

## Revelation 2:1 – 3:22 Letters to the Seven Churches

*“Nowhere is the battle between Christ and Satan more fierce than in the church of God itself. In some congregations Satan masquerades as an angel of light. He has a foothold stronger in some than in others, but nowhere is he inactive. He has not given up on his most cherished goal - to destroy the church, the sanctuary of the saved.*

*The church is where Satan wages his first battlefront; it's his primary battleground. Only through the church and its message of Christ's saving blood can Satan be defeated . . . and he knows it. If he loses the battle in the church, he loses the war. So, from a strategic standpoint, Satan's insidious and most vicious attacks will be launched against the church. His agents infiltrate the church and look for weak places in the fortress walls to attack. Do not be deceived into believing that Satan doesn't come to church.*

*John sees the battle between good and evil vividly portrayed in each of the seven churches of Asia, which represent various aspects of Christ's universal church. What Christ says to these seven churches in Revelation, he is saying to the church as a whole today: "Some things you are doing good, some are bad." <sup>1</sup>*

### I. Chapter 2 is a continuation of the vision from chapter 1

### II. Jesus instructs John to write messages concerning the seven churches

- A. Each letter has the same form indicating that we should read them as a unity
- B. The form of the letters are as follows
  1. Address to the “angel” of a city
    - a. If this were an actual person, then this indicates that they bear responsibility for the churches
    - b. If it is a heavenly angel, then they bear some responsibility for watching over the churches
    - c. The letters were not written *directly* to each church
      - They are addressed to the “angel” of each church
      - The “you” in each letter is singular, but should be understood collectively anyway
      - The churches, then, are “overhearing” the message, much in the same manner as the “see” the visions
  2. Reference to the description of Jesus
    - a. Instead of merely saying, “thus says the Lord...” each letter makes a reference to a characteristic of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Echols, Eldred. *Haven't You Heard? There's a War Going On!* (Fort Worth: Sweet Publishing, 1992), 87-88.

- b. All of the descriptions come from the vision of chapter 1
  - c. Each description is appropriate to the situation of the church being addressed
3. The body of all the letters begins with “I know....” followed by...
  4. Commendation - Most letters contain something commendable
  5. Condemnation – Usually, “I have this against you...”
  6. Warning & Exhortation – Most have an exhortation to repent and a warning of what would happen if they didn't
  7. Promise – All of the letter have a promise made to those who remain faithful

## Letter to the angel of the church at Ephesus (2:1-7)

### I. Background on Ephesus

- A. Perhaps the most important of the seven cities
- B. One of the best harbors of Asia
  - 1. It was a gateway to Asia
  - 2. Three main roads converged in Ephesus
  - 3. Ephesus was commercially prosperous
- C. Mixed population ethnically
- D. Many traditional pagan religions
  - 1. Famous for temple of Artemis (Roman name-Diana)
  - 2. Caesar worship also strong in Ephesus
- E. Paul spent three years of his ministry in Ephesus

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Ephesus

- A. Description of Christ – The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the lamp stands
  - 1. Domitian issued a coin depicting his son holding the constellations in his hands, implying that he held the destiny of the universe in his hand
  - 2. However, it is Jesus who holds the stars
  - 3. If the stars are meant to be angels, then Jesus controls the angels that watch over them
  - 4. Hold is Greek – “krateo” meaning to “grasp”
  - 5. This emphasizes his power and protection
- B. Commendation
  - 1. Toil and perseverance
    - a. Toil is hard work
    - b. Perseverance is steadfastness
    - c. They have endured for Jesus’ sake
    - d. They have not let up
  - 2. Doctrinal soundness
    - a. They do not tolerate evil people
    - b. They test anyone claiming to be an apostle
    - c. They have successfully dealt with false teachers
    - d. John had written I John 4:1 and 2 John 9-11
      - These were warnings against false teachers

- Apparently the brethren in Ephesus took this very seriously

3. Hate the deeds of the Nicolatians
  - a. No one knows for sure who these were
  - b. In other letters, reference is made to Balaam (2:14) and to Jezebel (2:20), which are clearly meant to be symbolic. Therefore, reference to the Nicolatians is probably also symbolic
  - c. The Nicolatians literally means “conqueror of the people.”
  - d. In other letters, Balaam and Jezebel represent compromise and accommodation of faith, so it is possible that the Nicolatians to as well
4. Three words to characterize Ephesian Christians are:  
Hard working, steadfast, sound.

#### C. Condemnation

1. They have left their first love - What could this mean in light of the commendation?
2. Possibilities
  - a. Left the love they had for Christ
  - b. Left the love they have for each other
3. In either case, the problem was a lack of love
  - a. Even in their hard work and soundness, they forgot the greatest thing
  - b. They outward appearance was right, but they were lacking in heart
4. Some related verses
  - a. Matt 22:36-40
    - Love God
    - Love neighbor
  - b. 1 Cor 13:1-3 – Without love, good things meaningless
  - c. 1 Jno 3:14 – He who does not love abides in death
  - d. 1 Jno 4:7-8 – He who loves is born of and knows God
  - e. 2 Cor 5:14 – Love of Christ compels us...

