

REVELATION

Chapter 2

2:1–3:22† Some take the seven letters as a preview of church history in its downward course toward Laodicean lukewarmness. Others interpret them as characteristic of various kinds of Christian congregations that have existed from John’s day until the present time. In reality, they were historical churches in Asia Minor. The general pattern in the letters is commendation, complaint and correction. (CSB)

Seven letters, each one addressed to the churches listed in 1:11. Every letter conforms to a similar pattern: (1) Jesus addresses the congregation; (2) Jesus introduces Himself as the speaker and is identified with significant titles; (3) Jesus affirms what is good and right with that church; (4) Jesus rebukes the congregants for what they lack; (5) Jesus issues a call to repentance; (6) Jesus promises blessing to “the one who conquers”; (7) Jesus gives an exhortation to “hear what the Spirit says.” The letters present Jesus as guardian and protector of His people. Jesus similarly identifies Himself with titles from the opening chapter in each of these seven letters. (TLSB)

Excursus

The Seven Letters of Preparation (2:1–3:22)

The Seven Letters within the Book of Revelation

The letters to the seven churches form a distinct literary unit within Revelation. Because there are *seven* letters, some commentators have suggested that they are to be interpreted as part of the prophetic, visionary message, which is presented in a sevenfold literary structure. Each of the other sevenfold sections of Revelation (the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven censers) speaks of and/or portrays events taking place on earth over certain periods of time. This would mean, then, that in the opinion of interpreters who consider Revelation to be historically sequential, the seven letters would give information about the period of time from Christ’s first coming up to the time in history when the sufferings pictured from 6:1 to 18:24 take place. Interpreters who view Revelation as cyclical would say that the seven letters give parallel information about the same period of suffering that is described in each sevenfold section (that is, the seven letters, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven censers all would describe the same general time period) . (CC pp. 56-64)

This commentary’s view is that the structure of the three sevenfold sections of Revelation (the seven seals, trumpets, and censers) is indeed cyclical, meaning that each of those sections covers the time period between Christ’s first and second advents. But the seven letters are different. They do not give information about periods of time as do the seven seals, trumpets, and censers. Other commentators, recognizing that the seven letters are not predictive of a historical sequence, suggest that they were not originally part of Revelation but were added later. But that explanation is to be rejected for there is no textual evidence to support it, and such source criticism is not helpful in interpreting the *canonical* text. Rather, these letters, while not part of the prophetic message, nevertheless fulfill an important role in the book of Revelation. (CC pp. 56-64)

The letters form a unit that is quite different from anything else in the rest of Revelation. Whether the seven are true letters, perhaps to be sent out individually, or set pieces in a larger literary creation, all of which is to be sent to each church, they are personal messages from the exalted Christ to the seven churches. *Their intent and purpose is to prepare the recipients for receiving*

and applying the message in the visions that begin in 4:1. They are thus preparatory in character and call for repentance. (CC pp. 56-64)

Each of the seven letters has a similar literary pattern (see figure 1). First, the addressee or recipient is mentioned, “to the angel of the church in [city],” (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) followed by a descriptive phrase that identifies Christ as the author and sender. Each letter then continues with an acknowledgment of the particular historical circumstances of the church addressed and of the work that the church is doing for Christ.⁷ The sender then also mentions and describes a danger or dangers that the particular church faces because of the sin of its members and some flaw or weakness in their Christian faith and character. The author of the letter then urges the recipient to repent lest the sender take away the recipient’s place with him. This is followed by a promised blessing to the one who repents, trusts, and conquers. Each letter concludes with an urgent appeal to whomever has an ear to “listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). That plural (“churches”) implies that these are “open letters” since their author intends all hearers (or readers) to listen to all seven of the letters. (CC pp. 56-64)

The Seven Churches and the Church

The letters indicate that the Lord Christ knows all about his churches, his people. The contents and messages, addressed to specific historical congregations, have a generalizing tendency within them. They are relevant for Christians of all time, from the Lord’s ascension until his return at the End. They intimately reveal the Lord Christ’s love and concern for his church. The heart of each letter is the danger that each church faces, and these are dangers that any member of Christ’s entire church may face at any given moment. The most imminent danger to the church’s faith may be, at any given time and place, a particular sin or failing. Whatever it is, it is a real threat to the Christians’ faith; unless they repent, it can destroy their fellowship with Christ. The end result of each letter is to direct the Christians’ attention and faith to a promised blessing. Through these messages, the Spirit enables the hearers to repent, to stand firm, and to take comfort in the promised blessing and hope of victory. In this way, the Spirit prepares the recipients of these letters to receive the prophetic message of Revelation (4:1–22:5). (CC pp. 56-64)

The seven churches which received the letters are historical congregations that existed at the time of John’s exile on Patmos (see figure 2). Ephesus was evidently the oldest or foremost church of the seven, for it is mentioned first. The location of each church—the social, political, and economic conditions of the city—also shapes the content of each letter. Each of the letters is, however, intended for all seven churches, for the entire prophecy of Revelation—including the seven letters—was to be received and read by all. Though these seven churches were the initial historical recipients of Revelation, the entire church throughout the world, at that time and of all time until the Lord’s return, is the final recipient. Thus the seven churches in Asia Minor represent or signify all churches—the entire church. Whether or not these seven churches formed a geographical or ecclesiastical unit (with Ephesus the seat of the bishop, John the apostle), the *seven* letters indicate that the *entire church* is under the care of Christ through the *sevenfold presence of the Spirit*. The seven churches thus model how the entire church is always under the grace, forgiveness, renewal, guidance, motivation, and power of the Spirit. (CC pp. 56-64)

“The Angel of the Church”

The “angel” of each particular church is the stated recipient of each letter. In 1:11 the trumpet-like voice of the Lord Christ tells John to send the revelation to the *seven churches*, but in Revelation 2–3, each letter is addressed to the *angel* of the particular church. These angels, first mentioned in 1:20, are represented by the seven stars in the right hand of Christ. Commentators past and present have disagreed about the identity of these angels. Some take them to be bishops

or pastors of the churches. Others say that they truly are angelic beings, heavenly messengers of God. Still others have understood these angels as symbolic of the prevailing spirit of each church, that is, the church itself and its character. (CC pp. 56-64)

In keeping with the whole character of Revelation, it is best to understand the angels of the churches as angelic beings, God's heavenly messengers. The word ἄγγελος, "angel," appears sixty-seven times in Revelation and, with the possible exception of the angels of the seven churches, it is quite clear that the referents of this word are *always heavenly messengers or figures*. For example, 1:1 says that the revelation was given by Jesus to John through *Jesus' angel*. That angel cannot be a human agent but is a heavenly figure whom Jesus delegates to convey the message to John. Throughout Revelation the word "angel" always has this same meaning and usage. (CC pp. 56-64)

In 8:1–2 seven angels take over from the Lord Christ the task of mediating the message to John. These seven trumpet-angels are likely the seven angels of the seven churches. The fact that in Revelation heavenly angels are used by God to mediate his word to human beings is not surprising,¹⁴ for God used angels to mediate the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2), to announce the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:20; Lk 1:26–27; 2:8–9), and to proclaim the resurrection (Mt 28:2–7). The view that the angels of the seven churches also model or represent the bishops or pastors certainly can be entertained too. (CC pp. 56-64)

The Preparatory Function of the Seven Letters

Each of the seven letters was written to a particular church and was relevant to that specific situation at the time of writing. However, each letter was to be received (as part of the one book of Revelation) by all the seven churches. Though Paul's canonical letters were written to particular churches and persons, they nevertheless are sacred Scripture, to be received by Christians of every time and place. Likewise, the seven letters to seven particular churches are also sacred Scripture addressed to all churches and to all Christians until the end of time. It is for this reason that at the end of each letter this statement—reminiscent of Jesus' own encouragement (e.g., Mt 13:9)—is made: "The one who has an ear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the churches" (e.g., Rev 2:7). (CC pp. 56-64)

