

(BKC [NT] p. 932)



Chapter summary. *Christ now dictates letters to the seven Asian churches concerning “what is now” (1:19). Each letter is addressed to the “angel,” or “messenger” (pastors?) of the church. Each message identifies Jesus in a special way, reveals an intimate knowledge of the church addressed, pinpoints the church’s most serious flaw, and then conveys a command intended to correct the problem or warn the church. The letter closes with a promise of reward to the victor who responds obediently.*

Personal application. *Each of us can be commended in some respect—yet each of us also has areas in which we need to grow.¹*

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I. the vision of the seven churches, (2:1-3:22)

A. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS -- “A LOVE LIFE ON THE BRINK OF DISASTER!” (2:1-7)

¹ Richards, Lawrence O., *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, Logos Library System.

1. Salutation, (1)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Visitor to the Church

¹ **“To the angel** (*lit. "messenger"* - possibly the pastor), **of the church of Ephesus** ² (Acts 19), **write, ‘These things says He** (Jesus Christ), **who holds the seven stars** (angels or pastors), **in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands** (representing the seven churches):³

2. Commendation, (2-3)

INTERPRETATION:

The Virtues to the Church

² **“I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds), **your labor** (your toil to the point of exhaustion in your work), **your patience** (your steadfast, persevering commitment to your work), **and that** (in addition to this), **you cannot bear those who are evil**, (those who claim to be holy, but are not). **And** (because of this), **you have tested** (examined), **those who say they are apostles and** (in reality), **are not, and have found** (or proven), **them liars;**

³ **“and** (through it all), **you have persevered and have patience, and have labored** (with a proper motive, i.e.), **for My name’s sake** (not rather, to draw attention to yourself), **and** (you), **have not become weary** (you are exhausted as a result of your loyalty, but you are not tired of being loyal.).

² Ephesus was wealthy, prosperous, magnificent, and famous for its shrine of Diana [*one of the seven wonders of the world*] . . . Its harbor--in the days of its glory--accommodated the largest ships . . . Ephesus was connected by highways with the most important cities of Asia Minor. [*It*] was for a long time the commercial center of Asia. The temple of Diana was at the same time a treasure house, a museum, and a refuge for criminals. It furnished employment for many, including the silversmiths who made miniature shrines of Diana.

Paul visited this city (Acts 18:19-21) on his way from Cornith to Jerusalem. This was during his second missionary journey, about AD 52. Here it was that he left Priscilla and Aquila (18:19); and that Apollos taught with burning zeal (18:25). On his third missionary journey Paul spent three years here (Acts 20:31) . . . Ephesus was more than forty years old when Christ dictated this epistle. Another generation had arisen. The children did not experience that intense enthusiasm, that spontaneity and ardour which had been revealed by their parents when the latter first came into contact with the gospel. Not only this, but they lacked their former devotion to Christ. A similar condition occurred in Israel after the days of Joshua and the elders (Jdg. 2:7,10, 11). William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, (MI: Baker Books, 1967), pp. 60-61

³ Here the reference is surely to Dent. xxiii. 14, where this walking, and the object of it, are the same as in the Day of the Lord. "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee." Here, Christ thus walks according to Lev. xxvi. 12. And his eye sees and exposes the unclean things in the camp of these Assemblies. E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, (MI: Kregel, 1984), pp. 167, 168

3. Reproof, (4)

INTERPRETATION:

The Verdict Against the Church

⁴ “**Nevertheless** (in spite of the wonderful things you are doing), **I** (Jesus Christ), **have this against you** (I cannot overlook the fact), **that you have left** (drifted away from, let the flame die out concerning), **your first** (and primary), **love**, (Me. No amount of work, labor, patience, or proper theology (no matter how good can override that. [cf., Mat. 22:36-40]).

F APPLICATION:

The church "left" its first love. It was not lost or stolen. They must then go back where they left it, and retrieve it. But what exactly is it that they must retrieve?

- Their deeds were proper.
- Their resolve was passionate.
- Their motives were pure.
- Their doctrine was perfect.

What is the problem?! Love always rates over action. As important as being zealous for sound doctrine and ministry is, it is not more important than being zealous in our love of Christ.

