



Revelation 2

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it,
because the time is near. 1:3

The Revelation encourages its readers to **faithfulness**. Our Lord's pleas for faithfulness begin in chapters 2 and 3, his letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Notice what pressures members of those churches faced: false teaching, hardship, persecution, affliction, poverty, sexual immorality, idolatry, spiritual apathy, and materialism. Because the faithful believer must surmount so many challenges to faith, Jesus refers to him in all seven letters as "him who overcomes." **Faithfulness means holding on to Jesus' promises through every trouble and temptation of life.** "Hold on to what you have," Jesus told the faithful in Philadelphia, "so that no one will take your crown" (3:11). The church at Thyatira heard a similar plea: "Only hold on to what you have until I come" (2:25). . .

Christian faithfulness means being true to Jesus. Through his promises, Jesus invites us to trust him. That's why the Revelation so often directs the faithful to the words of God. Jesus opens his book by blessing those who read and hear what he says and closes with a curse for those who add to or subtract from his Word. Jesus urged every member of the seven churches, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." **There is no faithfulness without faith, and there is no faith without attention to God's Word.** W. Mueller, Northwestern Lutheran, June 1996

Introduction: The Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22)

The letters to the seven churches are in the first instance actual descriptions of the historical situations of a cluster of congregations that existed in the Roman Province of Asia at the end of the First Century. To be sure, there is much that can be learned for the church in every time and place from these letters, for the characteristics, both positive and negative, that they reflect are in no way unique to these seven churches. That universal application may well explain why "seven" churches were chosen, utilizing *the Biblical number for completion or perfection*.

While the seven letters were addressed to historical churches in seven locales, they contain encouragement and admonition for all churches at all times: the Spirit says these things to the churches. They are also personal, intended for everyone who has ears to hear and who knows that his hope of the final victory is in Christ alone. "Come, Lord Jesus", R.D.Balge

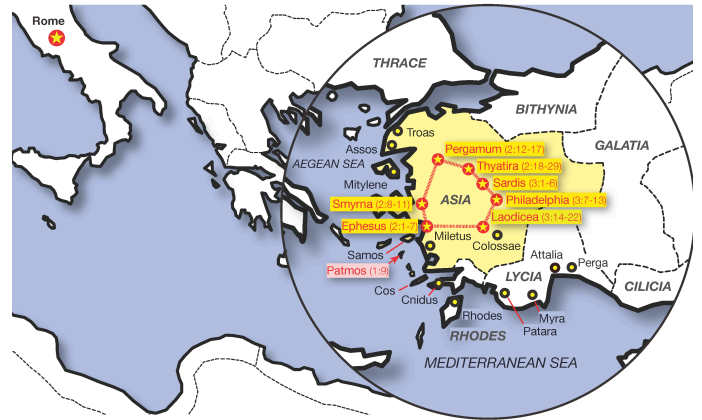
The letters follow the same general pattern including the following seven components:

1. The address with the command to write
2. The description of Christ
3. The assertion of complete knowledge about each congregation
4. The word of commendation and/or the word of criticism
5. The admonition
6. The call to hear and heed
7. The promise of blessing

**Thus, generally,
the seven letters
consist of seven parts
and conform to the
overall sevenfold
pattern of the entire
Book of Revelation**

In each letter, the description of the Speaker correlates to the content of the message to the church. The various details of the vision of Christ amid the golden lampstands in Chapter 1 provide the substance of the descriptions. The **same type of pattern** is also evident in the seven promises of blessings that conclude the letters. In this case, however, the blessing is formulated in terms of topics that will later be repeated in the closing chapters of the Book.

Dr. L. L. White, *Revelation*, p.39-40



Their intent and purpose is to prepare the recipients for receiving and applying the message in the visions that begin in 4:1. Thus they are preparatory in character and call for repentance.

Through these messages, the Spirit enables the hearers to repent, to stand firm, and to take comfort in the promised blessing and hope of victory. In this way, the Spirit prepares the recipients of these letters to receive the prophetic message of Revelation (4:1-22:5).

- † While each letter focuses on the sins and failings of the church for the purpose of repentance, the goal of each is the strengthening of the church's faith in the victory of Christ. For each letter ends in a promise of eternal blessing for the one who conquers.



Mosaic in St Mark's Basilica in Venice, Italy
Note the seven angels of the churches.

Read Revelation 2:1-7 The Letter to the Church in Ephesus

The Loveless Church

Ephesus was one of the three major commercial and cultural centers of the eastern Mediterranean.

The other two were Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. St Paul visited this strategic city during his second missionary journey in 52 AD. He returned on his third missionary journey and spent three years in the city as Ephesus became his base for the mission to the province of Asia (Acts 18:23-20:38; Ephesians 1-6). The port of Ephesus was situated on one of the major trade routes between the Aegean Sea and the plateau of Asia Minor thus bringing immense wealth to the city. It was culturally and commercially the most important city in the province. At the center of the city's religious life was the magnificent temple of the Greek goddess Artemis (Latin - Diana). The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, 425 feet long by 220 feet wide with 120 gold covered marble columns, was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Thousands of pilgrims traveled to the city each year for the great festivals and a flourishing industry in silver artifacts and images was established around

the temple. Diana of the Ephesians was a mother goddess, representing the power of fertility and life. The worship of her cult in Ephesus involved the most flagrant immorality with droves of temple prostitutes dedicated to her service. Her multi-breasted images are among the most common surviving artworks of the period. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.42



2:1 Angel

Angel is a word that means “messenger”. There is no basis in Scripture that each church has an angel assigned to it. The Pastor of the church who is the usual “messenger” of God’s Word. He is able to share the Letter with the people.