#### D. Warning – Repent, or else I am coming...and will remove your lamp stand

### E. Exhortation

1. Remember from where you have fallen
  - a. First step for prodigal son in returning home is when he “remembered” home (Lk 15:17)
  - b. Their problem was not doctrinal soundness or even their deeds. Both are commended
  - c. Their problem is a heart problem (Mt 23:23-28)
  - d. They needed to look within themselves and ask what motivated their deeds. Was it love, or self-serving?
2. Repent – Literally means to “turn” from their path
3. Do the deeds you did at first
  - a. This literally says, “Do the first works”
  - b. What was first? Probably had to do with love

### F. Promise

1. He who has an ear – The message is meant for more than just the “angel” of the church, but for all who would hear
2. To overcomers, Jesus will grant to eat of the tree of life

## III. Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever known anyone who looked completely healthy but died suddenly with little or no warning? What happened?
2. Was the church in Ephesus in danger of this?
3. How is it possible to look so healthy as a church (working hard, perseverance, doctrinal soundness), and yet have a weak heart?
4. How could you know if you have a heart problem? After all, everything on the outside may look perfect.
5. Read 2 Tim 1:6. How would this apply to a marriage that is in trouble?
6. Would this parallel in any way to the church at Ephesus?
7. What could you do to remind yourself of the love, devotion and passion you had when you first came to the Lord?

## Letter to the angel of the church at Smyrna (2:8-11)

### I. Background on Smyrna

- A. About 40 miles north of Ephesus
- B. Had a small but strong anti Christian element from the Jews
- C. A temple to the emperor Tiberius was built there
- D. A major seaport
- E. Had many pagan temples, including the temple of Dionysus, the god of fruitfulness and wine. The worshippers conducted a death, burial and resurrection ceremony in the spring to celebrate the coming of new life

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Smyrna

- A. Description of Christ – The first and the last, who was dead and has come to life

1. The reason for this identification might be due to the tribulation Smyrna had been experiencing, and their coming suffering
2. Life comes from Christ, not from Dionysus

- B. Commendation - I know your “tribulation”

1. Tribulation means, “to grind, crush, or press”
2. Word was used of grinding wheat, or pressing grapes
3. Christians were being ground to dust
4. Jesus “knew” (understood) their difficulties
5. Their tribulation took many forms
  - a. Poverty – May have had property confiscated, and were excluded from trade guilds
  - b. Blasphemies from the Jews
    - Blasphemy means to “speak against in order to injure.” It could be translated, “slander.”
    - They said they were Jews but were not (Rom 2:28-29)
    - They were a synagogue of Satan
      - (John 8:39-47) Not children of Abraham, but the Devil
      - (2 Cor 11:14) Satan can appear as an angel of light
      - (Matt 4:6) Satan can quote scripture!

## 6. But you are rich

C. Condemnation – NONE

D. Warning – NONE

E. Exhortation

1. Do not fear what you are about to suffer – Apparently it was going to get worse

- a. Some were going to be cast in prison to be tested
  - (Jas 1:2-4); (1 Pet 1:6-9)
  - Testing produces endurance, faith and joy
  - Gen 22 – Abraham’s testing produced an oath from God
- b. They would have tribulation ten days
  - This number is probably an apocalyptic symbol
  - 10 signifies human completeness
  - This indicates a comprehensive persecution
  - However, it is not forever, it is “human” completeness
- c. (2 Tim 3:12 ) – Persecution can be expected

2. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life

- a. For many, the death would come at the hands of their persecutors
- b. Jesus did not promise to deliver them “from” death, but through death if they are faithful
- c. (Matt 10:28) – Should not fear those who can only kill the body

F. Promise – Crown of life for those faithful until death; and, He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death

1. Crown (Grk – stephanos, not diadem)

- a. Diadem a kingly, royal crown
- b. Stephanos a victory wreath give to the victor of the games

2. The second death will not hurt them if they overcome

- a. Doesn’t meant they will not be put to death
- b. But second death will not hurt them (Rev 20:14, 15; 21:8)

### III. The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Polycarp, born about 72, was a bishop in Smyrna and was martyred in 156. Polycarp is said to have known the Apostle John, and to have been instructed by him in the Christian faith. Polycarp, in his turn, was known to Irenaeus, who later became Bishop of Lyons in what is now France. The following is an account of the arrest, trial, conviction, and martyrdom of Polycarp, written after his death by one or more members of his congregation<sup>2</sup>.

Polycarp was denounced to the government, arrested, and tried on the charge of being a Christian. When the proconsul urged him to save his life by cursing Christ, he replied: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The magistrate was reluctant to kill a gentle old man, but he had no choice.

