

Date: November 8, 2017  
Title: Ephesus: The City of Change and the GOD who Does Not Change  
Text: Revelation 2:1-7  
Theme:  
Introduction:

### **Outline:**

“The population of the city in the first century has been estimated at around a quarter of a million. It was the local capital, the most important city in the whole of western Turkey.”<sup>1</sup>

“Ephesus was used as Paul’s Asia Minor headquarters during his mission trips in the region. **During its history, the city actually was moved several times because of coastal changes, including the movement of the harbor which was so important to the city.** The modern city is now not near the water. Because of the harbor, Ephesus was called the Gateway of the Province, and as such, it had many, many visitors in the city. Basically, **Ephesus was a leading city in Asia Minor. One of the main attractions of the city was the Temple of Artemis, the goddess of fertility. Artemis was represented at one time by the cypress tree and the temple was built with ample cypress features,** including a U-shaped altar and the roof. The temple was so impressive, it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. **The temple was also called “The Paradise of God.”**”<sup>2</sup>

“The city’s landmark was the temple of Artemis, and one of its symbols was the date palm tree (contrast ‘tree of life,’ v. 7).”<sup>3</sup>

“**This tree even featured on some of the local coins. Criminals who came within a certain distance of it would be free from capture and punishment. It is no accident, then, that this letter finishes with the promise that God, too, has a ‘Paradise,’ a beautiful garden, with ‘the tree of life’ at its heart.**”<sup>4</sup>

“Its temple of Diana (Acts 19:21-41), with its great alter carved by Praxiteles, the most gifted Athenian sculptor of the fourth century B.C., was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The city derived revenue from the sale of “Ephesian Letters,” regarded as talismans and worn as amulets for a safe journey, health for the sick, a child for the childless, victory in sports, and success in general. There were more Jews in Ephesus than in any other heathen city except Alexandria. But with the spreading of the Gospel the city became third in importance among the early centers of Christianity, outranked only by Jerusalem and Antioch.”<sup>5</sup>

#### I. The commission - Greeting (“To the angel of the church in...” [v. 1])

- <sup>1</sup> “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:”

This is identical in each letter with only the recipient’s name being different. Each letter is addressed directly to the angel of the church. Some believe this is a literal angel. Perhaps God

has assigned an angel to look over each church. Others believe that this references the primary elder, or pastor, of each church. Since “angel” means “messenger” in Greek, this certainly is a possibility.

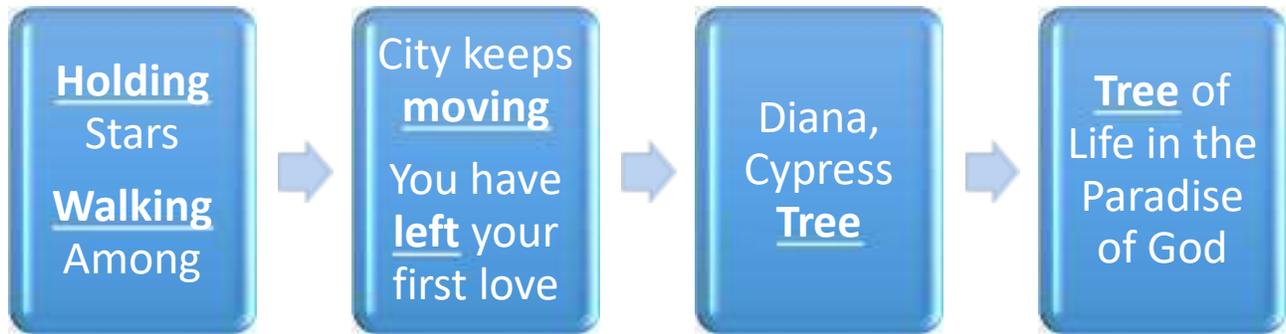
“**These things says** [the One]...’ The expression τὰδε λέγει (tade legei) occurs eight times in the NT, seven of which are in Rev 2-3. “The pronoun is used to add solemnity to the prophetic utterance that follows. ...In classical drama, it was used to introduce a new actor to the scene (Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, 307 [§1241]). But the τὰδε λέγει formula in the NT derives from the OT, where it was used to introduce a prophetic utterance (BAGD, s.v. ὅδε, 1)” (*ExSyn* 328). Thus, the translation “this is the solemn pronouncement of” for τὰδε λέγει is very much in keeping with the OT connotations of this expression. The expression *This is the solemn pronouncement of* reflects an OT idiom. The LXX has the same Greek phrase (τὰδε λέγει, tade legei) about 350 times, with nearly 320 of them having “the Lord” (*Heb* יהוה, Yahweh) as subject. **That the author of Revelation would use such an expression seven times with the risen Christ as the speaker may well imply something of Christ’s sovereignty and deity.** Cf. also Acts 21:11 in which the Holy Spirit is the speaker of this expression.”<sup>6</sup>

