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**The Book of Revelation**

**Chapter 2**

**Introduction**

Revelation Chapters two and three give us the narrative of “the things which are.” **(Revelation 1:19)** John is instructed to write the things that Jesus is saying to seven churches in Asia. These are not the only churches and they are not even the most prominent churches of the day. So, why is Jesus so interested in writing to these particular churches? First, it is important to note that these seven churches all lay along a common route that would be traveled by those who would be delivering mail. Beyond the normal route of travel, I believe there is a four-fold interpretation revealed in the messages to these seven churches.

**1. Locally**

Jesus commanded John to write these churches because the information revealed was the exact condition these individual churches were in. Throughout the years after Christ’s ascension, much compromise and sin had entered the church. There was also great tribulation and struggle. Jesus’ desire was to encourage these churches in what they were doing well, while at the same time calling these individual churches to repentance. Five of the seven churches are called to repentance. Christ also wants to reveal to the seven that this is not just an angry call to straighten up, but to reveal there were blessings attached to those who would recognize Jesus and walk in obedience to his Words.

**2. Corporately**

These words would not, and do not, apply only to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3, they apply to the body of Christ throughout the church age. No matter what time or dispensation believers find themselves, there is a temptation to sin and compromise. There is also great tribulation and trial faced by those who stand firm for Christ. A careful study of the letters to these churches give valuable insight into how the body of Christ should live and respond in whatever age they are in.

**3. Individually**

The letters to the seven churches are also to be applied individually. Each letter contains the phrase “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This is individual and not just corporate. Any believer male or female, Jew or gentile who chooses to hear and respond will be blessed. The same also applies to those who choose not to hear or respond. They will be held accountable.

**4. Prophetically/Historically**

Finally, these letters are to be viewed prophetically or from our perspective, historically. When these letters were written, the church had no idea what was to come. These letters laid out perfectly the “prophetic history” of the church age. Each letter shows an individual period in church history beginning with the church in the Book of Acts and continuing until the time when Christ returns for his bride. As one period passes, we see that the characteristics of the previous age do not disappear. Instead, they continue into the next age. Thus, we have a picture of the decline of the church progressing until the return of Jesus. However, even in this decline, there will be a group of believers who hear, respond, and find the blessing of God even in the midst of an increasingly apostate church.

**The pattern of the letters to the seven churches**

We will also find that there is a five-fold pattern in how Christ instructs John to write these letters.

**1. Christ revelation**

In each letter there is a description of some aspect of the character and position of Christ. The description given is, in some way, tied to the message Christ has for that church. For instance, to Ephesus, Christ is revealed as the one among the lampstands with the stars in His right hand. This would speak to the love, protection, and intimate knowledge of the church. Jesus doesn’t just know about the church; he dwells “in the midst of” the church. In each letter, the commendations and criticisms are prefaced with the words “I know.” Contrast this with the description of the Ephesian church as being a church that had lost its intimacy and love for God.

**2. Commendation**

Jesus gives recognition to the things these churches are doing right. He says, “I know” about your work, your efforts, your perseverance. Jesus give commendation where commendation is due. Only two churches of the seven receive no commendation. These churches are Sardis, the dead church and Laodicea, the Lukewarm church.

**3. Criticism**

Jesus also points out to each church how they are falling short. Only two churches receive no criticism. Those churches are Smyrna, the persecuted church and Philadelphia, the faithful church.

**4. Counsel**

In light of what these churches are doing right or wrong, Jesus gives counsel. To each church, he tells them what they need to do get things right or to continue to stay true.

**5. Commitment**

To those who heed the counsel of Christ, he makes a commitment to bless them in individual and important ways. These blessings are not for a chosen few, but for anyone who “has an ear to hear what the Spirit says.”

**Revelation 2:1(NKJV)**

*1“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:*

At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was one of the most prominent cities in Asia Minor. Ephesus was an important seaport with roads that led out to all the major cities of Asia Minor.

Ephesus was also a major center for culture, art, and religion. Ephesus was the location of the great theater. This theatre held up to 25,000 people and was used for concerts and plays, as well as for religious and political discussion. At times, the theater was also used for gladiator fights as well as animal fights.