#### *Chapter VII.-Polycarp is Found by His Pursuers.*

*His pursuers then, along with horsemen, and taking the youth with them, went forth at supper-time on the day of the preparation<sup>12</sup> with their usual weapons, as if going out against a robber.<sup>13</sup> And being come about evening [to the place where he was], they found him lying down in the upper room of<sup>14</sup> a certain little house, from which he might have escaped into another place; but he refused, saying, "The will of God<sup>15</sup> be done."<sup>16</sup> So when he heard that they were come, he went down and spake with them. And as those that were present marveled at his age and constancy, some of them said, "Was so much effort<sup>17</sup> made to capture such a venerable man?<sup>18</sup> Immediately then, in that very hour, he ordered that something to eat and drink should be set before them, as much indeed as they cared for, while he besought them to allow him an hour to pray without disturbance. And on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease<sup>19</sup> for two full hours, to the astonishment of them that heard him, insomuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and venerable an old man.*

#### *Chapter VIII.-Polycarp is Brought into the City.*

*Now, as soon as he had ceased praying, having made mention of all that had at any time come in contact with him, both small and great, illustrious and obscure, as well as the whole Catholic Church throughout the world, the time of his departure having arrived, they set him upon an ass, and conducted him into the city, the day being that of the great Sabbath. And the Irenarch Herod, accompanied by his father Nicetes (both riding in a chariot<sup>20</sup>), met him, and taking him up into the chariot, they seated themselves beside him, and endeavored to persuade him, saying, "What harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar,<sup>21</sup> and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety? "But he at first gave them no answer; and when they continued to urge him, he said, "I shall not do as you advise me." So they, having no hope of persuading him, began to speak bitter<sup>22</sup> words unto him, and cast him with violence out of the chariot,<sup>23</sup> insomuch that, in getting down from the carriage, he dislocated his leg<sup>24</sup> [by the fall]. But without being disturbed,<sup>25</sup> and as if suffering nothing, he went eagerly forward with all haste, and was conducted to the stadium, where the tumult was so great, that there was no possibility of being heard.*

#### *Chapter IX.-Polycarp Refuses to Revile Christ.*

*Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!" No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the*

<sup>2</sup> The Martyrdom of Polycarp, from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library Online. <http://ccel.org>



*proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists."<sup>26</sup> Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ; "Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour? "*

*Chapter X.-Polycarp Confesses Himself a Christian.*

*And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines<sup>27</sup> of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them." The proconsul replied, "Persuade the people." But Polycarp said, "To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God."<sup>28</sup> But as for these, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me."<sup>29</sup>*

*Chapter XI.-No Threats Have Any Effect on Polycarp.*

*The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand ; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent." But he answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil;<sup>30</sup> and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous."<sup>31</sup> But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."*

*Chapter XII.-Polycarp is Sentenced to Be Burned.*

*While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, "This is the teacher of Asia,<sup>32</sup> the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch<sup>33</sup> to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows<sup>34</sup> of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behoved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, "I must be burnt alive."*

*Chapter XIII.-The Funeral Pile is Erected.*

*This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals,-a thing*

*he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his holy life,<sup>35</sup> he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned<sup>36</sup> with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, "Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile."*

*Chapter XIV.-The Prayer of Polycarp.*

*They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup<sup>37</sup> of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat<sup>38</sup> and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful<sup>39</sup> God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen."<sup>40</sup>*

#### **IV. Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you suppose the church at Smyrna received no condemnation? Could the persecution have anything to do with it?
2. In what way was the church in Smyrna rich?
3. Are you rich? Do you feel rich? Why or why not?
4. What does blasphemy mean? Have you ever been blasphemed because of your faith?
5. Where did much of the persecution against the Christians in Smyrna come from? Discuss what that must have been like.
6. Have you ever been persecuted in any way from those close to you?
7. How does this letter encourage you?

## Letter to the angel of the Church at Pergamum (2:12-17)

### I. Background on Pergamum

- A. Capitol city of Asia
- B. The “official” center for emperor worship. It was the first city in Asia That was given the right to build and imperial temple. Pergamum was known as “The Guardian of the Temple”
- C. Housed the famous god of Pergamum, “Asklepios Soter” (Savior Aslepios). The god of healing. His temple was closest thing to a hospital in Pergamum. People came from all over to be healed there. The practice was a mixture of pagan mysticism and primitive medicine. Interestingly, his emblem was a serpent Pergamum coins have been found with an image of a serpent, representing Asklepios.
- D. Pergamum housed at 200,000 volume library. They perfected parchment and invented the Codex.
- E. Keep in mind that intellectual and artistic pursuits in ancient times were typically associated with the Emperor, a deity, or both.

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Pergamum

#### A. Description of Christ – The one who has the sharp two-edged sword

1. *“Roman governors were divided into two classes. Those who had the ius gladii, the right of the sword, and those who had not. Those who had the right of the sword had the power of life and death; on their word a man could be executed on the spot. Humanly speaking the proconsul, who had his headquarters at Pergamum, had the ius gladii, the right of the sword, and at any Moment he might use it against any Christian; but the letter bids the Christian not to forget that the last word is still with the risen Christ, who has the sharp two-edged sword.”<sup>3</sup>*
2. In apocalyptic literature, a sword usually denotes judgment (see introduction)
  - a. It proceeds from his mouth, which denotes the “word”
  - b. The word can be used constructively or destructively
  - c. Constructively – (Acts 2:37; Heb 4:12)
  - d. Destructively – (John 12:48)

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, William. *The Revelation of John*,. The Daily Bible Study Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), vol. 1, p.90.

