

the CHURCHES of REVELATION

THINGS THAT WILL KILL YOUR CHURCH

STUDIES

TOLERANT THYATIRA

Tolerance isn't always a good thing.

FUNDAMENTALIST EPHESUS

It's good to be committed to the truth...but the truth of the Gospel will drive you to love as well.

SELF-SUFFICIENT LAODICEA

Do you really need the Gospel if you've got everything?

THE YEAR AHEAD

LETTERS IN REVELATION

Jayesh is going to spend 3 weeks looking at the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3.

SONG OF SONGS

Derek will look at love, desire, sexuality & patience.

JAMES

Faith without deeds is dead. So we're going to learn what it looks like from James to be alive in Christ.

1 PETER

Leading into Christmas, we'll look at being God's people in a world that's not that fond of Christians.

2 PETER

How do you grow? How do you avoid pitfalls? What hope do you have?

04
06
08

MAY

JUN

AUG

OCT

NOV

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This term we're encouraging everyone to read Steve DeWitt's book, Eyes Wide Open. It's easy sometimes to get bogged down in the endless cycles of life and the mundane things that make up our day. But there are so many things in this world that we enjoy, and as Christians we realise they come from our God. This book aims to help us understand God's purposes for our joy & wonder as we walk with Him.

If you love the outdoors, art, food, sports, sunsets, coffee, mountains, or anything else, Eyes Wide Open enriches these experiences by turning them toward their created purpose. This is a book about our beautiful God who designed our craving for beauty to lead us back to Him.



Steve DeWitt

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

REVELATION 2-3

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1 EPHESUS (2:1-7)

Positives = toil and patient endurance for Jesus' sake, abhorrence of evil and false teaching
Negatives = abandoned first love
Command = remember, repent and return to previous good works
Disobedience = will have their lampstand removed
Obedience = will eat from the tree of life

2 SMYRNA (2:8-11)

Positives = enduring opposition and slander and being spiritually rich
Negatives = none
Command = be faithful to the point of death
Disobedience = none
Obedience = will be given the crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death

3 PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

Positives = holding fast to Jesus' name and not denying his faith
Negatives = some have accepted false teaching
Command = repent
Disobedience = will face war from the sword of Jesus' mouth
Obedience = will be given hidden manna and a white inscribed stone

4 THYATIRA (2:18-29)

Positives = love, faith, service and faithful endurance
Negatives = toleration of false teaching, idolatry and sexual immorality
Command = reject false teaching and hold fast to Jesus
Disobedience = tribulation and death
Obedience = will be given authority over the nations and given the morning star



5 SARDIS (3:1-6)

Positives = none
Negatives = spiritually dead and incomplete in works
Command = wake up, strengthen faith and repent
Disobedience = will be opposed by Jesus who will come like a thief
Obedience = will walk with Jesus, be clothed in white, will have names in the book of life and confessed by him before the Father and angels

6 PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

Positives = kept Jesus' word, not denied his name and patiently endured
Negatives = none
Command = hold fast
Disobedience = none
Obedience = will be kept from the hour of trial, made a pillar in the temple of God and have the name of God, New Jerusalem and Jesus written on them

7 LAODICEA (3:14-22)

Positives = none
Negatives = spiritually lukewarm, wretched, pitiable, poor and blind; need to buy spiritual gold and salve to become spiritually rich, clothed and seeing
Disobedience = be zealous, repent and hear Jesus' voice
Obedience = will eat with Jesus and sit with him on his throne

PATMOS (1:9)

An Aegean island south of Samos, where prisoners were exiled by the Roman authorities. John was sent here 'on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:9) and received his prophetic revelation during this stay.

TOLERANT THYATIRA

Today we're going to be starting a three-week study in the book of Revelation. Particularly, what Jesus personally says to three out of the seven churches in Asia in the first century. We'll kick things off by looking at the church in Thyatira and how the idea of tolerance can creep into our church in subtle yet detrimental ways.

T

olerance. A word that has not only gained major traction in the 21st century, but has become a catchcry for our generation. Now don't get me wrong, there are many benefits to living in a tolerant society.

