Revelation Chapter 2

The Letters to the Churches

- In Revelation 1:19 John received his instruction from the Lord to ***write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.***

  - This instruction falls into three parts, the first of which takes place in chapter 1 . . . ***the things which you have seen***.

  - Now, in chapters 2-3 John is about to fulfill the second part of the command . . . ***to write the things which are***. The present tense indicates that the conditions in the churches that the Lord is about to reveal and describe were present at that moment in time.

- As we study chapters 2-3 and the condition in each of the ***seven churches***, there is some disagreement among scholars throughout history regarding how the Lord's messages to the churches should be understood.

  - We have already identified each of the ***seven churches*** as literal churches that existed in western Asia in the first century A.D. **But did the message apply <u>only</u> to those churches or did the Lord wish His messages to be applied to all churches?**

- The fact that the letters to these seven churches are included in the book of Revelation and the canon of Scripture indicates that the message to these churches was <u>not</u> for these churches only.

  - Just as Paul's rebuke of the Corinthian believers was intended to apply to all Christians, so the instruction to the seven churches in Revelation is intended for all churches, for all time.

  - But the big question is, when did each of these churches . . . in various states of faithfulness and unfaithfulness . . . exist.

- There are **three predominant views** regarding the application of the Lord's letters to the churches.

  - **First**, those who take **a very narrow literal view** of the Lord's instruction believe that the Lord's letters are **only** to the seven churches, but no others.

    - This view, while advocated by a small number, makes little sense. If intended to be only for the seven churches named, why include the letters in the book of Revelation, as John is instructed to do?

  - **Second,** there is the view that each of **the seven churches have existed sequentially throughout the church age**.

    - Using this view, the characteristics of the Ephesian church were dominant during a period in history, but would then give way to the next dominant church.

- If listed sequentially, then the church in Ephesus would have been the first century or early church, followed, after a time, by the church at Smyrna, then the church at Pergamum, and so on.

- The **third** view is that **all seven churches have existed, simultaneously, throughout church history**.

  - This view seems more likely as there have always been a range of church bodies throughout history, in varying degrees, ranging from faithful to unfaithful.

- Acknowledging that the original seven churches existed, it seems most likely that **characteristics** of each of the seven churches, positive and negative, were present in the seven churches the Lord addresses, but have remained present in all churches throughout the church age.

  - That is the reason the closing instruction to each of the seven churches closes with the statement, ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***. **In other words, "if the shoe fits . . ."**

Characteristics of the Letters to the Seven Churches

- As we examine the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3, a pattern emerges in the way the Lord addresses each church.

  - **First**, the Lord begins his address to each church with the statement, ***to the angel of the church at [city/church name] write . . .***

    - Notice that while the Lord is addressing the state of each church, He specifically addresses each letter to the representative of each church who will carry the message to their respective church bodies.

  - **Second**, the Lord then describes Himself as the speaker in a way that calls upon His description in chapter 1 and is unique to each church. No two descriptions is the same.

    - For example, to the church at Ephesus, the Lord says of Himself, ***the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:***

  - **Third**, the Lord then reminds his readers of His omniscience as He begins addressing each church. He begins the same way in each letter with the phrase, ***I know.***

    - The word the Lord uses is the word *oida*, which means to have an inherent knowledge that is immediately known and <u>not</u> acquired by learning. This statement expresses the Lord's full, immediate and comprehensive knowledge of all things. Nothing escapes His notice.

  - **Fourth**, the Lord then lists both the commendations and criticisms of each church.

- Interestingly, in his letters to the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia the Lord lists no faults or criticisms, while in his letters to the churches in Sardis and Laodicea the Lord gives no commendations, but lists only their faults and failings.

- **Fifth**, as I mentioned a moment ago, the Lord closes each letter with the admonition, ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

  - With this statement the Lord . . . and the Holy Spirit . . . are calling upon all believers to do a self-evaluation to see if there is anything praiseworthy or blameworthy in His instruction to that particular church.

- **Sixth**, the Lord closes each letter with a promise to those persevering, or **"overcoming"** believers in each church with a personalized positive exhortation and promise.

  - For example, to the church in Ephesus the Lord exhorts the believers there, ***to him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'***

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

- We now begin examining the Lord's instruction to the seven churches, beginning with His instruction to the church at Ephesus.

  Revelation 2:1-7— 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

What was distinctive about the city of Ephesus?

- Ephesus was a thriving seaport and metropolis on the western coast of modern-day Turkey at the end of the first century A.D.

  - Commercially, it was the largest city in the Roman province because of its roads and port.

  - Ephesus was at the western end of the Spice and Silk Road from Asia and Arabia. because it was

- Large crowds were attracted to Ephesus by its annual athletic games.

- Ephesus was the location of the Temple of Artimus (Greeks) or Diana (Romans). This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world because of its massive size.

    - Religious and commercial life revolved around the worship of the Greek goddess Artimus. As we learn in Acts 19:24, Paul was attacked by the Demetrius the silversmith because he was destroying the trade in silver shrines of the Temple of Artemis by his preaching of the gospel.

- The population was diverse and was made up of the original native western Asians, Greeks, and a substantial Jewish population.

- Paul had a close relationship with this church, as he spent 3 years teaching in the school of Tyranus during his third missionary journey.

    - In addition, other significant people from the book of Acts settled in Ephesus, including Priscilla & Aquila, Apollos, Timothy and the apostle John.

- 40 years passed from the founding of the church by Paul to the writing of Revelation.

- Over the centuries, silt from the local river caused the shoreline at Ephesus to recede 1 mile, leading to the death of their port and their commerce. Today ancient Ephesus is nothing more than a collection of ruins. The city is no longer occupied.

<u>Attributes of the speaker</u>

- The letter to the Ephesians begins in v. 1 . . .

v. 1— The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

    - This description of Christ comes from John's vision in Chapter 1:13, with the difference being that here Christ is seen in this passage **firmly holding *the seven stars*** and He is **walking among** the ***seven golden lampstands.***

    - The term ***hold*** (Gr. *krateō*) does not mean to hold in an open hand, but "to firmly hold or possess," just **as a bank "holds" a mortgage** and ownership of a house until the mortgage is paid off.

        - This term, ***hold***, is used to describe "sovereign authority and control." Note that this sovereign ***hold*** is not over just the ***star*** of Ephesus, but over **all *the seven stars***. This is a statement and reminder that **Jesus Christ is sovereign over the churches**.

    - Second, the description of Jesus being ***the One who walks among the seven gold lampstands*** is a statement regarding the Lord's active watching and engagement with the seven churches. Jesus is not a dispassionate or uninvolved observer. On the contrary, Jesus is intimately involved in every aspect of all the saints in the **seven churches.**

Commendation to the Church

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

- As a reminder, in the opening phrase, the word ***know***, the Greek word *oida*, expresses the Lord's self-claim of complete and perfect knowledge of each church in each of the seven messages. This repeated statement, ***I know***, emphasizes the omniscience of Christ.

- And the thing the Lord ***knows*** is ***your deeds***. This is a phrase the Lord uses in addressing several of the churches (2:19; 3:1, 8, 15).

    - In the context of this letter, this phrase refers to **good works**.

First Commendation— *I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance*

- In His **first commendation** to the Ephesian church, the Lord tells them that the **good works He knows** are ***your toil and perseverance***. It is interesting to note that in the King James Version the three descriptive terms ***deeds, toil and perseverance*** are translated ***works, labor and patience***. So let's examine each word.

    - The NASB word for ***deeds*** is the Greek word *ergon*, which means "that which one undertakes to do." Thus the difference in translation between ***deeds*** and ***works.***

    - The NASB word for ***toil*** is the Greek word *kopos*, which means "to labor or work to the point of exhaustion."

    - The NASB word for ***perseverance*** is the Greek word *hupomonē*, meaning "a patient frame of mind" or "endurance or perseverance that comes from a steadfast spirit."

    - So, here in v. 2 the Lord is commending the Ephesians for both their **outward work . . . their *toil***, and their **inward strength . . . their *perseverance***.

        - Specifically, the ***toil*** the Ephesians were engaged in was the work of spreading the gospel message. At the same time, their ***toil*** in spreading the gospel was being accomplished with ***perseverance*** . . . they were steadfast in work, despite the great opposition they faced. They were faithful servants of the gospel, remaining faithful in the face of opposition.

    - We see a similar description of such faith work in spreading the gospel in Paul's salutation to the Thessalonians. In fact, Paul uses the same three Greek words, *ergon, kopos and hupomonē,* in commending the Thessalonians. But notice in Paul's use that his commendation is for the Thessalonians' ***work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope*** . . .