- † **WRITE!** These are the words of verbal inspiration. As all the rest of Scripture (II Peter 1:20-21) Revelation is also inspired by God. Every word (verbal) was given by God. Revelation, P.A. Bartz

2:1 Him who holds the seven stars

The description is intended to highlight Christ’s care and concern for His church. He stands in the midst of His people and holds them safe and secure in His loving hand. (Cf. John 10:28-29) The image of Christ walking among the golden lampstands also serves to emphasize His role as a powerful and watchful guardian over the church.

- † The Lord takes note of what is going on in every congregation even of every detail. Stoeckhardt, [Lectures on Revelation](#), p.5
- † Christ is ever watchful, continually active in behalf of every Christian congregation. He wants the Christian congregations to shine as lights in this world of sinful darkness, but he knows also that they require constant replenishing and care, and he is willing to be of assistance to them, less their lights flicker and fade. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.595

2:2-3 I know your deeds, your hard work.

The commendation begins with the assertion of Christ’s intimate knowledge of the people and their spiritual achievements. The Greek verb indicates a knowledge that is perfect and complete - ***I know everything there is to know about you.*** This is a congregation which understood duty and responsibility. They have worked hard and persevered in the face of overwhelming opposition over a long period of time - ***“and have not grown weary.”*** They have been faithful in matters of doctrine carefully testing the claims of those who falsely asserted apostolic authority and ***“found them to be false”*** (literally, “found them to be liars.”). In the face of false teaching they have diligently attempted to ***“contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.”*** (Jude 6) They have been absolutely intolerant of wickedness, and properly so. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.43

- † Suffering, hardships and persecutions the Ephesians could put up with. But they would not put up with wicked men. This is a word of commendation that the church in our ecumenical age should take to heart. Modern ecumenism is manifests almost complete indifference towards false doctrine in the name of Christian “love” and “patience”. Such “love” and “patience” are not pleasing to the Savior ... The Lord is pleased when his people recognize false teachers for what they are and do not patiently permit them to carry on their activities in their midst. Revelation, Becker, p.47-48

† True Christian conduct, faithfulness in the service of the Lord, proper brotherly discipline, firm adherence to the pure doctrine, patience and perseverance in the midst of enmity and tribulation: all the should be distinctive signs of every Christian congregation. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.595

2:4 You have forsaken your first love.

This is a very strong statement, a severe word of criticism.

Despite a consistent concern for moral and theological purity the Ephesian church was lacking in love. **This is both love for Christ and love for the brethren for these two can never be separated from one another** (1 John 4:20). That which had in the beginning been a spontaneous, joyful response to the love of God in Christ had gradually degenerated into duty and routine. **The amazing grace of God came to be taken for granted and consciences grew dull and insensitive to the incisive demands of the law and our desperate need for forgiveness.**

The sin of the church in Ephesus is taking the Promises of God for granted, treating His Law lightly, becoming dull in the faith, not loving God nor others according to the Commandments. It is **LACK OF FERVOR, ZEAL, AND GRATITUDE**. There is a real danger of idolatry happening; God is no longer first in their lives, and their love for him is growing cold.

Likewise, those fussy spirits are to be rebuked who, after they have heard a sermon or two, find hearing more sermons to be tedious and dull. They think that they know all that well enough and need no more instruction. For that is exactly the sin that was previously counted among mortal sins and is called *akadia* (i.e., apathy or satisfaction). This is a malignant, dangerous plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives the hearts of many so that he may surprise us and secretly take God's Word from us [Matthew 13:19].

Martin Luther,
Large Catechism,
Ten Commandments, 99

The Ephesians continued to **GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS**. ... Genuine love was not yet completely absent, but it was diminishing instead of growing. If this trend was not reversed, the critical moment would soon be at hand when the Lord would **“come and remove your lampstand from its place.”**

Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.44

The Ephesians had **lost the first fire and zeal for the truth, for the word of the gospel**, for the honor of the Lord which it been so prominent in the early days of the church. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.595

2:5 Remember & Repent & Do!

The first verb in this sentence is a present imperative indicating ongoing activity -- “keep on remembering!” The next two verbs, “Repent and do” are imperatives in the aorist tense, peremptory commands for immediate, decisive action. **“Repentance” is the change of heart and mind that turns away from sin and returns to God. It is not merely external action but internal transformation.** The change of heart, of course, must always result in a life that is transformed, thus the combination **“repent and do the things you did at first.”**

Repentance needs to continue and to be renewed in us every day. This need is especially acute where strong influences are striving to draw us away from the faith and love we have towards Christ. A lack of daily repentance may lead finally to a complete loss of faith. [Revelation](#), Becker, p.49

2:5 Remove the Lampstand

This vivid symbol represents the complete loss of faith and the apostasy of the church. The consequences of a failure to repent at this point would be catastrophic ... This is not the final judgement of the world but a specific act of judgement in time upon the apostate Ephesian church.

John's metaphor may well have been chosen with the grim events of 70 A.D. in mind when the Roman legions forced their way into the temple and removed the golden seven-branched lampstand from its place in the sanctuary. The light of a Judaism that had rejected its Messiah was literally taken away and extinguished. This tragic event was immortalized on the great Arch of Titus, erected in Rome to commemorate the emperor's decisive victory over the Jewish revolt and his conquest of the city of Jerusalem. The Roman soldiers are depicted carrying off the great golden Menorah which had stood with the Holy Place of the Temple.