*"You can be right theologically, but if you have lost your first love for Jesus Christ, then your theology is nothing but cold academics. It is the beautiful combination of sound doctrine and love for Christ that makes a church what it should be."*⁴

A wife who has a husband who lives out the marriage by the book, would prefer over him, the one who lives out the marriage from his heart. But, she would prefer over both a husband who lives out the marriage with a balance of both; the book and the heart. So too, does Christ.

This is the second generation of Christians. Dad and Mom get saved and develop a godly home that the children grow up in and some children become like the Ephesus church. They can quote fact after fact about the doctrines of the Bible, but their hearts are cold toward the Author of the Bible.

Twelve Evidences

We've Lost Our First Love for the Lord

1. When our delight in the Lord is no longer as great as our delight in someone else.
2. When our soul does not long for times of rich fellowship in God's Word or in prayer.
3. When our thoughts during leisure moments do not reflect upon the Lord.
4. When we claim to be "only human" and easily give in to those things we know displease the Lord.

NOTES:

⁴ John MacArthur, *The Church in Prophetic Perspective*, (CA: Word of Grace Publications, 1985), p. 5

5. When we do not willingly and cheerfully give to God's work or to the needs of others.
6. When we cease to treat every Christian brother as we would the Lord.
7. When we view the commands of Christ as restrictions to our happiness rather than expressions of His love.
8. When we inwardly strive for the acclaim of this world rather than the approval of the Lord.
9. When we fail to make Christ or His Words known because we fear rejection.
10. When we refuse to give up an activity which we know is offending a weaker brother.
11. When we become complacent to sinful conditions around us.
12. When we are unable to forgive another for offending us.⁵

4. Exhortation, (5-6)

 INTERPRETATION:

The Voice to the Church

⁵ “**Remember therefore** (think back in time and don't forget), **from where** (or the height from which), **you have fallen** (from intimate fellowship with Me, to cold orthodoxy); **repent** (turn from your sinful forgetfulness), **and do** (again at once, and keep on doing), **the first works** (maintain our romance, relive the joy of your salvation, spend time with Me, introduce Me to your friends, [*when you were first saved you didn't know what ministry was or what your theology was, all you knew is that Jesus loved you and you loved Him*] return to that),⁶ **or else I will come** (because I love you, [Heb. 12:6]), **to** (punish), **you quickly** (I will not overlook it, I will not let it slide), **and remove your lampstand from its place** (I will remove you local assembly, church)—**unless** (the only thing that will stop this from happening, is if), **you repent**.”

More Virtues of the Church

⁶ “**But this you have** (this is another thing you've got going for you), **that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans** (not the Nicolaitans themselves), **which** (deeds), **I also hate**, (you're doing so much right; don't throw it all away; don't forfeit your privileges in the gospel ministry).⁷”

⁵ Author Unknown

⁶ The Song of Solomon is a good example of what our love relationship with Christ should be like!

⁷ **Nicolaitans** (ni-koh-lay-xi-tahns), a religious sect in Ephesus and Pergamum whose members were denounced in Rev. 2:6, 15 for eating food sacrificed to idols and for sexual license. The church fathers considered them followers of Nicolaus of Antioch mentioned in Acts 6:5 and founders of libertine Gnosticism, which remained active beyond the second century.

(Achtemeier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.)

5. Promise, (7)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Victors In the Church

⁷ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches** (*pl.*, collectively). **To him** (*sing.*, each and every individual), **who overcomes** (to him who does remember, repent and return to his first love in this case), **I will give to eat from the tree of life** (at your home going; regardless of what the church as a whole does), **which is in the midst of the Paradise of God** (in heaven).”⁸

F APPLICATION:

1. Are we able to hear the warning signs that we are losing our first love? Where is the excitement we experienced as new believers in Jesus Christ? Where is the thrill of looking at the wife or husband we adored when we were first married? *Love is abused when it is not used.*

In our busy lives we may allow our love relationship with the Lord to grow weak. The church at Ephesus has an important message for us: the Lord is to have priority in our lives. Personally, I could stop at the first letter and have my heart burn with conviction. I know there are times when I slip into Ephesus, and I do not like the atmosphere.⁸

2. There is a possible spiritual meaning here. Adam was given the ministry of tending the Garden of Eden and exercising dominion over God's created world, (Gen. 1-2). God counseled Adam that if he did not obey His exhortation not to eat of the Tree of Life, he would die and forfeit his blessings and privileges which he had. Adam did not heed God's warning and thus lost his ministry and suffered hardship the rest of his earthly life, (Gen. 3). Adam was afterwards redeemed back to God and saved from eternal damnation, but he still suffered the tremendous consequences of his not listening to God's counsel. Here in Revelation 2, we have a fallen church. If we (believers), choose not to abide in the vine (John 15:1-14), we will not receive the life giving source of spiritual life, but will be forced to live out a miserable life on our own natural abilities and resources. We will forfeit the gospel ministry. We will forfeit the joys and blessings of God's supernatural resources, even though we will eventually get to heaven; yet as by fire, (1 Cor. 3:15).