Also located in Ephesus was the temple of the Roman goddess Diana, also translated at times instead as the Greek goddess Artemis. This temple was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was a city filled with great idolatry and spiritual wickedness. This temple was built of marble; 342 feet long by 164 feet broad; supported by columns that were 56 feet tall. In the middle of the temple, A shrouded shrine held an image of the goddess, which the people believed to have fallen from the sky. **(Acts 19:35)**

The church of Ephesus had a series of prominent leaders. The church was founded by the Apostle Paul, **(Acts 19:1-10)** Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years. Apollos also ministered in Ephesus prior to Paul’s arrival. **(Acts 18:24-26)** Paul also left Timothy to lead the church in Ephesus. **(1 Timothy 1:3)** History also tells us the Apostle John ministered in Ephesus before he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, and that John returned to Ephesus after his exile and stayed and ministered until his death somewhere around 100 A.D. This pedigree of leadership is stunning in relationship to Jesus rebuke of the church. How could a church with such a lineage of leadership have fallen so far in their relationship with Christ?

**Christ Revelation:**

*‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*

To the church of Ephesus Jesus is revealed as the one who holds the seven stars in his hand and who walks among the seven golden candlesticks. As the one who holds the stars in his hand, Jesus lets the church know that his ministers are under his special care and authority. As we have noted the leadership of the Ephesian church was strong and prominent. These leaders had laid a strong foundation for this church. As the one who walks among the candlesticks, Christ reveals that he is not distant from the church. His desire is for intimacy and a deep love relationship with the church. This desire stands in contrast with the fact that the Ephesian church had “left your first love.”

**Commendation:**

**Revelation 2:2-3(NKJV)**

*2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.*

There were many good things going on with the Church of Ephesus. They were hard workers. The ministry of the church was strong, and they had persevered through many trials and tribulations. They were also zealous in doctrine, not tolerating false doctrine, which was likely a direct response to the warning of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church. **(Acts 20:28-31)** After all their efforts they had not given up nor quit laboring for Christ.

**Criticism:**

**Revelation 2:4(NKJV)**

*4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

In contrast to the desired intimacy of Christ as he walks among the churches, the Ephesians had lost their first love for Christ. It is an important lesson for us all to learn. **Hard work does not equal intimate relationship.** It is possible to do all the works of Christ, but not truly love Christ. It is not enough for a church to have the right plans and programs, to have the best facilities and the soundest doctrine, but not have true worship. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” **(Matthew 22:37)** On the other hand, Jesus said there would be many who would do all kinds of work and in the end, he would say “I never knew you.” **(Matthew 7:21-23)**

**Counsel:**

**Revelation 2:5(NKJV)**

*5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.*

In light of the situation with the Ephesian church, Jesus gives a three-fold directive:

**1. Remember**

The church is counseled to reflect and remember where they were in comparison to where they are now. Common to the journey of many believers is to start with great zeal and passion for Christ. Their desire is to spend time with him and pour out their worship at his feet. As the believer “matures” in Christ, the temptation is to exchange work for passion. Instead of the desire to spend time in the Word of God and prayer for the sake of spending time with Jesus, devotion turns into ritual and passion is exchanged for dry orthodoxy. The passion to be a burning witness for Christ is exchanged for an “evangelistic program.” The admonition of Christ in these times is to stop, reflect and remember what it was like when the passion for Christ burned brightly.

**2. Repent**

When there is a realization that zeal and the love for Christ and for others have been lost, we are admonished to return to Christ with repentant hearts. Repentance involves a changing of the heart and of one’s actions. Repentance isn’t simply about asking for forgiveness. There must be a change of attitude and action that leads us back into a passionate relationship with Christ.

**3. Do the first works**

Notice that the sign of a passionate love for Christ is the works of the church and the individual believer. However, these works are not works of ritual or obligation, but works that flow out of a restored passion for Christ and His kingdom.

If the Ephesian church refused to heed the admonition of Christ, then Jesus would personally come and remove the “lampstand” of the Ephesian church. Unfortunately, it would appear that this very thing happened. Today, there is hardly a sign that this once thriving church ever existed.

**Revelation 2:6(NKJV)**

*6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

There is uncertainty about who the Nicolaitans are, but there are at least two prominent possibilities.

First, many commentators believe that the Nicolaitans were a group who were trying to establish a new priestly order. These would be a new group of bishops, priests and leaders who were above everyone else in the church. The reasoning behind this belief is connected to the word Nicolaitans itself.