### II. The character (**Reference to Son of Man from Revelation 1** - Christ’s self-description in Rev 1:12-20 [v. 1])

- <sup>1</sup>“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:”

“**The royal author describes himself** in terms from ch. 1.”<sup>7</sup> In the first chapter of the book, John described a vision he had of Jesus. The imagery John describes is highly symbolic and each letter draws from part of this description.

- The One Who Is  **Holding**  [Pres. Act. Ptc.]
- The One Who Is  **Walking**  [Pres. Act. Ptc.]
  
- The city actually was moved several times because of coastal changes, including the movement of the harbor which was so important to the city. The modern city is now not near the water.
- “You have left your first love” (v. 4)
  
- Q. Why is He holding and why is He walking?
- A. Because the Ephesian Church keeps moving!
  
- Q. Why are they offered the tree of life in the paradise of God?
- A1. Unlike the Ephesian Church, trees are stationary as is the Paradise of God.
- A2. What the false tree could not offer or secure, God’s tree can.



III. The commendation (Laodicea lacks this [vv. 2, 3])

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

Jesus’ praise of the church. “‘I know’ introduces his diagnosis of the church’s condition, both positive (except for Sardis and Laodicea) and negative (except for Smyrna and Philadelphia).”<sup>8</sup>

**“The Lord speaks of that which was commendable among them, giving the words ‘I know’ the warmth of approval and encouragement.”<sup>9</sup>**

“The work and perseverance of the Ephesian church was praised by Jesus. They also had no patience for evil men and tested all the self-professing apostles who visited them. Remember, that there were plenty of visitors moving through Ephesus, so the church there probably saw quite a bit of these people. In addition, they rejected the Nicolaitans. We don’t know anything about this group for sure. *Nikao* is Greek for “victory” so some believe that this was a group who believed they had victory over the flesh and they could not sin. Others believe this was a sect of the Gnostics, who denied that Jesus was fully human. Either way, the Ephesians recognized the heretical teaching of this group, whatever it was, and rejected them.”<sup>10</sup>

IV. The correction (Smyrna and Philadelphia lack this [v. 4])

- <sup>4</sup> “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”
- <sup>5</sup> “Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.”
- <sup>6</sup> “Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

Jesus’ rebuke of the church. The Ephesians were praised for quite a bit and most of us would feel pretty good about being part of such a church. But, then we see what words of criticism Jesus had for the church—and they stung. **The church had abandoned, or moved away from, the love they had at first. Don’t miss the intentional reference to how the city had moved throughout its history.**

“The Greek word translated “departed from” (ἀφίημι, *afihmi*; L&N 15.48) can actually be used of divorce (L&N 34.78), so the imagery here is very strong.”<sup>11</sup>

## Revelation 2:1-7 – Ephesus

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v. 6 Nicolaitans – “The *Nicolaitans* were a sect (sometimes associated with Nicolaus, one of the seven original deacons in the church in Jerusalem according to Acts 6:5) that apparently taught that Christians could engage in immoral behavior with impunity.”<sup>12</sup>

“No, the real problem with the Ephesians was that they had lost something of their understanding of God’s love for them. **They had forgotten that they were beloved sons of God**. They were a busy church but their works were based on their love for God, rather than His love for them. Paul once told the Ephesians that they were seated with Christ in heavenly places but by the time of John’s revelation it seems they had forgotten this. They’re no longer resting, they are striving. In a sense they have fallen from that seat of heavenly rest to a place of earthly works. They have fallen from a great height of grace. They have become known for *their* works, not His. Like the Galatians they have perverted the gospel and are no longer living by faith. Like the Laodiceans they have mixed law with grace and ended up in a lukewarm muddle.