⁸ Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*, p. 40

B. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA -- "*PERSECUTION CAN BE YOUR CROWNING JOY!*" (2:8-11)

Scripture does not record the founding of the church at Smyrna, nor is the city mentioned in the book of Acts. All that is revealed about this congregation is contained in this letter. Presumably, a church was planted in Smyrna during Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10).

At the end of the first century, life was difficult and dangerous for the church at Smyrna. The city, long an ally of Rome, was a hotbed of emperor worship. Under Emperor Domitian, it became a capital offense to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the emperor. Not surprisingly, many Christians faced execution. The most famous of Smyrna's martyrs was Polycarp, executed half a century after John's time. (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1999], p. 69)

... **Smyrna**, a large and wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus. Like Ephesus, it was a seaport. In contrast to Ephesus, which today is a deserted ruin, Smyrna is still a large seaport with a present population of about 200,000.

The name of the city, Smyrna, means "myrrh," an ordinary perfume. It was also used in the anointing oil of the tabernacle, and in embalming dead bodies (cf. Ex. 30:23; Ps. 45:8; Song 3:6; Matt. 2:11; Mark 15:23; John 19:39). While the Christians of the church at Smyrna were experiencing the bitterness of suffering, their faithful testimony was like myrrh or sweet perfume to God. Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, [Online]

1. Salutation, (8)

 **INTERPRETATION:**

The Head of the Church

⁸ **"And to the angel (*lit. "messenger"* - possibly the pastor), of the church of in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last (eternal and divine [Isa. 44:6; 48:12]), who was dead, and came to life (the resurrected and exalted Lord Jesus Christ):**

F APPLICATION:

This verse brought tremendous encouragement to the persecuted church. There is more to life than the here and now. There is an eternal future awaiting those who follow Christ's example in martyrdom. They may lose their earthly life, but they will be resurrected to an eternal reward. Their persecution and possibly even their death is not **meaningless** nor is it **foolishness**. "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*" (Psa. 116:15)

2. Commendation, (9)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Hardships of the Church

⁹ “**I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds), **tribulation** (the intense pressure),⁹ **and poverty** (in material things and physical needs)¹⁰ (**but** [in contrast to your earthly poverty, spiritually], **you are rich** [in that you possess what matters the most¹¹]); **and I know the blasphemy** (the slander, lies, deceptions), **of those who say they are Jews** (Jewish believers), **and are not, but** (in reality), **are a synagogue** (an assembly), **of Satan**, (i.e., in their slanderous accusations against you, leading to your persecution, they fulfill the will of Satan and are thus his servants).

F APPLICATION:

An earthly "religion" is more attractive to a carnal heart than a heavenly walk! (Newell, *Revelation*, p. 44) Christianity isn't a religion; it's a relationship.

3. Exhortation, (10)

INTERPRETATION:

The Hope of the Church

¹⁰ “**Do not fear** (fear no-longer [Jn. 16:33]), **any of those things which you are** (presently suffering and are), **about to suffer**, (1 Cor. 10:13), **Indeed** (know for certain that), **the devil** (not Rome or unbelieving Jews - remember you wrestle not against flesh and blood [Eph. 6:12] but the devil), **is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested** (as Job and Simon Peter were tested -- this is an age old tactic), **and you** (now are his target and you), **will have tribulation** (tremendous pressures for), **ten days**, (it will be brief, but it will be intense). **Be faithful** (don't succumb under the pressure; even), **until death** (as I and My disciples were), **and** (in the end), **I** (Jesus Christ), **will** (personally), **give you the crown of life**.

F APPLICATION:

As Christians we must expect occasionally to be mistreated. There are many around us who despise our Lord. Because of this, they will "despitefully use us" (Matthew 5:44). Frequently we will undergo

⁹ **One**, because of Smyrna being Zealous in its worship of the emperor; marking all others who refused as rebels of Rome. **Two**, because the Smyrna believers would not worship other favorite pagan gods, e.g., Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, etc.. **Three**, because those who hated Jesus Christ and those who were associated with Him.