2:6 Nicolaitans

An additional word of commendation now follows. There is still cause for hope in that the Ephesians still love the Lord enough to hate that which is hateful to God: the practices of the Nicolaitans.

- † The fathers of the early church identify the “Nicolaitans” as followers of Nicholas of Antioch, a Jewish proselyte who was one of the original seven deacons (cf. Acts 6:5). Irenaeus tells us that Nicolas fell away from the true faith and became the leader of a heretical sect which rejected the law and **indulged in the flagrant immorality** characteristic of paganism. Like many other Gnostic groups of the time they claimed special knowledge from which authorized their aberrant behavior. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.45
- † Followers of Nicolaus who taught that sincere faithful Christians could openly indulge in pleasures of the flesh and still remain faithful to Christ. [Revelation](#), P.A. Bartz
- † The Nicolaitanes turned the liberty which we have in Christ into license. They turned the forgiveness of sins into an opportunity to violate plain morality. They compromised with paganism in the public festivals. Today, they would participate in the various services of civic religion. They would give churchly sanction to easy divorce and promiscuity. They would develop a marriage ceremony for homosexuals who wanted to build an "enduring relationship" and they would try to sanctify "living together" with the Word of God and prayer. **The Lord hates these things; the church at Ephesus hated them; we are to express and exercise the same holy hatred.** "Come, Lord Jesus", R.D.Balge

2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

This admonition to hear and heed is identical in all of the seven letters. The message is identified as having come from the “Spirit” of God, thus reinforcing the divine inspiration of this book. Jesus and

the Holy Spirit speak as one within the unity of the Trinity. The message is clearly intelligible and available to anyone who cares to listen. **Not hearing in this context is an act of willful, deliberate disobedience.**

† The admonition of the text is reminiscent of the often repeated words of Jesus during His teaching ministry -- “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (I.e. Matthew 11:15; 13:9)

† This is call for all who read this to pay attention and heed the Lord of the church. [Revelation](#), P.A. Bartz

2:7 Tree of Life

The letter concludes with a promise drawn from the closing visions of the book. In **Revelation 22:2** we are told that in the midst of the heavenly New Jerusalem there “**stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.**” The obvious reference is to the **Garden of Eden** and the **tree of life** which once stood within it. The believer who repents and perseveres in the faith will be restored to the perfection for which mankind was created in the beginning. Life with God in eternity will be life as it was meant to be by our loving Creator. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.46

† The text uses the Persian loan word “**paradise**” to describe heaven. In the original, the word referred to a pleasure garden or park with wild animals built for the kings and emperors of Persia. It is an appropriate term to indicate that heaven will be a return to the perfection of Eden, the Garden of God. The word occurs only three times in the New Testament: here, in our Lord’s words to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), and in St. Paul’s description of his own vision of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Read Revelation 2:8-11 The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

The Persecuted Church

In the case of Ephesus it was internal decay that caused the pastoral letter to be written, in the case of Smyrna it was enmity and persecution from without. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.596

Smyrna is located about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was also a prosperous trading center and was renown throughout the ancient world for the beauty of its architecture. The ornate buildings of the town’s acropolis high on Mt. Pagus were referred to throughout the ancient world as “the crown of Smyrna.” Smyrna was the birthplace of Homer, the greatest of the Greek poets. It is the only one of the seven cities of Revelation which has functioned continuously since ancient times. It is presently the Turkish city of Izmir, a focal point of the country’s tourist industry specializing in antiquities and pristine white sand beaches. Ancient Smyrna was a town noted for its exceptional loyalty to Rome and the emperor. A temple dedicated to the worship of the divine Tiberius was erected there early in the First Century. During the reign of Domitian, the current emperor, emperor worship was made compulsory. Every year, every citizen had to burn incense on Caesar’s altar after which he was issued a certificate. To be without such a certificate was to risk imprisonment or death. The city also included an unusually large Jewish population. The combination of these two factors, exceptional dedication to the cult of the emperor and a large Jewish population, may well explain the letter’s emphasis on courage in the face of persecution. The story of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, in 155 A.D. was one of the best known and most popular historical tales of the early church. Polycarp, the “Twelfth Martyr in Smyrna,” was burned at the stake at age 86 because of his steadfast refusal to betray his Lord. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.47-48

† **Polycarp**. He lived to become a very old man, the supervising pastor of the church in Smyrna. Some seventy years after this letter was written, Polycarp was called upon by the Roman authorities to deny Christ and save his life. He responded: "**Fourscore and six years he has been faithful to me. Can I be unfaithful to him now ?**" February 23, 165 he was burned at the stake. But he will not be hurt at all by the second death. "Come, Lord Jesus", R.D.Balge

2:8 *kerygma*

Christ's identification in this letter stresses His crucial role as the divine Sovereign who is the **Victor over the power of death**. This would have been a most pertinent message for a church confronting bitter persecution. Christ emphasizes his death and resurrection which is the source of believer's eternal life.

Christ is the source of life for those that believe in him; **by faith in him they can scoff at death**, which has lost its sting through Christ's atoning work. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.596

This congregation hears no word of criticism, but only commendation and encouragement.

2:9 Afflictions, Poverty, Slander

Three terms summarize the condition of the church in Smyrna: "afflictions," "poverty," and "slander." This is a congregation struggling to survive in a most hostile environment.