**Nicolaitans**

*Nikos (Strong’s 3534)*

*Victory, Utterly vanquish, conquer*

*Laodikeia (Strong’s 2993)*

*Justice of the people*

* *Laos (Strong’s 2992)*

*A people, people group, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language*

* *Dike (Strong’s 1349)*

*Vengeance, Judgment, Punish*

So, we see that the word Nicolaitans itself really translates to mean, “to conquer the people” or to “Conquer the laity.” This gives rise to the belief that there were a group of people who were attempting to establish a hierarchy of religious leadership which would be completely opposed to the New Testament model of church leadership. These would not be pastors who lead the flock, but rulers who would lord over the flock. This would be in direct conflict to what Jesus said his church would be about. **(Matthew 20:24-28)**

The second belief about the Nicolaitans is that they are followers of Nicholas, one of the seven deacons who were chosen in Acts Chapter six. **(Acts 6:5)** Several of the early church fathers believed that Nicolas the deacon had become the leader of a heretical group of “Christians” who were involved in paganism, sexual immorality, and idolatry.

It would appear from the message to the church of Pergamum that there is some connection between the Nicolaitans and paganism and Idolatry. **(Revelation 2:14-15)**

It would seem that the former explanation is more likely.

**Commitment:**

**Revelation 2:7(NKJV)**

*7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’*

*He who has an ear, let him hear.*

These words of challenge and of promise are not only for the chosen ones. They are not just to the leaders of the church or the educated, they are for everyone. Notice that verse 7 does not say “hear what the Spirit says to the church but to the “churches.” These words are for every believer and every church that will live and exist from the time of Christ’s ascension until His soon return.

How then do we have an ear to hear? The individual who has an ear to hear is the one who not only hears and comprehends the words of Christ, but they are zealous to apply and live their lives in the light of God’s word and the revelation of The Holy Spirit.

*To him who overcomes*

The life of the believer is a life of war. It is not a physical war we are fighting, but a spiritual war. **(Ephesians 6:10-18)** It is not easy to live a holy and consecrated life in a culture of sin and depravity. It is difficult to walk in love amid a society that is filled with selfishness and hate. Sometimes, it may seem like the follower of Christ is fighting a losing battle and may be tempted to give up the fight. However, Jesus makes it clear that those who do not give up, those who continually respond to His words, those who walk in the holiness of Christ will receive great reward.

*I will give*

It is important that Jesus says, “I will give.” He is the only one who can make this promise because he is the only one who is qualified to make this promise. Only Christ truly overcame sin and depravity. Only Christ lived a perfectly obedient life and only Christ overcame death. We can receive the promise of eternal life not because of our worth or qualifications, but because of Christ.

*to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had access to every tree in the Garden including the tree of life. The only prohibition was that they were not to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **(Genesis 2:16-17)** However, Satan deceived Eve and ultimately Adam followed Eve into eating from the tree of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a consequence of this disobedience sin entered the world. At that point, God could not allow Adam and Eve to have access to the tree of life. Sin would then run unchecked eternally. **(Genesis 3:22-24)** So, as a result of this sin, Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden and an angel was posted to keep them from accessing the tree.

The promise that Christ makes is that the access to the tree of life lost because of sin in the Garden will now be restored. What does that mean? It means that the believer in Christ will inherit eternal life with Christ in Heaven. Additionally, the sin that disqualified humanity in the Garden is now utterly destroyed. Holiness and relationship with God have been restored. This is now the eternal state.

The Church of Ephesus represents the church from roughly 30-100 A.D. It represents the time in which The Revelation was being written.

It is interesting to read that Paul had warned the Ephesian elders of those who would come in and teach false doctrines. **(Acts 20:28-31)** Paul also counsels the Ephesians that spiritual leadership has been given to them to equip them, unify them and perfect them so that they would not be carried away by “every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful men plotting. **(Ephesians 4:11-14)**

In the two letters written to Timothy, the young man that Paul had left to lead the church in Ephesus, Paul repeatedly charges Timothy to teach strong doctrine and to oppose those who teach false doctrine. **(1 Timothy 1:3-7, 4:1-7, 6:1-5, 6:20-21, 2 Timothy 1:13-15, 2:1-2, 2:14-18, 2:23-26, 3:5, 3:10-17, 4:1-5)**

However, Paul continually reminds the Ephesians that truth must be presented with love. Eleven times in the Book of Ephesians Paul uses the words “love” and “Loved.” Likewise, we also see that Paul instructs Timothy that the purpose of all of this is love. **(1 Timothy 1:5)**

11 times in the book of Ephesians and 119 times in the Pauline epistles Paul uses the word love or loved. It is apparent that in the days that Paul and the other apostles were still ministering there was a strong focus on keeping the doctrine and fighting false prophets, but sometimes in the fight it is easy to forget that love is the highest calling.

