

## Revelation 2

**Intro:** We are going to be studying the seven churches to which Jesus is writing. He calls these churches by name in Rev. 1:11. Jesus has a word for each of these Churches. As we study these seven churches, I want you to keep in mind that these churches can be seen in 3 different ways.

1. They can be viewed Prophetically – These churches seem to represent different stages of the church history over the last 2,000 years. If this is true, then the church at Ephesus represents the time period between the Day of Pentecost and 100 AD. This was a time of great expansion for the early church, but it was also a time when some began to lose their zeal and fervency.
2. They can be viewed Practically – These letters were sent to literal, real congregations that were actually functioning at the close of the 1st Century. While they were written to real churches existing in that day, they still speak to every church in existence today. God has a word for Cibolo Valley Baptist Church in these verses!
3. They can be viewed Personally – These letters speak to congregations, but we should also be mindful that the Lord has a word for the individual in these letters as well. He has something to say to you and to me about our relationship with Him.

My desire is to take the practical application of these letters and seek to apply them to our church/lives. As we study these seven letters, I want you to notice that the Lord has something personal to say to each of these churches. He comes to this church talking about His presence among them. I believe the Lord has something specific to say to each of us from each of these letters.

### ***To the Church in Ephesus***

***1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.***

The first letter is to the church located in the city of Ephesus. The Church at Ephesus was not only the first church on the postal route, but it was also the most prominent church, and was instrumental in perhaps founding the other six churches, (Acts 19:10).

#### The City

It was to this sinful city that God sent the Apostle Paul, (Acts 18:19-21; 19:10). Paul founded the church and preached there for two years. While Paul was there, REVIVAL broke out. Many people were converted to Christ, and they brought their magic books together and burned them (Acts 19:18-19). They were worth about 50,000 pieces of silver, or the workers wage for 50,000 days. H

Also, while in Ephesus, Paul wrote the books of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. Timothy was the first pastor of this church, (1 Tim. 1:3). Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos all labored in the Ephesian church, Acts 18. The Apostle John also spent the last years of his life in Ephesus. It was here that he wrote the Gospel of John and his three epistles. According to tradition, Mary the mother of Jesus is buried in Ephesus.

This church was privileged to hear and know the best of the best preachers in those early days. God used the church in mighty ways and many souls were saved

Thirty years have passed, and the Lord comes to this church to speak to them about where they are and where He wants them to be. He comes to them with a message of comfort. They are reminded in verse 1 that He has them safely in His hand. The word **“holds”** speaks of “being in absolute control”. In a society that was out of control, they needed to know that He was in control. We need that same message today. He reminds them, and us, that He is always with us, observing us, protecting us, and empowering us to serve Him.

### The Church

To understand some of the things spoken to the church, we need to examine the city. Let me share a few facts about the ancient city of Ephesus. Ephesus was important in day for several reasons.

1. It was an important city Commercially – Ephesus was located on the Castor River, just a few miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was noted for its magnificent harbor, and ships came to Ephesus from all over the known world bring their goods and their wealth. It was the richest city in Asia Minor in its day.

2. It was an important city Politically – Because of past service to the Empire of Rome, Ephesus was granted the right to be a “free city”. This means that they practiced self-government. It means that they could make whatever decisions they wanted to make. It also meant that Roman troops were not garrisoned there. This allowed the city to thrive.

3. It was an important city Religiously – Ephesus was the home of the temple of Diana, or Artemis. In its day, it was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. People came from everywhere to come to that temple. Now, Diana was the goddess of sex and fertility. She was represented by a hideous statue of a many-breasted woman. This temple was filled with hundreds of temple prostitutes and the way you worshiped Diana was to have sexual relations with a temple prostitute.

The temple back then also served as a bank. People would bring their possessions there for safe keeping. It served as museum for fine art. Art from all over the world was housed in this ancient temple. It also served as a refuge for criminals. If a lawbreaker could get to the temple, he would be safe from prosecution.

So, it is easy to see that the city of Ephesus was a wicked, degenerate, vile place to live. A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus said, “No one could live in Ephesus without weeping over the immorality which he must see on every side.”

***2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.***

## The Commendation

They were diligent workers for the cause of Christ, in the midst of pagan darkness around them. They were evangelizing, ministering and discipling as a good church should. They held to a high standard and refused to tolerate evil.