What’s the solution? Like the Galatians and the Laodiceans, they need to repent. That is, they need to change their way of thinking. They need to change their theology. They need to do what they did at first which was presumably trust in the goodness and love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

A warning to “repent.” If they did not repent, their lamp stand would be removed. Earlier, the lamp stands are explained to be the churches, so this is a stern warning that if they failed to repent, their church would cease to exist.

“During his final journey to Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul sought to meet in Miletus with the elders of the church in Ephesus. When the elders of Ephesus’ church arrived, Paul warned them: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch...” (Acts 20:29-31) A few decades after this warning to the Ephesus’ church leaders, Revelation attests to Jesus commending the Ephesus church for having heeded the warning about false teachers but warning in turn that unless they repent and return to loving God as they first did, the lampstand - church - will be taken from them. They failed to heed Jesus, who made good on His words. The weed-covered desolation above of Odeum, the smaller theatre of Ephesus, symbolizes the state of Christianity today in Turkey, where Ephesus is located. **Turkey, once the heartland of Paul’s ministry, is 99% Muslim and devoid of Bible-based Christianity today.** That’s too bad for Turkey, but can the same thing happen to Europe or North America? **Europe is already a spiritual wasteland where Bible-believing Christians are a miniscule percentage of the population.** North America, meanwhile, has mixed materialism with worship of the self to concoct and export a deviant form of the gospel that sees God not as the Lord to thank, worship and serve but a genie who is supposed to produce earthly prosperity on demand. Savage wolves indeed have ransacked the flock and spoken perverse things to draw away the disciples.<sup>14</sup>

“But there are, to repeat, no active churches there today. If there are any Christians there, they are in hiding. That would have been almost as unthinkable to John’s audience as it would be for

us to imagine our great churches empty and in ruins, with no new Christian fellowships rising up to take their place.”<sup>15</sup>

I think it would be “fair” to see how the silting up of the port caused the city to move thus “killing” its effectiveness as a port. This same idea exists today. Too much silting over disables and ultimately eliminates the witness of a church in the community it seeks to “win.” The “muck” is anything other than the gospel. For a church to be “effective,” it must keep first things first.

#### V. The challenge (“to him who overcomes” [v. 7b])

- <sup>7</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

A specific reward promised to those who are victorious or overcome until the end. “A blessing is promised to ‘the one who conquers,’ foreshadowing the final visions in chas. 21-22.”<sup>16</sup>

“The identification of ‘overcomers’ with those who are united to Christ is important for correct interpretation. Overcoming, for the apostle John, is not a consequence of human effort but a result of faith in the work of Christ Jesus.”<sup>17</sup>

They would receive the true tree of life and the true Paradise of God, unlike the false one in the Temple of Artemis.

“In one tremendous sweep the closing promise of this letter (Rev. 2:7b) swings the hearts and thoughts of the faithful up into heaven, their eternal home. ‘He that overcometh’ is a victor, a conqueror. We are not told here what he overcomes, but in the light of the preceding and following context it is clear that all enemies of his soul are defeated. The best commentary is in Rom. 8:31-39 with its shout of triumph: ‘We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!’ This victory is timeless. It is ours in this life and in that which is to come. **The rewards of this victory are a gift of the Lord’s boundless grace** (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rev. 2:10; etc). He will give him who overcomes ‘to eat of the tree of life,’ that is, of its blessed fruit. (Matt. 10:22b) Paradise regained! Man did not eat of the tree of life in the original Paradise, the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9-3:24). Death had entered the world by sin (Rom. 5:12). But in heaven, the Paradise which is to come, the saints eat of the tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14, 19), drink of the water of life (Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17), and never die (Rev. 21:4). The devil, who by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil once overcame, likewise by a tree, the tree of the cross, was overcome, through Christ, our Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

#### VI. The call (“He who has an ear, let him hear...” [v. 7a])

- <sup>7</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

Each letter ends with the same refrain: “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

### **Shepherding the Sheep:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

Ephesus: “In His Presence is fullness of Joy”

“You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps. 16:11).