      1 Thessalonians 1:2-4— 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

- **This was high praise for the Ephesian church**

Second Commendation— *you cannot endure evil men and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles.*

- In His second commendation the Lord tells the Ephesians that ***I know . . . that you cannot endure evil men.***

    - This statement points to their **spiritual discernment** in refusing to accept or tolerate bad people. In context, ***evil men*** refers to those professing Christians who does not live up to proper standards.

    - Remember, Ephesus was a deeply pagan and immoral society and some professing Christians may have had difficulty separating from their previous lifestyles.

    - With this statement it appears the church practiced church discipline and was committed to removing those in their congregation who failed to repent of their immorality.

- In addition to those who were living immorally, the phrase ***you put to the test those who call themselves apostles*** is a reference to the fact that there were some self-proclaimed apostles who sought to insert themselves and influence the church as leaders and teachers.

    - The problem of false teachers and false teaching encroaching into the church has been a problem since the very start of the church age. Knowing he can't defeat Christ, Satan seeks to deceive men and women into denying or perverting the gospel so that the truth of the gospel message is lost.

    - In his first epistle, knowing that false teaching was already a problem in the church, the apostle John gives this instruction to the Ephesian church in **1 John 4:1 . . .**

      1 John 4:1— Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

    - The Lord's message to the Ephesian church is the same as John's . . . ***test, or put to the test, those who claim to be leaders and teachers to see whether they are from God***.

Question: How do we ***test the spirits*** or ***put to the test those who claim to be*** teachers of God's word?

    - As John says in 1 John 4:2-3 . . .

      1 John 4:2-3— 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

- The most common heresies deal with the deity of Christ. But other tests of orthodoxy are also important to determining if a teacher is teaching the truth or heresy.

Third Commendation— *you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.*

- In v. 3 the Lord reiterates his previous commendation concerning the ***work, labor and steadfastness*** of the Ephesian church

  - Here in v. 3 the Lord specifically commends the Ephesian church for their labor ***for My name's sake***. In other words, the Lord knows that despite ***toiling*** to the point of weariness, they had not grown weary. They remained faithful to the work of spreading the gospel message.

The Lord's criticism of the Ephesian church

v. 4— But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

- With verse 4, the tone changes from commendation to one of condemnation. Remember, this letter is written at least 40 years after the founding of the Ephesian church, so **the first generation of the church had now given way to the second and third generation of Ephesian Christians**, who were now the majority.

  - The ***love*** that had characterized the church at its inception by Paul, Timothy and John was, apparently, no longer present. There were, perhaps, a greater number of unregenerate members within this church that resulted in the indictment that ***you have left your first love***.

  - The word ***left*** is the Greek word *aphiēmi*. This word is an intensive word . . . a word of strong emotion and adamant action. In the Greek culture the word *aphiēmi* was used to describe the harsh action of a man divorcing his wife.

    - The use of this word, *aphiēmi*, indicates that the Ephesians had not merely "drifted" away from Christ, but had pushed Him away.

- From the Lord's commendations in v. 2-3 there is no doubt that there were many genuine believers still in the Ephesian church. But His strong condemnation for the loveless faith of the church brings into question the faith of many who professed faith based solely upon their embracing of orthodoxy doctrine.

  - The Lord's point here is that there is more to genuine faith than believing sound doctrine. A regenerated man will have an unquenchable fire in his heart for Christ and those who belong to Christ.

- John Calvin states in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that it is possible to have faith without having saving faith. The faith of unregenerate men is a faith based upon an intellectual understanding in doctrinal truth, but not based upon a regenerated soul.

- Such an unregenerated faith is described by the Lord in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3-9 . . .

  Matthew 13:3-9— 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

- Notice that while 2 of the 3 seeds grow for a time, they do not possess the depth of soil to grow to maturity. Their initial growth is unsustainable and they eventually wither and die.

  - So it is with professing Christians who appear, for a time, to possess genuine faith. But because their faith has no depth of soil . . . because they are <u>not</u> nurtured by the Holy Spirit . . . they eventually wither and die.

  - Think about that! 2 of the 3 seeds that grow for a time eventually wither and die. Only 1 of the 3 seeds that begins to grow actually grows to maturity. 2 of the 3 seeds that initially grow eventually die before reaching maturity. Those are terrible odds! And I would venture to say that in the professing church in America today that those odds are, in fact, much worse than 1 in 3.

- **Many in this church were genuinely converted**, as noted in their present works (v. 2-3), but here in v. 4 **the Lord is calling many others to awaken from their spiritual slumber**, which would result in a renewed love for Him and toward their fellow brethren.

The Lord's Warning to the Church in Ephesus

v. 5— Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

- Then, having commended and criticized the church in Ephesus, in v. 5 the Lord issues the Ephesian church 3 exhortations, followed by a warning. The 3 exhortations of the Lord are given in the form of **commands** to ***remember, repent*** and ***do . . . remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.***

  - The first command, to ***remember***, is a command to hearken back to the time when the church was founded. This command to ***remember*** assumes that they were not ignorant of the church's previous position in the first place . . . a position from which they had ***fallen***.

  - The use of the **perfect tense** in the verb phrase ***you have fallen*** reflects the fact that their fallen state, which began as a previous event, was still present in them. They **<u>had</u> fallen and presently <u>remained</u> fallen**.

- The purpose of **remembering** was to call to their remembrance the manner in which the church was founded. The command to ***remember*** assumes that they had knowledge of their things the Lord is calling to their remembrance.

- By **remembering *from where you have fallen***, the Ephesians would then be able to call to mind the previous behavior of the church and ***repent and do the deeds you did at first.***

- The second command, to ***repent*** (Greek: *metanoeō*), is a call to decisively change one's attitude with a resulting change in actions.

- The urgency to obey this command to ***repent*** should follow with a **return** to their first works.

- The final command, to ***do the deeds you did at first***, is a call to return to the works that first demonstrated their love of Christ.

- The implication is that **their present works were less motivated by love** and more from inferior motives. Christ is calling this church to action, prompted by love that they, as a church, had formerly known.

The Lord's Warning of the Consequence of non-repentance

- Then, having exhorted the Ephesian church to ***remember*** and ***repent and do***, the Lord then warns of the consequences of failing to obey His command . . . ***or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.***

- In the phrase, ***or else I am coming to you***, is problematic. Is this a reference to the Lord's Second Coming or is it a warning of Him coming to discipline them for disobedience?

- The answer to this question lies in understanding the warning. If the Ephesian church fails to obey the Lord's commands to ***remember, repent and do***, wouldn't the Lord's Second Coming be a reward and not a form of discipline? It seems so.

- Instead, it seems that the warning that He will ***come to you and remove your lampstand*** is a warning that failure to obey the Lord's command **will result in the destruction of the church**.

- But, you may ask, **why would the Lord destroy one of His churches???**

- The only reason the Lord would destroy one of His churches is because that church was no longer a church. Remember, a church is not a building. A church is a body of believers. And **if there were no longer believers present in Ephesus, that church body would cease to exist, whether the building remained standing or not.**

- In the warning that Christ ***will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent*** is in keeping with the eschatological nature of this book. The warning is for those who refuse to repent and thus prove themselves to be unbelievers and would enter the tribulation.

- Some early church fathers say that the Ephesian church did repent and turned back to the Lord. The fact that this church, and the city of Ephesus, no longer exists today does not signify that they eventually fell away.

    - The warning, however, remains in effect for all churches that act in the same way.

An Additional Word of Commendation

- Then, following His warning in v. 5, in v. 6 the Lord adds another commendation to the Ephesian church. ***Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.***

- This verse is very problematic because scholars cannot agree regarding the identity of ***the Nicolaitans***. **Who are the Nicolaitans?**

    - Some, including Iranaeus, believe that the Nicolaitans were named after Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the original seven deacons selected by the apostles in Acts 6:5. Others have suggested that some other man named Nicolaus was the founder of the movement. We don't know for sure.

    - It is generally believed that the Nicolaitans were a sect of licentious antinoimian Gnostics. As such, the Nicolaitans believed that indulging the desires of the flesh were permitted by God's grace.

