaningless idol? However, as a wise man once said, "We are never so clever as in the midst of self-justification."

Not only did the city's idol worship include gratification of the stomach, but also gratification of the flesh. Jezebel made allowance at these guild feasts for the **seducing** of believers **to practice sexual immorality**. Christ warned of stiff judgment for such carelessness and compromise. Yet, for those **who do not hold this teaching...who hold fast**, the Lord will not allow **any other burden**.

### OUR PURITY WILL BE REWARDED

Purity often involves abstaining from what feels good now, knowing that a greater reward exists later. This idea often gets discussed with sexual purity, but it's true for purity in all its forms. Any blessing of the Lord can be corrupted by sin. In fact, the idols of our hearts often stem from the good things that the Lord gave to us. Idols like comfort, power, and acceptance stem from that which the Lord intended for humanity to exercise under God's authority.

Jesus promised the Thyatirans, **"The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations."** When we read Psalm 2, we see a picture of the conquering Messiah. God said, **"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."** Jesus promised to pass on this reward to **rule...even as I myself have received authority from my Father**.

Although it seems ridiculous to pass up a million-dollar payday or to trade your livelihood, the reward for faithful obedience is to rule as kings and queens, sharing in the authority of Christ. In addition, we will receive the greater gift, **the morning star**, which most likely refers to Christ himself. Our greatest joy in eternity isn't found in the newly created things, it will be found in the everlasting, abiding relationship with the Creator who made it possible for us to spend eternity with him.