If you had gone to this church on a typical Sunday, you would have heard about a week filled with activity and opportunities for service. These people knew something that the modern church has forgotten.

- They knew that a church will not build itself.
- They also knew that a church cannot sustain itself.
- They knew that it takes people who will stick by the stuff!
- They also knew that it takes work to do these things!

### ***4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.***

Though they maintained their doctrinal purity and worked hard for the Lord, their service turned mechanical. Forty years after being a church marked by love (Eph.1:15; 3:17-19; 6:23). Their love for the Lord cooled. We can turn this place into a country club where the frozen chosen meet to congratulate themselves on their salvation and good works, but totally miss the love/relationship.

More than anything we can do for the Lord; He wants our love first and foremost (Matt. 22:37).

***5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you [not the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming] and remove your lampstand from its place.***

### The Challenge

The Lord calls on this church to repent. Otherwise, He threatens to come and remove their lampstand. As we saw in 1:20 the lampstand is the church. The Lord is threatening to close down this hard-working church unless they repent of their cold works and serve the Lord out of the overflow of their love from their hearts.

***6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.***

The Nicolaitans cannot be clearly identified. Some think that this refers to Nicolas, one of the first deacons chosen in Acts 6. Some argue that he was not a believer and introduced false teachings into the church. In Rev. 2:12-15, (the Church at Pergamum was scolded for tolerating) it links his teachings with the teachings of Balaam's false teachings that led Israel to sin. Through his seduction of using Moabite women to tempt the Israelites into sexual relationships and pagan rituals, ( Numb. 25:1-9).

***7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.***

This phrase closes each of the 7 Letters. The use of the plural noun “churches,” symbolizes the universal nature of this statement. So, it cannot be limited to just a group of overcomers in a particular church. Every church needs to hear these messages.

I want you to be honest with yourself and with your Lord for just a moment. Have you left your first love? Are you busy, but busy out of duty and not out of love? Can you honestly say that you are filled with fervent, emotional, extravagant love for Jesus? Or, would you have to say that your heart has gotten cold; that your zeal is not what it used to be; that you need to remember, repent and repeat the first works? If He had touched your heart, you need to deal with Him. The time/place is now.

### ***To the Church in Smyrna***

The City

See Book

***8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.***

The Church

See book

***9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.***

The Commendation

The church at Smyrna had every human reason to collapse. They were persecuted/hated/rejected/ (see pg-37 in book) Accused of atheism/ cannibalism/ political disloyalty/ immorality (incest) they stood firm in their faith and did not compromise or waiver.

The Lord promised them that He would give them strength, and the victor’s crown. Their perseverance proved the genuineness of their faith. True believers will persevere.

The Challenge

Jesus had no bad thing to say about this church. They received no condemnation

***11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.***

## ***To the Church in Pergamum***

The City

See book pg-37

Once each year, every Roman citizen was required to walk into one of these temples, place a pinch of incense on an altar and say, "Caesar is god." Of course, Christians refused to do that. As a result, severe persecution arose.

***12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.***

It is to the Christian congregation in this city that Jesus addresses this letter. They were a church in desperate need of a word from the Lord. So, when Jesus comes to them, He comes as One having "the sharp sword with two edges." The two-edged sword is a clear picture of the Word of God, Eph. 6:12; Also, in Heb. 4:12. God's Word is compared to a double-edged sword.

The church was doctrinally pure; but they had drifted into compromise. Jesus comes to call them back to the right path.

There is a word for our hearts today. There is always the danger that we too might drift of center. There is the danger that we might hold the right doctrines, but still drift into compromise with the world around us. There is a word here for our church and for the individuals in our church today.

***13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.***

These words are used to let these people know that Jesus knows they are living in a tough place. He knows where they are, and He has a word just for them. This church operated right in the middle of a city chosen by Satan as his headquarters on earth.

Satan is active and free to roam the earth, and he operates as the "god of this world", (2 Cor. 4:4) (1 John 5:19). He is the "prince and power of the air", (Eph. 2:2). Today, he has a seat of power somewhere. It might be New York, Las Vegas, Washington DC, Moscow, or any of a thousand other places.