#### I. His presence assures them of His joy/help (v. 1)

- <sup>1</sup> “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:”

God assures His people that He is holding and walking among them. Both holding and walking are present and continuous actions. We are transient and fickle; He is permanent and stable.

#### II. His presence assures them that He knows everything about them (vv. 2, 3, 6)

- <sup>2</sup> “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup> and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. . . <sup>6</sup> Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

God is among His people and is fully aware of their love for Him and His church.

#### III. His presence assures them that He knows their failings (vv. 4, 5)

- <sup>4</sup> “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.”

What is this idea of losing one's first love? Often, it is possible in living by faith to fail in one's awareness of the larger Story in which they exist. In so doing, we forget to live with a “God consciousness.” Such forgetfulness leads to a “lost love.” Nothing has changed, but one's awareness of God's great love for them and His watch care of the *Story's* unfolding.

#### IV. His presence invites them into His joy (v. 7a)

- <sup>7</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

God calls us to remember, but to remember what? He desires for us to remember that His love for us is unconditional, His acceptance of us is without requirement, His forgiveness of us is without limit, His favor of us is without merit, and His service toward us is without reward.

V. His presence assures them of their victory in Him (v. 7b)

- <sup>7</sup>“To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

Regardless of what our flesh, this world, and the devil might throw our way, God promises to us participation in the Paradise of His making. He calls us to remember the Garden where we will dwell with Him for our joy and His glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>3</sup> ESV Study Bible, Revelation 2:1-3:22, p. 2464.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 26.

<sup>6</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Revelation+2>

<sup>7</sup> ESV Study Bible, Revelation 2:1-3:22, p. 2464.

<sup>8</sup> ESV Study Bible, Revelation 2:1-3:22, p. 2464.

<sup>9</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 29.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Revelation+2>

<sup>12</sup> <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Revelation+2>

<sup>13</sup> <https://escapetoreality.org/2010/04/05/forsaking-your-first-love-what-was-the-ephesians-problem-rev-21-7/#prettyPhoto>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.israeljerusalem.com/ephesus-church.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> ESV Study Bible, Revelation 2:1-3:22, p. 2464.

<sup>17</sup> Gospel Transformation Bible, ESV, p. 1730.

<sup>18</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 33.



Date: November 8, 2017  
 Title: Smyrna: the City of Life and the God who Lives  
 Text: Revelation 2:8-11  
 Theme:  
 Introduction:

**THE BIG PICTURE:**

“Smyrna was a beautiful, wealthy city and **was an official site of emperor worship**, resulting in a close association with Rome. Emperor worship consisted of acknowledging Caesar as lord and burning a small amount of incense to him. Worshiping the emperor was required for voting, owning property, and trading in the market. In some instances, non-worshippers were persecuted. Smyrna also was the home for a huge Jewish synagogue and its participants partook in persecuting believers. The “**Crown of Smyrna**” may have referred to the appearance of the hills around the city which were shaped like a crescent, the layout of the city itself, or a crown of garland used in worshipping the gods.”<sup>1</sup>

**Outline:**

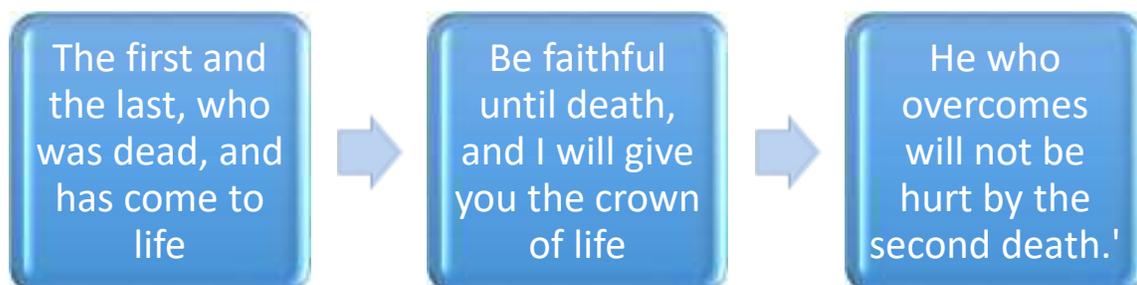
- I. The commission - Greeting (“To the angel of the church in...” [v. 1])
  - <sup>8</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:”