We can also note in the writings of Paul that there weren’t only disputes between true and false teachers, but there were budding divisions between members of the Christian church regarding certain doctrines. **(Galatians 2:11-14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9)**

When disputes with false prophets and disputes among the brethren begin to creep in and take over, love can very easily be lost in the midst of the battle. Jesus says this must stop immediately. Repentance must take place and love must be restored.

This trouble in the church did not stop at the end of the first century but continues even until this day. The admonition of Christ is as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago.

**Revelation 2:8(NKJV)**

*8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:*

*And to the angel of the church in Smyrna*

Smyrna was a prominent Aegean seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor. Smyrna was located 35 miles north of Ephesus and was not only a seaport but also sat next to a major road system that led to much of Asia Minor. Smyrna is still in existence today as the city called Izmir, Turkey.

**Smyrna**

*Smyrna (Strong’s 4667)*

*Myrrh*

Myrrh was a resin that comes from the sap of Commiphora trees. Myrrh had several uses but most importantly was used as an embalming agent during the time of Christ. This is significant symbolically in that, during the time of the Church of Smyrna and in the age represented there was major suffering, persecution, and martyrdom.

**Christ Revelation:**

*‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life*

To the church in Smyrna, Jesus is revealed as the one who is in control of all things from the beginning to the end. This would be an encouragement to the church because they suffered intense persecution. It is a comfort to know that Jesus is not detached from their situation, but that He knows what they are going through.

Jesus is also revealed as the one who was dead but is now alive again. As stated earlier, the church in Smyrna suffered greatly and Jesus reveals to them that He is not only aware of their suffering, but that he understands intimately what they are going through. Just like the church, Jesus also suffered at the hands of evil persecutors and tormentors. His promise is that because he also suffered, died, and rose again, that the faithful of the Church of Smyrna would also rise out of the ashes to victory.

**Commendation:**

**Revelation 2:9(NKJV)**

*9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

The tribulations of the church of Smyrna were many. On one side they faced tribulation from the Roman government and on the other side they faced persecution from the religious Jews. At times, the religious Jews would make up lies about the Christians in front of the Roman leaders and cause them to be imprisoned, tortured and on many occasions martyred for their faith in Christ.

Many of the Christians also came from poverty and some had poverty forced on them because of their faith. Compare this with the beautiful and economically wealthy city in which they lived, and it became a recipe for discouragement. Those who were living in sin and disobedience to God were living in abundance while those living for Christ were in a constant struggle for survival.

None of this is escaping the eyes of Jesus. The message to the church is, I know what you’re going through. Though evil may seem to prosper and prevail, not one act perpetrated against these faithful believers will go unnoticed.

Almost as a passing thought, Jesus announces to the church that although they are living in physical poverty, they are actually quite rich. Their faithfulness to Christ through suffering has stored up for them tremendous treasure in Heaven. **(Matthew 6:19-21)** Their faithfulness has also brought them into tremendous spiritual favor with God. Compare the church of Smyrna with the church of Laodicea who had great wealth and so-called blessing. However, Jesus says to them that they have no idea that they are poor, naked, wretched, and blind.

*The synagogue of satan*

The Jewish synagogue was known as the “synagogue of The Lord.” However, in the eyes of Christ they were the synagogue of Satan. While claiming to be acting on behalf of God, their actions and motivations were truly inspired by Satan himself.

**Criticism:**

It is interesting to note that only the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia receive no criticism. This contrasts with the other five churches who all received stern rebuke. It may be said of the church of Smyrna that it was their tribulation that helped them to stay focused and pure in their relationship with Christ. Their faithfulness is an example of how every believer and every church should operate. In this way we receive the ultimate blessings of God even during tribulation.

**Counsel:**

**Revelation 2:10(NKJV)**

 *10 Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.*

Notice that Jesus does not promise to stop the suffering. He will reveal that suffering will not last forever, but right now it will not end. He simply says that the church is not to be afraid. What basis would the church have to not be afraid? They have the assurance that Jesus is in control. Often, we can be tempted to live with the mindset that Jesus is a cosmic fix all who will rush to our side in every trial and tribulation to stop whatever is bothering us. This is not a biblical point of view. Jesus is, indeed, our rescuer, but oftentimes he will allow tribulation to come our way. Remember John the Baptist who sat in jail and asked if Jesus was the one or whether they should look for another. **(Matthew 11:2-4)** John may have believed that Jesus would come and get him out of jail. He did not. John was told simply to know that Jesus was the Messiah and whatever happened would

be for his glory. Instead of being released, John was beheaded. However, this ultimate defeat on Earth ushered John into the presence of almighty God. His suffering here on Earth was great, but his joy and reward are eternal.