## B. Commendation

1. I know where you dwell – where Satan’s throne is ...
  - a. You hold fast my name
  - b. You did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas
    - He was a “witness” (Grk: martus – from where the word martyr comes from)
    - Tradition says Antipas was roasted alive inside a brazen bull
    - Even though they were being tortured and killed, they did not deny Christ
  - c. So in addition to paganism, Pergamum say the martyrdom of faithful Christians. No wonder Jesus called it Satan’s throne!
    - a. 1 John 5:19 – Whole world lies in the power of the evil one
    - b. John 12:31; 16:11 – Satan called ruler of this world
    - c. Eph 6:12 – Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. We war against Satan, the real enemy

## C. Condemnation – I have a few things against you

1. They had some that held to the teaching of Balaam
  - a. Balaam mentioned elsewhere in New Testament
    - 2 Pet 2:14 – 15 – Speaking of those who entice unstable souls, he says they have gone the way of Balaam
    - Jude 11-12 – Some have rushed into the error of Balaam, and Jude calls the “hidden reefs”
  - b. The historical Balaam
    - Commissioned by Balak to curse Israel (Num22-25), but failed
    - (Num 25:1-9) After this, Israel sinned greatly by joining themselves to Baal of Peor
    - (Num 31:13-16) – Indicates that Balaam was the one who counseled the women of Midian to entice the Israelites into sin
  - c. In this passage, it says that Balaam actually counseled Balak to put stumbling blocks before Israel
  - d. So, in Pergamum, there were those who thought it okay for Christians to participate in the pagan activities
2. They had some who in the same way held to the teaching of the Nicolaitians.

- a. Some early Christian writers thought the Nicolaitians were Gnostic teachers
  - b. One feature of Christian Gnosticism was hedonism. The flesh did not matter, only the spirit did. Therefore a Christian could indulge his flesh and it would not affect his spirit.
3. Unlike the church at Ephesus, they tolerated false teaching
  4. Their problem, then, was compromise and syncretism

#### D. Warning

1. Repent or I am coming to you quickly
  - a. Does not refer to Second Coming, but judgment
  - b. Biblical examples: Isa 19:1; Matt 24:27-35
2. I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth
  - a. Vengeance to those who were leading them astray
  - b. He says I will make war against “them”
    - This was also a warning to the Christians. If they were in proximity to them, they would be in danger of judgment too, so they needed to distance themselves from them

#### E. Exhortation – Repent

1. How did they need to repent? The text does not say explicitly how they were to repent
2. They obviously needed to stop tolerating those who enticed the faithful to give up on their confession of Christ
  - a. Ezek 3:18 – Don’t tolerate sin or sit idly by
  - b. Rom 16:17 – Withdraw from disorderly
  - c. 2 John 11 – Do not give hospitality to false teachers

#### F. Promise

1. Hidden Manna for those who overcome
  - a. God gave Israel manna to eat while in the wilderness (Ex 16:13-36).

- b. To eat “hidden manna” was a Jewish expression which meant to enjoy the blessings of the Messianic Age. This goes back to a Jewish tradition that says Jeremiah hid the pot of manna from the Holy of Holies when the temple was destroyed.
  - c. (John 6:33-35, 50-59) – Jesus spoke of bread from Heaven, he who eats of it will live. In this context, he is speaking of faithful obedience to his word, and having life as a result
  - d. Some see this hidden manna as an allusion to communion, which denotes fellowship with God.
  - e. (Dt 8:1-3) - This promise may be simply communicating that God will provide for them while they are in the wilderness of testing.
    - (Luk 12:22, 29) - Life is more than food or clothing but seeking God’s kingdom (rule) in your life
    - (Matt 16:25) – He who saves his life will lost it, but he who loses his life for Christ will save it
2. A white stone with a new name written on it for those who overcome
- a. The possible interpretations for white stone are endless. But here is one possible one
    - “Stone” or “pebble” (Grk: psephon) is used twice in the New Testament
    - Acts 26:10 – I cast my “vote” against them. Literally is I cast my “stone” against them
    - Reflects a common ancient use to indicate approval or disapproval. A white pebble or marble indicated approval, a black one indicated disapproval. (A modern phrase – “he was blackballed” may go back to this practice)
    - This practice of voting, using colored pebbles was used in the judicial system
  - b. A new name written on it.
    - In the Jewish mindset, a name was not mere nomenclature
    - A name was nearly an adjective
    - God “re-characterizes” us with a new name
    - Some examples from scripture of a new name: (Gen 17:5; 17:15; 32:28)
    - When they pass the testing, they get a new name

### III. Discussion Questions

#### Review Questions:

1. What does it mean that Christ has a "sharp, double-edged sword"?
2. For what did Jesus praise the people of the church at Pergamum? (2:13)
3. What were the believers at Pergamum doing wrong? (2:14-15)
4. What command did Christ give to this church in light of its dangerous direction? (2:16)
5. What stern warning was issued for those who would not obey Christ? (2:17)
6. What did Jesus promise to "him who overcomes"? (2:17)

#### Application and Thought Questions:

7. What do you consider to be the most evil or sinful place on earth? Why?
8. Do you consider your community a sinful place? Why or why not?
9. In what ways could it be said that Satan lives in your city?
10. Does it have an effect on you or any Christian you know? Explain.
11. How is having a "new name" to affect the way you live?
12. Discuss the following statements in light of today's lesson
  - a. It is okay to join a fraternity or other organization
  - b. I can go to a company party even though there is drinking as long as I don't drink
  - c. It is okay to have close non-Christian friends, just so long as I don't participate in anything they do that is ungodly
  - d. I need to work a lot of overtime and be gone from home much of the time in order to get in good with the boss and get a promotion or raise
13. What is the best way to deal with brethren who think unbiblically about the world or have wrong ideas? (Read Ephesians 6:12 and remember who the enemy is)
14. How can we resist the influence of the world around us?

## Letter to the angel of the Church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

### I. Background on Thyatira

- A. Known for trade and trade guilds
- B. Was considered an unimportant city
- C. However, this was the longest of the seven letters. No one is unimportant to Jesus

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Thyatira

#### A. Description of Christ

- 1. Son of God
  - a. Originally a title for kings (Psalm 2)
  - b. Title was applied to Jesus (John 20:31)
  - c. In the case of Jesus, then, it emphasizes relationship to God, power, and authority
- 2. Eyes like a flame of fire
  - a. He knows all things
  - b. v.23 – I am he who searches minds and hearts
- 3. Feet of burnished bronze – Treads down the wicked

#### B. Commendation

- 1. I know your...love
  - a. (Rom 12:10; 1 Cor 13) – Love is very important
  - b. This the only church commended for love
- 2. Service/ Ministry
  - a. Their love was practical
  - b. 1 John 3:16ff – Love in deed and truth
- 3. Faith
  - a. Not just mental agreement. Faith means “trust”
  - b. Trust involves taking a risk, placing self into God’s hands
  - c. Hebrews 11:1-6 – Without faith, impossible to please him
- 4. Perseverance – Steadfastness, endurance
- 5. Growth in deeds – They didn’t diminish in energy



## C. Condemnation – Tolerate Jezebel

1. Most likely figurative – Most would not name their daughter Jezebel for same reasons as we wouldn't today
2. Information on Jezebel
  - a. 1 Kings 16:31 – Daughter of Eth-Baal (“With Baal”)
  - b. 1 Kings 18:3 – Destroyed prophets of Yahweh
  - c. 1 Kings 18:19 – Sponsored Baal worship
  - d. 1 Kings 21:1-16 – Responsible for Naboth’s murder
  - e. 1 Kings 21:23-26 – Elijah’s prophesy against Jezebel
  - f. 1 Kings 19:1-3 – Seeking to kill Elijah
  - g. 2 Kings 9:30-37 – Fulfillment of Elijah’s prophesy
3. Jesus’ problem not with just Jezebel, but with the church
  - a. They church “tolerated” Jezebel
  - b. 1 Cor 5:1-11 – In same way, Paul displeased with Corinthians when they “tolerated” sin among them
  - c. Eph 5:11 – Do not participate, but expose
4. Some MSS read “*your* woman Jezebel” – The reference to Jezebel may be a reference to a leader’s wife
5. She led God’s people astray
  - a. Caused them to commit acts of immorality
  - b. Caused them to eat things sacrificed to idols
  - c. Unlike the more subtle challenge at Pergamum, this may have involved direct threats of persecution for non-compliance to pagan practices

## D. Warning

1. Jesus gave her time to repent
  - a. God has always been patient
  - b. Example – Genesis 15:16
    - This was told Abraham about 2000 BCE
    - Exodus took place about 1300 BCE
    - God was patient with the Amorite for 700 years
  - c. Another example
    - Solomon dies in 931 BCE
    - Nation divides and turn heart away from God
    - Samaria falls to Assyria – 721 BCE
    - Jerusalem falls to Babylon – 586 BCE
  - d. 2 Pet 3:9 – God is patient

2. Poetic Justice
  - a. Jezebel seduced people into her bed, so to speak
  - b. God will cast her and her lovers onto a bed of sickness & tribulation
  - c. Jesus will kill her children (followers) with pestilence (lit: death)

#### E. Exhortation

1. v.22 – Repent
2. To those who do not hold her teaching
  - a. Placed no other burden on them
  - b. Did not instruct them to split or withdraw
3. Hold fast what you have until I come

#### F. Promise - To him who overcomes & keeps his deeds till the end . . .

1. Will be given authority/power over the nations
2. Will rule them with a rod of iron (rule is poimano – to shepherd)
  - a. This in contrast to shepherd's crook.
    - Crook used to rescue sheep
    - The Rod was used for beating and shattering and fighting off the enemy (Isa 11:4)
    - Emphasizes the destructive power of Christ
  - b. Psalm 2:9 – Imagery of this verse taken from here
  - c. Jeremiah 51:17-20 – God uses his people as his war club
  - d. Psalm 110:5-6 – God will shatter enemy kings
3. Morning Star – It will be a new day (also Rev 22:16)

### III. Discussion Questions

1. What challenge did the church at Thyatira face?
  - a. How was the challenge at Thyatira different than the challenge at Pergamum
  - b. Contrast the approach of Balaam and the approach of Jezebel in inducing people to idolatry.
2. What is the root problem of idolatry?
3. Why would Christians tolerate someone like Jezebel?
4. Why do you suppose Jesus did not explicitly tell the Christians to excommunicate, withdraw, or do something of this nature to Jezebel?
5. To tolerate or not to tolerate. How do you know when to do which?
  - a. Are there any potential pitfalls in being intolerant of sin? Explain.
  - b. How can you avoid these pitfalls?
  - c. Are there any potential pitfalls in being tolerant of one another? Explain.
6. Is there anything you have observed that you can equate with idolatry?
7. Is it possible to make Jesus into an idol? How?
8. How can you avoid the problem of idolatry?

## Letter to the angel of the Church at Sardis (3:1-6)

### I. Background on Sardis

- A. Had a history of glory
  - 1. It was the capital of the Ancient Kingdom of Lydia (560 BCE)
  - 2. King Croesus minted the first official government coinage
- B. Had a history of confidence
  - 1. The original city sat on top of a 1500 foot spur with perpendicular sides
  - 2. The only access was a narrow causeway which could easily be defended against enemies
  - 3. Cyrus offered a reward to anyone who could find a way in
    - a. A Persian soldier noticed a helmet falling down the cliff
    - b. Later, he noticed a Sardinian soldier appear at the bottom to retrieve his helmet
    - c. So there was a way up after all. The Persian marked the spot and informed Cyrus
    - d. At night, Cyrus and his army went up the trail and caught the city by surprise
  - 4. It could be said Sardis had a history of overconfidence
- C. After the Persian conquest, Sardis no longer allowed to make weapons
- D. By end of 1<sup>st</sup> century, earthquakes rendered Sardis a third rate town

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Sardis

#### A. Description of Christ

- 1. He who has the seven Spirits of God
  - a. Phrase first used in 1:4 – Reference to the Holy Spirit
    - Acts 2:38 – The Holy Spirit is given to Christians
    - Eph 3:16 – The Spirit strengthens Christians
    - Rom 8:11 – The Spirit lives in the Christian
    - Rom 8:13 – Spirit gives ability to deny evil
    - Rom 8:26 – The spirit helps Christian's weaknesses
  - b. Jesus holds the seven Spirits
    - Figuratively communicates that he has given us what we need in full
    - (2 Pet 1:3) – His divine power has given us everything we need . . .

## 2. The seven stars

- a. 1:20 - The stars are the angels of the seven churches
- b. Jesus has them – they are under his authority

## B. Commendation

1. No commendation for the congregation as a whole
2. “A few” have not soiled their garments
3. (2 Pet 2:7; Mt 7:14) – “Few” are those who find it

## C. Condemnation

1. They had a false reputation
  - a. Had a name that they were alive, but were dead
    - Probably looked like a vibrant, active church
    - Worship services may have been fantastic
  - b. Like the city, they were living in past glory
  - c. Many in Sardis would have been in disbelief over the condemnation in this letter
    - They may have seen themselves as blessed. There was no mention of persecution they were facing
    - They had a reputation for being a lively church. What proof is there that they were dead?
2. Symptoms of their problem
  1. Sleepiness
    - a. They were told to “wake up”
    - b. (1 Thess 5:6-8) – Always need to be alert
  2. Weakness/Laziness
    - a. Their deeds were not found completed
    - b. (2 Tim 2:15) – Need to be diligent
  3. Syncretism
    - a. v.4 – Implies many had soiled their garments
    - b. (Jas 1:27; 4:4) – Need to stay unspotted by world

4. Lowered Immune System
  - a. No mention of persecution
  - b. No mention of pressure to conform to paganism
  - c. One could interpret this as a blessing
  - d. Or – It could be the biggest challenge ever

D. Warning – If not wake up, I will come like a thief

1. They will not expect it because they will be sleeping
2. They need to be alert and sober
3. They need to be discerning about subtle influences that draw them away from God

E. Exhortation

1. Wake up
  - a. Some folks need to be “shaken” in order to wake up
  - b. When in guard duty, hard to stay awake when all is quiet
  - c. Alertness comes from knowing what to look for and being watchful for it
2. Strengthen what remains
  - a. Merely wearing the label, “Christian” is not the end goal
  - b. There is more to do, such as nourishing your faith
  - c. (Col 4:2) – Part of nourishing faith is through prayer
3. Remember what you received and heard, and keep it
  - a. Needed to remember their purpose
  - b. Who they are, who they stand for, and why
  - c. Forgetting your purpose leads to activity with no direction or focus
4. Repent – Stop doing what they were doing and change

