

Revelation 2 (NASB)

The seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3 all have six things in common. First, the letters are specific to each congregation. The one speaking identifies Himself (capital “H” in Himself refers to God or Jesus). The “I know” contents give the condition of the church. Each church gets a command from Jesus. They also receive a praise or condemnation for what they are doing right or wrong. Each church has a correction and a promised reward. John is writing about and how the things are within the churches. It differs from chapter 1 because John is writing about the things which you have already seen. Revelation 1:19 says *“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”*

Message to Ephesus

2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:”

Paul ministered in Ephesus for 3 years. Acts 20:31 tells us, *“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”* According to VERY strong and consistent church historical traditions, three prominent biblical persons pastored the church at Ephesus. These included John (himself), Timothy and Onesimos (the runaway slave in the book Philemon). The temple to the goddess, Diana was in Ephesus. She was worshipped for immoral sex. This temple was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Jesus identifies Himself as the *“one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”*. The phrase “Walks in the midst” means that He is not sitting on his hands. He sees and knows everything that is going on.

2:2 I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.

The letter begins with praise. There are four things that Jesus praises about this church which include works, labor, patience, hate and evil. The word “patience” translates as steadfast endurance. You can find a description of the evil that Jesus is talking about here in Acts 20:29-31, which say *“29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”* False teaching is the evil described here in Revelation 2:2.

“If a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some.” (Spurgeon)

By all outward appearances, the church at Ephesus did three things right. They were known for working hard, they had great outreach, and they protected the integrity of the gospel. Jesus expects us to do what is right and will not tolerate what we do that is wrong.

2:4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

“Nevertheless” or “but” is used to mean “despite all that”. All the good in the Ephesian church did not cancel out the bad Jesus is about to describe. They had gotten so far from Jesus because they

left Him and it was not that they had lost sight of Him. This seems like a small difference but it is important to teach us that without love we have nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Who we are in Jesus is more important than what we DO for Jesus. He doesn't need us to accomplish His goals. He allows us to join Him as He carries out the plan.

2:5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

The first step in getting right with God is to remember who He is and what He has done for you. Luke 15:17 uses the Prodigal Son to teach us this fact. It says *"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!"* The second step is to repent. Luke 15:18 says *"18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight!"* Repent means to change your direction and to go a different way. This definition differs from the Webster Dictionary's and the world's belief. Webster's defines "repent" as "to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin". Real repentance is an action, not a feeling. You get back to your first love by spending time in His Word, prayer, gathering together with other Christians and telling others about Jesus.

The warning to the Ephesian church is to straighten up or He will remove your lampstand. This means that Jesus will remove His presence from that church. The Ephesians listened. Historian Ignatius wrote a few decades later of the great love of the church at Ephesus and of how they were full of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus does not leave them feeling down. He praises them for hating the Nicolaitans. No one actually knows who the Nicolaitans were. There are two schools of thought. The first is that they were followers of Nicolas of Antioch. The second school of thought was that they were a combination of two Greek words - nikao (to conquer) and laos (people). They were, at any rate, false teachers.

"He who has an ear" means "listen everyone". This letter was written to the churches describing the Ephesians. It was written so that other churches could learn from what Jesus said to the church at Ephesus. It is believed that they need to overcome their cold hearts. The phrase "eat from the tree of life" means eternal life. The phrase "paradise of God" means the place where God lives.

Message to Smyrna

2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:"

Smyrna was 35 miles from Ephesus and it would have taken Paul around 10 hours to walk there. Smyrna had a population of 500,000 people and lies in modern day Turkey. Smyrna receives no condemnation from Jesus. Only two churches hear only good things about themselves from Jesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia. The main deity worshiped in Smyrna at this time was Roman Emperor Domitian. He was the first to demand to be called "God the Lord". He was the first to declare that all the decedents of David or the Jews were to be put to death. Nero tried to kill John by boiling him in oil and Domitian exiled John to Patmos. Domitian probably didn't persecute Christians because of Christ, but because they wouldn't worship him. Jesus describes Himself as the First and the Last. Isaiah used these exact words to describe the coming Christ, Isaiah 41:4, 44:6 and 48:12. Jesus also

identified Himself as the one “Who was dead and came to life.” The people in Smyrna would have understood the meaning of that introduction because Smyrna means myrrh and was used to embalm bodies.

