

Is God Tolerant?

- How many people in the world of religion take it too seriously? Is that part of the problem?
- I think we should take Jesus seriously. We should take the Bible seriously. Probably shouldn't take ourselves nearly as seriously and that's how I approach it.
- Do you think you're a tolerant kind of guy?
- I love people very much and it's-
- That's not the same thing.
- Well, it's how do you disagree sometimes with people that you love? That's a very difficult issue for everybody, but for a pastor in particular 'cause-
- You preach tolerance.
- I preach that we should love our neighbor, that we should accept diversity-
- But tolerance in particular.
- You keep hammering it. What what do you mean by tolerance?
- Tolerating people who may have a lifestyle or a belief that you don't agree with.
- Yeah, we have to. And that's when Jesus says, "Love your neighbor." You know, He knows you're not gonna agree with all your neighbors, but He wants you to love them, to seek good for them, to care for them-
- What did you make the Kirk Cameron-
- To make the world kind.
- Scandal? As it's become where he, you know, for 15 minutes here, he sat here espousing what I think he thought were perfectly normal Christian views, but he did it in a way that people saw as really very bigoted toward gays. What did you think of that?
- To be honest with you, I haven't seen the whole thing, so I-
- [Piers] You know what he said?
- I saw some of the Twitter and you know, some of the blogging and stuff, but that's not always

the best snapshot of the full context of the conversation. So, I don't know to be honest with you.

- Okay, I mean do you think that homosexuality is a sin?

- The Bible says on six occasions-

- [Piers] Well, what do you think?

- I believe that all sex outside of heterosexual marriage, so me as a teenager having sex before marriage, that was wrong. People looking at pornography is wrong. Single people having sex is wrong. Homosexuality is wrong. So, there's a long list of things that the Bible says wrong-

- Right, but given the eight states in America now have legalized gay marriage, that's fine, right?

- Well, no. I mean it's amazing 'cause there were anti-sodomy laws and anti-fornication laws on the books just a few generations ago.

- Well, no one's taking much account of the anti fornication laws.

- Yeah, I don't want to be the one to enforce those laws or go around-

- No, but my point is it, you know, the Bible is what it is. It's an extraordinary book, which has governed people's moral and personal behaviors now for-

- Thousands of years.

- Thousands of years. However, like everything in life, shouldn't it be drag kicking and screaming into each modern era and be adapted like the American Constitution? Because I mean my view about this is not that I don't respect Christians, or Catholics, or whoever who absolutely swear by every word in here. It's just that I just don't believe anyone who's genuinely Christian should be spouting bigoted opinions about sections of the community for their sexuality.

- Well I think when it comes to the bible, you've got three options. Take it. I believe what it says. Leave it. I don't believe what it says. Or change it-

- [Piers] Or adapt it. the word-

- Which would be to change it-

- For modern era.

- The changing of it, that's exactly what, for example, Thomas Jefferson did. He literally sat down in the White House with scissors and cut the parts out that he didn't feel should be in