- † "**Afflictions**" is a general term which refers to persecution of suffering of every sort.
- † "**Poverty**" in this prosperous and wealthy city suggests that the Christians of Smyrna have endured **economic hardship** as a result of their loyalty to Christ. Yet despite that poverty, comes the assertion - "**You are rich!**" While poor in the temporary material things of this world, the faithful believers of Smyrna were rich indeed in the eternal riches of the Spirit of God.
 - The enmity of the Jews was the cross which the congregation at Smyrna had to bear. The opposition on the part of the Jews did not stop with the little acts of meanness and with evil speaking and slandering; it was also due to their work that the Christians lost their earthly goods, money and property. On various trumped up charges the believers were robbed of all they possessed in this world; they endured the confiscation of all that their earthly labor had brought them. And yet, as the Lord tells them, they were rich, are they still had the grace of their Lord Jesus Christ; they still clung to the love of their heavenly father; they had the riches of the Divine Mercy in the Gospel. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.596
- † "**Slander**" is the Greek word for *blasphemy*. During the first century Christians were falsely accused of the most vile and immoral activities including cannibalism, lust and sexual immorality, home-breaking, atheism, sedition, and arson.
 - The source of the slander in this instance is "those who say they are Jews and are not." These physical descendants of Abraham proudly consider themselves to be the chosen

people of God but they are not. They have failed to recognize that descent from Abraham is a matter of **faith, not of blood** (Romans 9:6.) They call themselves Jews. They believe themselves to be Jews, but they are wrong. The book of Acts documents repeated instances where the local Jewish population would aggressively and maliciously incite the Gentile authorities to action against the Christian church. Like the Jewish leaders who confronted Jesus in John 8:31-47 claiming to be descendants of Abraham, these slanderers are instead children of the devil. They are not a church of God, but instead a “synagogue of Satan.” They may have claimed to be an assembly of the Lord, but in fact, they have placed themselves at the disposal of the Accuser, the Prince of Darkness, the Father of Lies. . White, [Revelation](#), p.49-50

† The Hebrew title “Satan” literally means “Slanderer” or “Accuser.” Its Greek equivalent is the more familiar “devil.”

2:10 Suffering on the Horizon

Christ does not offer this long-suffering church an easy way out. There is no prescription here as to how persecution may be avoided. **Things are bad and they are going to get worse.** The mounting intensity of that persecution is described in all of its grim reality. “*I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.*” The Lord of the Church knows what is going to happen and remains in control of everything that is taking place. Even the activities of His most bitter enemies serve to accomplish His plan and His purpose. The faith of the church in Smyrna in the face of persecution, as one after another they were killed and cast into prison, would become an inspiration for the church throughout the world.

† The “**ten days**” of testing may be an allusion to Daniel 1:12-15 and the testing of Daniel and his three companions. In the numerology of Revelation it refers to a complete time period ordered by the purpose and plan of God. **This persecution will continue, but it will not continue forever. God remains in control.** Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.51

† 10 days: short, intense, and complete period of time

† We have no reason to assume that we are exempt from the worst that Satan and his synagogue can do. **"If Christ wore a crown of thorns, we should not expect people to place wreaths and roses on our heads," said Luther.** In some generations (may God prevent it in ours) there is bloody persecution. Always there is a certain amount of pressure. Sometimes there are concentration camps and firing squads. Always there is a certain amount of ridicule.... Until the Lord returns, there will be martyrs. “Come, Lord Jesus”, R.D.Balge

† The old evil foe means deadly woe. The old dragon keeps thrashing around. The lion stalks his prey. Death lies in ambush. Whatever uncharted and unimagined dangers lie in the future, Christ is there. Even in death the Son of Man who died and rose again will be with us. Meanwhile, he has put a limit on the time of testing: "ten days (2:10)." It will be bad enough; it will not be easy. But there is a limit and he has set it. “Come, Lord Jesus”, R.D.Balge

Satan

REAL. PERSONAL. EVIL.
 ACCUSER. ADVERSARY.
 LIES. DECEIVES. LIAR.
 ROARING LION. WOLF.
 DEMONS. ABYSS.
 DESTROYS. ENEMY.
 MURDERER. DRAGON.
 ANGEL OF LIGHT.
 SERPENT. TEMPTER.
 WICKED ONE.
 BEELZEBUB.
 2:9,10,13², 3:9

- † **The Lord does not promise them relief from suffering.** His words rather imply that further persecutions are imminent, and as history shows that the next decades brought trials of various kinds to the Christians in this part of Asia Minor. And yet the Lord tells them to fear nothing, not to have the slightest apprehension as to their safety. Without his will or permission, not a hair of their head could be harmed. They should be filled with the power of faith, which rests secure in the hands of the Father, no matter what the changes of life may be. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.596
- † Even though many of its members should become martyrs, it must not yield, but hold out to the end. Stoeckhardt, [Revelation](#), p.8

2:10 Be faithful!

The Lord's encouraging promise to the church in Smyrna to look beyond suffering, and even death itself to the prospect of life eternal. He who has Himself overcome death now promises His people a share in his victory.

- † The "crown of life" is the laurel wreath awarded to the victorious athletes of the Olympic games. Those who die in the faith and for the faith have not truly died at all but have passed from life in time to life in a glorious eternity. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.53
 - ***They have crossed the "finish line" as victors!***
- † "Faith threatening fear of suffering violence at the hands of people is a temptation for any Christian." The remedy for fear then, is to repent and look with faith to Jesus Christ.
- † Christians should remember, when God subjects them to suffering for His name's sake, according to His good pleasure He will also fit them out with the necessary strength and endurance, so that they can remain faithful and so gain the crown of life. Stoeckhardt, [Lectures on Revelation](#), p.8
- † The very persecutions that were designed to make the Christians give up their faith serve to strengthen them. Thus the faith of the Christian is proved in the school of persecutions; for it is at such times that he has an opportunity to prove his faithfulness to his Lord. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.596

CONFIRMATION VOWS

When we were confirmed the pastor asked us,

Do you...intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?