The complete and holy number seven not only indicates that the seven churches represent all the churches, but it also suggests that all churches and all Christians are under the grace, forgiveness, renewal, guidance, and motivation of God through the sevenfold presence of the Holy Spirit (the "seven Spirits" in 1:4). *The seven churches then symbolize the entire church of Jesus Christ under the motivating influence of the Holy Spirit*. In Revelation the number twelve and its multiples twenty-four and 144,000 represent the church of God as church; the number seven symbolizes the sevenfold presence of the Spirit and the church under the control of the Spirit. (CC pp. 56-64)

The *seven sins and failings* mentioned in the letters—each letter deals with one particular kind of sin—are also addressed to all churches and all Christians. Though the sins are specific to particular churches, all churches and all Christians are tempted by—and may easily fall prey to—any or all of these attitudes and behaviors. The sins or failings seem to suggest a pattern or sequence. That is, each sin, when encountered in temptation and then in commission, leads to the following temptation or sin. When Christians leave their "first love" for Christ (2:4), there then follows the sin, or at least the temptation, of fear (2:10). Fear then gives way or leads into the sin of attempting to serve both God and mammon, and thus the danger of idolatry as exemplified by Balaam and Balak (2:14). The sin or temptation of idolatry can lead into the error of the teaching of Jezebel (2:20), which denies the uniqueness of Christianity, and which in turn gives way to a

deadness (3:1) of faith and heart. Once this has happened there is no longer the desire to take full advantage of opportunities to serve others in proclaiming the Gospel (3:8). The final sin which results from these is that of being “lukewarm” (3:16) in one’s relationship with the Lord Christ. Once this has happened, one is fit only to be separated from the Lord by being cast out of his holy presence. (CC pp. 56-64)

Each sin or failing not only endangers one’s faith, it also, unless repented of, can lead to the other sins; thus all the more is the Christians’s faith and life put at terrible risk. These seven sins are the seven deadly sins that confront all Christians and all churches, and to the extent that they are entertained, they are a constant threat to the Christian’s life and witness. Awareness of this is necessary for repentance, *a godly repentance which prepares the heart to receive the message of Revelation*. (CC pp. 56-64)

As with the seven sins, the *seven identification marks* of the speaker can be viewed individually and then in total. The Lord Christ shows himself in the first letter as the one who holds the seven stars and who walks about in the midst of the seven lamps (2:1). By such an identification he declares that he is the Lord of the church and the one who through the angels is the mediator of the revelation of God (1:1). In the second letter he points to himself as the Savior of the church when he says that he is the First and the Last, the one who died and rose again (2:8). In the third letter he identifies himself as the judge by referring to the two-edged sword (2:12). In the fourth letter, to the church of Thyatira, the Lord Christ points to the fact that he is omniscient and always present with his power and majesty by reminding the church of his flaming eyes and brass-like feet (2:18). In the fifth letter, by reference to the seven Spirits and seven stars (3:1), the Lord reminds his church that he is the one who sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and administers the care of the angels for the sake of his saints. In the sixth and seventh letters he reminds the church that he governs the opportunities for proclamation of the Gospel by reference to the key of David (3:7) and that he is the confirming witness of that Gospel message as the agent and source of God’s new creation (3:14). (CC pp. 56-64)

These seven descriptions detail for the reader the makeup of what it means to view Jesus Christ as the “Son of Man” (1:13), as the exalted Lord of the church. Thus the appearance of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man in Revelation 1 is interpreted in chapters 2 and 3. All this is for sake of the church, so that she will take warning and especially comfort in her Lord. And finally this detailed picture of the Son of Man reminds the church that the exalted Lord has a mission for his people on earth, and that he will supply her every need for that mission as she lives in repentance and faith. (CC pp. 56-64)

While each letter focuses (usually toward the beginning) on the sins and failings of the church for the purpose of repentance, the goal of each is the strengthening of the church’s faith in the victory of Christ. For each letter ends in a *promise* of eternal blessing for the one who conquers. The seven Gospel promises are given in expressions that refer to the *future*, so as to remind the hearer that the victory of Christ finds its full and final meaning before the very presence of God in eternal life. The Christian who conquers is one who endures the period of temptation and suffering and is faithful until the end of earthly life. (CC pp. 56-64)

The first promise speaks of paradise and the tree of life (2:7), a reminder of the Eden-like quality of that eternal life. The second and third promises hold out before the eyes of faith the truth that eternal death and hell have been forever destroyed for the Christian (2:11), since he is, in Christ, innocent of all guilt and judgment and is sustained by the manna of heaven (2:17). In the fourth and fifth letters the promise is given that the believer will participate in Christ’s everlasting reign (2:26–29), clothed in white and having his name written in the book of life (3:5). And the sixth

and seventh letters voice beautiful promises concerning eternal habitation in the new Jerusalem because of the name of God (3:12). In the new Jerusalem God's saints will sit with him on his throne and on the throne of Christ (3:21). Certainly these eschatological promises encourage the church to recognize God's love for her and the honor that he bestows upon her in Christ. (CC pp. 56-64)

The church, however, is not yet in that eternal glory. She is still in the great suffering as she is sustained by faith and carries out the mission her Lord has given to her. The visionary and prophetic message of Revelation, which begins with chapter 4, will be her guide and instruction, her comfort and inspiration in that mission. By indicting sin, calling for repentance, and extending Gospel encouragement, the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3 prepare the heart of the church to receive this revelation. (CC pp. 56-64)

Even though most of the letters contain stern rebukes, they are immediately tied to the person of Christ, who holds their leaders in his hand and walks among them to comfort, to admonish, to praise. In the same way, we can find it vastly comforting that Christ is present in all his glory even when we deserve his rebuke. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

Their intent and purpose is to prepare the recipients for receiving and applying the message in the vision that begin in 4:1. They are thus preparatory in character and call for repentance. (CC p. 57) CC pp. 57-59 give the literary pattern outlined below.

Jesus mentions their strengths first and does not exaggerate their weaknesses. By this, Jesus models the way Christians should deal with one another. (PBC p. 36)

The Lord takes note of what is going on in every congregation, even of every detail. (Stoeckhardt p. 5)

See chart at the end of this chapter...

- a. Local Detail
- b. Image of Christ
- c. Good Christ Sees
- d. Bad Christ Sees
- e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement
- f. Promise to the One Who Conquers

To the Church in Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

- a. Local Detail - False apostles and Nicolaitans are there – 2:6
- b. Image of Christ - Holds the 7 stars in his right hand; Walks among the 7 golden lampstands – 2:1
- c. Good Christ Sees - Have endurance; cannot bear evil people; are not weary; hate the works of the Nicolaitans – 2:3,6
- d. Bad Christ Sees - Have left your first love – 2:4
- e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement - Repent, do first works, or else I Will remove your lampstand – 2:5
- f. Promise to the One Who Conquers - I will grant to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God – 2:2:7

2:1 The exalted Christ identifies himself as the *author* of this letter by referring to himself as the one who holds the seven stars and walks about in the midst of the golden lampstands. This identification directs our attention back to 1:12 and 1:16. In the commissioning vision (1:9–20) the Lord Christ holds the seven stars and is in the midst of the golden lampstands. The stars are the angels of the seven churches and the lampstands are the churches (1:20). Christ is the Lord of the angels and of the churches. He controls the angels, since through them he gives the letters to the churches. Though visibly absent, he is, nevertheless, present with and in the midst of his churches through the Spirit (2:7). In thus identifying himself by a partial reference to his appearance as “the Son of Man” (1:13), the Lord Christ reminds the church that he is both her *Lord and judge*. By his presence through the Spirit he speaks his word to the church not only as her protector, for he holds the church in his hand, but also as her judge. *As the church’s judge, he calls the church to repentance (2:5), because of his love and concern.* (CC p. 67)

angel. Since Greek *angelos* literally means “messenger,” this likely describes the pastor of the congregation. (TLSB)

Ephesus. Ephesus was the greatest city of Asia Minor at that time, and it was the center for worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana). The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The church was begun through the preaching of Paul (Acts 19), and the riot that ensued as a result of Paul’s preaching of the Gospel shows how the world reacts violently against Christ when it believes that its own interests are being threatened. Nevertheless, Paul had a successful ministry there, and the congregation was well established through his preaching of the Gospel. (LL p. 32)