The Commendation

The church in Pergamos was doing a couple of things right and Jesus commends them for it. Let's see what Jesus found to brag on as He looked at this church.

First, they remained true/*steadfast to His name*. This church was not ashamed of the name of Jesus. His name is the most divisive name in history, yet His name is the only name "whereby men must be saved", (Acts 4:12). There are some churches you can go to and you can sit through an entire service and never hear the name Jesus mentioned. That is sad. We need to make much of that name!

We need to sing it, shout it, preach it and tell it! Cibolo Valley Baptist Church ought to be marked as a “Jesus” church. When people come here, they should hear about Jesus! We are not here to promote the Baptists, our church, our preacher, or anything else you want to name. We are here to exalt Jesus! We need to be in the business of lifting up the name of Jesus, John 12:32!

· Second, they are commended because they have not denied the faith. The church was doctrinally pure. They held on to the fundamentals of the faith, and Jesus praised them for it. There are some non-negotiable truths in Christianity. There is plenty of room for freedom in our service to the Lord. However, there are some things that are non-negotiable. If you do not hold these certain things to be true, then you are not a Christian, no matter what you say! This ancient church held fast to “the faith”. We must as well! What are these fundamentals?

- The Inspiration of the Scriptures
- The Virgin Birth of the Savior
- The Vicarious Death of the Savior
- The Victorious Resurrection of the Savior

We need to take our stand on these precious truths. Far too many “churches” are turning away from the fundamental doctrines of the faith and are sliding into apostasy. Regardless of what anyone else does, or even what our denomination does, we must take our stand on the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God.

***14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.***

Balaam was motivated by greed and he was guilty of leading the people of God into immorality and idolatry. His story can be found in Numbers 22-25. In those verses, Balak, the king of Moab wanted to curse the nation of Israel, so he called for Balaam to come do the dirty work. He promises him wealth and promotion for his services. Four times Balaam tries to curse Israel, each time the Lord turns his curses into blessings. When he sees that his attempts to curse Israel have failed, Balaam apparently suggests that since they can't curse Israel, they should corrupt them. This is accomplished by leading them off into immorality and idolatry with Moabite women, thus bringing the wrath of God down upon them, (Num. 25:1; 31:16).

Basically, the “doctrine of Balaam” is wickedness and worldliness. The church at Pergamos was tolerating people in their midst who claimed to be Christians, but who lived like the world around them. Some of their memberships were living immoral lives and participating in pagan worship. Jesus is not at all pleased with these things. This same problem is rampant in the modern church. There are so many who believe that since you are saved by grace and kept by grace, you can live any way you please. It is no wonder that society has no respect for the church! It is no wonder that there is no power in the church. We live as we please without regard for the clear commands of the Lord.

Here is the fact of the matter: if you are saved, you will not be like the world around you. If you are saved, you will walk differently, talk differently, and you will have a different set of standards than the world. If you can adopt this world's attitude about substance abuse, sex, music, etc, you are most likely not saved. When Jesus saves a soul, He creates a new creature, 2 Cor. 5:17. His changes everything about that saved person's life. They are different and they live like it! You can't have it both ways. If you are saved, live like. If you are not, then do as you please!

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans we discussed back in Rev. 2:6. "Nicolaitans" means "to conquer the people" and probably refers to a priestly class that had developed within the church. What was merely "deeds" in verse 6 has become a "doctrine" in verse 15. It had started out with the leadership in the church elevating themselves above everyone else and it has turned into a doctrine in that fellowship.

Now, God has established certain offices within the church. Those in these offices are to be respected and listened to, if they carry out their office according to the Word of the Lord. For instance, we have Deacons. They have a biblical office and they are to be respected and honored when they fulfill the demands of that office. If they don't fulfill their obligations, they should resign or be asked to step down. I am the Pastor of this church. When I preach the Word of God, and preach it correctly, you would do well to listen to the message and adjust your life to it. Not because I am preaching, but because this office is mandated by the Lord. In this church, I am the leader, but I am not the Lord. No one in the church is to be worshipped or placed on a high pedestal of honor. We are all under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and we are all accountable to Him!