*You will suffer for ten days*

The meaning of this phrase is not really known for sure. There are several opinions, and I will discuss the two that I believe have the most merit.

First, it is thought by some that the phrase ten days is simply a way of saying an indefinite period. They use several verses which seem to infer that ten days is not literal but figurative. **(Genesis 24:55, Numbers 11:19, Acts 25:6)** It is thought that this may mean that the church of Smyrna would suffer for a while, but that the suffering would not last forever.

Secondly, there are those that believe that ten days is a prophetic view not only of the individual church of Smyrna, but the period of church history reflected by the picture of this church. The Smyrna period of church history lasted from roughly 100-300 A.D. During this time there were ten major persecutions of the church that began with Nero in A.D. 64 and ended with the worst and most intense persecution under Diocletian that led to the rise of Constantine who made Christianity the state religion, thus relieving the persecution against the church. Seven of the ten major persecutions happened during the Smyrna period of church history.

**Commitment:**

*But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.*

There are several crowns, including the crown of life that are promised to believers in the New Testament.

**The Crown of Glory (The Elders of Pastor’s Crown)**

**(1 Peter 5:2-4)**

**The Crown of Rejoicing (Soul Winner’s Crown)**

**(1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Philippians 4:1)**

**The Crown of Righteousness (Those Who Love His Appearing)**

**(2 Timothy 4:8)**

**The Crown Incorruptible (Victor’s Crown)**

**(1 Corinthians 9:25-27)**

**Crown of Life (Martyr’s Crown)**

**(Revelation 2:10)**

The crown of life is the joy of eternal life that comes to those who are faithful to God. Even those who face persecution, tribulation and even death here on Earth will receive life that is eternal and will far outshine anything that ever happened in this life. **(Romans 8:18)**

**Revelation 2:11(NKJV)**

*11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*

The second death is a reference to the eternal separation of the unbeliever from God. Those faithful believers who remain true will never face the lake of fire, but will spend eternity with God living in perfection, joy, and face to face communion with God himself.

It is important to note that these believers are not saved simply because of the choice to be faithful. Instead, faithfulness is the fruit of true salvation. Those who remain steadfast are simply reflecting the truth of salvation that is received by faith alone.

**Revelation 2:12(NKJV)**

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword:*

Pergamos or Pergamum was another especially important city of Asia Minor, located about 66 miles North of Smyrna. Pergamum was, like Ephesus and Smyrna, very wealthy, but was steeped in pagan worship and the Imperial religion of Rome. In Pergamos there were temples dedicated to the worship of:

**Athena:**

The goddess of wisdom, reason, intelligent activity, arts, and literature

 **Zeus:**

God of the sky and ruler of the Olympian gods. There was an altar to Zeus built on the top of the Acropolis where they would worship Zeus as their savior.

**Dionysus:**

God of the grape harvest, wine, drunken revelry, agriculture, and fertility.

**Asklepios:**

God of healing symbolized as a bearded man holding a rod with a snake wrapped around it. This symbol of the rod and serpent is still used as the sign of the medical world today. At the temple of Asklepios the sick would lie on the floor and allow non-venomous snakes to crawl around them. It was believed that the snakes could bring dreams that would reveal what the treatment for their sickness would be. Once they had a dream, they would tell the priest and the priest would then provide a remedy based on the dream.

There were also, at Pergamum were three temples dedicated to the worship of the Imperial Cult. At the time of The Revelation, there was a temple built in honor of Augustus. Later two more temples dedicated to emperor worship were built in honor of Trajan and Septimius Severus. In the beginning the temples were dedicated to the worship of the goddess Roma. After a period, however, the worship began to be directed at the Emperor.

One time a year the Roman magistrate would come around and each citizen was compelled to burn a pinch of incense and proclaim, “Caesar is Lord.” If anyone refused, they could be denied the ability to get resources like food, be arrested, or even killed. Church history tells us that Polycarp, the leader of the church of Smyrna was martyred for refusing to offer worship to Caesar. It is thought that Polycarp may have been the leader of the church of Smyrna at the time of the writing of Revelation.