Smyrna was a seaport city about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It has been described as the most beautiful of the seven cities. Today it is called Izmir, Turkey. Scripture does not give us any information concerning the founding of this church, nor is it mentioned in the book of Acts. Presumably, this church was founded during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).<sup>2</sup>

“The Greek word translated ‘Smyrna’ was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to translate the Hebrew word for myrrh, a resinous substance used as a perfume for the living (Matthew 2:11) and the dead (John 19:39). Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna. Like myrrh, produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God.”<sup>3</sup>

- II. The character (**Reference to Son of Man from Revelation 1** - Christ’s self-description in Rev 1:12-20 [v. 1])

- The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:



## Revelation 2:8-11 – Smyrna

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### III. The commendation (Laodicea lacks this [vv. 2, 3])

- <sup>9</sup> “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“The church was praised for enduring tribulation and poverty as well as the synagogue of Satan. **The tribulation and poverty were no doubt because of not worshipping the emperor. The synagogue of Satan may have been the Jewish synagogue in the city.**”<sup>4</sup>

“In particular, in a city where Roman imperial presence and influence was everything, the Jews would have been exempt from taking part in the festivities of the imperial cult . . . and they may well have been accusing, to the authorities, the Christians who were claiming the exemption as well. Perhaps it was accusations like that, with social and political consequences, that had given Smyrna’s Christians a taste of poverty in an otherwise rich city (v. 9).”<sup>5</sup>

“The church is advised not to fear what they were going to suffer. Scholars have different opinions of what the 10 days of testing would be. Some believe it was a literal 10-day period. Others believe it is symbolic of a period of testing. Either way, we know it was temporary but that it was also intense. Jesus encouraged the church to be faithful through this period of testing or tribulation.”<sup>6</sup>

“It is believed that a man named Polycarp was the pastor of this church at Smyrna when this letter was written. He was martyred for his faith in A.D. 156. He fled briefly and then they caught him and he did not run that time. He just came in. They took him to the amphitheater where the proconsul tried over and over to persuade him to renounce his faith. “What harm can it do? Just say Caesar is lord to save your life.” And he would not do it. After repeatedly just not doing it, he said “for 86 years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my king and my savior?” Well, they threatened to bring out live beasts and he said to bring them on. They said “you make light of that then we will burn you at the stake!” The Jews who hated him gathered the wood for the fire. They were going to nail him to the stake, but he said they did not have to nail me, I will stay. They just put a rope around his hands. Before they lit the fire, he prayed, “Oh Lord, almighty God, I thank you for counting me worthy of sharing the cup of Christ among the number of your martyrs. May I be accepted this day before you as an acceptable sacrifice.” They lit the fire, but strangely enough, the wind blew the fire away from his body so it would not touch him. Finally, one of the soldiers took his sword and he ended the life of this great martyr, Polycarp. He died for one reason: his unyielding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was faithful until death and he lost his physical life, but he gained so much more which brings us to the fifth reminder to help us suffer well.”<sup>7</sup>

### IV. The correction (Smyrna and Philadelphia lack this [v. 4])

“**No fault is found in the church.** Of course, that is not to suggest that it was perfect. The church is given no warning.”<sup>8</sup>

V. The challenge (“to him who overcomes” [v. 7b])

- <sup>7b</sup> “Be faithful until death, and **I will give you the crown of life**. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

“Those who were faithful would receive the crown of life (**an intentional play on the Crown of Smyrna**) and would not be hurt by the second death, which is talking about the judgment of all unbelievers.”<sup>9</sup>