F. Promise

1. White garments
2. Will not be blotted out from the book of life
  - a. Alludes to Old Testament practice of recording the names of citizens (Isa 4:3; Ezek 13:9; Neh 12:22; Ps 69:28)
  - b. (Mal 3:16; Heb 12:23) – Our names enrolled
3. He will confess our names before the Father and Angels (Mt 10:32; 7:21-23)

**III. Discussion Questions**

1. Under what circumstances do you work the best. When under pressure, or no pressure? Why?
2. What did Christ think about the church at Sardis?
3. What was wrong with the church at Sardis? (3:2)
4. How can a church appear to be alive and thriving and yet be dead?
5. What do you think is your reputation among your coworkers? Neighbors? People at church?
6. When in your life has your reputation been misleading? How?
7. Is a lack of persecution and hardship a blessing or challenge? Explain
8. Rate your prayer life. Is it excellent, good, mediocre, nearly dead?
9. What motivates you to pray?
10. What motivates you in other areas of Christian devotion (Bible reading, evangelism, etc.) ?
11. What can you do today to enhance your reputation in the world and in heaven?
12. What can you do to improve your acts of Christian devotion (prayer, Bible reading, etc.) and therefore be spiritually alert?

## Letter to the angel of the Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

### I. Background on Philadelphia

- A. City was established to spread Greek culture
- B. Had so many pagan temples that it was nicknamed, “Little Athens”
- C. Its inhabitants steeped in Greek thought and culture

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Philadelphia

- A. Description of Christ – Does not use imagery from the vision
  - 1. He who is holy (lit: The Holy One)
    - a. Title reserved for Gad in the Old Testament (Isa 40:25)
    - b. So this is a claim to deity
  - 2. He who is true – “alethinos” – true, dependable, genuine, real
    - a. Stands in contrast to Jews who say they are but are not
    - b. Other claims to the “alethinos” of Jesus
      - John 1:9 – He is the true light
      - John 6:32 – He is the true bread
      - John 15:1 – He is the true vine
      - 1 John 5:20 – He is the true God
      - Rev 3:14 – He is the faithful and true witness
  - 3. He who has the key of David
    - a. Key symbolizes authority and power
    - b. Phrase used in Isa 22:20-22
      - Shebnu (v.15,19) deposed from being over Hezekiah’s house
      - Eliakim given “keys” to the house of David
      - He administrated affairs and decides who can and cannot get an audience with the king, he “opens and shuts”
    - c. Jesus grants access to the Father (Jno 14:6)
    - d. No one can interfere with Jesus granting or denying access to the Father
- B. Commendation
  - 1. Puny yet productive – Did what they could with what they had
    - a. They had “a little power”
      - 1 Cor 1:26 – Characteristic of the kingdom



- 2 Cor 12:9-10 – Power perfected in weakness
- Mk 14:8 – She has done what she could

- b. Jesus set before them an open door
  - Access to God?
  - Door of opportunity for the Gospel?
  - (Mt 25:14-30) – Those faithful with little given more
- c. They kept his word and did not deny his name

## 2. Persevered under persecution from the Jews

- a. Jews believed Christianity to be a heresy
- b. Jesus says Jews will come and bow at their feet
  - Originally this promise for national Jews
    - Isa 60:14 – Sons of those afflicted bow down
    - Isa 45:14 – Bow down saying God is with you
    - Isa 49:23 – Kings will bow down
  - Christians inherited the promises to Israel
    - The church is the Israel of God (Gal 6:16)
    - Rom 2:27-29; 4:9-15 – We are spiritual Israel
- c. Jesus called them a synagogue of Satan
  - They now doing Satan's work by opposing
  - No longer God's people if not accept Christ
- d. The Jews would know that Jesus loves Christians

## Christians

C. Condemnation - None

D. Warning – None

E. Exhortation

- 1. Because of perseverance – Will keep them from hour of testing
  - a. Because they kept his word, he will keep them safe
  - b. One purpose of troubles is to induce repentance or to test, which was not needed in their case
  - c. God did the same in Exodus
    - 1<sup>st</sup> 4 plagues affected everyone
    - God spared Israel from plagues 5-10 (Exod 9:1ff)
  - d. 1 Cor 10:13 – God will not allow us to be tempted beyond

what we are able. They only had a “little power”

2. I am coming quickly – Hold fast what you have
  - a. Hour of testing is coming soon
  - b. Hold fast their faith and their open door

F. Promise – For he who overcomes...

1. Will become a pillar in the temple of God
  - a. A pillar supports and sustains (1 Tim 3:15; Gal 2:9)
  - b. Pillar in ancient times also used to honor individuals by engraving their name on it with some info about them
  - c. Pillar carries the idea of permanence – They are important and permanent part of structure
  - d. Will not go out from it anymore – Place in Heaven is permanent
2. Will have the names written on him
  - a. Name of God written on him
  - b. Name of the city of God on him
  - c. Name of Jesus on him

### III. Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt weak? Why?
2. Was the church in Philadelphia weak or strong?
3. If the church in Philadelphia did not have a lot of power, why is it that they receive no condemnation as the church in Sardis did who had the reputation for being alive?
4. Is God pleased if you only have a little strength?
5. Is it possible to lose strength? How?
6. What happens to those who use their little strength according to this letter?
7. What does it take to help weakness turn to strength?
8. What can you do for Christ?
9. What advice would you give to a Christian friend who expressed physical exhaustion and a lack of spiritual strength?