Do you intend to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?

What was the answer to those questions? In every case, "Yes, with the help of God." The faithful Lord who calls on us to be faithful is the One who keeps us in the faith "Come, Lord Jesus", R.D.Balge

Tragically, many confirmands cannot remain faithful long enough to worship the very next Sunday after Confirmation Sunday!

2:11 Second death

The promise of life eternal is repeated after the admonition to hear and heed. **The "second death" is eternal death and damnation in Hell** (cf. Revelation 20:14).

But he that confesses Christ to the end, clinging to him in true faith, will not see the second death, will not come into judgment and condemnation, but will pass through death into life. Temporal death will be to him an entrance into the everlasting homes of joy. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.596

Faithfulness to God
is more important
than physical life.

Read Revelation 2:12-17

The Letter to the Church in Pergamum

The Permissive Church

Pergamum was the official capital of the Roman province of Asia, the seat of Roman authority and power in the region. The city was built on a 1,000 foot high cone-shaped mountain. Situated fifty- five miles north of Smyrna and twenty miles inland from the Aegean Sea, it was a city with a rich cultural past. Under the Greek King Eumenes (197-159 B.C.) Pergamum became one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world. Eumenes established a magnificent library with some 200,000 books and sought to outshine the great library of Alexandria in Egypt. In order to frustrate his rival, Ptolemy, the Greek King of Egypt, prohibited the sale of papyrus paper to Pergamum. Forced to find an alternative writing material, the use of vellum, a fine parchment made from animal skins was developed in Pergamum and eventually replaced papyrus as the basic material for scrolls and books. As the provincial capital, Pergamum was an important center for the official state cult of the emperor. The massive 4 story Pergamum Altar, 125 feet long and 115 feet wide, from the **Temple of**

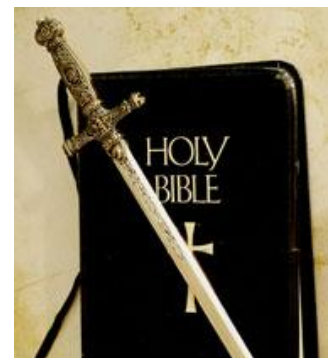


Zeus, was surrounded by beautiful statuary and carved reliefs. The altar has now been rebuilt in a Berlin Museum, and is one of the ancient world's most impressive works of art. Pergamum was also well known as a center of medicine. The cult of the Greek god of healing **Asclepius**, whose symbol was the serpent was based in the city. The sick came from all over the world to spend the night in the Temple of Asclepius which swarmed with hundreds of snakes . Those who fondled or fed these serpents thereby worshiped the god and sought his favor. Dr. L. L. White, Revelation, p.55



2:12 Sharp, Double-Edged Sword

The reference is to Revelation 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12. The image of Christ as the threatening Judge permeates the letter to the church in Pergamum. This is a place of great evil and corruption - twice the Lord mentions that this is "**where Satan lives**" (2:13). **The Lord sternly warns His people to recognize the deadly dangers that they face.**



2:13 Satan

The particular reference may be to the serpent cult of Asclepius which would remind Christians of the Satanic serpent through whom the Tempter beguiled Eve in Eden.

- † Satan had set up his throne (in Pergamum), claiming absolute domination over all people that live there. So it was particularly hard for anyone to be a true Christian. Stoeckhardt, [Lectures on Revelation](#), p.9
- † Thus the Christian congregation at Pergamum was in a difficult position. The Lord, therefore, acknowledges the faithfulness of the believers in adhering to his name, to the confession of the Christian faith, under very trying conditions. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.597-598
- † Pergamum was an especially bad place to be a Christian. The false religions were influential and it is through any false religion that the devil rules. His rule was strong here. The temptations to light a little incense to Zeus or Athena rather than be killed were intense. Sick people could go to the temple of Asclepius. [Revelation](#), P.A. Bartz

2:13 Remain True = Faithful

The congregation is commended because despite this evil environment **“You remain true to My Name.”** **To remain true to the Name of Jesus means to hold fast to the truth of the Gospel and to refuse to deny or abandon the Lord even in the face of overwhelming pressure.** The Roman government demanded that every citizen acknowledge the emperor as divine and participate in the worship of the official cult. The pagan culture was more subtle, but every bit as dangerous, urging conformity and compromise. To yield in either case would have required the Christians in Pergamum to “renounce your faith in Me,” and this they consistently had refused to do.

2:13 Faithful Martyr Antipas

Little is known of **“Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death in your city -- where Satan lives.”** An early church tradition indicates that he was burned to death in a bronze bull during the persecution of Domitian, and that he was not a native of Pergamum but had been brought to the capital for execution from a small town nearby.

- † The Greek word for “witness” is “martyr.” The term gradually took on the significance of one who is **willing to die for his beliefs** and was carried over into the English language in the word “martyr.” Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.55



2:14 Balaam's Error

The reference is to Numbers 25:1,2, the Israelites' sexual immorality with the gods and the women of Moab.

Despite their faithful resistance to Satanic pressure from the government and the culture, the congregation is guilty of harboring and tolerating false teachers in its midst.