there. Aren't you glad you don't have my job? How would you answer that question? Are you a tolerant person? If you're a Christian, you're probably getting asked that question. If you're a non-Christian, you're probably the one asking that question. What's the answer to that question? Are you a tolerant person? Is Christianity a tolerant people? It's tough, isn't it? How many of you in your first thought is, "Yes, I'm very tolerant. I'm open, diverse, evolved, progressive, loving, amazing?" Yes. How many of you say, "No, I believe the Bible. I have convictions. I don't wanna be a compromiser. I don't wanna be lukewarm. No, I'm not tolerant." Some of you are wondering what you would say. Well yeah, no, depends on what you mean. This is a massive issue in our culture. It's a massive issue for our church. What's the answer? G.K. Chesterton said, "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions." Some would say Christians are intolerant and some Christians would say that others are intolerant of us. And it fits in the framework of what we'll call a plausibility structure. There was a sociologist named Peter Berger. He coined and popularized a term called plausibility structure. And it means that there are certain assumptions, presuppositions, presumptions in every culture that are so widely held that there are unquestioned. So for example, if you go into an Asian cultural context, the thought of saving face and not experiencing shame, it pervades, permeates everything. The decisions that are made, the identities that are chosen, the lives that are lived. In the western world, particularly in Europe, Canada and the U.S., what you're looking at is a plausibility structure of tolerance. And tolerance is an assumed virtue. And if you don't hold to an open tolerant view where you agree with, and support, and embrace everyone and everything, then you're bigoted. You hear those words? Narrow-minded. You're discriminatory, you're prejudiced, you're out dated, you're primitive. You're two guys back on the evolutionary chart with a sloped forehead. That's who you are. Now as Christians, it puts us in a tough place. I mean that was what I was trying to explain to Piers. I enjoyed my time with him. I like him. I didn't feel he was very tolerant, but that's a whole nother sermon. I gave him a Bible and I hope that he reads it, and then hope he learns more about Jesus. I don't know where he is at with Jesus, but I prayed he come to know Jesus and that was part of my hope and prayer in giving him a Bible. But how do we answer that question, and where do we go, and where do we start? Interesting. We're gonna go today to the scriptures. How about that? We're gonna go to Revelation 2. We're gonna go to verses 18 through 29. We're gonna look at Progressive in Thyatira, a church that was more tolerant than God. We're gonna look at a 2,000-ish year old letter where Jesus writes through John a letter to a church and this is gonna blow your mind. He rebukes them for being tolerant. Let's just read it. "And to the angel," that's the spiritual leader of the church at Thyatira, "write, 'The words of the Son of God,'" so, here's Jesus, "who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance and that your latter works exceed the first." Here we go. "But," it didn't take long to get there, did it? Hey, congratulations. "But I have this against you, that you," what? What's the word? There it is. I'm not the mail writer, I'm the mail deliverer. I didn't write this letter. My job is just to deliver it. The rebuke is you tolerate. Now some of you, your mind just exploded. What? Jesus doesn't want us to be tolerant? How could that be? And he says, "I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice," not alternative lifestyle, but what? sexual immorality. Now when Satan and marketers got done with it, sexual immorality became alternative lifestyle. 'cause alternative

lifestyle sounds like, oh I don't know, chicken, ham, fish, I just don't know. There's so many alternatives. Sexual immorality has a bit more of a loaded moral implication, Amen. So, it goes from being a menu of options to obedience and disobedience. You could see why they killed Jesus and were he not in heaven saying this, they'd try again. "And to eat food sacrifice to idols. I gave them time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold I will throw her into a sickbed," a hospital bed. She's been messing around on a regular bed, gonna end up in a hospital bed. "And those who commit adultery," what? I thought that was yet another alternative diverse lifestyle. No, it's adultery. "With her, and I will throw you into a great tribulation, unless they repent of their works, and I will strike her children dead. Spiritual followers 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." You get the impression this isn't hugs and muffin Jesus. Amen. Like He's just not walking around in a dress, hugging people, throwing out zen-like fortune cookie statements, you know, riding a unicorn. He's just not, that's not this guy. This is resurrected from death, ruling and reigning, living in heaven, judging the living and the dead, big Jesus. "But to the rest of you in Thyatira," the faithful Christians in the unfaithful Christian Church, "who do not hold to 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. Only hold fast to what I, to rather what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron." Strong language, right? "As when earth and pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches." Jesus is talking and the question is, is anyone listening? The spirit is speaking through the scriptures. The question is, will we have ears to hear? We're gonna talk about Christ and then His commendation of the church, and then His correction of the church. We'll start with Christ. You always, everything have to start with Jesus. If you start talking about morality, politics, culture, lifestyle, orientation, you're gonna get confused. Start with Jesus Christ, who is He and how is it connected to Him. And here, He is called the Son of God. Big title. The one that the Muslims just trip right over. Because it's saying that He is God. That He is equal to God the Father. That He is the maker of heaven and earth. That He rules and reigns over all people, times, places, cultures, preferences, and lifestyles. This is big Jesus. This is after He died on the cross. This is after He rose from the dead. This is after He ascended to His throne. This is Him speaking authoritatively. Here's the point. The church belongs to Jesus. Jesus is the one who has the right to say whether you and I, individually and collectively, are being obedient or disobedient, whether our belief is orthodox or it is heretical. We all give an account to Jesus and the church belongs to Him. It's Jesus' church. The Church at Thyatira, Jesus church. It doesn't belong to you, doesn't belong to me, doesn't belong to us. Doesn't matter what we think, how we feel, or what we vote. It matters what He says.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- It's His church. And He looks at the church and He says, "I wanna give you commendation and correction" And Jesus here is typified with bronze feet and Thyatira, they had a lot of bronze workers. They would make weapons of war out of bronze. Showing here Jesus is immovable,