¹⁰ Many of the believers at Smyrna were slaves; most were destitute, Those few who had owned possessions had undoubtedly lost them in the persecution. (MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p. 76)

¹¹ e.g., salvation, refined faith, fruit of the Spirit, Christlikeness, etc. "There are both poor rich-men, and rich poor-men in God's sight" [TRENCH]. Jamieson; Fausset; and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Logos Research Systems, Inc.

ridicule, persecutions, afflictions, and trials for His name's sake. It is not easy to bear up under these trials. No one likes to be laughed at. No one likes to bear the heavy burden of illness, handicap, or lack of human love. Yet not only are we frequently called upon to bear these persecutions and trials, but we receive strength and comfort to complete the task, because the Bible says we will be rewarded for our faithfulness. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James 1: 12).

Yes, trials are to be expected, if we are living in Christ. Persecutions are a natural consequence of a consistent Christian witness. But we need not fear, for the Lord will reward those who are faithful in enduring such trials and persecutions. He promises us that it will be worth it all. The crown of life is only for those saints who are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.¹²

4. Promise, (11)

INTERPRETATION:

The Victors In the Church

¹¹ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches** (collectively). **He** (each and every individual), **who overcomes** (to him who does remain faithful even unto death), **shall not be hurt by the second death**, (eternal damnation in hell, [Rev. 20:14; 21:8]).” ’

F APPLICATION:

The supernatural battle in Smyrna was just one skirmish in the age-long war of Satan against God. It has always been Satan's plan to attack God's children and attempt to destroy their faith. That is why one of his titles in Scripture is the "accuser of [the] brethren" (12:10). His attacks on God's true children, however, cannot succeed. Jesus declared, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:28-29); and "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39). As their Great High Priest, Jesus is "able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). In Romans 8:28-29 Paul traces the unbreakable chain from fore-knowledge to predestination to calling to justification to glorification; no one is lost along the way. All who are called will be kept until they are made like Christ in glory.¹³

¹² Woodrow M. Kroll, *It Will Be Worth It All*, (NJ: Loizeaux, 1977), pp. 97, 98

¹³ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 77

C. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF PERGAMUM -- "COMPROMISE CAN COST YOU EVERYTHING!" (2:12-17)



Pergamum was located about 60 miles north of Smyrna and 15 miles from the coast. In 133 B.C. it became the capital of the Roman province of Asia and remained the seat of government for four centuries. The

city was the residence of princes, scholars, and priests. The municipal library contained 200,000 books. People assembled in Pergamum from distant places in order to worship Asklepios, the god of healing (represented in the form of a serpent); Zeus, chief of the Olympian gods; Dionysius, god of vegetation; and Athena, patron goddess of Athens. The city was also the center of the Caesar cult. The first temple for imperial worship was erected in 29 B.C. Other temples followed to honor Trajan and Severus.¹⁴

The church at Pergamum, like much of today's church, had failed to heed the biblical warnings against worldliness. Consequently it had drifted into compromise and was in danger of becoming intertwined with the world. That would be the next step in the downward spiral from the Ephesian church's loss of its first love for Jesus Christ.¹⁵

1. Salutation, (12)

📖 INTERPRETATION:

Salutation to the Church

¹² **“And to the angel** (*lit. "messenger"* - possibly the pastor), **of the church of in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He** (Jesus Christ; as Judge and Executioner), **who has the sharp two-edged sword** (*i.e., the Word of God which "...is living and powerful, ... piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Heb. 4:12)

2. Commendation, (13)

📖 INTERPRETATION:

Service of the Church

¹³ **“I know** (in detail), **your works** (your deeds),

Satan Around the Church

¹³ **“I know your works and** (am well aware of), **where you dwell** (your residence is), **where Satan’s throne is,** (Grand Central Station of pagan worship).

¹⁴ John L. Benson, *Revelation: The Grand Finale of History*, (CO: Accent, 1972), p. 15

¹⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 82

F APPLICATION:

Have you ever had the feeling of an evil presence? The Pergamum believers lived within the demonic stronghold where the authority and influence of Satan was at its strongest. The devil is the prince of this world and holds great power over it and its inhabitants (Eph. 2:2), and yet Christ did not want believers to be taken out of the world when they are saved, (Jn. 17:14-17). Jesus instead, endued the believer with the power of the Holy Spirit, who is far greater than the devil (1 Jn. 4:4), and He promised the believer that He **"would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it,"** (Mat. 16:18).