- † John identifies the nature of the threat by reference to the Old Testament incident of Balaam and Balak (Number 22:5-25:3, 31:8,16). **“You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by**

committing sexual immorality.” Balaam was the Sumerian prophet/magician hired by the Moabites to curse the nation of Israel. When God frustrated this attempt, Balaam advised Balak, the Moabite king, to lure the men of Israel into participation in the idolatrous rites of Moab which involved feasting, drunkenness, and sexual orgies. This effort was successful and brought God’s judgement upon Israel.

- † Evidently there were those in Pergamum who saw nothing improper in Christians taking part in pagan celebrations and ceremonies, many of which involved feasting, drunkenness, and sexual orgies. ... To refuse to participate would have resulted in economic and social ostracism.
- † It seems that certain members of the congregation at Pergamum had grown so lax that they deliberately took part in all the obscene practices of idol worship, and that they considered sexual excesses on harmless indulgence. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.597-598

THE LORD’S PRAYER
 The First Petition
Hallowed be Thy name.
What does this mean?
God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also.
How is God’s name hallowed?
God’s name is hallowed when His Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God live holy lives according to it. This grant us, dear Father in heaven!
But he who teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches dishonors God’s name among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!

2:15 Nicolaitan Heresy

This was also denounced in Ephesus, with its similar involvement in sexual immorality. **The willingness of the congregation to tolerate these false teachers and their failure to discipline and remove them from their midst is firmly condemned.** Dr. L. L. White, Revelation, p.56-57

2:16 Repent!

The Lord urges this permissive church to repent and return to the conscientious practice of doctrinal discipline. To His admonition is added the threat that if the congregation fails to act, the Judge Himself will come to Pergamum to deal with the false teachers and with the church itself.

- † The NIV’s translation weakens the force of the original text which literally says - **“Otherwise I will soon come for you.”** The weapon of His warfare with these false teachers and those who tolerate them will be the mighty Word of God which is sharper than any two edged sword.
- † Although only a few members of the congregation were actually involved in the sinning, yet the entire church, by its tolerant attitude, had become guilty before the Lord. Not to remove the cancerous growth and not to apply remedial measures was equivalent to abetting the guilty ones. So the Lord demanded repentance of the whole congregation for the sin of laxity in Christian discipline . . . laxity in Christian discipline is always a great peril for congregation, for not only does the entire body become guilty of the transgressions committed by a few, but the evil, if unchecked, is bound to spread, for “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”.

Repent!

Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.597-598

2:17 Hidden Manna, White Stone, New Name

The promised blessing is carefully designed to match the circumstances of the congregation. They were tolerating those who had yielded to the temptation to participate in the heathen festival

banquets of their city. Christ offers them a place at an *infinitely superior banquet*, the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven.

- † “**Hidden Manna**” was the heavenly food provided to the Children of Israel by God during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They grew weary and unappreciative of that food and thus fell easy prey to Balaam’s trickery. They should have relied upon what God had given them instead of feasting on the food of idolatry. The church in Pergamum now faces the same temptation and the Lord promises “him who overcomes” an eternal place at the heavenly feast. *The “manna” is “hidden” now in that here in time, surrounded by this life’s trials and temptations, the joys of the heavenly banquet cannot yet be seen. We look forward to them by faith.* They will be revealed at the end of time, or at the time of death, which ever precedes for the individual believer.
- † The “**White Stone**” further reinforces the idea of admission to the eternal feast. In the Roman world it was a well established custom to reward victorious athletes or heroes with a “*tessara*,” that is a personalized pass or ticket to special feasts and celebrations. That “*tessara*” came in the form of a white stone with the victor’s name inscribed upon it. White, in this case, is the color of victory. The Lord promises to present such a stone guarantying admission to the heavenly banquet. The name to be inscribed upon that stone is “a new name...known only to him who receives it.”
- † The **New Name**, and the secrecy that surrounds it signifies *the unique intimacy of the believer with His Lord*. ... Those who here in time “remain true to My Name” (Verse 13) will receive in eternity a new name indicative of their close and intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus, who will raise them up to dwell within His presence throughout all eternity. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.58-59

Read Revelation 2:18-29 The Letter to the Church in Thyatira

The Compromising Church

Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, although it received the longest of the seven letters. It was a military base and trading center located in the middle of a fertile valley which connected two of the major river valleys of the region and linked the cities of Ephesus and Sardis. Thyatira remained primarily a garrison town, although the trade guilds, with all of the idolatrous practices associated with them, were very prominent here. Thyatira was the home of Lydia, the seller of purple whom Paul met in Philippi (Acts 16:14). One of it’s primary industries was the manufacture of bronze armor which was exported throughout Asia Minor and beyond. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.58-59

2:18 The Omniscient Son of God

The speaker identifies Himself as “the Son of God,” a title not found in the original description of Chapter 1. In fact, this is the only time in the Book of Revelation that Jesus is called the Son of God, although John repeatedly used the title in his Gospel. **Its use here serves to emphasize the profound seriousness of the judgement pronounced upon the congregation.** The Son of God’s blazing eyes and gleaming feet depict the fearsome judgement of the holy and righteous God from whom nothing can be hidden. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.61

† It is as **A JUDGE FULL OF HOLY WRATH**, as a consuming fire, that Jesus, the Son of God, is here introduced, as one from whom his enemies may expect certain and terrible punishment. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.598-599

2:19 Love, Faith, Service, Perseverance,

The all-seeing eyes of the Lord note that in Thyatira love had continued to grow and increase. The Son of God is well aware of the “deeds/works”; and the text specifies four categories of those works - “your love and faith, your service and perseverance.”