unshakable, and faith in Him is built on a sure foundation. And that His eyes are like fire that He sees and knows all. Jesus doesn't just have a perspective and ideology. He does not have His own interpretation. He sees the truth, He knows the truth, He says the truth. And from there, we proceed to hear about His commendation of and correction for the church. His commendation of the church is a chapter two verse 19. "I know your works, your love, and faith, and service, and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceeds the first." Jesus says, "First of all, let's start with a little encouragement. You are loving and serving better and better, greater and greater." See, while He was on the earth, Jesus fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He cast demons out of the possessed. He welcomed into friendship women, children, those marginalized and ostracized. And part of being a Christian is living by the power of the Holy Spirit, the lifestyle of Jesus. We give to those in need. We serve, we love, we care. Jesus would look and say, "You know, the redemption groups for the assault victims, that's great. The code drive around the holidays to help those who have nothing, that's great. The canned good drive to help feed those and stock the food banks, that's wonderful. The community groups being unleashed into the community to love their neighbors and serve their neighbors and partner with organizations that aren't even Christian. And just love and care for people is awesome." Because people are made in the image and likes of God. That's what Jesus did. He loved, gave, cared, served. And Jesus says, "That's good. It's increasing. Keep it going. Don't be discouraged, don't be distracted, don't be dissuaded. Be a giver, not a taker." How's it going for you? How's it going for us? Is there a generosity, a love, a humility, a service, a sacrifice beyond your family, beyond our church, for the wellbeing of the city? That's the commendation, the correction, and the correction is lengthy. It's extensive. It's painful. While He commends their actions, He corrects their doctrines. He says it this way in chapter two verses 20 through 21, "But." And a lot of churches would just simply talk about and a lot of Christians would simply talk about, look at all the good things we do. Look at all the people we serve. Look at all the help we provide. And Jesus would say, "That's great. What about your doctrine? What about your theology? What about your beliefs? But." "Yeah, but look at all the things that we did." But it's not just how you behave, it's what you believe. "But this I have against you, that you," what? Tolerate. So, this is the issue. This is not just a new issue. This is an ongoing issue, because Satan and demons oppose Jesus and scripture. And there's always a conflict. And the church is always being tempted to compromise. And even though it might be an issue that the culture is still very much discussing, it's an issue that the church has been discussing quite frankly for 2,000 years. How do we retain biblical conviction and kingdom commitment in the midst of a culture that does not love Jesus or believe the Bible? He says, "But this I have against you, you tolerate." We're gonna unpack that. But what does that mean you tolerate? "You tolerate that woman Jezebel," he says, "who calls herself a prophetess." A spiritual leader that God didn't appoint, but she appointed herself. "And is teaching and is seducing my servants to practice," what? "Sexual immorality and to eat food sacrifice to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality." Here's the doctrinal correction. It says, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel." Now, Jezebel is a type of person like a Judas or like a Benedict Arnold. The actual woman, Jezebel, lived quite a bit of time prior to this in the Old Testament, in the days of Elijah. And she was a very powerful woman. She had political authority. She had spiritual authority. She had financial ability. And what she decided was, "I don't like the real