2:9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

The first three things Jesus notices about this church are their works, tribulation, and poverty. He was aware of their hardships and their faithfulness. The word “poverty” means abject poverty, the poorest of the poor. Their poverty contrasts with the things around them in that they lived in a very wealthy city. Jesus says that they are rich because they are spiritually rich. Their rewards are being stored up where thieves cannot steal and moths can’t destroy them. As you will see later the church at Laodicea thinks they are rich but are actually poor. Revelation 3:17 says “*Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”*” The pastor here was Polycarp. He died by knifing.

Jesus told the Jews that they belonged to the synagogue of Satan and that they were not real Jews. The Jews had allowed the early Christians to meet in their synagogues. But when persecution came and they saw that Jesus didn’t come to save them, they turned on the Christians and kicked them out. The short answer is they were not true converts.

2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The phrase “Do not fear” means stop being afraid. The enemy here is not the Romans or the Jews but is Satan or the Devil. They were thrown into prison to await execution, not for rehabilitation or punishment. In Smyrna, if you were a Christian, you were an outlaw. Some say the 10 days means 10 years as Daniel wrote the days were years. Some say the 10 days are for 10 emperors under whom Christians would be persecuted. Some say the 10 days refers to a short amount of time. The word day preceded by a number, in this case, 10 tell us that it is a 24 hour period. This probably refers to ten actual days. (Remember our sermon on creation.)

The purpose of the coming persecution was to test them. The word “test” here means proven to the unbelievers around them. The word for crown here is ‘stephanos’ and it is different from what a King wears, it is a trophy given to a winning athlete. It also was the crown worn at marriages and is a picture here of Jesus and His bride.

2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

Those with ears to hear are everyone. This phrase is used here to tell everyone to “Listen up. Pay attention here.” The second death is the lake of fire. (see Revelation 20:14 and Revelation 21:8) The second death was a Rabbinic expression that meant “total extinction” of the utterly wicked.

Message to Pergamos (Pergamum)

Pergamos was the capital of Roman Government in Asia. It had a library consisting of over 200,000 books. Today Pergamos is called the Middle East. It had temples to 3 Roman emperors, as well as to Zeus. Pergamos had been the Asian capital for 4 years. In Pergamos was the great statue to the god, Asclepius. This god was usually shown holding a serpent on a pole. We see this symbol in America every day in Medical institutions.

2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

Jesus describes Himself as the "one who has a sharp two-edged sword". The sword is used for piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 says *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* This sword is the Word of God (see - Isaiah 49:2). There isn't any question that it could be anything else. Ephesians 6:17 says *"Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. NLT*

2:13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

The word "dwell" means to set up permanent residence. Satan has taken up permanent residence here, even making his throne here. Spiritually, this was the worst of the seven cities. We know this because Jesus Himself calls it Satan's throne. The phrase "Hold fast to My name" means hold fast to the word of my truth. He is known for His truth just as a man by his name.

It is such a high honor for Jesus to refer to Antipas as "My faithful witness because it is how Jesus referred to Himself. Revelation 1:5 says, *"and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-"* Antipas means "Against All". Apart from this Biblical verse, nothing is known about Antipas. He received such high praise from Christ because it shows that even though the world had and has no idea who he was, Jesus knows. No one is anonymous. Some versions say "Faithful Martyr." The Greek word 'martyr' means martyr or witness.

2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The people in this church lived in extremely difficult circumstances yet did not deny the name of Christ. But the good things did not give them an excuse for the other things. Balaam was a prophet. He was wicked and a diviner. Balaam accomplished all those things against the Israelites because his curses kept blessing Israel but he came up with a wicked scheme. (The story is in Numbers chapters 22-24 and 31) The Nicolaitans were idolators, sexually immoral. They were people conquerers who apparently had their own doctrines. Pergamos tolerated the Nicolaitans but the first church in Ephesus hated them (Very important). Those who are tolerating those who follow the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans are condemned in these two verses. As in our David sermon the past few weeks, they did not LOSE their salvation. (See 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Compromise is another word for “tolerate”. Compromise means the acceptance of standards that are lower than is desirable.

2:16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

In order to get right with Jesus, the word He uses is “Repent”. If they don’t repent, they will be quickly judged by Him. Revelation 2:12 says *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of the One who has the sharp, double-edged sword.”* Jesus will strike His own people because judgment begins in the Church. We are held to a higher standard as a light to the heathens. 1 Peter 4:17 says *“For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News?”*

2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’

The hidden manna is Christ Himself. John 6:41 says *“Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”* No one knows for certain the identity of the white stone. A couple of plausible theories are: First, in the courts of the day, a black stone meant that the judge had ruled guilty and a white stone meant that the judge had ruled innocent. Another theory is it was also common at the time for Pagans to wear amulets with the name of the god they served written on them, which certainly seems to fit here.

Message to Thyatira

2:18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

Though Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, the letter to Thyatira was the longest of the seven letters. They suffered no political or religious persecution. The noted historian Pliny describes Thyatira as an unimportant city. Thyatira had more trade guilds than any other Roman city. A famous woman of the Bible lived here. She became a friend to Paul and helped financially support his ministry. Her name was Lydia. She made her money selling purple dye that Thyatira was the only place in the world it was available.

Note, the Son of God is talking here. The phrase “Eyes like a Flame of fire” means penetrating judgment, not happy and He sees everything. (Revelation 1:14) The strongest known metal in the world at this time was brass. Using brass to describe Jesus’ feet says that Jesus is pure and steadfast or unmovable. A passage in Deuteronomy shows that God put a solid ceiling over the Israelites so that their prayers would not be heard. Deuteronomy 28:23 says *“The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron.”* Bronze and brass were considered equal, both are alloys of copper.

2:19 ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

Even though Thyatira was considered small and insignificant, Jesus still knows their works. This shows that nothing is insignificant to God. The next four things Jesus notices about this church are love, service, faith and patience. The church at Thyatira seems like the perfect church. The word “service” is the same as works and means deacons and refers to ministry to others. As we will see,

this church had love but lacked discernment. The Greek word loyal is 'pistis' and means "faithful". The term "long-suffering" is the same as patience. This church was growing spiritually. We know this because the phrase "More than at the first" is used in this verse.

2:20 (NIV) "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality."

The term "nevertheless" means "despite all of that." Jezebel was an evil queen and Ahab's wife. She murdered all the prophets except the hidden ones and she persecuted Elijah. We can find her story in 1 Kings chapters 16-21 and 2 Kings 9:30-37. The Jezebel referred to here was not that person but she had her characteristics. She is evil. Calling someone Jezebel would be like us calling someone Judas or Hitler. Jezebel tried to get Israel to combine the worship of their God with the worship of Baal. She was not a prophetess but she claimed to be one. They did not accept her as a prophetess. Matthew 24:11 says that "*Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.*" She tried to teach the members here to commit sexual sin and eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Two of the only three things that Gentiles are ordered not to do as part of the OT law were to not commit sexual sin or eat meat sacrificed to idols. It included eating meat with blood still in it. "My servants" are followers of Christ. It is bad to follow Jezebel and lead others to do the same. In Mark 9:42 we are warned: "*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.*" The Bible warns us that it would be better not to have been born. Jezebel commits the unpardonable sin. She refused to repent. Matthew 12:31 warns "*Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.*" The church at Ephesus didn't tolerate these evil deeds. The church at Pergamos had 'some' who tolerated them. This church allowed it.

2:22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. 24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. 25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

Before Jesus tells them what they must do, He tells them what He will do. These people committed adultery, both physically and spiritually (by honoring other gods). We are not sure if this means an actual sickness but it may be. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 says "*For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.*" The word 'bed' means a "banqueting couch". So the literal translation of this statement is "I will strike her down as she sits at her forbidden feasts." The only thing that can stop the church members from suffering her same fate is repenting of their evil deeds. The term 'minds and hearts' means "hearts and kidneys". Strangely enough, the Jews considered the heart and not the brain, as the seat of intellect and the kidneys the place of emotion. Jesus is saying, I know every thought and emotion. Jesus says to hold fast, that is, be faithful until He returns.

2:26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Verse 26 shows that even surrounded by evil, He still expects us to be who we say we are, regardless of the circumstances. Verse 27 says that Jesus will "rule with a rod of iron", this means that Jesus has complete power and authority. The phrase 'Dash them to pieces' shows that we are on the winning team and He will destroy all who oppose you and me. The word 'rule' means to shepherd. In verse 28, Jesus is this Morning Star. Revelation 22:16 says "*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*"