- † **Love** (Greek - “agape”) comes first for it is the basis of all that follows
- † **Faith** follows closely thereafter ... Love and faith are accompanied, as they must always be.
- † **Service** (Greek “diakonia”), that is voluntary ministry to the needs of others
- † **Perseverance** the willingness to endure hardship and persecution.

The natural dynamic of a living relationship with Christ in which faith and love and the evidence thereof in works are consistently increasing is evident and commendable in the congregation in Thyatira. Dr. L. L. White, [Revelation](#), p.61-62

† The congregation of Thyatira as such was noted for its diligence in works and service of love, of brotherly love. These were the natural fruits of the faith which was still held by the great majority of the brethren. Another fruit of this faith was patient endurance amidst the persecutions which were instigated on the part of the enemies. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.598-599

2:20 Tolerate

The verb “tolerate” defines the essence of the problem. ***The danger to this church was not from the outside. No external enemy threatened Thyatira. The foe was already inside the church itself and the congregation was guilty of permitting and approving this most dangerous false teaching.***

- † The church at Thyatira thus becomes an example of how **compromise** with the culture leads to a degeneration process caused by a persistent failure to recognize God as He truly is. This process can silently and almost invisibly take a believing Christian and reduce him to the most degenerate levels. [Revelation](#), P.A. Bartz
- † The result was that many servants of the Lord, many true Christians, had been seduced to a life of idolatry, of over indulgence, of immorality and sexual devices. They had been plunged into the veritable abyss of wickedness, where the most abominable works of darkness were committed with the plea that this was Christianity in an advanced state. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.598-
- † All of this the congregation permitted; knowing the pool of unspeakable filth which was in their midst, the members had done nothing to remove the stain, the blot, from the congregation. Kretzmann, [Popular Commentary](#), p.598-599



2:20 Jezebel See 1 Kings 16:31, 18:4

The false teacher is identified with Jezebel, the infamous Sidonian princess who became the wife of Ahab and queen over Israel. Jezebel was a fanatical devotee of the Canaanite fertility cult of Baal and Astarte. She made it her life’s goal to establish the worship of Baal as the official religion of Israel. Jezebel . . . seduced the Israelites into pagan worship which included all manner of sexual vices (see 2 Kings 9:22, 30-37). She was the nemesis of the prophet Elijah and all who sought to remain faithful

to the Lord. Jezebel was murdered by Jehu in the purge which followed the death of Ahab. **To this day, her name personifies feminine wickedness and evil.**

- † The allusion to the notorious Old Testament queen would seem to suggest that the false teacher in Thyatira was **a prominent woman** of the congregation, perhaps the wife of one of the pastors or leaders of the church. Thus, like Jezebel of old, she was in a position to use her influence, based on her husband's position, to further her own false doctrine. Dr. L. L. White, Revelation, p.62
- † **Prophetess** In claiming the gift of special revelation from God, this evil woman assumed for herself a position of authority and power within the church. However, her claim to speak for God was false, and the doctrine she put forward misled the people into error and sin.
- † **Sex & Food** Pagan worship is summarized by "sex and food" -- the "sacraments" of pagan worship that connect you to the pagan god. It may well be that this false prophetess claimed special revelation from God which authorized participation in the sex and food rites of the pagans!

Jezebel represents the sin of syncretism; the ecumenism that tolerates all faiths as equal; the "all roads get to God" idea. We must be careful of false teachers and false worship (syncretism). Syncretism borrows and incorporates each other's beliefs into their own beliefs: eclectic. Syncretism at its core, denies the uniqueness and absolute claims of Christianity and that Christ is the only way to the Father. See John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Isaiah 42:8

2:21 Unwilling to repent

Christ's past dealings with this woman and her impending punishment are described in unusual detail. This is a long standing error. Jezebel has been given ample time to repent but she has obstinately refused to do so. She has hardened her heart and is immovably set in the wicked course that she has chosen for herself and those foolish enough to follow her. The Greek text uses the word **pornia** which refers specifically to illicit sexual activity. Now the time for punishment has come, and yet the hope remains that the punishment itself will drive her and her followers to repentance.

2:22-23 Judgment

The Baal/Astarte cult of Jezebel was notorious for the perverse sexual excesses which surrounded their worship of the god/goddess. Now that very place where she had reveled in her passion and pleasure will become for her and those who follow her a place of torment and suffering instead. Sickness, suffering, and ultimately death are the punishments which the Judge has prepared for this wanton, wicked temptress. The "children" of Jezebel are not physical offspring, but those who have followed her in her falsehood and shared in her immorality.

- † **Christ's judgement upon Jezebel and her children will serve as a lesson to the whole church so that all may recognize His omniscience and His righteousness.**
- † Churches may grow indifferent and permissive, but the righteous judgement of God will stand nonetheless. Dr. L. L. White, Revelation, p.64
- † In the very midst of this terrible threat the Lord holds out amnesty to the sinners if they but repent. Physical distress and illness were not to come upon the men and women only that imitated the prophetess in her licentiousness, but her sin was to be visited also upon her children, whom the Lord threatened to exterminate. **Thus by this one example of righteous wrath and punishment the Lord wanted to issue an emphatic and solemn warning to all the**

congregations, to all congregations to the end of time, in fact, to show that he searches the inmost mind and heart, that no transgression is hidden before his eyes, and that he will punish the evil doers according to their works. He may not always strikes so openly, but it is true, nevertheless, that no man can escape his avenging justice. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, p.598-599

2:24 Satan's so-called deep secrets

The false teachers boasted of their knowledge of the “deep secrets of God,” a common slogan among the **gnostic** sects of the period. They are really “Satan's so-called deep secrets.”