leaders that God raised up. So, I'm going to persecute, put them to death. Instead, I have some alternative spirituality, a new religion. I'm gonna start a cult as an offshoot of biblical faithfulness. We're gonna have a new involved, evolved, enlightened, spiritual ideology. It's gonna be more tolerant and diverse and less historical and biblical." So, she encouraged the worship of a false God named Baal. So, this is demonic idolatry and she is powerful, but not everyone who's powerful or successful is empowered by the Holy Spirit. You can't just look at somebody and say, "Well, look at how rich and powerful they are. God must be blessing them." No, or Satan is blessing them and demons are empowering them and enabling them. And that was the case with Jezebel. So, she starts her own religion. She starts her own Bible college, her own seminary. It's kind of like biblical faith, but it's kind of not. And it takes bail, worship, and it integrates it with something called syncretism. This is biblical belief plus other religions, ideologies, and perspectives. What is it's a compromised faith. It's a hyphenated faith. It's a synchronized faith. It's a diluted faith. It's a compromised faith. It's a both end and what Jesus says either/or. And the result is she becomes very powerful. Now, there's a woman like that in the church of Thyatira many years later. We don't know if she started off as an official leader in the church. We don't know. What we do know she's very influential. She's very powerful. She is divisive. And what she's saying is, "Don't listen to the teachers. They're not as evolved. They're not as enlightened. They're not as advanced as we are. We have new insights. We have deep knowledge. We have new scholars, and new interpretations, and new books, and new perspectives, and new experiences, because we've spiritually evolved beyond some of those primitive beliefs." She's becoming very powerful, very influential. A couple things I wanna say about this. Number one, in the church, usually theological problems are just moral problems in disguise. Meaning here, Jezebel is teaching things, but the reason that she's popular is not because her teaching is so biblical, but because it allows sexual sin. So, this would be like in our day someone becomes very popular because they say, "You could be a faithful Christian and a homosexual. You could be a faithful Christian and an adulterer. You could be a faithful Christian and a fornicator. You could be a faithful Christian and a porn watcher. And you can have both and God doesn't judge. And we shouldn't judge and we should be tolerant and diverse. And Jesus loves you and we love you. And who are we to judge?" Jesus says "This I have against you, you tolerate that." Oftentimes when I have seen pastors, preachers, start reducing their belief in the authority of scripture, the necessity of Jesus alone for salvation, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, turning from sin, trusting in Him, when I see that diminishing... People aren't really going to hell. Maybe we're not that bad. Other religions aren't that wrong. Almost invariably behind it is sexual sin. Here's the big idea. Let's not change the word of God. Let's allow the Word of God to change us. That's the difference. And here, what looks like a theological disagreement is really a moral disobedience. Almost invariably, when I have some pastor come up at a conference and argue with me, "I don't believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God," da da da. My question is always, "Who are you sleeping with?" They'll say, "What does it have to do with anything?" That is everything to do with it. Because oftentimes, the issue is not an unconvinced mind. It's an unwilling heart. It's someone that says, "I don't like what it says and it's trying to change me. So, I would rather change it so I can do what I want." Number two, there is a price to be paid for faithfulness to the God of the Bible. There's a price to be paid. In that day in Thyatira, most of the commentators agree the big issue

was something called the guilds. And the guilds were complicated. It's like an extended family, like a trade union, like a fraternity or sorority, like a governmental social service, welfare net. It's a lot of things together, like a cult or religion. It's all of that together. So, here's how it generally worked. You would inherit the business of your father. So if he was a blacksmith, you were a blacksmith. If he's a banker, you're a banker. And the people who worked in various trades, they had guilds where they would work together. So, here's your blacksmith guild and here's your banker's Guild, just as examples, and you would join it. Now, the government didn't have the social service welfare safety net. There weren't food stamps or support when you're hungry. There's not unemployment. There's not disability. There's not retirement. What you do is you pay dues into a guild, and then they take care of you in your time of need or take care of your family. Maybe you have your wedding, your children's wedding at the guild. Maybe you die and they have your funeral at the guild. And because it's a lot of coworkers, these are people that are friends of yours. And because many of the people working with you or for you are family members. Here's your aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, big extended community. And they would get together and they would have a god or a goddess that was representative and worshiped by them, some powerful demonic spirit. And they would get together and they would sacrifice food, make sacrifices to the idols, and then eat the food of the animals that were sacrificed. Now, here's the problem. You become a Christian. You're in a guild. And all of a sudden they say, "Hey, pay your dues." And you're like, "Ah, but I don't like where all the money's going." Show up to the feast and worship the pagan, demonic, false God. Well, I worship Jesus. I can't do that. Eat the food sacrifice to the idols. I can't do that because it's a worship act. Oh, and by the way, after we're done eating and drinking, we tend to wife swap and sleep around and it just turns into crazy, fraternity meets Mardi Gras. You know, Roman's gone wild. It goes nuts. You say, "Well, I'm a Christian now. I can't give money to a cause I don't believe in. I can't worship a false God. I can't commit adultery. What do I do? Because if I tell 'em I'm a Christian, they're gonna kick me out of the guild. I lose my job. I lose my income. I lose my health benefits. I lose my retirement. My family turns their back on me. My friends reject me. I'm destitute, poor, and I'm cast out and exiled." So, this woman comes along and says, "You can have both. You don't need to pick and choose between faithfulness to Jesus and comfort and convenience. You can have comfort and convenience and Christ." And a lot of people raise their hand and say, "That sounds great. So, I'll worship Jesus and false demon gods. I'll give money to the guild and the church. I'll go to church and hear about sexual purity. But then if the guild has a crazy event, you know, nobody's perfect and I might fornicate, or commit adultery, or at least if those who do commit adultery notify me, I'm not gonna tell their spouse. Because after all, who might a judge?" Dear student, your grade point average probably will go down if you raise your hand for Jesus on campus. Dear middle manager, you may not get promoted if you raise your hand for Jesus in your place of work. Dear senior executive, you may lose a lot of money, status, and power if you raise your hand for Jesus at work. And it doesn't mean that we are to impose our faith on others, but that we should propose our faith to others. And as we do, they will ask us, "Can't you bless this? Can't you participate in this? Can't you ignore this? Can't you just cover your eyes and pretend like you don't see this?" And if the answer is I love Jesus and I love you, but the truth is I love Jesus more and I need to be faithful, it's gonna cost you money. It's gonna cost you power, and prestige, and prominence, and position. It might cost you

family members or friends. Number three, time doesn't heal all wounds. Some of you say, "Yeah, I'm in a hard place like that. I understand and I'm just waiting it out. I'm sure in time, it's all gonna get better." Not necessarily. He says, Jesus does, "I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality." Sometimes you can wait a long time. It's not gonna get better. Your family still may not love the fact that you love Jesus. Your boss may not love the fact that you love Jesus. Your professor may not love the fact that you love Jesus. The culture we live in, the city you live in, it may not be excited that you're excited about Jesus. You need to accept that. You need to own that. We worship a guy who got crucified. And those who loved and served Him most faithfully, they followed in His footsteps. And I'm not saying that we wanna suffer, we wanna be opposed, we wanna be persecuted. But I'm saying that if we're not, it may be because number one, we don't talk about Jesus, or number two, we talk about Him, but we don't tell the truth. Number four, it's a sin for Christians to be more tolerant than Christ. He says, "But this I have against you, you tolerate." Some of you are more tolerant than Jesus. Hey, bottom line, not everybody's going to heaven. Bottom line, not all religions lead to the same path. Bottom line, not all saviors can save. Bottom line, not all sacred books say the same thing or tell the truth. It's hard, isn't it? It's really hard. And initially, those of you're Christians, you'll hear yes. And then, you'll say, "Oh." And then, "Oh, but this is gonna cost me a lot." And that was the exact tension that they were feeling. So, let's talk about Christian tolerance. What is it? What is it not? Christian tolerance. How about legal tolerance in culture? Should we practice legal tolerance in culture? Meaning we believe Muslims have the right to worship. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Buddhists, Baha'is, atheists, agnostics are welcome to their belief. Scientology as goofy as it is, you know, it's okay. It's not that we agree with it, but that we'll tolerate it. Should we have legal tolerance of other views, other religions, other ideologies, other perspectives? Yes. Yes, we should. Because Christianity is not a religion, not a belief system that is imposed. It's about loving Jesus Christ. You can't simply pass a law that says everybody loved Jesus. It doesn't work like that. So, we don't impose Christian faith, but we propose Christian faith. We like to talk to you about Jesus. He loves you, we want you to love him. So, we don't think that we can in any way impose faith by making Christianity the legal religion and then making other beliefs illegal. So if somebody comes along and say, "Do you tolerate other religions?" Say, "I defend the right of religions, ideologies, spiritualities, and perspectives that I disagree with because I believe in the marketplace of ideas." You throw Christianity in the mix and the truth always wins and it is the one that will prevail. But I'm not afraid of other beliefs and I'm not going to make illegal other beliefs. So yes, we will tolerate, we do tolerate. Number two, how about social tolerance in community? Meaning you have a family member that disagrees with you. You have a friend that disagrees with you. You have a coworker or a neighbor that disagrees with you. They hold to another religion, spirituality, ideology. They're an atheist. They're an agnostic. They're something else. Should we tolerate them socially and personally? Totally. That's what I was getting into with Piers. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor. He doesn't say agree with 'em. They don't agree with us. They're very intolerant of our intolerance. But yes, you should love, serve, be good friends with, neighbors to people of other beliefs, and ideologies, and religions, and perspectives. Absolutely, 'cause Jesus says, "Love your neighbor." The Bible says, "God loves the whole world that people are made in His image and likeness." And we wanna love people and serve people. So yes, we should practice social