Ephesus eventually became the principal commercial center and replaced Pergamum as the provincial capital. By the middle of the first century AD it had a population of around a quarter of a million people. It was an important commercial center and was the hub of three great trade routes. Paul, together with Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila was instrumental in forming a Christian community years before John became bishop of the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). The major cult was the worship of Diana (Artemis in Greek); a great temple (about four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens) was erected in honor of the goddess. (CC pp. 65-66)

Take a bus out of Izmir, on the western coast of Turkey in Asia, and after about an hour’s ride of some 35 miles southeast, plus a little walk, you reach the ruins of ancient Ephesus. Today it is a miserable village called Ayasalook. There were more Jews in Ephesus than in any other heathen

city except Alexandria. Paul's epistle to Ephesus, probably written from Rome about A.D. 62, sheds some light on the conditions in the church at Ephesus at that time. The church at Ephesus had been served also by Timothy and Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Aquila and Priscilla had instructed Apollos there (Acts 18:26). (Poellot pp. 26-27)

holds the seven stars. kratheo – To use strength in order to seize and retain possession of something. (QV)

seven golden lampstands. That Jesus walks among them signifies His abiding presence among His people on earth. (TLSB)

2:2-4 The Lord knows the *activity of the church*. In particular he recognizes how alert the church is toward false apostles, false teachers who by their deceptive teachings are enemies of the truth (see 1 Jn 4:1–6). And he recognizes the patience by which the church endures in the face of weariness brought about by constant toil and watchfulness (see Rev 1:9; 3:10). The patience of God's saints in the midst of turmoil and sufferings is a mark which identifies them as God's people on earth (13:10) and by which they display their faith and obedience to God's commandments (14:12). (CC pp. 67-68)

What the Lord finds wrong in the church at Ephesus—and it is, of course, a danger for all Christians—is that God's people have left their “first love” (2:4). John is known as the disciple of love not only because of his nearness to Jesus Christ (Jn 19:26) but also because he testifies so abundantly to God's love in Christ toward the world. (CC pp. 67-68)

Of the one hundred and forty-three times that agapao, “to love,” appears in the NT seventy-two are in Johannine literature. Agape appears thirty-seven times in this gospel according to John, twenty-eight times in 1 John, four times in Revelation, twice in 2 John, and once in 3 John. (By contrast Luke has it thirteen times.) Agape, the noun “love,” appears eighteen times in 1 John, more than any other writing in the NT. (CC p. 68)

Jesus told his disciples to love one another as he loved them (Jn 13:34) and that there is no greater love than that someone should lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). It is this love that moved God to give his own Son for the life of the world (Jn 3:16). This is the “first love” (Rev 2:4), the original love: the love of God in Christ. It is the genesis of all other love and of all of love's works. (CC pp. 67-68)

From this love the church had fallen—a love that redeemed and saved her. Her members had forsaken this love of God that possessed them and bound them to each other; it was no longer of first importance in their lives. “You have left your first love” (2:4) is the chief sin, from which all the others mentioned in the following six letters evolve and result. How the church had left her first love is not mentioned, but the sins and failings mentioned in the six following letters indicate what she had done to manifest her loss of it. (CC pp. 67-68)

2:2 *your toil* - kopos – Work that reduces one's strength and brings on weariness. It is painful and is truly labor. (QV)

patient endurance - hoopomony – This involves constant patience and endurance. (QV)

These are both necessary in dealing with error. (Stuenkel p. 21)

who are evil – Means those who are morally evil. They are lowlives. False apostles attempted to lead the Ephesians astray with fake teaching credentials. Some years before, Paul predicted the Ephesians would encounter such false teacher. He warned their elders. (PBC p. 27)

tested.† The necessity of testing for correct doctrine and dependable advice was widely recognized in the early church (see 1Co 14:29; 1Th 5:21; 1Jn 4:1). The method of testing may have been that used by the Bereans (Ac 17:11). (CSB)

apostles...false – Pseudo-apostles offered counterfeit versions of the Christian faith (cf 2 Cor 11:4-5, 2-15; Gal 1:6-9) The Epistles of John warn against “docetic” teachings, i.e., the denial that the Son of God truly assumed human flesh (2 Jn 7-8). (TLSB)

2:3 *enduring patiently* – They had endured hardships for a long time and were still holding firm at the time he wrote. (PBC p. 27)

Evil we should be willing to bear patiently, but evil men cannot be tolerated within the congregation. The church at Ephesus acted according to this principle for the Lord’s sake, whose holy name was here involved. (Stoeckhardt p. 6)

2:4 *love you had at first.* The love they had at first for one another and/or for Christ. (CSB)

John’s Letters show a similar concern for Jesus’ command to love one another as He has loved us (Jn. 13:34-35; cf. 1 John 4:7-12; 2 Jn. 4-6). The Lord warned against brotherly love growing cold in the chaos of the end times (Mt. 24:12) (TLSB)

It is this love that moved God to give his own Son for the life of the world (John 3:16). (CC p. 68)

In their fight for the truth, however, these Christians seem to have become harsh and bitter and lost their first love (agape) which is always active and self-sacrificing vertically to God and horizontally to the neighbor. (Stuenkel p. 21)

Their love for Christ and for another had cooled, and had to be restored, since love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). While engaged in his earthly ministry, Christ warned the Pharisees of their unloving, self-righteous attitude, pointing out that the heart must be right for the actions to be approved by God. (LL p. 32)

Earlier all their works had been prompted by their love for their Lord. Now they are yet performing the same works outwardly, but they no longer flow from the heart of love towards their Savior. They perform their Christian duties, either by sheer force of habit, or they are motivated by some other selfish interest. (Stoeckhardt p. 6)

2:5-6 The church has fallen, and *if she does not repent*, the Lord threatens to remove her from her place in his presence (2:5). Remembrance of that first love and how she now has fallen from it is a prerequisite for repentance. God’s Spirit, through this letter in this book of Revelation, gives that reminder and works contrition and faith. God’s love and forgiveness in Christ are received anew. Works worthy of repentance will follow (cf. Mt. 3:8), that is, works which flow from this first love and which demonstrate it to others. Such were the “first works” (2:5) of the Ephesian Christians—and all Christians. (CC pp. 68-69)

The church at Ephesus had not fallen so far as to embrace the licentious works of the Nicolaitans. To have done so would have compromised their faith with false worship and pagan activities of lust and evil (cf. Rom 1:18–31). The fact that those addressed in this letter hate the ways of the Nicolaitans and that Jesus refers to them as “the church” (2:1) shows that they are *believers who are in the world*, not unbelievers who are of the world. As such, they are commended for their steadfast vigilance against evil and false people (2:2) but also warned and called to constant repentance, for the Christian in this world *lives in repentance*. (CC pp. 68-69)

2:5 *remember* – mnaymonyoo – To exercise memory or be mindful of something. (QV)

This appeals to the mind. (Poellot p. 32)

do - poyeho – To commit one’s self and execute or carry it out. (QV)

This lays claim to the entire body and all of life, which is to be a constant, ceaseless repentance: not only sorrow over sin but also a return to love in action as the evidence of faith. Where this is lacking, worse follows. Ancient Ephesus and its church is no more. A modern traveler found only three Christians there, and they were scarcely familiar with St. Paul and St. John. (Poellot p. 32)

do the works you did at first – The NT contains many exhortations for the faithful to remain zealous for good works until the day of Christ’s appearing (cf. Titus 2:11-14). (TLSB)

We know from the analogy of marriage relationship or friendships that love can only remain strong if it is continually nurtured. Love grows when it is fed. Let us clearly recognize that God will produce in us the love for him that must be the foundation of our faith lives if we let him have the time to create it in us. In our busy world, we rarely give him the time. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

remove your lampstand. Immediate judgment. (CSB)

The lampstand is the symbol of God’s grace among his people. The threat to remove the lampstand warns us that when a congregation despises the gospel, God will eventually remove his means of grace from them. (Religion or lack of it in Germany) Today the once proud city of Ephesus no longer exists. No Christian congregations gathers there around the gospel in Word and Sacraments. (PBC p.28)

2:6 *you hate* – The point is that hating false teachings and practices is consistent with loving Jesus. (PBC p. 29)

A strong but appropriate word, given the destructive nature of the false teaching involved. (TLSB)

Nicolaitans.† A heretical sect within the church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. They apparently taught that spiritual liberty gave them sufficient leeway to practice idolatry and immorality (license for sensual sins). Tradition identifies them with Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch who was one of the first seven deacons in the Jerusalem church (Ac 6:5),

though the evidence is merely circumstantial. A similar group at Pergamum held the teaching of Balaam (vv. 14–15), and some at Thyatira were followers of the woman Jezebel (v. 20). From their heretical tendencies it would appear that all three groups were Nicolaitans. Note that their hateful practices (v. 6) resulted from false doctrine (v. 15), and that our Lord hated the practices of the Nicolaitans and praised the Christians at Ephesus for joining him in this hatred (v. 6). (CSB)

Comparison with Rev. 2:14-15, as well as reports from Early Church fathers, suggests that the Nicolaitans indulged in meat offered to pagan gods and engaged in sexual immorality. Similar problems plagued the Corinthian Church (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 8:1-13; 10:6-30). If, as the Church fathers Irenaeus and Clement claimed, this sect was named for the Nicolaus mentioned in Acts 6:5, then one encounters here a striking fall from grace. (TLSB)

The church at Ephesus had not fallen so far to embrace the works of Nicolaitans. That fact that he says “you hate the practices,” shows that they are believers who in the world. (CC pp. 68-69)

These people taught that a Christian could give reign to the will of his flesh and yet remain a believer in Christ. They openly indulged in all kinds of carnal pleasures without apology. (Stoekhardt p. 6)

2:7 The Lord implores his church to repent, and those who do so by heeding the warning word of the Spirit will receive the blessed assurance of eternal life. This is their victory, even their faith (cf. 1 Jn 5:4). The “tree of life” and “paradise” (Rev 2:7) give promise of eternal life in the new heaven and earth, the restored Garden of Eden. (CC p. 69)

he who has an ear, let him hear – Exhortation found in many prophetic passages including Jesus’ own teaching (cf. Mt. 13:9). A modern equivalent might be “word to the wise.” (TLSB)

Jesus uses this expression urging attention to his Word that he used a number of other times during his earthly ministry, Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 13:43, and Mark 4:23. This implies effective hearing which results in action (Matthew 7:24-27). (Stuenkel)

The Creator gave us ears, and the Holy Spirit inspired these words of correction and comfort. This appeal echoes those Jesus offered during his earthly ministry (Mt 11:15; 13:9,43; Mark 4:23) (PBC p. 29)

the Spirit says. † A clear clause on the inspiration of Scripture, and on the Spirit as a person distinct from Christ. (CSB)

conquers. The challenge to overcome occurs in each letter (here; vv. 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). (CSB)

We are told here what he overcomes, but in the light of the preceding and the following context it is clear that all enemies of his soul are defeated. The best commentary is in Romans 8:31-39 with its shout of triumph: “We are more than conquerors.” (Poellot p. 33)

Jesus’ attached a promise to his appeal to listen. This promise demonstrates that his appeal is also an invitation of grace. (PBC p. 29)

paradise. † Originally a Persian word for a pleasure garden (see note on Lk 23:43). In Revelation it refers to the place where God and man are restored to the perfect fellowship that

existed before sin entered the world. Eating from the tree of life is a figurative way of promising eternal life. (CSB)

Cf. Gen. 1-2. Had Adam and Eve avoided sin, they would have forever lived in holiness and continually eaten from the tree of life. John's final vision depicts the Lord bringing a renewed heaven and earth and restoring access to the tree of life (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5). (TLSB)

This calls to mind the garden of Eden, where God first put the tree of life (Gen 2:9) (PBC p. 29)

2:1–7 Jesus encourages the Ephesian believers to avoid false teachers, return to their first love, and be zealous for good works. Such admonitions continue to apply today, even as moral relativism and watered-down doctrine abound. Yet Jesus helps us overcome all these things. Not even death and hell could defeat Him! • “Praise, Lord, for Your apostles ... May we with zeal as earnest The faith of Christ maintain, Be bound in love together, And life eternal gain.” Amen. (LSB 518:28)

To the Church in Smyrna

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander[a] of those who say that 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 throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

- a. Local Detail – Synagogue of Satan there – 2:9
- b. Image of Christ – The First and the Last, who was
Dead and came back to life – 2:8
- c. Good Christ Sees – I know your suffering and poverty
– 2:9
- d. Bad Christ Sees – Are afraid of suffering – 2:10
- e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement – Stop being afraid of coming
suffering, poverty; be faithful to
death and I will give you the
crown of life – 2:10
- f. Promise to the One Who Conquers – Will not be hurt by the second
death – 2:11

2:8 The Lord Christ identifies himself as “the First and the Last” (2:8). This title is immediately interpreted by that which follows, “the one who was dead and came [back] to life.” The Lord Christ is the First and the Last *because* he died and rose again. He thus is the first, the *cause* of the Christian’s faith and life because of his death and resurrection, and he is the last, the *goal and object* of the believer’s faith and life because he is the Lord and giver of eternal life with the Father (cf. also 22:13; Heb 12:2). This identification as the First and the Last would be a great comfort to the Christians who were daily faced by the fear of suffering and death. (CC p. 72)

Smyrna. A proud and beautiful Asian city (modern Izmir) closely aligned with Rome and eager to meet its demands for emperor worship. This plus a large and actively hostile Jewish

population made it extremely difficult to live there as a Christian. Polycarp, the most famous of the early martyrs, was bishop of Smyrna. (CSB)

Now (1962) it is a city of 250,000, full of brightness, life and activity. Today half of the city population is considered Christian. (Poellot pp. 34-35)

The city at the time of Paul and John had a well-known stadium, a noted library, and a public theater which was the largest in Asia Minor. Smyrna was also noted for its imperial cult. It was the first city in the ancient world to build a temple in honor of Dea Roma, the goddess of Rome. The province of Asia was the only province in the Roman Empire to have more than one center of the emperor cult. (CC p. 70)

Only two of the seven congregations receive commendation without criticism. Smyrna is one of them. (PBC p. 30)

came to life – To be alive, have vitality, to spring back to life (CC p. 70)

2:9 At this particular time the church at Smyrna was evidently experiencing such fear of persecution. In addition they were suffering material poverty, a common hardship among Christians of the first century. Though they were poor in the material wealth of the world, they were rich in the spiritual wealth given by God (see 3:17–18, where spiritual poverty is contrasted to material wealth). Not only were they poor, they were also persecuted by their Jewish neighbors, some of whom seem to have infiltrated their Christian community. These Jews claimed that they (and not the Christians) represented the true inherited faith of Moses and the prophets (see Gal 3:1–14). But the Lord names these oppressors for what they are: the synagogue of Satan—referring metaphorically to the fact that they, as a group, follow the lies of Satan. (CC p. 72)

I know – In the middle of trouble, we often wonder whether God knows or cares about our situation. Twice in verse 9 Jesus says knows. The fact that he mentions it also shows that he cares. (PBC p. 30)

tribulations - thlipsis – This means to be under pressure, be burdened, in anguish or persecuted. (QV)

The property and goods of some were confiscated when they refused to worship the emperor. These factors combined to make the church literally poor in this world's goods (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Probably it was not easy for its members to find profitable, gainful employment. (Poellot p. 35)

your poverty – The property and goods of some were confiscated when they refused to worship the emperor. These factors combined to make the church literally poor in this world's goods (1 Cor 1:26-29). Probably it was not easy for its members to find profitable, gainful employment. (Poellot p. 35)

you are rich – They were rich in God and His blessings of the forgiveness of sins through faith in a loving, ever present Savior, peace of heart, mind and conscience, and all of the other gifts and fruits of the Spirit. (Poellot p. 35)

They are the opposite of materially rich but spiritually poor Laodicea. This congregation typifies believers everywhere: “poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:10). (PBC p. 30-31)

the slander - A vilification against God. To blaspheme or speak evil or even rail against another (QV)

The first Christians repeatedly suffered hardship when unbelieving Jews slandered them and turned public opinion against them (cf. Acts 13:42-50; 14:1-7, 19). Believers frequently had to defend themselves before government officials (Acts 17:1-9; 18:5-17). (TLSB)

They told Christians they were not God’s children unless they were physically descended from Abraham or conformed to Moses’ circumcision. But Jesus had taught the Jews during his earthly ministry that the real descendants of Abraham were those who “hold to (his) teaching” (John 8:31). And Paul assured the Romans, “A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such man’s praise is not from me, but from God” (Rom 2:29). (PBC p. 31)

who say they are Jews. † See Ro 2:28–29; Gal 6:16.). (CSB)

A corrupt sect of Judaizers seems to be referred to. (CB)

It was not fashionable to be a Christian. (Poellot p. 35)

synagogue of Satan – Such hostile unbelief is ultimately inspired by Satan. (TLSB)

Satan. Hebrew for “accuser” (see Zec 3:1; cf. Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7). (CSB)

The church at Smyrna were persecuted by their Jewish neighbors, some of whom seem to have infiltrated their Christian community. These Jews claimed that they (and not the Christians) represented the true inherited faith of Moses and the prophets. But the Lord names oppressors the “synagogue of Satan” referring to the fact that they, as a group, follow the lies of Satan. (CC p. 72)

2:10-11 The suffering of the Christians at Smyrna, their poverty, and the opposition they suffered from Jewish neighbors were certainly ample causes for fear. The present tense imperative with the negative (μηδὲν φοβοῦ, 2:10) indicates that the Christians were *already* full of fear; they are being enjoined to “stop fearing.” Therefore the Lord Christ speaks his word of comfort. He is aware that his people will suffer, even intensely (“ten days,” 2:10). But they are not to be afraid, for the time of their suffering is set by God (“ten days”). To be afraid of the sufferings in persecution at the hands of people is fear misdirected, and as such it could open up the Christians to a weakening or even a loss of faith. Fear of anything or anyone besides God is a sin that not only endangers faith, but can, unless repented of, lead to idolatry (e.g., offering worship to Caesar). (CC pp. 72-73)

Faith-threatening fear of suffering violence at the hands of people is a temptation for any Christian. God’s people are open to this sin if they have left their “first love” (2:4). Fear then follows because the heart no longer looks to the love of God in Christ but to other things (see Mt

14:28–31). The Lord Christ, in his love and concern for his people, tells them not to be afraid for he has overcome the world (Jn 16:33). *The remedy for fear, then, is to repent and look with faith to Jesus Christ.* Through repentant, faithful focus on Christ there is reborn that first love (1 Jn 4:16–19; 5:1–5), which sustains endurance through persecution (cf. Heb 12:1–3). (CC pp. 72-73)

To those who are “faithful” Christ promises the crown of life (Rev 2:10; cf. 4:4). In this context “faithful” (πιστός) refers to repentance and faith (see Rom 1:17 and Hab 2:4 in both the MT and the LXX). Like the crowns given to victorious athletes (1 Cor 9:25), “the crown of life” (Rev 2:10) is a symbol of victory—victory over fear and death and the grave (1:17–18; 2:8) which results in the gift of eternal life (3:21; 7:13–17). Jesus Christ wears that crown, because by his death and resurrection he won the victory (14:14; 19:12 has διάδημα, “diadem”). Crowns are worn by the twenty-four elders and the woman in chapter 12, who represent the church (4:4, 10; 12:1). The Christians brought to faith and nurtured by Paul are his “crown” (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19). On the Last Day the bestowal of “the crown of righteousness” inaugurates the Christian’s hope of reigning with Christ forever after death (2 Tim 4:8). And this crown is so precious to each Christian that he is to guard it so as not to lose it (Rev 3:11). James also calls it a “crown of life” (James 1:12), while Peter refers to it as a “crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). (CC pp. 72-73)

As do all of the letters, this one closes with a reminder of the closeness of the Spirit to Jesus Christ (Rev 2:11; cf. 5:6). Not only is the Spirit sent to the church by the Father in Jesus’ name to teach the church (Jn 14:26), the Spirit is also and always the “Comforter” (παράκλητος) of God’s people (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The close relationship between the Spirit and Christ is also demonstrated by the fact that both share this title of “Comforter” (παράκλητος, of Christ in 1 Jn 2:1). (CC pp. 72-73)

2:10 *do not fear* – The form of (extremely frightened and alarmed) is the present tense imperative here which means that the Christians were already full of fear; they are enjoined to “stop fearing.” (QV)

Faith-threatening fear of suffering violence at the hands of people is a temptation for any Christian. God’s people are open to this sin if they have left their “first love” (2:4). Fear then follows because the heart no longer looks to the love of God in Christ but to other things (Matthew 14:28-31). The remedy for fear, then, is to repent and look with faith to Jesus Christ (1 John 4:16-19; 5:1-5) (CC p. 73)

you are about suffer – Forewarned is forearmed. The faithful were to know not only that these things would happen among them, but they were also to be very clear in their own hearts and minds as to the cause and source of these severe trial, namely, the devil. They should know that the purpose of these afflictions is that they are to be “tried,” that is, tested, proved and improved, and so strengthened in their saving faith. (Poellot p. 36)

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them? It is the whole process of meeting and solving problems that gives life its meaning. It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually. (The Road Less Traveled pp. 15,16)

devil. Greek *diabolos*, meaning “accuser.” (CSB)

The one who casts something like a spear or an arrow (“as the evil one” does in Eph. 6:16) or an accusation. In Zech 3:1-5 there is a graphic picture of Satan standing before God in heaven as an

adversary of Joshua the high priest. The devil is the one who accuses God's saints before him (Rev. 12:10). Jesus called the devil the great liar (John 8:44). (CC p. 71)

Satan and his followers often operate under the guise of religion (Matthew 4:6; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15), deceiving the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:18). Forewarned is forearmed. The faithful were to know not only that these things would happen among them, but they were also to be very clear in their own hearts and minds as to the cause and source of these severe trials, namely, the devil. (Poellot p. 36)

you may be tested – Greek *peirazo*, “test” and “tempt.” On the one hand, Satan tempts us to become faithless. On the other hand, the Lord also allows us to be tested (cf. Job 1-2). But God never tempts anyone to sin (James 1:13). (TLSB)

tribulation. See the warnings by Jesus (Jn 15:20) and Paul (2Ti 3:12). (CSB)

To have pressure be put on, to burden someone or make trouble that causes anguish. (QV)

ten days.† The time of persecution will be limited and of short duration. (CSB)

Probably symbolizes a short time, like the 10 day period of testing in Dan. 1:12, 14. (TLSB)

Ten symbolizes the perfection of God in the human context. The number seven symbolizes the perfection of God unto himself. The number ten was used to symbolize events or time periods which would be total and complete. It could also signify an event or period of short duration, not always literally ten (Gen. 24:55; Dan. 1:12-14). Here ten days indicate a short but intense period of time, a complete period as regards God's timetable. (CC p. 71)

It means that God knows what troubles his people face and limits the influence of evil on his children. (PBC p. 32)

Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

crown of life. The crown that is eternal life. “Crown” does not refer to a royal crown (12:3; 13:1; 19:12) but to the garland or wreath awarded to the winner in athletic contests (3:11; 4:4, 10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14). (CSB)

A prize in the public games or a symbol of honor. (QV)

Here it signifies eternal life. (CC p. 71)

The crown is not earned by any effort or striving, but is a pure gift of God's grace and favor. First the cross, then the crown. (Poellot p. 38)

2:11 *second death*.† The lake of fire (20:14; see 20:6; 21:8), or eternal death in hell. (CSB)

2:8–11 Jesus promises the Church at Smyrna the crown of eternal life if it would faithfully endure the persecution it was suffering. In many parts of the world, the Church is still undergoing persecutions today. And then there are Christians who complain about being inconvenienced for their faith! In either case, what matters is the surpassing greatness of the crown that Jesus will bestow on those who remain true. • “ ‘Come unto Me, ye weary, And I will give you rest.’ O blessed voice of Jesus, Which comes to hearts oppressed! It tells of benediction, Of pardon, grace, and peace, Of joy that hath no ending, Of love that cannot cease.” Amen. (LSB 684:1)

To the Church in Pergamum

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith[b] even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

- a. Local Detail – Satan’s throne is there; Satan lives there; Antipas was martyred there; the teachings of the Nicolaitans are there – 2:13,15
- b. Image of Christ – Has the sharp two-edged sword – 2:12
- c. Good Christ Sees – Hold on to my name; did not deny the faith even when Antipas was martyred – 2:13
- d. Bad Christ Sees – Some hold to the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans – 2:14-15
- e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement – Repent, else I will war with the sword of my mouth – 2:16
- f. Promise to the One Who Conquers – I will give of the hidden manna and a white stone and a secret name – 2:17

2:12 The sender of this letter identifies himself as the Lord who has the sharp two-edged sword, a reference to 1:16, where, in the commissioning of John, the Son of Man has such a sword. The sword symbolizes the judgment of God. The fact that the Son of Man wields the sword demonstrates that he, under the authority of the Father, will execute the judgment. When he comes in judgment at the End, the Son of Man will bear this sword of judgment (19:15). That the

Lord of the church should identify himself also as the one who executes the judgment of God suggests that the church is also under this judgment. But even more, it shows that he is the defender of the church as he judges the enemies of God who afflict his people. (CC pp. 76-77)

Pergamum. Modern Bergama; the ancient capital of Asia, built on a cone-shaped hill rising 1,000 feet above the surrounding valley. Its name in Greek means “citadel” and is the origin of our word “parchment.” (CSB)

It had a library of some 200,000 volumes, and legend suggests that parchment was invented there when papyrus became short in supply. It was famous for its cultic altars and temples, the foremost of which was the great altar of Zeus. Religion played a dominant role in the life of the city for it was the center of four of the most important religious cults: Zeus, Athene (the city’s patron goddess), Dionysos, and Asklepios (the god of healing). It was the seat of a famous school of medicine. (CC p. 74)

sharp two-edged sword. The congregation at Pergamum should accept what they are about to hear as the Word of God’s Son. The sharpness of a sword is its effectiveness. The double edge cuts both ways: the law criticizes; the gospel comforts. (PBC p. 34)

Isaiah 55:11 “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

2:13-15 The “throne of Satan” indicates the source of the sufferings that the church of Pergamum was undergoing. The suffering may have been ridicule and hostility from a pagan society dominated by pagan rituals and emperor worship. Or it may have been persecution resulting from their steadfastness in their faith. Behind every form of opposition was Satan, the devil. Satan had seemingly focused his warfare on the church in Pergamum with a single-minded intensity. The critical feature of this letter’s introduction, then, is that the Lord Christ, the Lord of the church, knows of their dangerous situation and cares for them as their avenger who will judge their adversaries. (CC pp. 77-78)

The church in Pergamum remained faithful even when tested and tried to the limit. The martyrdom of a notable member of their community, Antipas, must have shaken profoundly the hearts and faith of his fellow Christians. But they held to their faith in Jesus Christ, perhaps more so in view of the example of the courageous faith and steadfastness of Antipas (cf. 2:10). (CC pp. 77-78)

Yet lurking alongside their steadfast loyalty to Christ was a sin and failing that posed a threat to their victorious faith. Some in the fellowship held to the “teaching of Balaam” (2:14). The sin of Balaam, as can be deduced from the role he played between the Moabites (and Midianites) and Israel, was that of wanting both God and money (Mt 6:24). When the temptation came to him by way of Balak to curse Israel, he knew that he had to remain faithful to God and his word. But at the same time he desired the honor and riches that were promised to him if he heeded Balak’s request. If only he could remain true to God while at the same time pleasing to Balak, he could have both God and earthly gain and wealth. *The sin and teaching of Balaam was the attempt to serve two masters, God and mammon (human honors and material wealth, Mt 6:24)*. This sin ended in disaster: Balaam’s own death, and his influence on many in Israel to add to their worship of God the worship of a false god. It resulted in leading many in Israel into sexual immorality and idolatry, and finally death (Num 25:1–2; 31:13–17, cf. 2 Pet 2:14–15). (CC pp. 77-78)

In the pagan society in which the Pergamum Christians lived the temptation was to compromise their faith and witness to gain earthly honor (and perhaps also material wealth) and security, as well as the freedom to engage in illicit relationships. Many might have thought they could remain faithful to God but also worship another god and so gain earthly ease. When they fell into this temptation and sin, they not only lost their faith but also encouraged other Christians to engage in syncretistic idolatry. What the Lord of the church had against them was twofold: their sin of compromising their faith for the sake of worldly gain and pleasure, and the sin of doing nothing to correct it (cf. 1 Cor 5:1–13).

To make matters worse, some within the church were holding to the antinomian heresy of the Nicolaitans, which encouraged Christians to misuse their Christian liberty for the purpose of licentious living. This latter sin worked along with and abetted the sin of Balaam (cf. Rom 1:32). (CC pp. 77-78)

2:13 *I know where you dwell* – This was a comforting thought for the members of this church. Jesus knew how hard it was for them to remain true to him in a city where Satan had his throne. (PBC p. 34)

where Satan’s throne is. Satan “ruled” from Pergamum in that it was the official center of emperor worship in Asia. (CSB)

Likely refers to Pergamum’s reputation as home to numerous pagan shrines. Additionally, worship of the emperor flourished there. This detail is important, since the Christians’ refusal to offer Caesar divine honors was the root cause of so much persecution. Hus” “(Christ’s) seat in which he reposes, dwells and resides by grace is all the saints, just as, on the other hand, the seats of Satan in which the Satan reposes, dwells and resides are all the wicked” (The Church, p. 198). (TLSB)

Pergamos was a center at which the devil had succeeded in co-ordinating a number of factors against the church: the Roman state religion of emperor worship, with its temptation to deny the Christian faith by lighting a bit of incense on a pagan altar, and often death for those who refused; the temple of Zeus and his occasional love affairs with mortal women; the cult of Athena, the gray-eyed warrior-maid goddess; and the shrine of Aesculapius, with its reputation for “dream cures,” and a serpent, the Christian symbol for Satan, as its distinguishing emblem. A person will do well to measure and judge environments with Christian standards and to count well the cost of living in neighborhoods which present particular hazards to Christian faith and life (Poellot pp. 41-42)

A throne is a seat of power. (PBC p. 34)

Antipas. First martyr of Asia. According to tradition he was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle during the reign of Domitian. (CSB)

His martyrdom was a great testing for the Christians of Pergamum. (CC p. 75)

Mentioned only here in the Bible, Antipas had apparently been martyred. Remarkably, for all of the emphasis on persecution in Revelation, Antipas is the only named martyr. (TLSB)

2:14 *teaching of Balaam.* Balaam advised the Midianite women how to lead the Israelites astray (Nu 25:1–2; 31:16; cf. Jude 11). He is a fitting prototype of corrupt teachers who deceive believers into compromise with worldliness. (CSB)

Alludes to the shameful incident related in Numbers 25:1-9. Henceforth, the name Balaam was synonymous with the most depraved forms of idolatrous worship (i.e., those involving sexual immorality). (TLSB)

The powers of evil know that they cannot conquer us through direct confrontation, even as Balaam could not curse the Israelites. Therefore, the powers of evil come to us subtly and lead us astray by small increments. Living intentionally requires great deliberation, choosing our actions carefully so that they do not contribute to the various idolatries of power and earth in our culture. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

It is tempting to “flirt” with sin, or to think that, since forgiveness is always available, resisting is not all that important. (LL p. 34)

food sacrificed to idols ... immorality. See Ac 15:20, 29. (CSB)

ἄκάρῳ ἢ ἰδοῖν - Meat or anything offered as a sacrifice to an idol. (QV)

2:15 Nicolaitans. The church at Ephesus was commended for its stand against them, but the church at Pergamos tolerated some of their followers in it midst. (Poellot p. 43)

In public the congregation gave a bold witness and defense of the name of Jesus. But some of the members privately caved in to the sins of the pagans, who sought fertile fields and material profit from their false gods by sacrificing animals and engaging in sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes. It was an attractive worship formula: win the god’s favor while indulging your own lusts. (PBC p. 36)

2:16 God leads believers to repent and to view with horror the temptations to sin and the sin itself. Within that horror and fear of judgment, the Spirit of God brings forth sorrow and contrition that moves the penitent heart to bring the sin and its guilt to the throne of God’s mercy (2 Cor 7:8–10). In faith the sorrowing heart sees Jesus Christ, who assumed our guilt and by the blood that was shed on the cross earned forgiveness, life, and salvation for sinful human beings (Rev 7:13–17; cf. Heb 4:14–16). (CC p. 78)

sword of my mouth. The long sword. (CSB)

This warns that if Christians turn away from Christ, His righteous anger and unsparing judgment will fall upon them on the Last Day. (TLSB)

2:17 Through faith worked by the Spirit of God, Christians hear the word of grace, the sentence of innocence (the white stone) and the promise of new and everlasting life (the heavenly manna). For Jesus Christ is not the Lord who wields the sword of judgment to kill the one who repents, but the Lord who is the eternal manna, the bread of life (Jn 6:31–35). The sword of judgment is for those who do not repent. For those who hear the Spirit, there is the peace of victory over sin and death. (CC pp. 78-79)

The promises are phrased in language that recalls Baptism (the “new name”; see the textual note on ὄνομα καινόν in Rev 2:17) and the Lord’s Supper (“the manna which has been hidden”). In the Lord’s Supper, Christians receive “a foretaste of the feast to come.” That “feast to come” is the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:6–9). The Lord’s Supper is *hidden* manna (2:17) because the

future banquet is now hidden from view, and the presence of Christ in the Supper is also hidden, not visible, but nevertheless real and as certain as Christ's own promise: "This is my body. ... This is my blood" (Mt 26:26, 28). In prophetic anticipation the church can hymn, "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing" *even now*, affirming "eat we *manna* from above." (CC pp. 78-79)

hidden manna.† The heavenly food available to the believer who overcomes (cf. Ps 78:24), in contrast to the unclean food of the Balaamites. A promise of everlasting life to those who overcome. (CSB)

Jewish tradition held that manna would again be given to the faithful at the Messiah's appearance during the final days. Christian interpreters naturally associate this reference with Holy Communion. Cf. Jn. 6. (TLSB)

This expression occurs nowhere else in the Bible. The promise expressed here refers to heaven. (Poellot p. 44)

The manna is Jesus and all he did to win eternal life for us. To eat this manna means to believe the gospel message of Jesus. This gospel and its reward of eternal life are hidden from those whose false pride claims a better avenue to God (Mt 13:11; 1 Cor 2:9; Col 3:2-3). (PBC p. 38)

Before long the wetness of sin grows stale and nauseating, and ends in bitterness and death. But this hidden manna offers the most exquisite sweetness, which never deteriorates and of which one never tires. It is the perfect joy of everlasting life, prefigured by the manna which Moses had to hide away in the ark. And that is given to everyone who remains faithful. (Stoeckhardt p. 10)

John 6:35 "Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

white stone.† Certain kinds of stones were used as tokens for various purposes. In the context of the Messianic banquet the white stone was probably for the purpose of admission. In ancient Greek law courts, a white stone (pebble) was a vote for acquittal. Here it symbolizes Christ's verdict of "not guilty" on all believers. (CSB)

In the ancient world, special pebbles were sometimes used as admission tickets to banquets. (TLSB)

The white stone corresponds to the voting stones that juries in that part of the world used to arrive at their verdict. If they gave the judge a white stone, they indicated acquittal. They returned a guilty verdict by giving him a black stone. (PBC p. 38)

new name. The name of the victor (see Isa 62:2; 65:15). (CSB)

Likely the saving name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). (TLSB)

In the Bible a new name often signifies a new relationship with God (Jacob to Israel in Gen. 32:28). The white stone and the new name assure each believing heart that it has been declared innocent before God. (PBC p. 38)

2:12–17 Jesus urges the congregation in Pergamum to repent of the pagan practices into which they were slipping and to follow the example of one who stood fast, even to the point of death. Sadly, compromising the Gospel and committing sexual sins remain problems today. Yet, Jesus

offers us repentance and forgiveness also. He even prepares for us a seat at the messianic banquet that never ends. • Lord, I thank You for the godly example of those that surrendered their lives rather than deny Your name. Give me a similar unwavering faith, that I may ever hold fast Your name. Amen.

To the Church in Thyatira

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. 25 Only hold fast what you have until I come. 26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule[c] them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself 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.’

- a. Local Detail – The so-called prophetess Jezebel
Is there; some there have known the depts. of Satan – 2:20,24
- b. Image of Christ – The Son of God, who has eyes like fire and feet like brass; searches thoughts and hearts – 2:18, 23
- c. Good Christ Sees – Have love, faith, service, endurance; your last works are more than your first works – 2:19
- d. Bad Christ Sees – Tolerate the so-called prophetess Jezebel, who teaches people to commit sexual immorality and eat idolatrous food – 2:20
- e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement – Repent of adultery with Jezebel; her children will be killed; the faithful must hold fast to what they have – 2:22-23
- f. Promise to the One Who Conquers – I will give authority to rule the Nations with an iron scepter and will give the morning star – 2:26-28

2:18 The Lord of the church now identifies himself as the Son of Man by referring to his fire-like eyes and brass-like feet, both of which are a part of his appearance when commissioning John

(1:14–15). The flashing, fire-like eyes suggest the Lord’s righteous anger over against the agents of darkness, the enemies of the truth, whether inside or outside the visible church. The brass-like feet demonstrate his firmness and determination to trample under foot these same enemies (cf. Dan 2:33, 40–41). For the first and only time in Revelation Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of God” (Rev 2:18). As the “Son of Man” Jesus Christ earned the right to be the judge and Savior of the human race. But this “Son of Man” is also none other than the mighty, everlasting God,^c who, together with his Father, is the Creator of all life and its ultimate destiny. The Lord impresses upon his church, his people, that he, as true man and true God, is the only one who holds within his hands the destiny of the entire human race, the world itself and all history.⁹ He calls the church to listen carefully to his voice because he speaks for its eternal well-being. (CC p. 82)

Thyatira. Modern Akhisar. Founded by Seleucus I (311–280 B.C.) as a military outpost, it was noted for its many trade guilds. Lydia, “a dealer in purple cloth,” was from Thyatira (see note on Ac 16:14). (CSB)

The city was not known for its religious life, though it did have temples dedicated to Artwimis and Apollo, the sun –god (Trimnos, the patron god of the city, was identified with Apollo). – Acts 16 tells how Paul was directed in a vision to go to Macedonia. At Philippi, the first important city he visited in Europe, he found welcome Christian hospitality at the home of “a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.” (Poellot p. 44)

write – Again, Jesus asked John to write down his words. In the minds of the listeners, this should remove any doubts that its message originated in the human mind. (PBC p 39)

Son of God.† The only time this title for Jesus appears in the book. (CSB)

eyes ... like a flame of fire. These suggest the Lord’s righteous anger over against the angels of darkness, the enemies of truth, whether inside or outside the visible church. (CC p. 82)

burnished bronze. A refined alloy of copper or bronze with metallic zinc. – These demonstrate his firmness and determination to trample under foot the enemies of truth (cf. Dan 2:33, 40–41) (CSB)

2:19-20 The Lord knows and acknowledges the works of his church, in particular its faithful service and patience. He knows also that the believers are increasing and growing in faith and Christian service. But all their faith, steadfastness, and service will be of no avail unless they realize the grave sin in their midst: the woman of sin within the congregation, Jezebel. Whether she was an actual woman who was the cause of the evil, or whether the name Jezebel served as a symbol of the sin itself which many fell into or were tempted by, it is quite clear by John’s use of the OT figure what the sin and evil was. (CC p. 83)

Jezebel stands for and represents the sin of syncretism, a universalistic belief that all religions are of value and are able to be of benefit before God. In the pluralistic society of the Greco-Roman world, in which many religions were believed to be acceptable before God, this syncretism of religious ideas was a particular threat to the Christian community. To witness to and to live in the truth that Jesus Christ is the only truth about God and the only name by which human beings can be saved was to court economic and social ostracism, possibly even danger and death (cf. Acts 4:1–12; 5:27–32). The temptation was always present to tone down one’s witness or even to deny Christ by silence or action in order to escape such treatment and persecution. Believers might all too easily compromise the Christian truth and faith, so that the unique and

nonconforming dictates of their Christian faith and conscience might not stick out and gain attention. (CC p. 83)

2:19 *I know your works* –In contrast to the Ephesians, whose faith and good works were beginning to wane (v. 4), the congregation at Thyatira was increasing in works and faithfulness. (TLSB)

2:20 *you tolerate* – The good members are being reprimanded for putting up with it. (PBC p. 40)

Those who practiced fornication and adultery belonged to this sect, which also adorned itself with the name and the Word of God. Its followers insisted on being counted as members of the Christian Church. They lived in open works of the flesh, claiming that through appeasing their lust they could mortify their flesh. This of course, was diabolical blindness. Here in Thyatira this libertine sect had many followers, whom the congregation tolerated as their members. The congregation, granting recognition to the followers of this sect as being members, was to blame that many of its faithful servants were carried away to immorality. (Stoekhardt p. 11)

James 5:19-20 ¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

Jezebel. See 1Ki 16:31; 2Ki 9:22, 30–37. The name is used here as an epithet for a prominent woman in the congregation who undermined loyalty to God by promoting tolerance toward pagan practices. (CSB)

Just as Jezebel led Israel into the worship of false deities (1 Kings 18:4; 2 Kings 9:22), so this new false prophetess was leading the community in Thyatira into heresy and vice. (TLSB)

Interfaith theologians and militant secularists lump together conservative Christians with the Muslim terrorists as “fundamentalists,” as the enemy who deserves to be eradicated. (Veith – Terrorism p. 92)

sexual immorality ... food sacrificed to idols. See v. 14. (CSB)

2:21-23 The Lord of the church in his patience urges those who are practicing this sin and are influencing others toward it to repent. He gives them time to do so. In order to help lead them to repent he lays affliction upon them. For those whom he loves, he chastens and disciplines, even painfully so at times in order that they might avoid the coming fearful judgment (see Heb 12:1–13; cf. 2 Cor 12:6–10). It is clear that, though the Lord chastens, it is not his will that sinners die but that they repent and live in God’s forgiving grace (Ezek 18:23, 32). But those who do not repent will suffer his judgment now and eternally. This judgment will now be seen by others as a warning and as a witness to the truth that the Lord Christ alone searches the hearts and thus is able to exercise God’s judgment (Is 11:3–5). (CC p. 83)

2:21 *I gave her time to repent* – This Jezebel has been warned but refuses to repent. (TLSB)

2:22 *unto a sickbed*. Disease was often considered as appropriate punishment for sins (cf. 1Co 11:29–30). (CSB)

Jezebel’s bed – for the moment a place of pleasure – will become a place of suffering when both she and her partners are overcome with tribulations. (TLSB)

ballo which is bed. Here is used by metonymy (a figure of speech) for a debilitating illness which confined one to bed (cf 2 Ki 1:4, 6, 16; Ps. 41:3 [Mt. 41:4]). Here it is active, is also used in the passive when a person is “cast onto a bed,” that is, bed-ridden (Mt 9:2; Mk 7:30) (CC p. 81)

2:23 *her children*. Jezebel is the spiritual mother of all who pursue antinomian (libertine) doctrines. (CSB)

Jezebel and her consorts will be punished severely for their idolatry and immorality, and all the more because they ignored repeated calls to repentance. (TLSB)

he who searches mind and heart.† Cf. Ps 7:9; Pr 24:12; Jer 11:20; 17:10. “Mind” (lit. “kidney”) probably refers here to the will and the affections; “heart” may designate the center of rational life. The order is reversed in the Greek text. (CSB)

This was regarded as being the seat of the inmost thoughts, feelings, and purposes of the soul. (Poellot p. 48)

according to your works. Judgment based on works is taught by Jesus (Mt 16:27) and Paul (Ro 2:6) as well as John (Rev 18:6; 20:12–13; 22:12). (CSB)

2:24-25 The “depths of Satan” (Rev 2:24) is another way of referring to the teaching and sin of Jezebel. The sins of syncretism and universalism deny the uniqueness of Christianity—the only true and saving knowledge of God. They are lies of Satan, perhaps even *the* lie, by which he attempts to subvert the truth of Jesus Christ. As for those Christians of Thyatira who, though severely tested by this sin, held firm to their Christian witness, the Lord will not further burden them—perhaps in the sense that he would not test them further (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). They have suffered enough. Instead, they are exhorted to hold on faithfully until their Lord returns (see Rev 2:10). Those who thus hold on and conquer do so by holding to the works of Jesus Christ, namely, his redeeming death and triumphal resurrection for their eternal well-being. These works of Christ they also exhibit to others in their Christian witness and life. (CC p. 84)

2:24 *the deep things of Satan*. Later Gnosticism (see Introduction to 1 John: Gnosticism) taught that in order to defeat Satan one had to enter his stronghold, i.e., experience evil deeply. (CSB)

Jezebel and her followers doubtless acted like the wayward people in Corinth. They ate meat sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality, while claiming to be more deeply spiritual than ordinary believers (cf. 1 Cor. 8-10). (TLSB)

2:25-26 Only those remaining faithful unto the end will see heavenly glory (cf. Mt. 25:1-13). (TLSB)

2:26-28 The blessing of God’s grace is pronounced upon such faithful slaves of Christ. They will share in his authority over the nations and in his demonstration of judgment. He will separate them from the ungodly as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats with his staff (see Ps 2:6–12; Mt 25:31–46). At his resurrection and ascension, Jesus Christ receives the honor of being the bright star in the firmament of God’s heavenly host, including both angels and saints. He promises to share this glory with those who conquer and remain faithful to him (see Rev 22:16–17). (CC p. 84)

2:27 *rule*.† Lit. “shepherd” (a common metaphor for “rule”). See 2Ti 2:12. (CSB)

This power is not exercised by anyone while he is still here in time and on this earth, because he receives it only after his “end.” Having gone to heaven, he there rules with Christ over the nations, that is, the heathen, as is evident from what follows. (Poellot p. 50)

rod of iron. Symbolic of the strength of his rule (see 12:5; 19:15). (CSB)

Imagery from Ps. 2:8-9, a messianic passage. There, however the Messiah is depicted crushing the disobedient nations. Here, it is His people that do so. Thus, this passage emphasizes that Christians will share in Christ’s heavenly reign (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 20:4, 6). (TLSB)

This is not a picture of a gentle and tender shepherd. (Poellot p. 50)

2:28 *morning star.* † In 22:16 Jesus calls himself “the bright Morning Star.” Possibly the gift is the privilege of being with Jesus in all his glory through eternity. (CSB)

In Jewish tradition, the Messiah was associated with the appearance of a star (cf. Mt. 2:1-12). Revelation 22:16 explicitly identifies Jesus as the morning star. (TLSB)

This star was the last to fade away with the rising of the sun; it was the most brilliant of the heavenly stars. (It may actually have been a planet). In the early church, Baptism was sometimes call photismos “enlightenment,” because the baptized have been called “out of darkness into his (God’s) glorious light.” (1 Peter 2:9) (CC p. 82)

2:18–29 Just as Jesus warned the Ephesians, so He also admonished the Thyatirans. They must avoid idolatrous worship and sexual immorality. We, too, must remain vigilant against such failures and repent of the times we have fallen short. By God’s grace, we remain faithful to the Word of Christ and so share with Him in ruling His eternal kingdom. • Deliver us, dear Savior, from the deceptive doctrines and practices of this present age and prepare us for the age to come. Amen.