2:25 The Thyatira Remnant

Not all have been taken in. Some still remain faithful – to this godly remnant come the comforting promise – “*I will not impose any other burden on you.*” They will be spared the judgement that is about to fall upon Jezebel and her followers. The Lord is coming soon. The day of deliverance is at hand – “*Only hold on to what you have until I come.*” “**What you have**” is the **faith** and that faith will sustain and strengthen the faithful until the end. Dr. L. L. White, Revelation, p.65

2:26-28 Double Promise

The only church to receive a double promise: **authority over the nations**, and **the morning star**.

- † The promise of “authority over the nations” is based on the messianic prophecy of Psalm 2:8-9 **which is quoted in the text**. The Psalm predicts that the coming kingdom of the Messiah shall utterly destroy the kingdoms of this world. ... Those who are now oppressed and persecuted by worldly kings and powers will reign one day with the Lord.
- † The second blessing promised the **morning star**. The morning star is the star whose appearance in the heavens signals the end of the darkness and the coming of the light. Balaam had prophesied the rising of a star out of Jacob, a Messianic King whose scepter would crush the princes of the nations; Daniel promised that after the end times the people of God “will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever”. **Thus, to be given the morning star means to share in the imminent rule and reign of Christ, the Savior King.**
- † **The darkness of sin's night is almost over.** The dawn of heaven's glorious light is drawing near. All who persevere and overcome share in glory of the Savior's kingdom and will reign with him forever – “I give to him the morning star.”

How many church bodies, congregations, preachers, teachers, and individuals in the “church” today are Nicolatians and Jezebels? *They are living a sad self delusion. Through the service of sin they have become the slaves of sin, and with every sin they commit they shackle themselves with the new fetter. . . here again, as we saw before, appeal is repeated: “he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Every church and every church member should take to heart what is been taught here. That church is in a bad way that tolerates a larger group of evil men and false teachers as its members. And if such a church does not repent and mend its ways, it will cease to be a church and will become a disorderly horde of evil men.* Stoekhardt, Lectures on Revelation, p.12

FALSE DOCTRINE

Heresy Is Dangerous!

Jesus: YEAST <i>Living, active, and spreads</i>	But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. MATTHEW 16:11-12
Paul: GANGRENE <i>Kills, destroys, and spreads</i>	Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene . 2 TIMOTHY 2:16-17
Peter: DAMNS TO HELL <i>Translated “destructive, shameful, condemnation” Indicates loss of eternal life 4x in 3 verses!</i>	But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction . 2 And many will follow their shameful ways , and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 2 PETER 2:1-3
John: EVIL / SATANIC <i>From the Evil One</i>	Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work . 2 JOHN 9-11

In Revelation 2,

Christ displays His attitude towards false doctrine and false teachers:

2:6 You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, **which I also hate**.

2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things **against you**: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.

2:15-16 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent Therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come for you and **I will fight against them** with the sword of my mouth.

2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You **tolerate** that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

The attempt to get rid of the Word of the Apostles and the central teaching of Christianity, the doctrine of salvation by grace, has been and still is the sole cause of the division in the Christian Church Christian Dogmatics, Francis Pieper, Vol 1, p.23

There is but one cause for the divisions within the visible Church: the refusal to abide by scripture as the only source and standard of Christian doctrine and in consequence to this, substitution, in one form or another, of the doctrine of works for the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace.

Christian Dogmatics, Francis Pieper, Vol 1, p.31

HERESY WARNINGS!

Amazingly, 26 of the 27 New Testament books warn us of false teachers and false doctrines. This is a serious issue that the Christian church must battle until the Lord returns. It is no easy task, and in our culture, it is considered intolerant to call something “false” and “untrue”. Many times the false teaching is difficult to see, or appears “minor”.

Matthew	7:15
Mark	13:22
Luke	12:1
John	16:1
Acts	20:29f
Romans	16:17f
1 Corinthians	16:13
2 Corinthians	11:13ff
Galatians	2:4
Ephesians	6:10ff
Philippians	1:17
Colossians	2:8
1 Thessalonians	5:3
2 Thessalonians	3:6
1 Timothy	1:3
2 Timothy	2:17ff
Titus	1:11
Philemon	<i>Personal letter from Paul on behalf of Onesimus</i>
Hebrews	13:9
James	4:4
1 Peter	5:8
2 Peter	2:1
1 John	4:1
2 John	7
3 John	9-10
Jude	4
Revelation	2:2



People have the ability to turn to God on their own initiative.¹

82%

Individuals must contribute to their own salvation.²

74%

Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.

71%

God knows all that happens, but doesn't determine all that happens.

65%

My local church has the authority to withhold Communion and excommunicate me. (Asked of evangelicals who attend church at least once a year.)

57%

The Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being.³

56%

Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.

54%

God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Isl

48%

Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation.

48%

Worshiping alone or with one's family is a way to replace church.

42%

My good deeds help to earn my place in heaven.¹

39%

God will always reward faith with material blessings.

37%

¹ Ruled out by Council of Orange (A.D. 529); ² Ruled out by First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325); ³ Ruled out by First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381).

NOTES Evangelicals are defined as those who strongly agree that: **A** the Bible is the highest authority; **B** evangelism is very important; **C** sin can only be removed by Jesus' death; and **D** salvation comes only through trusting in Jesus as Savior.

“Christianity Today” online
November, 2016