The Steadfastness of the Church

¹³ **"And** (yet despite Satan's influence), **you hold fast** (you remain true), **to My name, and did not deny My faith** (you did not renounce your faith in Me), **even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you** (for his faith in Me), **where Satan dwells**, (the roaring lion, **"walking about, seeking whom he may devour"** [1 Pet. 5:8]).

F APPLICATION:

"No believer is responsible for being in the world, but we are responsible for our attitudes toward the world. A man may own much property and yet be heavenly-minded, while another may lack title even to a grain of sand and yet mind earthly things."¹⁶ The Pergamum believers lived right in the devil's lair and faithfully kept and proclaimed the gospel of Christ. Most of us don't live anywhere near an environment that demonically intense, but are we just as faithful to the gospel?

3. Reproof, (14-15)

INTERPRETATION:

The Shortcomings of the Church

¹⁴ **"But** (in spite of your unwillingness to recant your faith), **I have a few things against you, because** (I cannot overlook the fact that), **you have there** (in your company), **those who hold the** (self-indulging and compromising), **doctrine** (teachings), **of Balaam** (a prophet for hire), **who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel**¹⁷(Num. 25; 31:16), **to eat things sacrificed to idols** (which they were commanded not to do in Acts 15:29), **and to commit sexual immorality.**

NOTES:

¹⁶ Barnhouse, Revelation, p. 53

¹⁷ During the Smyrna period, Satan sought to destroy the church by persecution. In the next three centuries he tried different tactics: he endeavored to ruin the testimony by worldly patronage from without and the introduction of false principles from within. Ironside, *Revelation*, p. 43.

Satan had not been able to destroy them by coming as the roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), but he was making inroads as the deceiving serpent. A group of compromising people had infiltrated the church fellowship, and Jesus Christ hated their doctrines and their practices. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*: Logos Library System.

¹⁵ “**Thus** (because of this compromise), **you also have those who hold the** (likeminded), **doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate**.¹⁸”

F APPLICATION:

Balaam had been guilty of counseling King **Balak** to cause Israel to **sin** through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship (cf. Num. 22-25; 31:15-16). Intermarriage with heathen women was a problem in Pergamum where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols.¹⁹

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, God commands that a believer not marry an unbeliever. There is a part of the believer that cannot be yoked together with the unbeliever. The believer is spiritually alive and the unbeliever is spiritually dead. In any marriage there is the danger of being led away from God and towards the world, but in a marriage between a believer and unbeliever from day one you start with one foot in the world.

4. Exhortation, (16)

INTERPRETATION:

The Sword at the Church

¹⁶ “**Repent** (stop doing what you know is wrong and do what is right), **or else I will come to** (i.e., against), **you quickly** (suddenly), **and will fight against them** (those who are practicing this doctrine, as well as the rest who are tolerating it), **with the sword of My mouth**, (I will judge and convict you according to the Word of God).

F APPLICATION:

If the church tolerates some kind of indisputable evil, other forms of evil that are related to it, will also show up. After this compromise is made, it is only a matter of time before a new compromise is introduced. It then will be tolerated with all of its forms. Eventually, the little leaven that was initially allowed, will leaven the entire church with sin, (1 Cor. 5:6, 7).

"Sinning believers should be made to feel miserable in the fellowship and worship of the church by being confronted powerfully with the Word of God. Neither is the goal of the church to provide an environment where believers feel comfortable; it is to be a place where they can hear the truth and be convicted of their sins so as to be saved (Rom. 10: 13-17). Gently (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26), lovingly graciously yet firmly unbelievers need to be confronted with the reality of their

¹⁸ The Nicolaitans derived their name from Nicholas, one of the seven men chosen to oversee the distribution of food in Acts 6. Whether he became an apostate (as some of the early church fathers believed) or the **Nicolaitans**, his followers, perverted his teachings is not known. Abusing the biblical teaching on Christian liberty, the **Nicolaitans** also taught that Christians could participate in pagan orgies. They seduced the church with immorality and idolatry. (MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 89)