tolerance in our community. Number three, how about theological tolerance in the church? And I'm talking here within the bookends of orthodoxy. Yeah, you know, some who homeschool, and some who private school, and some who public school. And you know, there's all kinds of secondary issues that yeah, we just tolerate a little difference. We could talk about it, but we're not gonna declare war over it. These are distinctions. They're not divisions. Get the difference? And so yeah, they're members of our family, our church family. Say, "Well, I disagree, let's talk about that." But ultimately, we're not gonna file for relational friendship divorce over this issue. You tolerate me, I'll tolerate you. We disagree on a couple things, but we agree that we love Jesus and we're family. There has to be that in the church. Otherwise, the church becomes a very, a very narrow group. We wanna invite all of God's people to come in. And you're all coming in from different places and perspectives. Even those of you who are Christians, you're gonna study, and learn, and change, and grow. And Lord knows I have and I am. We need to be that kind of community that loves, and serves, and tolerates, and brings along fellow brothers and sisters, and reconsiders ideas and learns to live together peaceably. Absolutely. How about beyond our local church, partnering with other churches? Should we tolerate other churches? Yeah. They may disagree with us on certain secondary issues. Our church has male pastors. Their church may have women pastors, but they really do love Jesus, believe the Bible, they are family. We'll be with them in the kingdom of God. So yeah, we need to be friendly and for the sake of evangelism, partner that people might meet Jesus and lovingly have a discussion about some of the things we disagree about. But that's not war. This is just dialogue between brothers and sisters. Number four, how about heretical tolerance in the church? See there are certain beliefs that are national borders. Others that are state borders. The Bible is God's word. Jesus is God's son. Jesus lived without sin, died on the cross in our place. Rose as our savior. The Bible is the word of God, right? Those kinds of things. national boundary, state boundaries, you Baptist, you Lutheran, your Presbyterian, your assemblies of God, you Foursquare, you reformed, you Armenian, where are you at? State borders. State borders. We should get along across the state borders, but we still have to protect the national borders. So, somebody comes along and they're teaching heresy. They're claiming to be a Christian. We're not talking about Christians. They're claiming to be a Christians and they're doing what this woman is doing. Teaching false doctrine, encouraging false thinking and behaving. So no, we don't tolerate that, because here's what the Bible says, "Sheep, shepherds, wolves." The people are like sheep. The pastors are to be shepherds. Jesus is the chief shepherd. And Satan sends in wolves. Spiritual leaders, powerful, influential, winsome, and evil. And so in the name of tolerance, it would be very unloving. See, this is my heart for you as your pastor. I love this church. I've given 15 years of my life to this church. And someone say, "Boy man, he gets a little frustrated right there." Yeah, shepherds tend to get fired up with wolves, right? When there's wolves, shepherds, they wake up. They stand up, they step up because they love the sheep. No, no, you can't teach that here. You can't promote that. That's not biblical. That's not right. You can't just use these people. You can't just lead 'em astray. The answer is no. Do we allow wolves? No. Again, non-Christians aren't wolves. What we're talking about is those who say they're Christians and then lead people away from Christianity. That's exactly what's going on at Thyatira. He says, "But this I hold against you." Not only are you good at hugging, but you're good at hugging wolves. Keep hugging, but stop hugging wolves, okay? Anytime a shepherd

allows wolves, they really don't love the sheep. They really don't love the sheep. So yes, there are doctrinal distinctive at Mars Hill. Yes, we have a full doctrine membership class. Yes, I wrote a systematic theology. Yes, we teach the Bible. We're not ashamed of the gospel. We're not ashamed of what we believe. We're not gonna hide anything from you. We just put it all out there, because we're not trying to lie to you, or bait and switch you, or con you. We just wanna tell the truth and let the Holy Spirit do a work and your heart and mind to see if you would come to agree with us on what the Bible says. And if you love Jesus and disagree with us, maybe you could even teach us some things, so we could be more faithful. But at the end of the day, yes, we believe what Christians have believed for 2,000 years. We believe what the Bible has written from the beginning to the end. We do love Jesus. We have deep convictions. Among them are to love our neighbors, to love our enemies, to love our brothers and sisters. But above all else, to love Jesus and to be faithful to Him. And though people might be offended, our primary hope is not to offend Him. Number five, how about immoral tolerance in the church? That's the issue here. He says this, "I have against you. You tolerate sexual immorality." Should we as a church tolerate from those who are professing Christians? Immorality. I'm not talking about non-Christians. The problems in the church, the divisions in the church is not because of the non-Christians. It's because of those who say they're Christians. They profess of faith that they do not practice and may not possess. Some of you'd come in and say, "Why do we have to talk about sin?" Why if somebody lives a life of habitual, unrepentant sin, and they say they're a Christian? Why is there this thing I heard about called church discipline where you try and get them to change? Because Jesus says, "This I have against you, you tolerate things I don't tolerate." Now let me say this. Christianity begins with tolerance and moves to repentance. Meaning it doesn't matter who you are, where you are, what you've done, come to Jesus just like you are and He's gonna change you. So, it begins with tolerance and it moves to repentance. Do you see that? Jesus says, "Come to me and you're gonna change." So, the issue is can we welcome people? Absolutely, we welcome them to change. This was something that was impressed upon me some years ago. I've used this analogy previously. I had the great honor of meeting someone that I respect very much, Dr. J. I. Packer, well-noted, scholar, theologian, Bible teacher, super faithful. He's an older man now. He's like John writing this letter. He's an older man. He's lived a long faithful life. He carries a lot of spiritual authority. And I had an opportunity to meet with him. And he'd been pastoring in Canada for many years and his denomination kicked him out. They kicked out J. I. Packer. That's just a unbelievable. You kicked out J. I. Packer? If he doesn't fit, you're all wrong. That's kind of my view of the thing, you know? And so, I meet with J. I. Packer and I said, what happened? He basically says, "Here's my summary of our conversation." He said, "My denominations become heretical apostate." That's a big word . I've said this before, if a blogger uses it, doesn't even count, right? You know, doesn't even count. But when J. I. Packer says it, that counts. That's a big deal. So I said, "Okay, explain that." He said, "Christianity is about repentance. And anytime we don't practice repentance of our sin and preach repentance for other sin, we're heretics, because Christianity is about repentance." That's right. That's right. Christianity presumes we're wrong. We need to change our mind. It presumes that what we're doing is wrong and our behavior needs to change. And so, Christianity starts with tolerance, come as you are, and then Jesus, I'm gonna change you. And if we never call people to repentance, if we never say the what, the way you're

thinking is wrong, the way you're acting is wrong, the lifestyle you've chosen, the identity you've embraced, the actions that you celebrate are ones you should be mourning, then we're no longer Christians. We're no longer faithful. We're cult leaders. We're heretics. We're apostate. Meanwhile, those in culture will cheer us and Jesus would rebuke us and say, "But this I have against you, you tolerate." Christ, commendation, correction, and consequence." Chapter two verses 22 through 29, here's Jesus, let me just say this to you. I just feel impressed with the Holy Spirit to just say this before I proceed forward. Categorically, for some of you this makes sense. But emotionally, it gets tested when someone you love goes astray, right? So, you can hear me preach with conviction in my voice and a Bible in my hand and say, "That sounds right. We need to hold the line. The truth is the truth. Jesus is Lord, people need to repent. That starts with me. I'm not perfect. I need him first, and then I can humbly proclaim him to others. That makes sense to me." And then, your child comes home and says they want to explore their sexuality. Your grandchild comes home and says they want to choose to explore an alternate sexual identity. Your mom, your dad decides they want to try a new form of spirituality that's kind of Christian, kind of not. Your spouse decides they wanna start going to a church that doesn't talk about sin, repentance in Jesus, but maybe everything and anything but that. The person in your community group that you really care for, or maybe they've loved you or served you or helped you, they go astray. What they're believing is not biblical. How they're behaving is not ethical. And all of a sudden what moves from a mental conviction becomes an emotional conflict. You're like, "Oh man, are they not a Christian? Are they going to hell? Are they wrong? When I talk to 'em about it, they smile. They say they're happier than they've ever been. They say they love me and it's working. Maybe they even say they feel closer to Jesus than ever." This is where we need to humbly hold the line, humbly tell the truth, humbly love and serve well. "Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed." Right, again, behind much theological conflict is often sexual sin. So, they've been messing around in the bed and now they're gonna go to a hospital bed. "Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her." This may be physical and spiritual adultery. A sexual immorality which is behind a lot of demonic teaching, and false leaders, and cults, and errant doctrine. But it's also spiritual adultery that the church is to be like a bride and Jesus is like a groom. And if a church starts whoring around with demons and other religions and being disobedient, it's spiritual adultery. This is a massive theme in the Old Testament. "I will throw her into great tribulation, unless they," what? What's the word, Marcel? Repent. Christianity, Jesus Christ is about repentance. This means we don't change God. God changes us. We don't change God. God changes us. We don't look at God and say, "You're old fashioned and outdated." 'Cause he would say, "I'm eternal without beginning or end. You're the one who's sinned. You're the one who's aging. You're the one who's dying. I'm perfect, your not. I don't need to change, you do. I don't have any defects, you do. I don't have any shortcomings, you do. I've not said or done wrong, you have." See if there's a problem between us and God, the problem's with us and we're not God. This really comes down to the root issue of authority. Who is going to be God? Now, Jesus says repent. That's a change of mind. I'm thinking wrong about this. I don't care if I went to Bible college, seminary, read books from a guy with more degrees in Fahrenheit, educated beyond his intelligence, and we took a vote and everybody on my Facebook page said they liked it. It's wrong. And I need to repent 'cause what I'm thinking is wrong. And the way I'm feeling is wrong

and the way I'm acting is wrong and the way I'm reacting is wrong. And that's repentance. It begins with the assumption if I disagree with God, I'm the one who needs to change. And then, it becomes less about changing the word of God and more about obeying the word of God. See, this is why the prophets always get killed. They come out preaching, "Repent, repent, repent." And some people say, "Yes, we will. And thank you God. and we need grace and mercy and we're born again." And others say, "If you won't shut up, we will kill you." And they do. And they do. "And I will strike her children, the followers, dead." And all the churches will know, you know, what Jesus cares about all the churches. And some churches serve as negative examples for other churches. And sometimes, Jesus judges the church and sometimes he shuts down a church, because it's not faithful to him and it's a bad witness to the world. Marcel, I pray we're not that church. I pray we don't become that church. And I know apart from the grace of God, anything is possible. Anything is possible. He goes on to say, "And all the churches will know that I'm he who searches hard and mind. Jesus knows it all. And I'll give to each of you according to your works. 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 any other burdens on you. Only hold fast what do you have until I come? The one who conquers and keeps my works until the end to him, I'll give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received from my father. And I'll give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches." Jesus says, "If you're hearing this, have an ear to hear, listen to this. Number one, you can repent and if you do, you'll be rewarded. It's not too late." You could say, "Yeah, I'm wrong. I gotta change. Jesus help me, forgive my sin. Make me a Christian or if I am a Christian, make me not a hypocrite." And then, there's rewards 'cause there are degrees of rewards for Christians in heaven as their degrees of punishment for non-Christians in hell. God's justice and his reward is always perfect. And he says, "Here, I'll reward you." Friends, this life seems very long until you get into the life to come. And in 50, a hundred thousand, 200,000, 200 million years from now, when you're in the presence of Jesus, this life will seem like a very short while. And some of you will not receive much of a reward in this life, but you're storing up for yourself, Jesus says, treasures in heaven. We don't know what they are. We know they're great. We're not competing over scarce resources. Jesus has no limitation. He can faithfully bless all of His people and reward us all for the life we've lived in this body on this earth. So option number one, you can repent right now. You can say, "I'm a sinner. I need Jesus. What I'm thinking is wrong. Who I'm listening to is wrong. The books I'm reading are wrong. The arguments I have are wrong because my heart is wrong, 'cause I wanna do whatever I want to do and Jesus loves me enough to tell me to stop." Or number two, there could be justice and judgment. He talks about this. He talks about sexual sin leads to sickness, the hospital bed. Spiritual adultery leads to death and war with God. That's the language and imagery. And that day, it was customary when two nations would go to war, the king would assemble his people. He'd take a base or a jar made out of let's say clay. He would write the name of the opposing king and kingdom on it. And as an act publicly of declaration of war, he would slam it on the ground and it would shatter into a million pieces. And that meant we're off to war. Sin is declaring war on God. And here Jesus is saying, "If you don't repent, I'm writing your name and we're going to war." This is very serious. It's very serious. And this is where immediately, I know some of you'll say, "Yeah, but I'm not

sure I believe in hell." Wow. Satan is already whispering in your ear saying, "Well, I'm not sure that I agree with all the theological interpretation." Bottom line, people repent and are rewarded or they receive justice and judgment, that's it.