But what happens when tolerance finds its way into the church? Especially in the way we allow one another to deliberately remain in sin out of fear of being exposed ourselves, being labelled judgemental, or because we simply don't think it's any of our business? What happens when we turn a blind eye to sin in our own lives?

Tonight we're going to explore this idea and look at how a tolerance of sin crept into the church in Thyatira, and what Jesus has to say about it.



As we begin...

What does tolerance mean to you? How would you define it?

What negative or positive experiences have come out of our society's current take on tolerance?

Read Revelation 2:18–29

(As you're reading this, look out for the formula we mentioned in the introduction to the studies, and see how it fits.)

1. KNOWING IT

What seems to be the core problem going on in the church in Thyatira? How does this problem affect the members of the congregation?

Do you think the level of punishment for Jezebel (vv. 22–23) is appropriate? Why or why not (consider vv. 21, 24)?

Verse 23 says that Jesus will repay each person according to their deeds. But doesn't that seem to negate the idea of grace? What's going on here? (Check out Rev. 20:12–13 & 22:12 [and Rom. 2:5–6] for some context.)

3. DOING IT

Nobody wants to be labelled judgemental. We all want to appear relevant, accepting, even inviting. Which isn't a bad thing. But as a church, God also calls us to encourage holiness, repentance & spiritual growth in one another.

Why do you think the idea of 'judging one another' is such a taboo thought today—both in the world and in the Church? Can you ever think of a time when we're meant to judge one another?

What do you think stops us from calling out sin in our friends' lives?

Can you remember a time when someone called out a particular sin in your life? Whether it was an attitude problem, a wrong action, or something you weren't doing. How did that make you feel? What was the outcome of that experience?

Pray that we wouldn't gloss over our own sin, but that we'd always see it in ourselves (& others) as something which Christ died for and forgives us for. Pray that as we love the world and those who don't know God, that we'd have a heart for pointing them to Jesus, not towards sin.

2. APPLYING IT

In the church in Thyatira, there was a woman who deliberately led people away from God and back to their old, pagan ways (v. 20).

Have you ever felt the social pressure to go back to your old way of living—whether in thought, word, or deed? How did you feel in that moment?

How does God usually reveal sin in your life?

What does Jesus promise in this passage to those who listen to his call to repent of their sin (vv. 26–29)?

4. SHARING IT

The Gospel calls unbelievers to repentance and faith, and it calls believers to ongoing faith and conformity to Jesus.

How can we make this distinction when it comes to sharing the Gospel with our loved ones who are not yet Christian?

Would there ever be a time you can think of where calling out your non-Christian friend on their sin would be the more loving thing to do? How would you do that in a way that screams of love and not condemnation, guilt, and so on?

FUNDAMENTALIST EPHESUS

Tonight we're looking at the letter to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the biggest and most powerful cities in the Roman Empire at this time, a city of around a quarter of a million people. It was the centre of worship for the fertility goddess Artemis, and it boasted a temple to her that was made completely out of marble (a first—see picture below) and was four times the size of the parthenon in Athens. Ephesus was a city of influence.

Being a city of influence, a city that was progressive and was a centre of thought and worship, it's no surprise that the church in Ephesus saw their role as a sort of "mother" church to the whole region. They're addressed first in Revelation not merely because of the route this letter from John would have travelled (1:11), but because they were seen to be leaders.

If you read Acts 19, you'll see that Paul spent a considerable amount of time in Ephesus. And you'll begin to see how passionate the Ephesians were about their city and their god Artemis, and how closely those two things were tied together. The Christians living in this important and influential city were up against it. But the question is, what was the cost of the siege mentality that develops when you're constantly under attack?



It's easy to feel under attack as a Christian in Australia today. While (thankfully) we don't experience the physical persecution many Christians do in the rest of the world, it's still not all that popular to be a Christian, and even less popular to take it seriously.

Walk through how you react when you're constantly criticised about something over a long period of time.

Describe the ways different churches (denominations?) have reacted to criticism over the past couple of decades?

As we'll see as we look at Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus, the battle to hold on to the Gospel has taken its toll. And for us, living in an increasingly hostile environment to Christians, it's worth considering what we need to look out for.

Read Revelation 2:1–7

(As you're reading this, look out for the formula we mentioned in the introduction to the studies, and see how it fits.)

1. KNOWING IT

What's trying to be conveyed about Jesus in v.1? (See also 1:13,16)

Discuss what Jesus praises the Ephesians for in 2:2–3, 6. What's the relationship here between deeds, perseverance and truth? Why have they done it?

So it's clear that Jesus loves the truth, and he's loving the fact that the Ephesians are holding on to it & defending it. But there's a problem in 2:4–5. Try and unpack from what you know of Ephesus, and what you've read in this letter to them, what v. 4 could be referring to. (You could look also at 1 John 3:10–24)

2. APPLYING IT

How is it possible to hold to truth in word, but deny it in deed?

What produces Christian lives that are doctrinally sharp, but devoid of love towards God or others?

How do we assess and identify in ourselves that we aren't moving on from our first love?

3. DOING IT

How do we speak about having fellowship with others—Christians, other denominations, or non-Christians—in a way that reflects the truth of the Gospel in both doctrine & practice?

As a community, are we more in danger of being too harsh in our critique of others, or too liberal in defending the truth?

We're not looking for balance on these two things—we want to pursue both truth in word & practice with equal passion. How do we do this as a community?

4. SHARING IT

As we consider the sharing of the Gospel with others, how do Gospel truth & Gospel lives intersect?

In your experience, how do you deal with people's genuine objections (& offense) to the Gospel, and how do our lives, relationships & community with them play into that?

Spend some time praying that we, and our whole church community, might be continually defined by our love for one another. Pray as well that as we hold to truths which are unpopular, that we might neither compromise or become jaded in the face of criticism.

SELF-SUFFICIENT LAODICEA

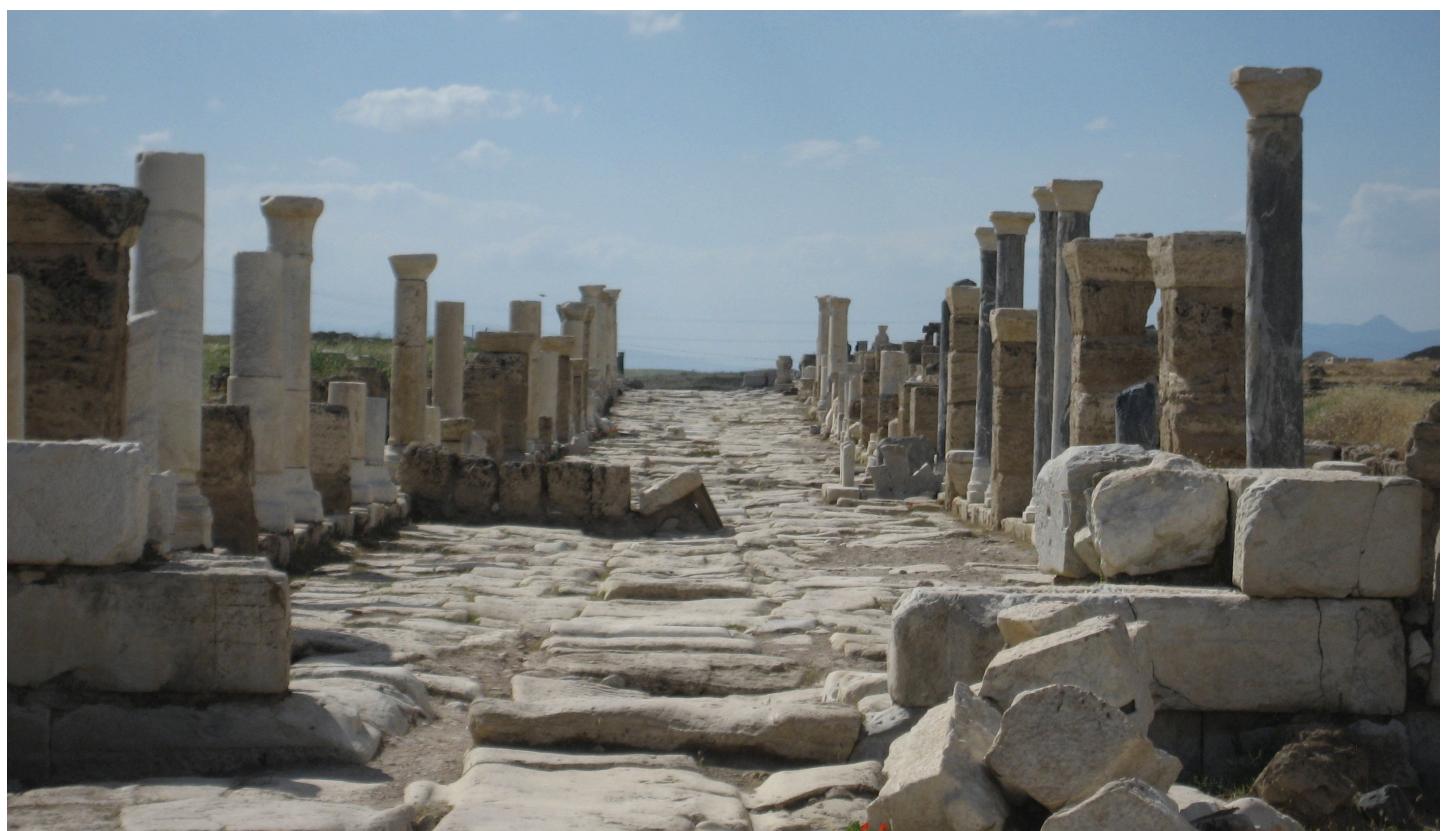
It's not wrong to be comfortable and to have everything you need. But it's often easy to forget about your need for Jesus when life is going well. In this final study for the series, we're looking at how self-sufficiency can kill your church.

L

located in modern day Turkey, Laodicea was an incredibly wealthy city of the Roman Empire, famous for producing textiles and eye ointments. The hot springs in nearby Hieropolis supplied the city's water (which wasn't hot once it arrived at Laodicea via the Roman aqueducts). When an earthquake hit the town in AD 60, the Laodiceans did not request the assistance of the Roman Empire that they rightfully had access to: they said they'd fix the town themselves. This was the attitude of the people at Laodicea: *we've got everything we need, and we don't need your help, thank you very much.*

This smug, self-sufficient attitude crept into the church, and it led the Laodicean Christians to becoming apathetic and unpassionate about Jesus. So Jesus deals them one of the harshest critiques out of all the letters. He tells them that they're just like their tepid, lukewarm water—and that he's about to spit them out of his mouth.

What are the implications if someone says you're lukewarm at or towards something?



Read Revelation 3:14–22

(As you're reading this, look out for the formula we mentioned in the introduction to the studies, and see how it fits.)

1. KNOWING IT

Is there anything in this passage that jumped out at you, or that you found interesting or confusing? Discuss these.

In verses 16 and 17, Jesus deals a pretty hard blow to the church. He tells them that they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked, and that he is about to spit them out of his mouth. Do you think that Jesus hates or dislikes the Laodiceans? Why/why not?

What advice and encouragement does Jesus give to the church to help them out of their condition? What do you think it means to buy gold, clothes and salve from Jesus (v18)?

3. DOING IT

If a Christian is in a state of apathy and lukewarmness, what steps do you think they could take to get out of that state? What motivations does Jesus provide in this passage?

What are some ways that we can practically rely on Jesus, rather than relying on ourselves?

Spend some time together praying for each other. Ask God for zeal and passion for Him, and that we would not grow apathetic towards him.

2. APPLYING IT

In what ways can Christians be lukewarm about Jesus here in Australia?

Jesus tells the Laodicean Christians in verse 17 that they don't realise that they are wretched. They are blind to their own condition of apathy. So how can we tell if we are lukewarm towards Jesus?

4. SHARING IT

How does being lukewarm about our faith affect our witness to others?

How do we share the Gospel effectively with our friends and colleagues in seasons of our lives where we are not passionate and zealous about it?