¹⁹ Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Logos Library System.

sin and God's gracious provision through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Error will never be suppressed by compromising with it." ²⁰

NOTES:

5. Promise, (17)

INTERPRETATION:

The Spirit at the Church

¹⁷ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches. To him who overcomes** (to him who does remember, repent and puts an end to this compromising), **I** (Jesus Christ), **will** (personally), **give some of the hidden manna to eat**, (which those of the world cannot find and believers in love with the world cannot enjoy; the eternal and/or the more abundant life in Christ, [Jn. 6:33-35, 48-51]), **And** (in addition to that), **I will give him a white stone** (representing purity or victory), and on the stone a new name (qualitatively speaking, will be), written which no one knows except him who receives it.” ²¹

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D. CHRIST DESCRIBES THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA -- "CORRUPTION PAYS DOUBLE DIVIDENDS!" (2:18-29)

The longest message was sent to the church in the smallest city! Thyatira was a military town as well as a commercial center with many trade guilds, [founded by Seleucus, one of Alexander the Great's successors, as a military outpost in order to guard the north-south

²⁰ (MacArthur, *Revelation I-II*, p. 90)

²¹ According to the first interpretation the stone represents the person who receives it, just as in Israel the twelve tribes were represented by twelve precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:15-21). Now this stone is white. This indicates holiness, beauty, glory (Rev- 3: 4; 6:2). The stone itself symbolizes durability, imperishability. The white stone, therefore, indicates a being, free from guilt and cleansed of all sin, and abiding in this state for ever and ever. The new name written upon the stone indicates the person who receives the stone. It expresses the real, inner character of the person; his distinct, individual personality. Every one of the blessed is to have a particular and unique consciousness of that personality: a knowledge given to none but the recipient himself.

According to the second interpretation the pellucid, precious stone--a diamond?--is inscribed with the name of *Christ*. Receiving this stone with its new name means that in glory the conqueror receives a revelation of the sweetness of fellowship with Christ--in His new character, as newly crowned Mediator--a fellowship which only those who receive it can appreciate.

Let us not exaggerate the difference between these two views. On the basis of the first, the believer receives a new name, that is, a new relation to his Saviour revealed in a gloriously transformed character. On the basis of the second interpretation, Christ reveals His new name to the believer, especially in the hereafter. (Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, pp. 68-69, 71)

road]. Wherever guilds were found, idolatry and immorality—the two great enemies of the early church—were almost always present too.²²

Some forty miles south-east of Pergamum, a Lydian city on the edge of Mysia, under Rome since B.C. 190, a centre of trade, especially for the royal purple, home of Lydia of Philippi (Acts 16:14f.), shown by inscriptions to be full of trade guilds, Apollo [*the sun god*], the chief deity with no emperor-worship, centre of activity by the Nicolaitans with their idolatry and licentiousness under a “prophetess” who defied the church there.²³

Despite the clear biblical teaching to the contrary, churches throughout history have tolerated sin, following a pattern like the Thyatiran congregation, whose members were engaging in both spiritual and physical adultery. Through the insidious efforts of a false teacher, those sins had become pervasive in the church at Thyatira. The letter Christ addressed to its members was a sobering one, and marks a new phase in the letters to the seven churches. Commentator Charles Erdman offers this perspective on the place of this letter among the seven:

The letter to the church in Thyatira begins the second group of messages to the churches of Asia. In the first group, the church of Ephesus was characterized by loyalty to Christ which was lacking in love. In the church of Smyrna loyalty was tested by fire. In the church of Pergamum the loyalty was lacking in moral passion. Yet all three churches were true to the faith, and had not yielded to the assaults of evil.

In the case of the church at Thyatira, as of the churches in Saidis and Laodicea, the situation was far more serious. Here not merely a small minority was indifferent, but large numbers had actually yielded to the demoralizing influences of false teaching. (*The Revelation of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966], 56)

There is a progressive worsening in the character of these seven churches, as they depict becoming more and more influenced by evil. That downward spiral reached its lowest point at Laodicea.²⁴

1. Salutation, (2:18)

INTERPRETATION:

Christ in the Church

¹⁸ “**And to the angel** (lit., “messenger” - possibly the pastor), **of the church in Thyatira write: These are the things says the Son of God** (Jesus Christ, not just a human being, but deity as well. The God Man! [*“Son of God”* is only used here in all of

²² Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

²³ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Logos Library System.

²⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 95

Revelation]), **who has eyes like a flame of fire** (indicating the penetrating scrutiny or fierce judgment of Christ as Judge, [Rev. 1:14]), **and His feet like fine brass**, (Showing Christ to be strong and steadfast, supporting His own interest, subduing His enemies and those unfaithful to Him, -- Jesus is making it very clear to the church at Thyatira that He is their Creator and Judge, [Rev. 1:15]).

2. Commendation, (2:19)

INTERPRETATION:

Commendation to the Church

¹⁹ **I know** (in detail), **your** (four kinds of godly), **works**, (your agape), **love** (your inner decision, commitment to love -- your), **service** (the external manifestation of your love -- your), **faith** (your dependable, reliable, consistent faithfulness), **and your patience** (your habitual patient endurance), **and as for your works** (I know as well that), **the last are more** (numerous), **than the first**, (your love, faith, service and perseverance is stronger, more consistent and more evidenced than ever).

F APPLICATION:

It is interesting to note that "more praise is given in the case of Ephesus and Thyatira when blame follows than in the case of Smyrna and Philadelphia when no fault is found."²⁵ This would be a good principle for us to remember when dealing with our children, mates, friends, neighbors, etc.

3. Reproof, (2:20-23)

INTERPRETATION:

Corruption in the Church

²⁰ **Nevertheless** (despite how godly and profitable your deeds are), **I** (Jesus Christ, the Son of God), **have a few things against you** (I cannot overlook the fact that): **You allow** (tolerate), **that woman** (who is like), **Jezebel, who calls herself** (i.e., makes the claim that she is), **a prophetess**, (one who speaks on My behalf). **To teach and beguile** (mislead) **My servants** (believers in Me -- My bride), **to commit** (heresy such as), **sexual immorality** (infidelity), **and eat things sacrificed to idols**, (which I hate and have taught against [Act 15:29]).

F APPLICATION:

The church was permitting a false prophetess to influence the people and lead them into compromise. It is not likely that this woman was actually called "Jezebel," since such an infamous name would not be given to a child. The name is symbolic: Jezebel was the idolatrous

²⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Logos Library System.

queen who enticed Israel to add Baal worship to their religious ceremonies (see 1 Kings 16–19). The seductive teaching of Jezebel was similar to the “doctrine of Balaam” that the Lord condemned in the church of Pergamos (Rev. 2:14). She taught believers how to compromise with the Roman religion and the practices of the guilds [leaders of trade industry], so that Christians would not lose their jobs or their lives.

It is interesting to contrast the churches at Ephesus and Thyatira. The Ephesian church was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers; while the people in the assembly at Thyatira were growing in their love, but too tolerant of false doctrine. Both extremes must be avoided in the church. “Speaking the truth in love” is the biblical balance (Eph. 4:15). Unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise are both hateful to God.²⁶

Chastisement in the Church

²¹ **And I** (as a gracious and merciful Savior), **gave her** (ample), **time to repent of her sexual immorality, and** (loving darkness rather than light), **she did not repent**, (she was unwilling to end her sinful teaching and practices to espouse true ones).

²² **"Indeed** (because of her unrepentance), **I** (as a holy and just Judge), **will cast** (or hurl), **her** (not out of a window as I did Jezebel, but), **into a sickbed** (a bed of disease and death signifying the anguish and judgment sin brings), **and** (I will cast as well), **those who commit adultery with her** (those who are following her doctrines), **great tribulation** (intense suffering from some torturous disease of the body leading to the torment of the soul [cf., 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Jn. 5:16]), **unless they** (her disciples), **repent of their deeds**, (her doctrines and practices in order to espouse God's true doctrine and practices).

²³ **"I will kill her children** (her disciples), **with death, and** (the judgment will be so profound that), **all the churches shall know** (shall be convinced), **that I** (the Son of God), **am He who searches** (follows up on, tracts down), **the minds and hearts**, (the hidden thoughts and affections of the soul, as well as a persons obvious actions). **And** (it will be known that), **I will give to each one of you according to your works**, (what you sow, you will reap -- Job 4:8b, *"...Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."* Hosea 10:12a, *"Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy..."*).