    - Tom Pennington points out that "Victorinus, the first commentator on Revelation, writing around 270 A.D., said this of the Nicolaitans, "They were false and troublesome men, who as ministers under the name of Nicholas, had made for themselves a heresy to the effect that, **what had been offered to idols might be eaten, and that whoever should have committed fornication might receive peace on the eighth day." In other words, eight days later, you're good, God will forgive you, you move on.**

    - That sounds very much like the Roman Catholic practice of **confession**. You confess your sins to the priest, as penance he assigns you to say "10 hail Marys" and "10 Our Fathers" and the slate is wiped clean. No repentance required. Nice and easy forgiveness.

    - Scholars also believe that the Lord's reference to the ***Balaamites*** in Revelation 2:14-15 is a reference to the ***Nicolaitans***. Like the Nicolaitans, the Balaamites were guilty of committing the acts of Balaam, leading the people into immoral and licentious living.

- It is significant and commendable to the Ephesian church that they ***hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which [the Lord] also hate***.

    - Two things should be noted here. **First**, the Lord commends the Ephesian church for their **hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also hates.** The word ***hate* is a strong word**. The Greek word *miseō* literally means "to strongly detest" or "to bear ill will."

    - **Secondly**, and importantly, it is not the ***Nicolaitan* people that the Lord and the Ephesian church *hate*, but their *deeds***.

- But, **importantly, this is <u>not</u> a case of "love the sinner, but hate the sin." This is a case of "call the sinner to repentance because he is condemned if he remains in his sin." And there is a very big difference between those two statements.**

- It is also important to see that **the Lord does not wink at sin and say, "well, you tried your best."** No, the Lord ***hates*** **the deeds of sinners and His wrath abides on those who remain in their sin, even as He calls sinners to repentance.**

A Call to Spiritual Discernment

- Finally, in v. 7 the Lord closes His letter to the church in Ephesus with the exhortation . . . ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***
- We will see this same closing exhortation from the Lord in all seven of His letters to the churches.

  - Notice that this exhortation is to ***hear what the Spirit says <u>to the churches</u> . . .***plural. Not ***what the Spirit says to the church***, but to the ***churches***.

  - In other words, all who read this letter, Ephesians and everyone else, are exhorted to **hear and heed** the commendations and criticisms to this and to the other six churches. There is a lesson in the Lord's letters for every Christian.

Promise to the overcomers

- And, finally, the Lord closes this letter to the church in Ephesus with the exhortation . . . ***To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'***

- In the phrase, ***to him who overcomes***, the Greek word for ***overcome*** is *nikaō*, meaning "to conquer or overcome." The use of the word ***overcomes*** denotes someone who is an "overcomer."

  - In the context of Revelation, the term "overcomer" is a term that is applicable to <u>all</u> believers. **Overcomers are believers.**

- The reference to ***the tree of life*** hearkens back to Genesis 2:9 and 3:22 and anticipates Revelation 22:2, 14.

  - Original sin barred man from ***the tree of life*** and "overcoming" sin restores man's right to eat from the ***tree of life*** **and thus live forever**.

- The phrase, ***I will grant***, signifies God's gift of giving of His own accord and good will.

  - This promise, like all the other promises to the ***overcomer*** looks forward to the future Millennial Kingdom and the New Jerusalem of Revelation chapters 20-22. <u>Never</u> is the ***overcomer*** called upon to anticipate the coming judgment of God's wrath in chapters 4-19.

- The reference to ***the Paradise of God*** is the place where the ***tree of life*** stands. Two other New Testament uses of the phrase (Luke 23:43 and 2 Corinthians 12:4) show it to be a name for "the abode of God," a permanent home of the redeemed with Christ.

- As we go through the Lord's letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3 we will see a different promise from the Lord to the **overcomers**, emphasizing various aspects of the reward that awaits the ***overcomers*** **who persevere in faith.**

Discussion Questions:

- Where would you put the church in Ephesus on the spectrum of **faithful—unfaithful**?
- What sort of actions or attitudes would fall into the category of "having left your first love"?
- Have you ever seen this sort of attitude in a church? What happened over time, did it get better or worse? Why?

Revelation 2:8-11
Smyrna—The Persecuted Church

- The Christian church is the most persecuted religious group in history. And while we might not realize it, living here in the relative security of the United States, the Christian church has never been more persecuted by the world than it is today. More Christians are being martyred for Christ in our generation than at any other time in history.
    - While we live in the relative safety of the United States, our brethren in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa are being persecuted and killed by Muslims at an unprecedented rate.
    - Christian persecution has become so severe that President Trump has warned the Nigerian government that it must rein in the persecution or the United States will intervene, militarily.
    - But in other countries around the world . . . India, Pakistan, China, Egypt, Turkey . . . virtually every country in the world, Christian persecution is growing worse.
    - And there is coming a day, maybe very soon, when persecution and martyrdom of Christians will reach our country.

- As we read the Lord's letter to the church in Smyrna we are reading a letter to a church that had come under severe persecution in the first century A.D.

- The Lord begins His letter to the church in Smyrna in the same way He begins all seven of His letters in chapters 2 and 3 . . . ***And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:***

What was significant about Smyrna?

- Of the seven cities and churches addressed in Revelation, only the city of Smyrna still exists. The city has been renamed **Izmir** and is the third largest city in Turkey, with a population of 3 million.

- And of the seven churches addressed in Revelation, only the church in Smyrna . . . Izmir . . . still exists.

- The word ***Smyrna*** means "bitter." The meaning of the word ***Smyrna*** increases the significance of the name, given the martyrdom for which these believers were destined.

- Located 35 miles north of Ephesus, the city is located on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. It had a large port and was a wealthy old, beautiful city.

  - It began as a colony of Greece sometime before 1000 B.C., but was destroyed around 580 B.C. The ancient city lay in ruins for 300 years, until Alexander the Great decreed the city be rebuilt. The city's reconstruction was completed in 290 B.C.

  - Smyrna became one of the great cities in that part of the world. During the first century A.D. Smyrna was a center of pagan worship, where the temples to Zeus, Apollo and Aphrodite were located.

  - The leadership in Smyrna was politically astute to recognize the growing influence and power of the Romans and committed to becoming an ally of Rome. Their decision to build a temple to Emperor Tiberius and the first city to worship the Roman Emperor solidified their alliance and favor with the Roman Empire.

- Because of their strong support of Rome, when Emperor Domitian ascended to power in 81 A.D., he instituted a requirement that every citizen was to go to the temple of the Roman Emperor and burn incense and pledge allegiance to the Emperor. Once have completed this pledge, each citizen would be given a certificate. If a citizen was found without the certificate they were imprisoned and faced execution.
  - Once a citizen made the yearly sacrifice and pledge to the Emperor, they were free to worship any god they wished. But to fail to complete the required pledge to the Emperor was considered a capital offense.

  - So, Christians living in Smyrna were in a dangerous situation. Christians refused to burn incense and pledge "Caesar is lord." As a result, many Christians who were discovered to not have their certificate were imprisoned.

  - Because of their animosity toward the followers of Jesus Christ, the Jewish population in Smyrna reported Christians who did not have their certificate and often incited the local government to attack the.

- The founding of the church is not known. Since Smyrna was only 35 miles from Ephesus, it is very likely that the church in Smyrna was formed during Paul's three year stay at Ephesus.

- Then, having identified ***the angel of the church in Smyrna*** as the recipient of this letter, in v. 8 the Lord then identifies and describes Himself as the One sending the message . . . ***the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:***

- In the Lord's self-description, ***the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life***, several observations can be made.

- **First**, the phrase ***the first and the last*** **refers to the deity of Christ** and emphasizes **the Lord's eternality**. In addition, since Smyrna was one of the centers of pagan religion, the phrase, ***the first and the last*** emphasizes that **He is first. He existed before any of the pagan gods existed and He will still be on His throne when all the world's idols are shattered and lie as dust.**

  - The phrase, ***the first and the last***, is also a phrase God uses of Himself in Isaiah . . .

    Isaiah 41:4— "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.'"

    Isaiah 44:6— "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.

    Isaiah 48:12— "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.

- **Second**, the second part of the phrase, ***who was dead, and has come to life***, **refers to and emphasizes the humanity of Christ.**

  - In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus entered into His creation as a man. And as a man He suffered the pain of the worst possible physical death, but victoriously arose in His resurrection to glory.

- To the church in Smyrna, the statement that He ***was dead, and has come to life*** is a reminder that, like many of them, Jesus was persecuted to death, but was resurrected to eternal life . . . just as they will be.

- In v. 9-10 we have the body of the Lord's letter to the church in Smyrna . . . 9 ***'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*** 10 ***'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

  - It is important to note that **of the letters to the seven churches, the church in Smyrna is one of the two churches that receives only commendation and no criticism from the Lord.**

- The Lord begins his commendation of the church in Smyrna with the statement . . . ***I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) . . .***

  - The Greek word for ***tribulation*** is *thlipsis*, meaning "distress" or "affliction." ***Tribulation*** can refer to the pressure of a trial that **can come in many forms, such as emotional distress, sickness or persecution.**

  - In the New Testament the term ***tribulation*** is most frequently associated with the distress that comes with **persecution.**

- And the ***tribulation*** that the church in Smyrna was suffering from was religious **persecution**, for several reasons.

  First, they were being persecuted by the government for disloyalty because they refused to worship the emperor.

  Second, they were being persecuted by the Gentiles as atheists because they didn't participate in the pagan religions of the region.

  Third, they were being persecuted by the Jewish community because the Jews thought them to be blasphemers because the Christians said that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and the Jews rejected Christ.

  Fourth, they were being persecuted because neither the Jews nor the Gentiles understood their Christian beliefs.

  - The Christians were accused of being cannibals because during their celebration of the Lord's Table they said that they were symbolically eating the Lord's flesh and drinking His blood.

  - The Christians were accused of immorality and incest because they greeted one another with a holy kiss and referred to one another as "brother" and "sister."

  - For these many reasons the Christians in Smyrna were easy and convenient targets of those who wished to discredit and persecute them.

- In addition to ***knowing their tribulation***, in v. 9 the Lord also tells the church in Smyrna that ***I know your poverty (but you are rich).***

  - One of the major problems the early church faced in every city in which they lived was **poverty as a result of being ostracized from society**. The Greeks and Romans rejected Christians because they didn't worship their pagan gods, and the Jews rejected the Christians because they believed they blasphemed against Judaism by worshipping the Messiah whom they had rejected.

  - Being marginalized or ostracized from society made day-to-day living difficult. No one would hire them. No one wanted to do business with them. They received few, if any, protections from the state, so they were easy and frequent targets for looters and government confiscation.

  - So, when Jesus says ***I know your poverty***, He is referring to the fact that these people were financially poor. **Many lived in extreme poverty**.

- But, despite the fact that they lived in extreme poverty, the Lord tells the church in Smyrna, ***but you are rich***.

  - The Lord's point and encouragement here is that **He knew their condition.** He knew of their poverty. But, the Lord assures the Christians in Smyrna that they were, in fact, **rich in their faith.** The fact that they were unwilling to compromise their faith for the sake of worldly comfort was **highly commendable**.

- How many people, if told that they simply had to say, "Caesar is lord" and would receive a job and enough pay to live comfortably would be willing to compromise their faith for the sake of physical security? Many, I'm sure. After all, it's easy to rationalize that "I don't really believe that Caesar is lord, so it doesn't count." But the Christians in Smyrna were unwilling to dishoror the Lord by compromising . . . even for the sake of their physical well-being. **And for this the Lord commends them highly.**

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

- Then, in a difficult and controversial statement in the second part of v. 9, the Lord adds . . . ***and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.***

  - The word ***blasphemy*** is the Greek word *blasphēmia*, meaning "to speak evil" or "to slander." This word is most frequently used to accuse those who **speak evil or falsely against God.** But it can also mean **"to speak evil or slanderously against other people."**

- As Matt taught us through the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, Jesus and the followers of Christ were constantly being accused of blasphemy by the Jews for teaching that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. To the unbelieving Jews such speech . . . that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah . . . was blasphemy . . . evil and slanderous speech against God.

  - In John 8:39-44 the Lord is teaching in the Temple. During the course of His teaching concerning the truth of who He is, the Jews angrily reject His teaching, proclaiming that they were the children of Abraham. We then read the Lord's response . . .

    John 8:39-44— 39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.

  - The Lord's point in John 8:44 is that while they claimed and believed that they were the spiritual children of Abraham, by their rejection of Jesus they were proving that they were the spiritual children of the devil.

  - The apostle Paul makes this same point in Romans 2:28-29 . . .

    Romans 2:28-29— 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

- The unbelieving Jews have always made the mistake of thinking that their salvation was based upon genetics . . . that having Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's DNA, they were spiritual children of Abraham. As the Lord and Paul teach, **being physical descendants of Abraham does not automatically make the Jews spiritual children of Abraham**. Salvation is not based upon genetics, but adoption by God and receiving the Holy Spirit.

- The Lord's point in Revelation 2:9 . . . and affirmed by Paul in Romans 2:28-29 . . . is that being a physical descendant of Abraham does not automatically make one a child of God.

  - A true Jew will not reject his or her Messiah. Therefore, because they rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah, those who reject Him are not spiritual Jews. They are merely physical descendants of Abraham.

  - That is why Jesus shockingly says of the Jews in Smyrna in Revelation 2:9 . . . ***those who say they are Jews and are not.***

- And because they are not spiritual Jews . . . because they are ***of their father the devil***, as the Lord declares in John 8:44 . . . the synagogue they worship in is **not a synagogue of Yahweh, but *a synagogue of Satan***.

- The tragedy for the Jews in Smyrna . . . and there was a large population of Jews living in Smyrna . . . is that while they thought they were defending the name of God by persecuting the followers of Christ, they were, in fact, doing Satan's work in persecuting the true children of God . . . the followers of the Jewish Messiah.

- In v. 9 the Lord tells the saints in Smyrna that He knows of their suffering. Then, in v. 10, the Lord tells them that **their suffering will continue . . . *'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

- It is a natural human reaction to fear that which is painful and unpleasant. But here in v. 10 the Lord exhorts the saints in Smyrna to **fear not**.

  - The statement to ***do not fear what you are about to suffer*** is more than an exhortation . . . it is a command. **But how can we obey a command to not do something that is a physiological response?** Fear is a physiological response to something that is unexpected and frightening.

  - **If you startle a small child, what does that child do?** They stand still and begin crying, because that is a physiological response to something frightening.

  - **What do adults when they encounter something terrifying?** They cry out, they often instinctively cover their faces and are frozen in place, immobilized by fear. People who suddenly encounter something terrifying are unable to move, because their fear immobilizes them.

- But here in v. 10 the Lord commands the saints in Smyrna, ***do not fear what you are about to suffer.*** **So, how could they obey this command?**

- An interesting thing about our response to frightening situations. We are much less capable of processing and responding to frightening events when they are sudden and unexpected. But if we have time to mentally prepare for fearsome events, we are capable of responding in a way that prevents the normal physiological response.

- That is what the Lord is doing here. He is telling the saints in Smyrna to mentally and spiritually prepare themselves for worsening persecution, so that when persecution arrives at their door, they will be able to respond appropriately.

- Preparation and anticipation of coming persecution is a frequent message in the New Testament. And we learn in the New Testament that our suffering is not an accident or unexpected. The persecution, trials and suffering that come upon us are **according to the will of God.**

  - For example . . .

    1 Peter 4:19— Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

    1 Peter 2:21— For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps

    1 Peter 3:17— For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

    Philippians 1:29— For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake

  - Suffering and affliction are part of God's process of sanctification. It is through suffering and affliction that we are being transformed, even though we don't understand how. We can only trust in the Lord that He has only the best intended for His own.

  - And because the Lord is telling them in advance that the suffering and persecution will continue, the saints in Smyrna were able to prepare themselves for the difficulty to come.

- Then, having prepared them for continued and worsening persecution, the Lord then says something significant in v. 10 . . . ***Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested . . .***

  - Notice here in v. 10 who it is that is persecuting the church in Smyrna. The Lord tells them who the leader of the persecutors is. It is not the Romans or the Greeks or the Jews who is leading the attacks against them. ***Behold, <u>the devil</u> is about to cast some of you into prison***.

  - The word ***devil*** is the Greek word *diabalos*, meaning "the accuser" or "the slanderer."

  - The word *diabolos* is not a noun . . . it is not a name or person. The word *diabolos* is **an adjective**, meaning ***the devil*** . . . the slanderer . . . the false accuser . . . **is not who Satan is, it is what he does.**

- The word ***satan*** literally means "adversary." As our **adversary**, one of the things **the adversary does is act as a *devil* . . . as an accuser and slanderer.**

- And as the accuser of the brethren, ***the devil*** enlists the forces of the world to work for him against the children of God.

- So, as the Lord says in Revelation 2:10, while the Jews accused the Christians . . . while the government officials swept them up for not having their certificate of loyalty to the Emperor . . . while business refused to hire them or do business with them . . . all of them were working for their master . . . ***the devil***.

- So, when the Lord tells the saints in Smyrna that ***some of you are about to be cast into prison***, remember who it is that is persecuting them. **It is their adversary, the devil.**

- Next, the Lord adds a phrase that is difficult to interpret . . . ***and you will have tribulation ten days.***

  - The question here is, **is the Lord describing a literal 10 day tribulation or is He using symbolic language?**

- Over the centuries biblical scholars have put forth different views on the meaning of the ***ten days of tribulation***.

  - Some have expressed the view that ***ten days*** represents **10 periods of persecution under Roman emperors in the church age.** But there is no historical confirmation of such persecution.

  - Some have expressed the view that ***ten days*** is symbolic of **an indeterminate period of time.** But ***ten days*** seems like such a random way to express this.

  - Some have expressed the view that ***ten days*** represents **a brief time**. While ***ten days*** is brief, why not take it literally then? If it was 27 days, then why not say how long it would last?

  - Some have expressed the opinion that ***ten days*** represents 10 years. They why not say ***ten years***?

  - **The simplest answer seems the best.** ***Ten days*** literally means ***ten days***. Although the events that went on in Smyrna after they received this letter are unknown to historians, it seems likely that **there was a brief, but intense, *ten day* period of persecution that some in the church suffered.** And it is this brief period of persecution that the Lord is preparing them for here.

- By telling the saints in Smyrna exactly how long their period of brief, but intense persecution would last, this is also a reminder that ***the devil*** can only do what God permits him to do.

  - Just as **satan** was only permitted to afflict Job with disease, but not kill him, so **satan** is only permitted to inflict intense persecution on the saints in Smyrna for ***ten days***.

  - This is a reminder that God is sovereign. God ordains all events to accomplish the purpose He has ordained, and the ***devil*** can only do what God permits. No more and no less.

- The Lord then closes His instruction to the saints in Smyrna in v. 10 . . . ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

    - The grammatical construction of the Lord's command to ***be faithful*** literally means, ***keep being faithful***. It is a middle voice present tense command to **continue along the course of action you are currently on.**

    - And the phrase ***until death*** does not assume the saints in Smyrna would suffer death as a result of persecution. The command is that they **remain faithful for the rest of their lives, until they leave this world and go to be with the Lord.**

    - This command is not limited to the church in Smyrna. In fact, this command is a command that every Christian should obey. **Remain faithful for the rest of your life and the Lord will give you *the crown of life.***.

- In the phrase, ***the crown of life***, the word for ***crown . . .*** the Greek word *stephanos* . . . refers to the wreath made of laurel leaves that was awarded to winners in the athletic games in the first century.

    - But, unlike the athletic competitions the Greeks and Romans loved, the ***crown of life*** . . . the victor's crown . . . will be awarded to **all who complete the race, not just the first across the finish line.** This is what Paul means when he says in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 . . .

      2 Timothy 4:7-8— 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

- It is also significant to note in the Lord's promise . . . ***be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life . . .*** that **the *crown of life* is not earned by our merit, but is bestowed as a gift from the Lord.**

- Then, as He does in each of the seven letters to the ***seven churches***, the Lord ends this letter with the exhortation, ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***
    - Again, this exhortation is to **all who will read this letter**. While the specific message is to the saints in Smyrna, the lessons learned apply to every person who reads this letter.

- The Lord then closes this letter with the promise . . . ***He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.***

    - Once again, this promise is made to ***he who overcomes*** . . . ***"overcomers" . . .*** **are believers.**

    - In this promise there is an unfortunate loss in translation. In the Greek text the negative, ***will not***, is an emphatic double-negative. To paraphrase this promise using an emphatic would render this statement . . . ***He who overcomes absolutely can never be hurt by the second death.***

What is *the second death*?

- **Death is, literally, "separation."** In Genesis 2:17 God told Adam . . .

  Genesis 2:17— from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.

  - In the moment when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he was immediately separated from fellowship with God. He died, spiritually. And as a result, Adam died, physically, 935 years later. Though he was created to live forever, Adam suffered the **first death** as a result of his disobedience . . . **the first death is our physical death . . . the separation of our eternal soul from our physical bodies.**

- We learn about the ***second death*** in Revelation 20. Revelation 20:6 teaches that when the Lord returns, He will raise all unbelievers, from all time, and judge them and cast them into the Lake of Fire to suffer wrath for eternity. This is stated in Revelation 20:11-14 . . .

  Revelation 20:11-14— 11 And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

- Here in Revelation 2:11, when the Lord promises, ***he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death***, He is making an absolute promise that those who persevere in faith to the end of their lives have the promise that when they appear before Him, they will receive the ***overcomer's crown of life*** . . . eternal life with Him.

Question: It has been said that the persecuted church is frequently the purest in faith. Why is this?

Question: Can you think of some churches that fit the description of the church in Smyrna?

Question: What must this church have thought as they received this letter, to know that they were about to go through an intense period of testing?

Question: What encouragement do you glean from the Lord's message to this church?

Revelation 2:12-17

Pergamum—The Church of Indiscriminate Tolerance

- Pergamum is sometimes identified as "Pergamus." The city of Pergamum was located about 40 miles north of Smyrna and 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.

- The city's name means "citadel," which describes the city. The original city was built on a plateau which rose 1000 feet above the valley floor.

- The city of Pergamum was significant and famous for several reasons.

    - **Politically**, it was **a provincial capital of the Roman empire and the residence of the Roman Proconsul**, making it the most significant political city in the region.

    - **Academically**, Pergamum was the location of the second largest library in the ancient world, the Library of Celsus, which was second only to the Library of Alexandria. The library in Pergamum contained over 200,000 scrolls. The library in Pergamum was given by Marc Anthony to Cleopatra, who later moved the library's scrolls to Alexandria.

    - **Economically**, Pergamum was a significant city of commerce in the region. Because of the jealous rivalry between the library of Alexandria and the library of Pergamum, the Egyptians cut off the export of papyrus to Pergamum. So Pergamum had to come up with a new paper on which to write its scroll. The use of parchment, discovered centuries before but no longer used, was revived and the city became famous for the manufacture of parchment.

    - **Medically**, Pergamum was the location of one of the most significant hospitals in the region. One of the doctors who trained there, **Galen**, is second only to **Hippocrates** in fame in medical community of the ancient world.

    - **Religiously**, Pergamum was one of the great centers of Greek and Roman worship, containing the Temple of Zeus. As the provincial capital, it was also the center of the Roman Emperor worship described previously in Smyrna.

        - And being the most prominent Roman city in the region, Pergamum was the most prominent in the enforcement of Emperor Worship and the requirement that all citizens possess an annual certificate of fealty to the Emperor. Being the center of Emperor worship, Christians were at even greater risk than they were in Smyrna. The only thing that helped them was the larger size of the city made it somewhat easier to hide.

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

- The Lord begins His letter to the church in Pergamum in exactly the same way He begins His letters to the other six churches . . . ***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:***

- Then, the Lord proceeds to describe Himself as ***the One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this . . .***

    - The Lord's self-description looks back to the description of His glorified appearance in Revelation 1:16 . . . ***and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword***.

- The sword described here is a Thracian sword, which was large and was wielded in great sweeping blows. Its design enabled the warrior who wielded it to cut using both sides of the blade.

- Contextually, the Lord's description of Himself who ***has the sharp two-edged sword*** is significant because Pergamum was the seat of the Roman proconsul, and the proconsul's sword symbolized Roman authority over the region. By virtue of his position as proconsul in Pergamum, he was granted the "right of the sword," meaning he had the power to carry out capital punishment at will. But here the Lord Jesus declares that His own sword was greater in power and authority than the Roman empire or any other earthly power.

- In addition, because the Lord addresses **the church in Pergamum** in this way . . . ***out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword*** . . . this indicates the Lord's power and intent to defend His church from enemies, both inside and outside the church body. **In other words, He would come in judgment upon those who were corrupting the church.**

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Commendation of the church in Pergamum

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

- The Lord begins the body of His letter with His acknowledgement of their situation . . . ***'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is;***

  - With this expression the Lord tells the saints in Pergamum that he knows the dangerous circumstances they live in.

  - The phrase, ***Satan's throne***, refers to the fact that Pergamum was the **seat** of Roman authority, including the requirement of Emperor worship. Surrounding the Emperor worship was a special priesthood devoted to the Emperor and to the enforcement of Emperor worship by the citizens. This pagan priesthood was a Satanically-inspired menace to the existence of the church.

  - William Mounce writes, "As Rome had become the center of Satan's activity in the west, so Pergamum had become his throne in the east."

- Then the Lord proceeds to commend them . . . ***you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.***

  - The first phrase, ***you hold fast My name*** is in the **present tense**, literally meaning **"you are holding fast . . . and continue to firmly hold . . . My name."**

    - Because of the pressure to swear allegiance to and worship the Roman emperor, the saints in Pergamum were under constant threat to their financial and physical well-being. They knew that to worship the emperor was equivalent to denying Christ . . . and they ***were holding fast*** to their faith in Christ, even at the risk to their lives.

- The Lord then goes on to commend them for ***not denying*** **their *faith* in Christ, even during one particularly terrifying incident.** The Lord tells us what the incident was . . . that one of the saints in Pergamum, ***Antipas***, whom the Lord praises as ***My witness*** and ***My faithful one was killed among you***.

  - Other than the mention here of ***Antipas***, nothing more is known of this man or the events surrounding his martyrdom.

  - But, regardless of what we don't know about him, the name ***Antipas*** is now forever recorded in God's word of a ***witness*** for Christ and a ***faithful one***. **What greater legacy can a Christian have than to be praised by the Lord for His faithfulness unto death!**

- Having already stated that Pergamum was the location of ***Satan's throne***, the Lord then cites the location of the martyrdom of ***Antipas*** . . . ***where Satan dwells***. ***Antipas*** was a resident of Pergamum.

Christ's complaint against the church in Pergamum

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

- So far, the Lord's evaluation of the church in Pergamum has been positive. But in v. 14-15 the Lord tells the church in Pergamum that He has some criticisms that need to be corrected.

- In the phrase, ***but I have a few things against you***, the phrase ***a few things*** refers to two groups that had infiltrated the church and were being tolerated.

  - These two groups are identified as **those who held to the teachings of *Balaam*** (v. 14) and **those who held to the teaching of the *Nicolaitans*** (v. 15).

  - In v. 14 the Lord says what that one major problem is . . . ***you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.***

- The beginning of His criticism is the opening phrase, ***you have there***. This phrase indicates that these people . . . ***those who hold the teaching of Balaam***, were present in their congregation and were being tolerated.

  - The Lord's fault with the church was not their acceptance of the teaching or doctrine of Balaam, but, rather, their indifference to those within who were sympathetic to this false teaching.

  - It is important to note that in the Lord's criticism, ***you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam***, that the word ***some*** indicates that a minority of the church were actually embracing this false teaching. **The problem the Lord has is that the majority were tolerating and not removing this false teaching.**

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What was the teaching of Balaam that the Lord hates so much?

- Balaam is a somewhat mysterious character who appears in Numbers chapters 22-25. Balak, the King of Moab, was concerned about the approaching Israelite nation on his border and paid Balaam to come and curse the Israelites. And though he tried on three occasions, God did not permit Balaam to curse Israel, but instead blessed Israel.

    - When he saw that God would not permit him to curse Israel, Balaam advised Balak that he could curse Israel another way . . . by causing them to commit acts of immorality with the Moabite women and to commit idolatry by worshipping the Moabite gods. Balak took Balaam's advice and that is exactly what the Israelites did, as we read in Numbers 25:1-2 . . .

      Numbers 25:1-2— While Israel remained there at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

    - And as a result of the seduction of the Moabites, God caused a plague to come upon the people and 24,000 Israelites died.

- For the church in Pergamum, the Lord's denunciation of them was for tolerating those in their congregation who participated in the pagan practices ***to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality***.

    - What this minority group in the church at Pergamum were advocating was a form of **antinomianism**. Antinomianism is the doctrine that teaches that since Jesus Christ has covered all the sins of His people with His sacrifice on the cross, we can sin all the more and there is no penalty or condemnation.

    - The form of antinomianism some in the church at Pergamum were advocating was nothing more than doctrinal compromise. They attempted to say that participating in the pagan temple worship and immorality meant nothing to them, they really were demonstrating themselves to be cowardly. By "fitting in" to society, they were trying to hide their Christianity so that they would not be discovered.

    - It is also very likely that these compromisers were also pledging support to the Emperor in order to get their certificate and thus avoid persecution.

- Then, in v. 15 the Lord also specifies another form of spiritual compromise these people were engaged in . . . ***'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***

    - This heretical group, ***the Nicolaitans***, is first mentioned by the Lord in His letter to the Ephesian church. As I mentioned then, ***the Nicolaitans*** were a sect of licentious antinomians who advocated for participation in sinful activities because "the sin debt has already been paid."

    - Tom Pennington points out that "Victorinus, the first commentator on Revelation, writing around 270 A.D., said this of the Nicolaitans, "They were false and troublesome men, who as

ministers under the name of Nicholas, had made for themselves a heresy to the effect that, **what had been offered to idols might be eaten, and that whoever should have committed fornication might receive peace on the eighth day." In other words, eight days later, you're good, God will forgive you, you move on.**

- That sounds very much like the Roman Catholic practice of **confession**. You confess your sins to the priest, as penance he assigns you to say "10 hail Marys" and "10 Our Fathers" and the slate is wiped clean. No repentance required. Nice and easy forgiveness.

- Then, having rebuked the church in Pergamum for their tolerance of ungodliness, in v. 16 the Lord issues the required corrective action . . . ***'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.***

- The church in Pergamum already knew that the things this minority of people was doing was sinful. They knew the story of Balaam. They knew what the Nicolaitans advocated.

  - As with any sinful behavior, the only remedy is **repentance**. They had to stop what they were doing . . . **tolerating sin** . . . and do what they knew needed to be done . . . **remove sin from the church.**

- In v. 16 when the Lord warns the church in Pergamum that **they must *repent, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth***, this threat serves as a warning to <u>the entire</u> church.

  - For those who were guilty of following the evil teachings of ***Balaam*** and **Nicolaus and did not repent,** they would be judged for their <u>actions</u>.

  - For those members of the church in Pergamum who <u>allowed</u> **and did not repent of their inaction**, they would be judged because they <u>failed to act</u> in opposing these destructive heresies.

- The destructive nature of the actions of the church at Pergamum are reminiscent of the actions, or inactions, of the church in Corinth when they failed to discipline one of their members who was committing incest.

  - As Paul warns the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 . . .

    1 Corinthians 5:6-7— 6 Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened.

- It's interesting to note that the problem with the church in Pergamum was exactly the opposite of the church in Ephesus.

  - **Ephesus practiced discipline but had lost their first love for Christ. Pergamum still was committed to Christ, but failed to faithfully discipline false teachers and sinning members.**

- Then, following His command to ***repent***, the Lord issues a warning to those who fail to obey this command . . . ***'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.***

    - The phrase, ***or else***, means the members of the church in Pergamum have two choices . . . ***repent, or else . . .***

    - Notice the use of the pronouns in this warning. First, the Lord warns ***I am coming to YOU quickly.*** He then changes pronouns and says ***and I will make war against THEM with the sword of My mouth***.

    - The pronoun, ***you***, refers to the entire church body, while the pronoun, ***them***, refers to the false teachers and the sinning members among the congregation who were following after their teaching.

    - In His warning, ***I am coming to you quickly***, the reference to coming ***quickly*** is not a reference to His coming at the rapture or His Second Coming. It is most likely a reference to a **coming in temporal judgment against that church if they remain tolerant of sin.** This temporal judgment would most likely take the form of removing this church.

    - We see the same sentiment in His closing warning to the church in Ephesus when Jesus warns them in Revelation 2:5 . . .

      Revelation 2:5— or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Closing Exhortation

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

- As with the exhortation to the other 6 churches, the Lord exhorts ***he who has an ear***, stressing the need to **hear** this instruction.

    - Then, having **heard** the Lord's instruction, the next necessary action is that the hearers **heed** ***what the Spirit says*** so that **they will overcome** the situation plaguing their church.

- For those who **hear and heed** these words of the Lord, He promises **3 things** to those who obey Him.

    - First, the Lord promises that ***I will give some of the hidden manna***.

        - The reference to ***the hidden manna*** is an obvious reference back to the source of the nation of Israel's sustenance in the book of Exodus.

- But, unlike the Israelites, who received literal or physical ***manna***, here the Lord promises ***hidden manna***. The reference to ***hidden manna*** is a reference to **the Lord, Himself**, who is **"the Bread of Life,"** found in John 6:48-51 . . .

  John 6:48-51— 48 "I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

- Second, the Lord promises ***I will give him a white stone.***

  - In the culture of the day, special events were occasionally held in which ***white stones*** were given to those invited as the proof of their invitation and for admission to the event.

  - John MacArthur points out that it was also a cultural practice, as part of an award for victory in the games, that athletes be given a ***white stone*** inscribed with their name, which served as their ticket to the special awards banquet.

  - In either case, the mention of Christians receiving a ***white stone*** appears to be a reference to his or her invitation to the eternal banquet in heaven.

- Third, the Lord promises ***a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.***

  - The reference to ***a new name*** that is ***written on the stone*** seems to be a reference to the fact that each Christian who receives a ***white stone*** will have a new and unique name specifically assigned and designated to him or her. Every ***white stone*** will be unique in that each will have a name that is not found on any other ***white stone***.

  - This is one of the passages that is cited regarding our new identity in heaven. We will no longer be referred to by our earthly names in heaven, but by our new name ***which no one knows but he who receives it***.

  - Until the moment that we receive this ***white stone*** with our ***new name written*** **on it**, no one but God will know what our new name will be. We will not know our new name until the moment we receive this ***white stone***.

- Tom Pennington paraphrases this closing exhortation in v. 17 in this way . . . **"Christ says be faithful and I'll give you the hidden manna. I'll give you the bread that came down from heaven. I'll give you Myself. And, if you're faithful, I'll give you a white stone that shows you were an overcomer. And I'll write your name on that stone. And that will be your ticket into the marriage supper of the Lamb, into eternal glory. And that name that I inscribe on that stone, it will be a new name. It describes not who you were, but who, in sovereign grace, I have made you."**

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your opinion of this church? Where does it fall on the **Faithful <----> Unfaithful** spectrum?

2. Does the Lord's complaint against the church in Pergamum imply that <u>every</u> member of that church was guilty of tolerating the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans? If not, what responsibility did they have?

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Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira—Tolerance of False Teaching

v. 18a— "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

What do we know of Thyatira?

- Thyatira is the fourth of the seven churches the Lord writes to here in Revelation chapters 2-3.
- Though this letter is the longest of the seven letters, the city of Thyatira was the **smallest of the 7 cities**.
- Located 40 southeast of Pergamum, the city of Thyatira was originally founded as a military garrison whose purpose it was to serve as an outpost to protect Pergamum.
- Located on an indefensible plain, the city of Thyatira was conquered and destroyed numerous times as it fulfilled its role of protecting the city of Pergamum. But, over the centuries, Thyatira's location along the main north-south road made it an influential center of trade and commerce.



- Unlike Pergamum and Smyrna, the city of Thyatira was not a significant religious city of its time. There was no major acropolis or temple to one of the pagan gods.
- After its conquest by the Romans in 190 B.C., Thyatira was transformed from a military outpost whose sole purpose was to protect Pergamum into a major manufacturing center.
    - In Acts 16:14 we learn that Lydia is from Thyatira and is a seller of purple fabric. Paul encounters Lydia in Philippi and she is influential in helping to found the first church in Philippi.
- Because of its significant role in producing goods, Thyatira's production was influenced heavily by the "guilds" . . . modern-day unions. No one could work or sell their goods without the approval and help of the guilds.

- Thyatira apparently had a very small Jewish population.

    - The main source of persecution of the Christians in Thyatira came from the guilds. Each guild had a patron deity and to deny or denigrate these deities would cause anyone to find themselves opposed by the guilds and unable to work.

    - Because membership in a guild was necessary to find work, Christians would become members of a guild. But part of membership in a guild was participating in the worship and immoral reveling that accompanied this pagan worship. Those Christians who avoided such events were mocked, ridiculed and persecuted.

- Because of its location on the major north-south road, at the time the book of Revelation was written, Thyatira was coming into its period of greatest prosperity. But it did not last long.

- As we will see, the defects of the church in Thyatira were similar to those in Pergamum. Not only did they lack zeal, godly discipline and proper doctrine, they also condoned the errors that had encroached into the church.

The Lord's Self-Identification

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

- Here in v. 18 the Lord uses **three expressions to describe Himself**, two of which He has previously used in chapter one.

    1. The Lord first identifies Himself as ***the Son of God***.

    - He had previously been described in Revelation 1:13 as ***one like a son of man***, emphasizing His humanity and His humility.

    - The title ***the son of man*** views Christ in his ability to sympathize with the needs, trials and temptations of His church.

    - Here in Revelation 2:18 it is not the Lord's humility on display, but the Lord's deity that is now in view as He is described by His rightful title as ***the Son of God.***

    2. The second description of the Lord is of His ***eyes like a flame of fire***.

    - Here it is the penetrating all-seeing vision of the Lord in view. His piercing vision sees all and misses no detail.

    - That the Lord sees all and knows all about the character of each church He writes to here in Revelation is a reminder to us that the Lord sees all and knows all in our lives. He knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves.

    3. The final description of the Lord is of ***His feet like burnished bronze***.

- In a city with a large metal-working guild, the church in Thyatira would have immediately seen the significance of this description. Metal that is in a molten state is like a crucible for everything it touches, removing impurities. In the same way, as Christ walks through His churches, He purifies them like metal is purified in a furnace.

The Lord's commendation of the church in Thyatira

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

- Here in v. 19 the church in Thyatira is commended in **4 categories**.
- First, unlike the first three churches in this chapter, Thyatira is commended for its ***love***.
  - Since it is not specified, it can be assumed that this commendation is for both their **love of God and love of one another**.
  - Unlike the church in Ephesus, which was doctrinally sound, but had **lost its first love**, the church in Thyatira is commended for their continued ***love***.
- Second, the church in Thyatira is commended for its ***faith***.
  - The word that is translated ***faith*** is the Greek word *pistis*, which can also be translated **"fidelity"** or **"faithfulness."**
  - The true Christians in Thyatira were dependable, reliable and consistent.
  - Because of the link between ***faith and love*** in the New Testament, this commendation is significant.
- Third, the church in Thyatira is commended for its ***service***.
  - It is significant that ***love*** and ***faithfulness*** are mentioned first. It is out of ***love and faithfulness*** that **true *service* to God and the brethren is rendered**. Any service that is <u>not</u> rendered to God in ***love and faith*** is worthless. But when rendered in ***love and faith***, it is commendable to God.
- Finally, the church in Thyatira is commended for its ***deeds of late that are greater than at first***.
  - With this statement we learn that their ***love, faith and service*** were becoming stronger and more consistent. In many areas they were growing in grace and maturing in their Christian lives.
  - So far this appears to be a remarkable and praiseworthy church. **But this church has a major problem . . .**

The Lord's condemnation of the church in Thyatira

v. 20-23— 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

- Unlike the problem facing other churches, **the problem for the church in Thyatira was not persecution <u>from outside</u> the church, but compromise <u>within</u> the church.**

  - It was not the vicious wolves trying to get <u>into</u> the flock, but the goats <u>within</u> the flock who were causing so much damage.

- In the first indictment of the church, the Lord states that ***I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel***.

  - It is significant that both the pronouns, ***you***, are singular pronouns, indicating that the Lord is addressing an individual, most likely the leader of the congregation.

  - The word ***tolerate*** means "to allow one to do as he wishes, to not restrain." There was one specific person in the church who was being "tolerated" who was wreaking havoc on this church.

- The sin for which the Lord so strongly denounces the church is that ***you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

  - It is very unlikely that this woman's name was ***Jezebel***. Instead, it is likely that this false teacher is identified by this infamous name because she was having the same effect the original ***Jezebel*** had on the nation of Israel.

  - The original ***Jezebel*** is found in 1 Kings 16. She was the wife of the evil King Ahab. ***Jezebel*** was a Gentile, the daughter of the King of Sidon. After marrying Ahab she set out to eradicate the worship of Yahweh in the northern kingdom of Israel and replace it with the worship of Baal.

  - It was Jezebel from whom the prophet Elijah fled in terror after God's victory over and Elijah's execution of the priests of Baal and Asherah in 1 Kings 18.

  - And, apparently, the amount of sin that this woman caused within the church in Thyatira was considerable and involved a significant percentage of the church membership.

- The sins for which this "Jezebel" are condemned are **two**.

  1. First, she ***calls herself a prophetess***.

  - A prophet or prophetess is a person who has received a special revelation from God to communicate to the people.

- Over the millennia thousands upon thousands of false prophets and false prophetesses have arisen within Judaism and the church.

- The only ***prophetess*** found in the New Testament is Anna. It was Anna, in Luke 2:36, who identified the infant Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

2. The **second** sin for which this "Jezebel" is condemned is that ***she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

- An important observation needs to be made here which I will point out again in v. 22. One of the great sins of this ***Jezebel*** is that ***she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray.***

- The term ***bond-servant*** is the Greek word, *doulos*, which is also translated **"slave."** But in Scripture this term is almost exclusively used of those who are **"slaves of Christ" . . . believers**. Therefore, when the Lord speaks of ***Jezebel teaching and leading <u>My bond-servants</u> astray***, the Lord is saying that she is **leading Christians . . . believers . . . astray**.

  - And if believers have fallen victim to false teaching, the Holy Sprit will not allow them to become apostate . . . to fall away from the faith. Yes, believers can fall victim to false teaching, but God will always rescue those who belong to Him.

- Now, another important point is that just because this ***Jezebel*** is leading some of the Lord's ***bond-servants astray*** doesn't mean that all who are being led astray belong to Christ. Some who are led astray by her false teaching may fall away because they never belonged to Christ and this false teaching may the cause of such people forever falling away in unbelief.

- We don't know the specifics of what this ***Jezebel*** taught, only that the result of her teaching was that she ***leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

  - It is very likely that the teaching of this ***Jezebel*** was embraced by many in the congregation because it provided a convenient solution to the problem of guild membership.

  - Remember, you could not work or do business in Thyatira without the endorsement of the appropriate workers' guild. And because guild membership involved worshipping their particular pagan god and participating in the grossly immoral idol worship, Christians refused to participate. ***Jezebel*** **offered the perfect solution** . . . she claimed that God revealed to her that participation in the pagan practices were permissible. This was the perfect "out" for Christians.

Question: According to Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, eating meat sacrificed to idols is not sinful. Why is it sinful here in Revelation 2:20?

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The end of this false prophetess

v. 21-22a— *21* ***I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.*** *22* ***Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness***

- Only our great God is able to endure gross disobedience and remain willing to give someone ***time to repent*** of his or her sins against Him, as we read in v. 21.

    - We aren't told how this woman was called to repentance. Because all these churches were in relatively close proximity to one another, it is possible that John, prior to his exile on Patmos, or some other church leaders, had called this woman and this congregation to repentance prior to the Lord sending this letter.

    - In any case, we learn here in v. 21 of this woman's refusal to repent of her gross sins. Instead, we read that ***she does not <u>want</u> to repent of her immorality.*** She has become powerful and influential in the church **and she likes it.**

    - As sinful humans, we love our sin and will refuse to repent unless the Holy Spirit is working in us.

- As a result of her refusal to repent, we read of God's judgment upon this woman in v. 22a . . . ***Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness***.

    - This ***bed of sickness*** is not merely an illness from which she will suffer, but is a ***bed of sickness*** that leads to her death and condemnation . . . the ultimate end of every person who refuses to repent.

God's judgment upon those deceived by this Jezebel

v. 22— Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

- Here in v. 22 we see that the Lord is not only calling ***Jezebel*** to repentance, but also those who have followed after her false teaching . . . ***those who commit adultery with her.***

- In referring to ***those who commit adultery with her***, the Lord indicates His similar willingness to forgive those who ***repent of <u>her</u> deeds*** . . . those who followed her teaching into idolatry.

    - The Lord, as always, is willing to forgive if there is true faith and repentance.

- But to those who refuse to repent, the Lord promises to inflict ***great tribulation***.

    - The reference to ***great tribulation*** is not an eschatological reference but the ***great tribulation*** **of affliction in present suffering**, hopefully leading to repentance.

The ultimate end of this woman's followers

v. 23a— And I will kill her children with pestilence

- To those who refuse to repent of their sins against God, the Lord pronounces His ultimate judgment against them . . . ***and I will kill her children with pestilence.***

- The reference here is not to this woman's <u>biological</u> children, but her <u>spiritual</u> children . . . these are people not just carried along by her sin, but people who have completely bought into her teaching and are freely, like her, teaching others to do the same.

- As John MacArthur points out, "the severe judgment promised to the false prophetess and her followers again reveals Christ's passion for a doctrinally and behaviorally pure church. He will do whatever is necessary to purge His church of sin—even to the point of taking the lives of false teachers."

God's judgment serves as a warning to other churches

v. 23— And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

- The judgment pronounced upon those of the church in Thyatira is used here as a warning to those who commit similar sins and refuse to repent. Here the Lord warns those who do such things . . . ***and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.***

  - As we see in this verse, it is not mere outward conformity that God seeks. God requires that we repent of our sins in our minds as well as our bodies. A sin that is kept in the mind is not repented of. It is merely hidden from men. But, as we are reminded here, God is omniscient . . . He ***searches the minds and hearts***.

  - And because the Lord ***searches the minds and hearts*** of the church in Thyatira, **the innocent in the church will not be punished along with the guilty.**

- With the final statement . . . ***and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds*** . . . the Lord is giving both a word of warning <u>and</u> a word of encouragement.

  - By way of warning, the Lord promises similar judgment for those who refuse to repent.

  - But for those in Thyatira, and in similar churches, those who do not fall for the false teaching <u>or</u> those who repent of their previous sins, the Lord promises to give blessing.

- With this passage we are reminded of God's justice . . . that He gives both **remuneration** (reward and blessing) to those who obey, and He metes out **retribution** (punishment) upon those who fail to repent.

Commendation to the faithful of Thyatira

v. 24-25— 24 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. 25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

- We don't know what percentage of the congregation in Thyatira was caught up in the sin the Lord speaks of here in this passage. Maybe a large number or maybe only a small percentage.

- To those who have not fallen into the sin described, the Lord gives an encouraging word . . . ***I place no other burden on you.***

- Bearing the burden of seeing blatant false teaching and immoral living rampant in their church, and having to resist the incessant solicitation and ridicule from the Jezebel party, was burden enough for them to bear.
- The command to ***hold fast until I come*** stresses the difficulty that they would encounter. The Greek word for ***hold fast***, *krateō*, means "to exert great power and force to seize and cling to."

- His command of the faithful, ***nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come***, is a command to persevere and remain steadfast in faith.

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Closing exhortation

v. 26-29— 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

- In His closing exhortation, the Lord promises **2 specific rewards** to those who prevail in faith.

1. First, the Lord promises the faithful in Christ . . . **the Overcomer** . . . that ***he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations***.

- This is a reference to one of the functions that we will serve during the Millennial Kingdom. We will be helping the Lord administrate the earth during the Millennium.

- As part of His rule on the earth during the Millennium, we learn that God's justice will be swift upon the disobedient . . . ***he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father.***

- The Old Testament passage cited in v. 26-27 is from Psalm 2, which is a Messianic Psalm . . .

Psalm 2:8-9— 8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'"

  - In Psalm 2:8-9 we read that God the Father gives God the Son ***the nations as Your inheritance*** and His rightful authority to **rule over them.** Now, in Revelation 2:26-27 the Lord Jesus teaches us that when we enter into the Millennial Kingdom He will delegate His authority to the **overcomers** to rule with Him, as His appointed servants.

2. Second, the Lord promises that to the faithful, ***I will give him the morning star***.

- The reference here is to fact that every single person who is redeemed **will receive Christ, Himself**. And how do we know that Jesus is the *morning star*? Because He tells us so in Revelation 22:16 . . .

Revelation 22:16— I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.

- And Jesus Christ being ***the morning star***, will be given to each of us who are saved.

- **What lessons do we learn from the Lord's letter to the church in Thyatira?**

- **First,** you can't compromise the truths of Scripture with the world. Because the ***Jezebel*** false teacher was teaching compromise for the sake of getting along in society, those who followed her were lost to the world.

- **Second**, there is no new revelation from God. Everything we need is given to us in Scripture. Unfortunately for the Thyatirans, the canon of the New Testament was still a work in progress, so they were at much greater risk from false teachers who claimed to have new divine revelation. But we have no excuse for buying into false teaching that claims new divine revelation.

  - Regarding extra-biblical revelation, the only thing we can be sure of is that it will always result in error and false doctrine.

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- Then, for the fourth time, the Lord concludes with the exhortation that ***he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Question: The great sin of the church in Thyatira was tolerating extra-biblical and unbiblical teaching. While many . . . or even most . . . of the church may have rejected the heretical teaching, it was apparently tolerated. What warning does this provide us if a similar situation arises in our church?

Question: Where does the church of Thyatira fall on the **Faithful <-----> Unfaithful** spectrum?

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