Pergamum was also known for its library. The library at Pergamum boasted a collection of 200,000 volumes. Only Alexandria in all of Rome had a library larger than the one at Pergamum. Pergamum also had a theater that could seat up to 10,000. At the time, the theater had the steepest seating of any theatre in the known world.

**Christ Revelation:**

*This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword:*

**Sword**

*rhomphaia (Strong’s 4501)*

*a large sword, properly a long Thracian javelin, also a kind of long sword wont to be worn on the right shoulder*

The word “rhomphaia” is a word that is used only seven times in the scripture. **(Luke 2:35, Revelation 1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 6:8, 19:15, 19:21)** The first time it is used is in reference to the suffering that Mary will endure as she sees her son crucified many years later. Every other instance this word is used it is in reference to the judgment that is coming upon the Earth. Hence, this sword proceeding from the mouth of Jesus is not the Word that divides and reveals the thoughts and intents of our heart. This sword is a sword of judgment that is being brought upon the nations of the world.

It also seems important to mention that the sword was also the symbol of the Roman Proconsul. This picture of Jesus with the sharp two-edged sword serves to remind believers that it is the sword of the Lord that is to be heeded over any sword of humanity.

**Commendation:**

**Revelation 2:13(NKJV)**

*13 “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

Again, Jesus says, “I know.” Even during all that is going on, Jesus is present and involved.

Jesus knew the works of the church of Pergamum. They were not denying Jesus Christ even in times of tremendous persecution. Even when believers in Christ were being martyred, they continued to believe in Jesus. This would be a tremendous challenge given the city in which they lived along with the temptation to quit and to completely embrace the gods of the city and the emperor “god.”

*Where Satan’s throne is*

Satan’s throne is thought to be either the altar built to Zeus, the temple of Asklepios or the temple of the Imperial cult built for the worship of the Caesar. It is also possible that Satan’s seat is a reference to the pervasiveness of paganism and evil that seemed to be centered in the city of Pergamum

*Antipas was MY faithful martyr*

Biblically we don’t know much about who Antipas was other than that he was one who died as a martyr. A look at church tradition tells us that Antipas was the Bishop of the church at Pergamum. Because of his faithful witness, his refusal to stop casting out devils and to offer incense to Caesar, Antipas was martyred by being place inside of a hollowed-out image of a bull. Antipas was placed inside, and a fire was built underneath. As the fire heated up the metal, Antipas was roasted to death. Before his death Antipas was told, “The whole world is against you,” to which Antipas replied, “Then I am against the whole world.”

**Criticism:**

**Revelation 2:14-15(NKJV)**

 *14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

*Those who hold the doctrine of Balaam*

In the Book of Numbers Chapters 22-25, we discover what the doctrine of Balaam is. The King of Moab, Balak, was fearful of Israel because he had seen them defeat all their enemies. His plan was to hire a prophet to curse Israel. Balaam, although not an Israelite, was considered to be a prophet of Yahweh. At first Balaam declines, but ultimately ends up going. It would appear in reading the story that God was angry with Balaam because he was ready to curse Israel for financial gain. However, through a series of prophecies, Balaam is only able to bless Israel. We then see that Balak begins to introduce prostitution and idolatry to the Israelites. In this way, they would bring the curse upon themselves. The plan worked. God’s anger was aroused, and he sent a plague that ultimately killed 24,000 Israelites. A few chapters later, it is discovered that it was apparently Balaam who offered the strategy of compromise to Balak. **(Numbers 31:16)** Later we find that Balaam wasn’t really a true prophet of God, but that he practiced divination to predict the future. **(Joshua 13:22)**

So, what then is the doctrine of Balaam? It is to introduce idolatry, immorality, and paganism into the doctrine of the church. In Pergamum they were teaching that it was acceptable to be a believer, but also to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit immorality. They taught that it was fine to mix pagan beliefs into the Christian faith. As these destructive doctrines were introduced into the church, the church would inadvertently bring judgment on themselves because of their compromise.