4. Exhortation, (2:24-25)

INTERPRETATION:

Constancy in the Church

²⁴ **"Now** (having warned the erring ones to repent), **to you** (who are not being misled), **I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have** (embraced), **this** (Jezebel's), **doctrine, who have**

²⁶ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System.

not known (or endeavored to know), **the depths** (the deep things), **of Satan, as they** (Jezebel and her disciples), **say**,²⁷ **I will put on you no other burden**, (as you have suffered from the consequences of the false teaching, immorality, solicitations and ridicule of Jezebel and her disciples already).

²⁵ “**But** (don't let your guard down though, or become proud), **hold fast** (don't lose your grip, as it won't be easy to maintain), **what you have** (the word of truth and the character of godliness -- remain true), **till I come**, (until you pass from this earthly world or I come to take you out of it, [i.e., the rapture of the church]).

5. Promise, (2:26-29)

INTERPRETATION:

Compensation for the Church

²⁶ “**And he who overcomes** (clings faithfully to what is true and pure), **and keeps My works** (My will, rather than Jezebel's, Satan's or anyone else's), **until the end** (of his life or until the moment of My coming), **to him** (the overcomer), **I** (the Son of God), **will** (personally), **give power over the nations**— (I will delegate to you positions of authority in My millennial kingdom, [Rev. 19:15; 20:4-6]).

²⁷ ‘**He** (Christ and the overcomers; in the millennial kingdom), **shall rule** (shepherd), **them** (the nations), **with a rod of iron** (a royal scepter signifying a rigorous rule, [Psa. 2:7-9]); **they** (the rebellious during this period), **shall be dashed** (easily), **to pieces like the potter's vessels** (during the millennial kingdom if rebellion should arise, and certainly at its conclusion with the rebellion that Satan instigates)’ — **as I also have received from My Father** (the saved believer in Christ, will "share in Christ's dominion over the nations--which Christ, in turn, had received from the Father"²⁸);

²⁸ “**and I** (Christ), **will** (not only share the authority of My royal scepter, but I will also), **give him** (the overcomer), **the morning star**, (I will share with him My royal splendor).

²⁹ “**He who has an ear** (he who truly is saved and whose mind is spiritually discerning), **let him hear** (pay attention and act on), **what the Spirit says to the** (seven), **churches.**”

F APPLICATION:

Three important truths stand out. First, this letter reveals the seriousness of practicing and tolerating sin, and that God will judge

²⁷ Those involved in cults often say that they have a special knowledge pertaining to the deeper, more mysterious things regarding the supernatural realm. But, in reality Satan is simply exercising his profound knowledge of man and his shrewd art of introducing error in order to lead people astray. Satan is the father of lies and it is lies that led a third of the angels to forsake God and follow him. It was his lies that led Eve to forsake God's command not to eat of the forbidden fruit in the garden. It was his lies that were causing the church of Thyatira to forsake God's true doctrine for that which was false.

²⁸ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 72

continued, unrepentant sin in the church. Second, a pattern of obedience marks true Christians. Finally God's gracious promise to His own is that, in spite of struggles with sin and error in churches, they will experience all the fullness of Christ as they reign with Him in His kingdom. Those churches, like Thyatira, who fail to heed the message will receive divine judgment; those who do heed its message will receive divine blessing.²⁹ We must remember that the Christian life is not a single battle, but a life long campaign.

Today the devil seems especially eager to dominate university and business life. He has his throne on many a campus and in many a corporation. Can [you] settle down in an environment where Satan rules and not surrender to his influence?

Yes. Many ... remained faithful to Christ although they lived in a place that was under the control of the devil. Noah stood alone at a time when virtually everyone else had capitulated to the world system.

The more hostile and subtle the world becomes, the nearer the child of God must draw to Christ. Christ alone can keep us unspotted from the world. When sin abounds, His grace much more abounds.

²⁹ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, P. 104

II. The vision of the seven churches, (2:1-3:22)

A. Christ describes the condition of the church of Ephesus, (2:1-7)

1. The churches commendation, (2:1-3)
2. The churches condemnation, (2:4-6)
3. The churches forewarning, (2:7)

1. Salutation, (1:1-3)

 INTERPRETATION:

2. Commendation, (1:1-3)

 INTERPRETATION:

3. Reproof, (1:1-3)

 INTERPRETATION:

4. Exhortation, (1:1-3)

 INTERPRETATION:

5. Promise, (1:1-3)

 INTERPRETATION:

 INTERPRETATION:

F APPLICATION:

 COMMENTARY: