

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## WEEK 3: CHAPTER 2 TEACHING NOTES

### CHAPTER 2

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#### The Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira (2:1–29)

##### Introduction

- Revelation 1:19 Write therefore the things that you have seen (Chapter 1), **those that are** (Chapters 2 and 3) and those that are to take place after this. (Chapters 4-22).
- Think of it: The risen Christ himself, dictating a message addressing the strengths and weaknesses of your local church, prefaced by a description of some aspect of his own glory, containing important information for the immediate future of the church, and concluded by a promised reward offered to those who heed his word.<sup>1</sup>
- These messages, therefore, contain divine revelation and exhortation pertaining to the present age, and, having special pertinence in the present situation in the church, they constitute one of the most incisive and penetrating exhortations in the entire New Testament in relation to church doctrine and Christian living.<sup>2</sup>
- In general, these messages are letters of reproof, rebuke, and reassurance.<sup>3</sup>
- The selection of the seven churches is as simple as to their location on a commonly followed route and as genius as the Lord himself in examples of churches with implications that were relevant at the time of writing that are rich with implications for the church until Christ's return.
  - Seven different churches with seven different problems.
    - There aren't a narrow set of problems for the church, but rather a wide mixture furthering the infinite wisdom of our creator.
  - The problems they faced 2000 years ago are the same problems we face today.
  - People were the same then as they are now. The same mixture of strengths and weaknesses can still be observed today.

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Hamilton jr. *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway), 53-101.

<sup>2</sup> Walvoord

<sup>3</sup> Walvoord

- As we look at the structure and contents of the seven letters to the churches, John's point will be clear: For the glory of God, the churches are to be zealous for the gospel, reject false teachers, and live in a manner that corresponds to the gospel.<sup>4</sup>
- These letters follow a definite pattern with eight parts<sup>5</sup>
  - 1. Introduction to write to an angel—meaning a messenger—the undershepherd of the flock.
  - 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to.
  - 3. Commendation using “I know” statements.
  - 4. Accusation like "But I have this against you”.
  - 5. Call to change and repentance. Strengths and weaknesses called to action.
  - 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do. Can be an encouragement or a warning of judgement.
  - 7. Promise to those who overcome.
  - 8. Invitation stating, He who has an ear, let him hear.
    - Not everyone will perceive.
    - Those who have the mind of Christ, will hear the spirit, and will obey.
- The central aim is to be overcomers. A one word summarization of the entire book of Revelation is the Greek word Nike meaning Victory; Or one who overcomes<sup>6</sup>
- Each of the seven churches face obstacles and the question is will the church overcome or succumb?

**To the Church in Ephesus (2:1-7)** Theologically and morally sound but deficient in love.<sup>7</sup>

### **Brief Background**

- The city of Ephesus was diverse and idolatrous with the famed temple to Artemis.
  - The Ephesian Artemis was a “queen of heaven” deity emphasizing fertility, virginity, and the protection of childbearing.
- The Ephesian church was started by Paul, entrusted to Timothy, and tradition later places John there as an overseer.

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<sup>4</sup> James M. Hamilton jr.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin DeYoung. <https://christcovenant.org/sermon-series/7-churches-of-revelation-2/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

## Summary

- 1. Introduction (Rev 2:1a)
  - To the pastor of the church in Ephesus
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 2:1b)
  - Jesus is looking for His light to shine from the Ephesian church. If their light doesn't shine, Jesus will take away their status as a church.
- 3. Commendation (Rev 2:2-3, 6)
  - The church was characterized by hard work as they were doers of the Word.
    - The body was steadfast and did not grow weary.
  - The Ephesians were discerning with God's Word.
    - They resisted evil, false teaching, and the Nicolaitans (against the mind of God)
- 4. Accusation (Rev 2:4)
  - The body of the Ephesian church was marked by great love initially, but over time they lost their first love. The love being referred to was love for their neighbors which they had lost. They had keen minds, busy hands, but shriveled hearts.
  - The Ephesian church had careful eye for theological and moral error, but a critical eye for finding fault in one another. This is a great danger for sharp, steadfast, and careful churches.
  - Christians can be good in war time, but poor in peace time. A church can be against all the right things, but are they for all the right things? Jesus calls the Ephesian church to love what the God loves.
- 5. Call to change and repentance (Rev 2:5a)
  - Repent from the lovelessness, remember what you used to do, return to what you once did.
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do (Rev 2:5b)
  - Jesus will remove the lampstand.
    - Jesus threatens that they will no longer be a church if they remain loveless
- 7. Promise to him who overcomes (Rev 2:7b)
  - Those who conquer will eat from "the tree of life." The tree of life will be infinitely satisfying, and those who fail to conquer because they prized other things over Jesus will feel infinite remorse. And that remorse will never end.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James M. Hamilton jr.

- 8. Invitation (Rev 2:7a)
  - He who has an ear, let him hear.

### **Additional Reading**

- Love or Die: Christ's Wake-up Call to the Church, Alexander Strauch

### **To the Church in Smyrna (2:8-11) Vibrant but fearful.<sup>9</sup>**

### **Brief Background**

- Smyrna was a wealthy city, second only to Ephesus in the entire area and, like Ephesus, a seaport. In this large and flourishing commercial center was the little church to which this message was sent. Smyrna is mentioned only here in Scripture, but from other literature it is evident that this city was noted for its wickedness and opposition to the Christian gospel in the first century.<sup>10</sup>

### **Summary**

- 1. Introduction (Rev 2:8a)
  - To the bishop of the church in Smyrna
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 2:8b)
  - To this church our Lord is introduced as the One who is "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive" In describing Himself as "the first and the last" Christ is relating Himself to time and eternity. He is the eternal God who has always existed in the past and who will always exist in the future.<sup>11</sup>
    - Jesus states this as a comfort.
- 3. Commendation (Rev 2:9)
  - The church at Smyrna was poor, hated, harassed, faced persecution, and even faced death.
  - Jesus knowing their tribulations was meant to be comfort. He is the God man, so he understood what they were facing. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He was there before their trouble, and He would be there well after their troubles ended.
- 4. Accusation
  - Smyrna is one of two churches to not receive rebuke. Philadelphia being the other.

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin DeYoung

<sup>10</sup> Walvoord

<sup>11</sup> Walvoord

- 5. Call to change (Rev 2:10a)
  - Jesus commands do not fear because of suffering.
  - Jesus commands be faithful unto death
- 6. Statement (Rev 2:10b)
  - Jesus states faithfulness will yield the crown of life.
- 7. Promise (Rev 2:11b)
  - The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.
  - The second death is a death that those who are thrown into the lake of fire will experience forever. The only way to avoid it is to believe in Jesus and to live like you believe in Jesus, being faithful unto death.
- 8. Invitation (Rev 2:11a)
  - He who has an ear, let him hear.

## **Polycarp**

- Polycarp was the bishop at the Church in Smyrna around the time John wrote Revelation. Christ clearly took hold of him with the content of that letter.
- Polycarp when asked to recant his faith replied. “Eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”
- When Polycarp was sentenced to die by burning at the stake he offered up a prayer showing steadfastness like few others.
  - "O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received full knowledge of thee, the God of Angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee! I bless thee, that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the Resurrection to everlasting life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, today, be received among them before Thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou, the God who lies not and is truth, hast prepared beforehand, and shown forth, and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee through the everlasting and heavenly high Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to Thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come, Amen." <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Martyrdom of Polycarp, <http://www.archive.org/details/apostolicfathers02lakeuoft>  
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## Additional Reading

—Polycarp of Smyrna: The Man Whose Faith Lasted, Sinclair Ferguson (for family/children)

—The Martyrdom of Polycarp, <http://www.archive.org/details/apostolicfathers02lakeuoft>

**To the church in Pergamum (2:12–17)** Witnessing but undiscerning.<sup>13</sup>

## Brief Background

- Located in the western part of Asia Minor north of Smyrna and about twenty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, it was a wealthy city with many temples devoted to idol worship and full of statues, altars, and sacred groves. It was an important religious center where the pagan cults of Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus were prominent.<sup>14</sup>
- A university was also located there. Among its famous treasures was a large library of two hundred thousand volumes, later sent to Egypt as a gift from Anthony to Cleopatra. One of the products for which this city was famous was paper or parchment.<sup>15</sup>
- The temple of Asklepios was located there.
  - Asklepios was known as the god of healing. Snakes were kept loose throughout the temple and people would lie down on the floor and believed if the snakes touched them, they'd be healed.
- The exclusive nature of Christianity rubbed against the culture because culture wanted to worship all gods.
  - The false religions didn't have doctrine. They merely offered sacrifice.
    - Simplistically, the addition of gods was ok, the subtraction of gods (exclusivity of Christianity) was not ok.

## Summary

- 1. Introduction (Rev 2:12a)
  - To the elder of the church in Pergamum
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 2:12b)
  - God's Word separates believers from unbelievers
- 3. Commendation (Rev 2:13)
  - Their main strength was holding fast to Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Kevin DeYoung

<sup>14</sup> Walvoord

<sup>15</sup> Walvoord

- 4. Accusation (Rev 2:14-15)
  - Their main weakness was a lack of discernment.
  - They allowed false teaching
    - Nicolaitans had influence here like in Ephesus.
  - The reference to Balaam refers to Numbers 22, 23, and 24 chronicling the hiring of Balaam by King Balak to curse Israel. In numbers 31 Balaam is associated with leading people astray in sexual sin and idolatry which led to plague and great destruction in Israel. In a way Balaam was the prototype for a false teacher. The Balaamites referenced in verse 14 were teaching that compromise with the world was ok. (Immorality, sacrifice, etc.)
  - Relationship and rules go hand and hand. The church at Pergamum didn't see the danger of damaging their relationship with God by associating with the world. They had no discernment. Likely their compromise started with silence, then complexification, then a pivot. Compromise is a slippery slope because the absolutes of truth erode until everything goes and nothing is sin.
- 5. Call to change and repentance (Rev 2:16)
  - Repent or Jesus would come to war with those opposed to Him
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do (Rev 2:5b)
  - If you do not repent of this permissive attitude I will come with the sharp two edged sword of truth.
    - On the one hand, this is meant as encouragement as living in the name of Christ is an act of obedience.
      - Don't look like the world. The world is attractive, but not Christian.
    - On the other hand, this is meant as a warning as a sword will cut and even kill.
- 7. Promise to him who overcomes (Rev 2:17b)
  - To the one who overcomes Jesus promises to satisfy
  - White stones were tokens given to signify a jurors vote of innocence. Whatever the world's verdict, Jesus acquits.
- 8. Invitation (Rev 2:17a)
  - He who has ears let him hear.

## To the church in Thyatira (2:18–29) Loving but over tolerant.<sup>16</sup>

### **Brief Background**

- The fourth message of Christ was addressed to the angel of the church in Thyatira, a small thriving town located about forty miles southeast of Pergamos. The city had been established as a Macedonian colony by Alexander the Great after the destruction of the Persian empire. Located in a rich agricultural area, Thyatira was famous for the manufacture of purple dye, and numerous references are found in secular literature of the period to the trade guilds which manufactured cloth.<sup>17</sup>

### **Summary**

- 1. Introduction (Rev 2:18a)
  - To the overseer of the church in Thyatira
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 2:18b)
  - Jesus isn't at all like the little rubber Jesus that seems to be popular right now, he has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze—he's not to be tinkered with.
- 3. Commendation (Rev 2:19)
  - Vibrant church marked by hard work, faith, service, perseverance, and love.
  - The type of church where connection was immediately felt with a sense of belonging, friendly, caring, and extending service in the community. (speculation)
- 4. Accusation (Rev 2:20)
  - The problem—their love was indiscriminate and uncritically accepting. They were too tolerant. Their warm hearts overtook their clear minds.
  - The church is to reject that which God hates.
  - The church is not free to believe whatever they want about that which is clearly articulated in the Bible.
  - Compromise was woven into the culture in Thyatira; the people didn't have to go looking for it. The false teachers made Christianity easier, and Jesus hated it because it wasn't true.

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin DeYoung

<sup>17</sup> Walvoord

- The Ephesian church didn't love what Jesus loved. The Church in Thyatira didn't hate what Jesus hated.
  - Loving what Christ loves is to gain Christ
  - Hating what Christ hates is to gain Christ
- 5. Call to change and repentance (Rev 2:21)
  - There was a woman who was a false teacher who was like Jezebel leading the church to tolerate idolatry and immorality.
  - Jesus says to get her out or he will.
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do (Rev 2:22-25)
  - Those who continue in her ways will be judged
  - Those who continue to ignore sin will be judged
  - Jesus tells them to hold fast to the Gospel
- 7. Promise to him who overcomes (Rev 2:26-28)
  - If faithful now, the enemies of Christ will be crushed in the end.
  - Receive morning star; Jesus is promising himself
- 8. Invitation (Rev 2:29)
  - He who has ears let them hear.

### **Looking Ahead to Chapters 4-22**

—The vision of the one who sits on the throne is the antidote for everything that challenges the church.

—Matthew 5:8—Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.