

THE CHRISTIAN AND SIN

Revelation 2:18-29

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Christians have always faced intense pressure to sin. To disobey God. To conform to the world.
2. The pressure to sin comes from three sources:
 - i. The world. Non-Christians pressure us to compromise with sin. To join in the fun. They try to convince us that by abstaining from sin we are abstaining from fun; from happiness; from getting the most out of life. At first they try to convince us to join in. If that doesn't work, they pressure us with criticism, and ridicule, and other forms of persecution.
 - ii. The flesh. Our own bodies pressure us to sin. We like to feel good. We like pleasure and hate pain. We prefer comfort over discomfort. Our own bodies are drawn and sometimes even crave what is forbidden.
 - iii. The devil. Satan and his forces are actively working to tempt us to sin. He constantly tells us lies: "It won't hurt you. Just this once. Nobody will know. You deserve it. You only live once. God doesn't really love you. He's only holding you back."
3. When you add these three up, the pressure to sin is intense.
4. Is the struggle really worth it? Is sin really that big a deal? Sure, we all agree that some sins are really bad (murder, rape, voting Democrat, etc.), but is all sin that serious? Can we lighten up a little about sin? How should Christians deal with sin? What should our attitude be toward sin?
5. We can learn a lot about dealing with sin from the church in Thyatira – a group of Christians living in the first century when the Bible was being written.
6. We are currently studying the book of Revelation. In chapters 2-3 we find seven letters from Christ to the seven churches in Asia (modern Turkey). Today we're going to look at the letter written to the church in Thyatira.

II. TEXT: Revelation 2:18-29

1. 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:
 - i. "Angel": Remember that "angel" is a Greek word that can just mean a human messenger. Each letter is written to the messenger to the church, or the pastor, who is then supposed to pass on the message to the church.
 - ii. In chapter 1:12-16, John describes a vision of Jesus. And in each of the seven letters, he emphasizes one or two aspects of Christ's appearance. In this letter Christ describes his eyes that are like a fiery flame, and his feet like fine bronze.

2. 19 I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first.
 - i. He starts out by praising them. They appear to be a healthy church.
3. 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.
 - i. It looks like they were making the same mistake as the church in Pergamum – hyper-tolerance. They were tolerating church members who were living in sin.
 - ii. “Jezebel.” In this case, the sin in the church was instigated by a woman. John calls her Jezebel, but that’s probably not her real name. Jezebel is probably the most wicked woman in the Bible. In OT Israel, she was the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal. She was given in marriage to Ahab, the king of Israel. When she came to Israel, she brought her gods with her and led Ahab and the nation into the worship of Baal. She murdered the prophets of the Lord, and she personally supported 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. So the woman in the church of Thyatira is symbolically called Jezebel because she led the church into sin.
 - iii. We learn four things about the “Jezebel” in Thyatira:
 1. She called herself a prophetess. She claimed that God was speaking through her.
 2. She was a seductive teacher in the church.
 3. She led some in the church to sin by eating meat sacrificed to idols, and sexual immorality.
 4. She persistently refused to repent.
4. 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.
 - i. Here is a both a promise of a judgment, and a warning of judgment. First Jesus promises to punish Jezebel, and then He warns that He will also punish those who have followed her if they don’t repent.
5. 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.
 - i. In other words, “Stand firm in obedience. Stand firm against sin.”
 - ii. Often we talk about standing firm against false teaching. But here the command is to stand firm against sinful living.
 - iii. Next, Christ makes a number of promises to those who fight against sin.

6. 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.
7. 29 “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.
 - i. The church in Thyatira faced intense pressure to sin.
 1. First, Biblical morality was a far cry from the morality of the culture they lived in. It was acceptable for a married free man to have sexual relations with his male and female slaves, prostitutes, and even teenage boys. None of this was considered adultery. And homosexuality was acceptable as long as the man took the active, not the passive role in the relationship. Prostitution was legal, with brothels all over the place. There was great pressure from the world for Christian men to engage in sexual sin.
 2. Second, Thyatira was known for its many trade guilds, or professional associations. There was a guild for every trade – a carpenter’s guild, a blacksmith’s guild, a butcher’s guild, etc. Every guild had a patron god, and they had periodic gatherings in which they would meet in the temple and offer a sacrifice to their patron god. These gatherings were filled with drunkenness and all kinds of sinful behavior. If you refused to take part in these ceremonies and festivities, then you could not be a part of the guild, and therefore you could not practice your trade in the city. There was great pressure to practice idolatry.
 3. Third, when people would go to an idolatrous temple to offer a sacrifice, only a small portion of the meat was burned, sometimes a few hairs cut from the forehead of the animal. A portion was given to the priest, and then the rest was given to the worshiper. The worshiper would then hold a feast either on the temple premises, or at home, and invite all his friends. Christians were pressured to attend these gatherings and to eat meat that was sacrificed to an idol, which Christians cannot do (Acts 15:29).
 4. Fourth, the priests couldn’t eat all of the meat that was given to them, so they would sell it to the butchers. Thus, much, if not most of the meat sold in the meat market was from idolatrous sacrifices. And once again, Christians couldn’t eat this meat.
 - ii. The Christians in Thyatira were facing intense pressure to sin, and that’s what Jesus writes to them about. He tells them how to deal with sin. In this letter we can find 3 truths about sin.

III. THREE TRUTHS ABOUT SIN

1. Jesus demands repentance.

- i. The word “repent” is used three times in this letter.

1. **Revelation 2:21** “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.”
- ii. God demands that we repent of sin.
- iii. What does it mean to repent? It means to change your mind, heart, and actions. It means to turn away from sin. It means to do a 180. Turn completely around and walk in the opposite direction.
- iv. Three sins are specifically mentioned in this passage:
 1. Hyper-tolerance. The church was tolerating sin among its members rather than exercising church discipline. As a church it is not enough that we abstain from sin; we must confront, restore, and if necessary, cast out the sinner.
 2. Sexual immorality. The Greek word is *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography. But it means far more than just pornography. That term refers to any kind of sexual behavior outside of marriage between one man and one woman. This would include sex before marriage (pre-marital sex), sex outside of marriage (adultery), and sex with the same sex (homosexuality). It would include living together before marriage. It would include pornography and strip clubs. Sexual immorality is any kind of sexual gratification outside of marriage.
 3. Eating meat offered to idols. This is not an issue for us today, but back then it was at parties, festivals, the meat market; it was everywhere. This would be the equivalent of us having to abstain from any products bought from Amazon, or any products made in China. It would be very difficult.
- v. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say, “Since sexual sin is so prevalent, I don’t expect you to be pure. Since meat sacrificed to idols is everywhere, I don’t expect you to repent. Since you have to take part in idolatrous festivities to be a part of the trade guilds, I don’t expect you to repent.” He demands repentance, no matter the cost.
- vi. Often Christians will repent if it’s easy; if it’s not too hard; if it’s not too costly. That’s not Christianity. Jesus demands repentance no matter the cost, no matter the sacrifice, even if it means poverty, imprisonment, or death.
- vii. **Luke 9:23** Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”
 1. If you want to be a Christ-follower, you must...

- a. Deny yourself: Do God's will, not your own. If any area of your life, any action, any habit, any thought, is against God's will, repent.
 - b. Take up your cross: The cross is a symbol of suffering and death. The meaning is to deny yourself, repent and do God's will no matter the cost; no matter what you have to lose; no matter what you have to endure.
- viii. Notice that God demands repentance of all sin.
 - 1. The church in Thyatira was mostly good, but that wasn't good enough for Him. He starts out praising them for their good works – their love, faithfulness, service, and endurance (v. 19). But He doesn't stop there. He doesn't say, "Since you're doing well, I'm not going to bother you about your sin. Since you're doing so many things right, I'm not going to confront you about the one or two thing you are doing wrong." Mostly good isn't enough. Just having a little sin is not good enough. God doesn't tolerate any sin. He wants us to be holy, as He is holy.
 - 2. **1 Peter 1:14-16** "14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. 15 But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy."
 - a. We are to be holy in all our conduct.
 - b. We are to be holy as God is holy – completely sinless.

2. Jesus threatens the rebellious.

- i. **Revelation 2:21-23** "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."
- ii. When Christians sin, God disciplines us to move us repentance. You can count on it.
- iii. Notice three things about this warning:
 - 1. God gives us time to repent.
 - a. **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."
 - b. When we sin, God doesn't move in right away to punish us. He's not standing by, hoping that we'll fall so He can whack us. He gives us time to repent.

- c. Hebrews 12:5 (KJV) “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”
 - d. Notice the three degrees of discipline:
 - i. Rebuking: verbal warning. This can be a convicting thought; a prick of your conscience; a timely word from another person; a Scripture; a sermon; or conviction by the Holy Spirit. If you harden your heart and close your ears, God intensifies the discipline.
 - ii. Chastening: It is felt as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy no longer does. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finances. Feeling unfulfilled at church, critical of Christian friends, on the outs with God. The Bible feels like lead weight instead of welcome relief. Your relationship with God seems blighted by sadness or lethargy.
 - iii. Scourging: To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It means cause excruciating pain. “Every son” experiences this at some point. This is when you are living in open sin and ignoring God previous attempts to get your attention. This can be something like a serious illness.
2. God will punish the sinner.
- a. **Revelation 2:23** “I will give to each according to your works.”
 - b. You will not get away with it. If you don’t repent, God will find you and punish you.
 - c. Galatians 6:7 “Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap”
 - d. Do you remember how Christ described Himself to the church in Thyatira? As “the one whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine bronze (v. 18).” We didn’t talk about the meaning of that description.
 - i. His eyes are like a fiery flame. This has a two-fold meaning.
 - 1. His fiery anger toward sin. The Bible says over and over that God hates sin. He will not tolerate it.

2. His all-seeing vision. He sees everything sin you commit – in private, in your mind, and even in your motives.
 - a. **Revelation 2:23** “I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines minds and hearts”
 - ii. His feet are like fine bronze. This has to do with the immovable power of Christ, or the terrible power with which He will trample the unrepentant. You cannot stand against Christ. You cannot run from Him. Either repent, or face the consequences.
3. God will punish the sinner in this life.
 - a. Unbelievers will face the eternal punishment of hell (1 Cor 6:9).
 - b. But as Christians, if we persist in sin, we will have to face the consequences of sin in this life.
 - c. For the church in Thyatira the threat was sickness, great affliction, and then death.
 - d. I wonder how many Christians are facing serious difficulties in their life because they are living in sin, and God is punishing them.

3. Jesus promises to reward the victorious.

- i. **Revelation 2:26-28** “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.”
- ii. “The one who conquers.” The word “conquers” comes from the Greek word *nike*, which means victory. What does it mean to conquer? It means to keep His works to the end. To fight against sin until you die.
- iii. He gives a promise to the victorious, or the one who conquers.
- iv. “I will give him authority over the nations.” This is a quote from Psalm 2, which is a Messianic Psalm, or a Psalm about the Messiah. It says that God will give Him authority over the nations, and He will punish His enemies.
- v. “just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star.” First, Jesus says that God promised to give Him all authority over everyone. Then he says, as I have received this, I will give you the morning star.
- vi. The morning star is a reference to Jesus in Revelation 22:16. Jesus is saying, “God has given me all authority, and I give you me. I give you

salvation. When you die, you will wake up immediately to be with me for all eternity.”

- vii. In other words, Jesus promises salvation to those who conquer sin.
- viii. Does this mean we have to live a holy life to be saved? Yes and no.
 - 1. No, in the sense that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). We are not saved by good works.
 - 2. Yes, in the sense that to turn to God for salvation, we must be willing to repent. Conversion involves faith and repentance. But also, the person who is truly saved will spend his life fighting against sin, not living in sin. Christians aren’t sinless, but they sin less and feel worse. They are in the fight; in the struggle. They strive to obey; they strive to repent; they strive for holiness; they strive to become more and more like Jesus.
- ix. In other words, repentance relates to salvation in two ways.
 - 1. You must be willing to repent in order to be saved.
 - a. **Luke 13:3** “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well.”
 - b. Faith in Christ is not just trusting Him as Savior, but also as Lord. Not just to get you to heaven, but to lead you through this life.
 - c. If you aren’t willing to repent, to hand the steering wheel of your life over to Jesus, then you can’t be saved.
 - 2. Repentance is proof of genuine salvation.
 - a. **1 John 3:6** “Everyone who remains in him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen him or known him.”
 - b. If you have been living in sin, and you refuse to repent, then you have a good reason to doubt your salvation.

IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. How should Christians deal with sin? We must repent. Of all sin. Immediately.
- 2. Let me tell you the story of Harry Truman. Harry Randall Truman. He owned a home at the foot of Mt. St. Helens in Washington state. In 1980, the volcanic mountain was showing signs of a major immanent eruption. One expert said the chances were 100 percent. Truman’s home was located at the south end of Spirit Lake at the foot of the mountain, in the most likely path of volcanic flow. He was facing almost certain death. Government officials implored him to leave. He refused. On May 18, 1980, the volcano erupted and lava flowed right through his house. And on that day, Truman died, because he refused to leave his house.
- 3. If you refuse to leave your sin, you will face serious disaster, in this life and in the next. The stakes couldn’t be higher. Will you turn? Will you leave your sins behind?