## Letter to the angel of the Church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

### I. Background on Laodicea

- A. Affluent city. In 60 CE an earthquake destroyed the city, and unlike other cities in the empire, the inhabitants rebuilt it with their own money
- B. It was famous for an eye-salve developed at its medical center
- C. Known for hot mineral springs used for medicinal baths in Heiropolis, about 6 miles away
- D. Resort city. Popular place for the wealthy to retire
- E. Was a great center of clothing manufacture. Famous for its black wool.

### II. Content of the Letter concerning Laodicea

- A. Description of Christ
  - 1. The “Amen” – Dependable
  - 2. Faithful and true witness – His testimony is dependable
  - 3. Beginning of the creation of God
    - a. Beginning is “arche” in Greek
      - Beginning, origin, ruler (as in “arch angel”), source
      - Does not mean he a created being
    - b. “Arche” also used in other passages (Col 1:15; Jn 1:1-3)
- B. Commendation – None (not even for a “faithful few”)
- C. Condemnation
  - 1. Lukewarmness
    - a. In the area, Heiropolis famous for hot mineral springs used for medicinal baths to heal
    - b. Also in area, Colossae had cold springs used for refreshing
    - c. Potable drinking water a problem in Laodicea because the water was the lukewarm runoff from the hot springs in the area. Not suitable for drinking
    - d. Hot spring water useful as is cold spring water.
    - e. Problem with the church – they were neither – useless
    - f. Apparently doing deeds “I know your deeds” but they were

## useless deeds

2. Pride – They do not thing they need anything
3. Blindness – Not aware of their condition
  - a. Poor – In contrast to the physical riches of Laodicea
  - b. Blind – In spite of their eye salve
  - c. Naked – In spite of clothing industry
  - d. The world has blinded them to their inner condition
4. Lukewarmness is a Trojan horse. Why? It is tolerated and not seen as being that bad – But it can bring disaster

## D. Warning

1. Will spew them out of his mouth (Zeph 1:12)
2. Cannot be lukewarm and straddle the fence
  - a. (Lev 18:24-28) – Israel supposed to worship Yahweh exclusively but did not
  - b. 1 King 18:21 – Need to choose one or the other (Josh 24:15)

## E. Exhortation – Buy true riches from Christ

1. Gold refined by fire
  - a. (1 Pet 1:7) – Faith tested by fire more precious than gold
  - b. (Mt 13:44-46) – True treasure costs everything
2. White garments
  - a. This stands in contrast to the fine black wool produced in Laodicea, which was a symbol of luxury
  - b. This is an exhortation not to love the world or the things in the world (Jno 12:25; 1 Jno 2:15)
3. Eye salve
  - a. In order to see and recognize their condition
  - b. (2 Cor 4:18) – We focus not on what is seen, but unseen
  - c. (Rom 12:2-4) – Need to be discerning
4. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline
  - a. Word for love here is phileo, not agapao
  - b. Emphasizes Jesus' affection for us
  - c. Heb 12:5-6 – God disciplines sons that he loves for good

d. Heb 12:10 – Not to punish, but correct

5. Be zealous and repent  
- To be zealous is to come out of a lukewarm religion

F. Promise –

1. For those who open the door to Jesus, he will come in and dine with them
2. For overcomers, will sit down with him on his throne as victors
  - a. 2 Tim 2:11 – We shall reign with him
  - b. Jas 4:10 – God will in the end exalt those who humble themselves before him

#### Summary of the Condition and Cure in Laodicea

The City and Church	Spiritual Condition	Cure from Jesus
Wealthy	Poor	Refined Gold
Medical Center	Blind	Eye Salve
Clothing Industry	Naked	White Garments

### III. Discussion Questions

1. What is the nastiest food or drink you ever tasted?
2. What are some foods or drinks that taste better cold or hot than at room temperature?
3. In what ways was the Laodicean church deceived? (3:17)
4. What do we know about the Laodicean Christians from the fact that Jesus described Himself as being outside the door?
5. Why do you suppose the Laodicean Christians were lukewarm?
6. What is a hot Christian, a cold Christian, or a lukewarm Christian?
7. What does a lukewarm Christian act like?
8. In what ways can a person be religious yet indifferent to what God wants?
9. How can you buy gold refined by fire from Christ? White Garments? Eye Salve?

10. What benefit would these things be to you?