They also tried to USE THEIR Christian freedom to justify their sinful compromise with the world (see page 39 in book)

***16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.***

He promises them "hidden manna". In the Old Testament, when the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness, God fed them by sending Manna down from Heaven. Some of this Manna was gathered and kept in a golden pot in the Ark of the Covenant. Ancient Jewish tradition says that when Israel was taken into captivity by the Babylonians Jeremiah hid this pot of Manna, and when Messiah returns, He will feed the people of Israel again. This Manna is a picture of God's precious promise to feed His children.

Lord also promises to give His faithful ones a white stone. This does not mean much to us, but it held special meaning to the people of that day. There are several possible meanings attached to the white stone. I want to point out a few that speak to us.

- White and black stones were used to indicate judgment in ancient courts of law. When a judge rendered his verdict, he would place a stone in a container and at the appropriate time, he would roll the stone out, thus rendering his judgment. A black stone indicated a judgment of guilt, while a white stone indicated a judgment of innocence.

Jesus is telling these people that they were innocent in His eyes. He had taken all the black stones that were against them and He had washed them white in His blood.

- White stones were used to signify citizenship. A white stone was often given to people who had proven their allegiance to the city. Jesus honors those who live for Him.
- White stones were used as a symbol of victory. They were given to those who had won a victory in one of the ancient games
- A courageous gladiator would be given a white stone. So, Jesus promises to honor those who take a stand for Him!
- White stones were a symbol of friendship. Often two friends would take a white stone, break it in half and write the other friend's name on their half. When they met, even after many years, they could place the halves of their stones together, signifying their lasting relationship.
- White stones were used to gain access. When a wealthy person would throw a party, they sometimes gave their invited guests a white stone. When it came time for the celebration, the person who presented a white stone was granted access to the banquet. Jesus allows His people access to the greatest banquet of all times: the marriage supper of the Lamb, Rev. 19!

### ***To the Church in Thyatira***

The City

See book page 40

***18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.***

The Church

Jesus comes to this church in three ways. He comes as:

1. The Saving One – "*The Son of God*" – He reminds these people that He is the Savior and that He alone is worthy of worship.
2. The Searching One – "eyes are like blazing fire" – He comes as one Who sees all. He sees the works of the hands and the motives and thoughts of the heart. He comes seeing all. He comes, not as the meek and lowly Jesus, but with His eyes ablaze with anger over sin.
3. The Sovereign One – "feet like burnished (fine)bronze ( brass)" – Brass, or bronze, in the Bible is symbolic of judgment. Jesus not only comes as One able to see all; He also comes as One able to judge all.

If there is one word that describes the situation we find at Thyatira it is the word "compromise". This is a church that has left its founding principles and has gone off into compromise and apostasy with the world.



**19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.**

#### The Commendation

He Commends Their Ministries – This was an active church. They were working within their own number and within the community around them. Their ministry is noted by the words Jesus uses

1. They Are Busy – Works – This word means “deeds”. It speaks of them as being active in good deeds and benevolent outreach.
2. They Are Burdened – Service – This word means “ministry”. It is the same work translated “Deacon” throughout the New Testament. The word carries the idea of “those who kick up dust”. In other words, they were so busy that they kicked up a cloud of dust as they went from task to task.

B. He Commends Their increased works – They were developing and progressing on their works. Their outreach and ministry to their fellow man was ever on the increase.

God knows our works too. He did not save us to be lazy Christians, but to be busy in His Kingdom work, (Eph. 2:10). We should be a church that is busy for the glory of God. Not just having activities for the sake of doing something. One preacher said it this way, “We can Bowl for Blessings on Monday night, Jog for Jesus on Tuesday night, eat in the kitchenette and endure a sermonette on Wednesday night. We have Home runs for Heaven on Thursday night, Golf for Glory on Friday, and spread the table to stay able on Saturday.” We should be active in the Lord’s work; but, we should see that everything we do is motivated by either 1. Edifying the Saints; 2. Evangelizing the Sinner; and/or 3. Exalting the Savior.

**20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.**

#### The Challenge

He tells them that all He expects from them is that they stay the course. He wants them to avoid being sucked into the vortex of evil that is swirling there in Thyatira. That is His will for us in these confusing days as well. He wants us to stay the course for the glory of God. Just because everyone around us is taking a new path does not mean that we have to. We can stand our ground and be faithful until death or the rapture takes us away.