*Thus, you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

**Nicolaitans**

*Nikos (Strong’s 3534)*

*Victory, Utterly vanquish, conquer*

*Laodikeia (Strong’s 2993)*

*Justice of the people*

* *Laos (Strong’s 2992)*

*A people, people group, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language*

* *Dike (Strong’s 1349)*

*Vengeance, Judgment, Punish*

So, we see that the word Nicolaitans itself really translates to mean, “to conquer the people” or to “conquer the laity.” This gives rise to the belief that there were a group of people who were attempting to establish a hierarchy of religious leadership which would be completely opposed to the New Testament model of church leadership. These would not be pastors to lead the flock, but rulers who would lord over the flock.

The second belief about the Nicolaitans is that they are followers of Nicholas, one of the seven deacons who were chosen in Acts Chapter six. **(Acts 6:5)** Several of the early church fathers believed that Nicolas the deacon had become the leader of a heretical group of “Christians” who were involved in paganism, sexual immorality, and idolatry.

It would appear from the message to the church of Pergamum that there is some connection between the Nicolaitans and paganism and Idolatry. **(Revelation 2:14-15)** Perhaps there is a connection between the two theories with a hierarchy of leaders who were teaching that compromise with the world was acceptable. Not everyone in the church was involved with this sin, but it would appear they were tolerating it. This is the opposite of what we saw in Ephesus, where they rejected the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

God declares that he hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It is never good to be on the side of something that God hates. It is not appropriate for the church to tolerate what God hates.

**Counsel:**

**Revelation 2:16(NKJV)**

*16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*

Again, as we saw with Ephesus, the command is repentance. The church was warned that if they did not turn away from their compromise with and tolerance of the thing that God hates, the sword that was meant to bring judgment on the enemy would be turned to them. The sword that could bring salvation and healing will, instead, bring destruction.

**Commitment:**

**Revelation 2:17(NKJV)**

*17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”*

*I will give some of the hidden manna to eat.*

Jesus tells the Pergamum church that if they are willing to give up the corrupted meat sacrifice to idols, he will give them a feast that is hidden from the rest of the world. **(John 4:31-34)** Jesus taught the disciples to pray, “give us this day our daily bread.” **(Matthew 6:11)** Jesus said in the Book of John, “I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will never hunger.” **(John 6:35)** If any church or individual believer is willing to give up the compromises of this world, they will receive a communion and an intimacy with God that cannot be compared and cannot be known by anyone outside of that covenant relationship.

*And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”*

In the days of John votes were cast using a white stone and a black stone. Today, we may say someone was “black-balled” meaning that they have been rejected. A white stone was the symbol of a yes vote. To those who will respond to Christ, he will give the white stone of acceptance. Their sins will be forgiven, they will be made righteous and they will be given a new name.

What is this new name? It is the name of adoption. When we accept the offer of Jesus, we are given the family name. We are no longer known as sinner, failure, loser, addict, convict, or a host of other names we may have been associated with. We are no longer orphans to sin but adopted sons and daughters of the King of Kings. **(Romans 8:14-17)** Now we are known as royal, chosen, holy, accepted. The scripture, I believe, even goes further than that by claiming that there will be one name that is given to each believer that will only be known by them and the Father.

In Church history, the Pergamos church represents a time from approximately A.D. 300-500. It was a time of great compromise in the church. The last of the ten emperors who had consistently persecuted the church were gone. Constantine was attempting to take their place. It is said that Constantine saw a vision in the sky of a cross and heard a voice that said, “By this sign, you will conquer.” As the story continues, that night Jesus came to Constantine in a dream and told him the same thing he had heard when he saw the vision. In response to this, Constantine supposedly gave his life to Christ and made Christianity the official state religion.

Constantine began to elevate and fund the church. He began to build large cathedrals and dress the ministers in elaborate clothing. The church began to compromise with the government as their power began to increase.

Adding to the scenario, Constantine also understood there were followers of many gods and he chose to compromise for the sake of power and the church began to compromise as well adopting aspects of pagan worship and calling it Christian. This is the era of the rise of the Papal church.

Satan tried to destroy the church through persecution at Smyrna and when that did not work, he chose to lead the church into compromise. His plan worked perfectly, and the church was led into the time of the “dark ages” of church history.

**Revelation 2:18(NKJV)**

*18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:*

Thyatira, located approximately 50 miles southeast of Pergamum, was a much smaller city than the previously mentioned cities. It would be seen in the eyes of the world to be the least important of the cities mentioned in the seven letters. Thyatira was a city that was the scene of multiple military battles and changed rulers several times. Thyatira was known as an industrial city which was prominent for pottery, tanners, weavers, robe-makers, and a prominent Dyeing industry. Particularly, Thyatira was known as a place where fine purple dye was produced.

Thyatira was also a center of pagan worship. Within the borders of this city were temples built for the worship of Apollo, Artemis, and Helios. There seems to be evidence that there was also a temple built to the worship of the emperor Hadrian.

Lydia, who is mentioned in the Book of Acts, was from Thyatira. **(Acts 16:14)** It is thought that it could have been Lydia’s encounter with Paul that led to the founding of the Church of Thyatira.

**Christ Revelation:**

*These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.*

In Thyatira, there was a temple built to the god Apollo. Apollo was known as the god who pulled the sun across the sky. This action was also attributed to Helios. It is thought by some, therefore, that Jesus introduces himself as the “Son of God.” It is the only time this title is used in the Book of Revelation. Jesus is asserting that he is the true deity.

*Eyes like a flame of fire*

The flaming eyes of Christ speak to his omniscient and burning vision. There is nothing happening in this church that is escaping the view of Christ. He sees that there is a great deal of good happening in the church of Thyatira. However, he also sees that there is compromise in the church. The sexual immorality and those who are taking part in pagan practices will never escape his gaze.

*His feet like fine brass.*

The feet of brass represent the divine judgment of Christ when He returns. Brass is, throughout the Old Testament, connected to judgment for sin. **(Exodus 38:29-30)** The feet represent action and movement. Christ will not stop until He has crushed his enemies and destroyed those who will rebel against Him. His judgment will be complete and will wipe away every ounce of rebellion. **(Isaiah 63:3, Revelation 19:15)**

**Commendation:**

**Revelation 2:19(NKJV)**

*19 “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

In contrast to the church of Ephesus, this church was growing in their service and zeal. The eyes of Christ had seen the love they had for each other. His eyes had seen the hard work and the faith of these believers. However, even with all these commendations, there were great problems in this church as well.

**Criticism:**

**Revelation 2:20-23(NKJV)**

*20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

The so-called prophetess Jezebel was pressing for a doctrine of tolerance. It didn’t matter what the truth of the doctrine of Christ was. Since Jezebel was a “Prophetess,” she could claim a higher authority than the true God-called leaders of the church. There appears to have been a claim that she had a revelation that it was appropriate to engage in sexual immorality, paganism, and adultery.

All the church was not involved in this sin, but they do appear to have allowed it to go on without addressing it. This, in the eyes of God is also sinful.

It is also true that God did not just rain down judgment, but that he had provided time and opportunity for Jezebel and her followers to repent but they did not. The arrogance of Jezebel and her followers will lead to their destruction. If they continue to refuse to repent, God’s judgment will be released, and it will be severe. It is always God’s mercy that holds off judgment and gives time for repentance. It is God’s desire that no one should face this type of judgment, but there will be a day when the time for repentance is past and judgment will come to all who refuse to walk in repentance before God. **(2 Peter 3:8-10)**

**Counsel:**

**Revelation 2:24-25(NKJV)**

*24 “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26*

The command to those who have compromised is to repent and repent immediately. Judgment will be released if they do not. However, not everyone is involved. So, to the righteous remnant, Jesus says “Hold Fast.” They are to continue standing in the true Gospel they have known. Even during the temptation to give in to compromise, continue down the narrow road.

“The depths of Satan” seems to be a play on words. In every generation there are those who claim to know the deep mysteries of God and claim higher revelation than Scripture. They claim to know the deep things of God. Jesus says these aren’t the deep things of God at all but the depths of Satan himself.

**Commitment:**

**Revelation 2:26-29(NKJV)**

*26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 27 ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’— as I also have received 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.”* ’

Those who overcome will be given the honor of ruling with Christ when He comes to establish his Millennial kingdom. **(Revelation 20:1-4)** These overcomers will share in the authority that was given to Jesus by His Father. **(Psalm 2, Isaiah 9:6-7, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, 2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 3:21, Revelation 20:4-6)**

**Rule**

*Poimainō (Strong’s 4165)*

*To feed, To tend a flock, Keep sheep*

Those who overcome will not just be those who will administer justice but will be caring leaders who will help to shepherd the Kingdom of God.

As far as church history goes, Thyatira represents the church during from approximately 500-1400, a time known as the “dark ages.” During this time, the Roman Catholic church was reigning in power. By this time there was great compromise and corruption that had infiltrated the church. Many pagan customs had been introduced to the church and the hierarchy of leadership that Christ had previously rebuked had fully taken over.