The church in Thyatira was being led away from the Lord by the teachings of an influential woman in their congregation. This woman is called “Jezebel”. She is called by the name of one of the most infamous women in the entire Bible. Jezebel was the wife of wicked king Ahab, 1 Kings 16:31. She was the wicked daughter of a Gentile king. She was a devoted worshiper of the god Baal and she kept up some 850 prophets of that wicked, sensual religion, 1 Kings 18:19. Baal was a fertility god and his

prophets and priests were no more than temple prostitutes. Baal was worshiped through sexual acts at their temple. Jezebel led her weak-kneed husband to follow her gods and influenced Israel to seek Baal instead of Jehovah,( 1 Kings 21:25). She even did her best to kill every true man of God she could get her hands on. She killed Elijah one time and he ran away in fear, (1 Kings 19:1-3).

Ahab had a desire for Naboth's vineyard, (1 Kings 21:1-29). It was Jezebel that arranged for the murder of Naboth so that Ahab could have the vineyard. This act prompted Elijah to pronounce God's sentence upon Ahab and Jezebel, (1 Kings 21:17-24). Jezebel came to be identified with wickedness and idol worship. This self-appointed prophetess, whoever she was, was guilty of leading the people away from the true worship of God. No one is quite sure what was actually going on, but one theory has to do with the trade guilds. These guilds would often have meetings in the pagan temples around town. Such meetings were often immoral affairs involving drunkenness, drug abuse and sexual immorality. These meetings would also involve a meal and would either begin or end with a sacrifice to a pagan god.

This woman may have been telling the people in this church that they could hold onto their pagan beliefs and practices and still serve the Lord; that they could sin and still be saved; that one thing had nothing to do with the other. This may have been the tool that church was using to get the pagans of Thyatira to come to their church. They were compromising their standards to attract the world. They were saying, "Oh, come as you are! Don't change a thing. Keep living like you have always lived. We'll accept you just like you are. God loves you and we do too. Neither He, nor us, expects you to change one thing. Whatever she was doing, she was leading the people of God astray.

The same teaching abounds in the church today. Everywhere people who call themselves Christians claim that they can have a relationship with the Lord on the one hand and live lives of open sin on the other. Homosexuals, pornographers, drug abusers, drunkards, adherents to false religions, etc. all claim to be saved and still able to do as they please. Somebody is a liar! The Lord told His people to separate from that kind of lifestyle, (2 Cor. 6:17). He told us that His people received a new birth, (John 3:3). That they became new creatures, (2 Cor. 5:17). The Bible tells us that anyone who lives a lifestyle of committed, continual, unrepentant sin is lost, (1 John 2:9-10). We have freedom as Christians, but our freedom is not a license to sin!

v. 21 – The Lord had given this woman and her followers time to turn from their sins, but they refused to do so. Now, His patience has run out and she is slated for judgment.

v. 22-23 Her Sentence Is Declared – Because of what she has done, she and all her followers will face God's wrath, but He is still giving them space to repent!

***24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.' 26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations 27 that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery' —just as I have received authority from my Father.28 I will also give that one the morning star.***

He Comforts Them Concerning Their Destiny – The Lord Jesus promises them that if they will remain faithful to Him, they will rule with Him when He comes in His kingdom. He seems to be saying, “You people are powerless to change your situation now, but the day is coming when I will put My power into your hands. You will reign with Me and your struggle for holiness will be worth it all in the end.”

Understand, if you are going to be a holy, godly Christian in these days, you might as well get ready to be hated, misunderstood and persecuted. But, one day, the King is coming! When He does, He is going to let His faithful servants reign with Him. We might be weak today. The worldly, compromising churches might be the ones with all the people, all the power and all the prestige. But, when the King comes, those who have served Him faithfully now will reign with Him then! It will be worth it all when that day comes.

He Comforts Them Concerning Their Deliverance – Jesus promises these faithful believers “*the morning star*”. There is much speculation as to what He is talking about here. Some believe that He is promising them Himself. After all, He is the “bright and morning star”, (Rev. 22:16). Some think this refers to Satan, (Luke 10:18), and that Jesus will let the church see Satan get what’s coming to him someday. However, we will see that in Rev. 20:10.. Note: the book says that it is Christ Himself page 41

***29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***