“Be content to go with Jesus through the first death. He was dead, and came to life; and so will you.”<sup>10</sup>

“‘A crown of life’ is theirs. Literally, ‘*the crown of the life*,’ the only crown that matters, the only life that endures! Among the Greeks the winners in the athletic games were crowned with a wreath as an emblem of victory (1 Cor. 9:24, 25; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7, 8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4). But the wreaths which crowned their brows have long ago faded and decayed. They are dust and ashes, like those who once proudly wore them. Faithful loyalty to the Lord, however, through suffering, and to the very point of death, leads to an inheritance and a crown incorruptible, undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:4, 5). **The crown is not earned by any effort or striving, but is a pure gift of God’s grace and favor** (Rom. 3:28; 6:23; Eph. 2:8, 9). First the cross, then the crown. One religious symbol shows a cross thrust through a crown, usually a kingly crown, or diadem, to indicate that those who receive it from the hand of Christ also reign with Him.”<sup>11</sup>

VI. The call (“He who has an ear, let him hear...” [v. 7a])

- <sup>11</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

**Shepherding the Sheep:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

Smyrna: The Death Conquering King (1 Cor. 15:20-25)

<sup>20</sup> “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, <sup>24</sup> then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (1 Cor. 15:20-25).

I. The Death Conquering King has been there and done that (v. 8)

- <sup>8</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:”

If the Scripture teaches us anything, it is that Jesus has embraced all the poison of death and came out on top. He has receive all that was ours and gave us all that is His.

### II. The Death Conquering King knows our sufferings (v. 9)

- <sup>9</sup> “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

It is this Death Conquering King that knows the suffering and poverty of His people. He sees them for what they are in Him and not for what they are in this world’s estimation.

### III. The Death Conquering King assures us of sufferings/ death’s limitations (v. 10)

- <sup>10</sup> “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

He knows that all who claim His name in this life will suffer. He also knows suffering has a “shelf life.” Inside of the larger *Story*, sin and suffering; death and dying are temporal elements. He controls the parts of this *Story* and will bring all things to its appropriate and final end.

### IV. The Death Conquering King invites us to Hear His Words (v. 11)

- <sup>11</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In every possible scenario, He wants us to hear His words of encouragement and comfort. He does not want us to fear, but to feast on His mercy and grace.

### V. The Death Conquering King promises victory over sin and death (v. 11)

- <sup>11</sup> “He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

His victory over sin and death, becomes the victory of His people. All those who are His will NEVER be hurt by the second death.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-smyrna-suffering-church> See also John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>3</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-smyrna-suffering-church>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>5</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://bible.org/seriespage/3-smyrna-suffering-church#P2\\_403](https://bible.org/seriespage/3-smyrna-suffering-church#P2_403)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>10</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 38.

Date: November 8, 2017  
Title: Pergamum: The Royal City and the God who Wars  
Text: Revelation 2:12-17  
Theme:  
Introduction:

## **THE BIG PICTURE**

### **Outline:**

**“While Smyrna was a site of emperor worship, Pergamum was the seat of Roman authority and emperor worship in the region. It was called “City of the Sword” because it was given permission to execute by Rome.”<sup>1</sup>**

“Pergamum was another city with a **major centre of the imperial cult of Rome and its emperors**. John does not identify Rome with the devil. But, as we shall see, he believes that the devil has been using Rome for his own ends, not least to attack the church. And Pergamum was the seat of the Roman governor of the whole region.”<sup>2</sup>

#### I. The commission - Greeting (“To the angel of the church in...” [v. 1])

- <sup>12</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”

“Pergamos was a royal city, **‘with its immense acropolis [1,000 ft. high] on a rock rising out of the plain like a mountain, self-centered in its impregnable strength**, looking out over the distant sea [15 to 20 miles west] and over the land right away to the hills besides far-off Smyrna [about 50 miles south].’ (W.M. Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (London, 1904), pp. 43, 44.)”<sup>3</sup>

“Pergamos was the official capital of the Province, the seat of authority in the ancient kingdom and in the Roman administration. But one who speaks in Rev. 2:12-17 has *absolute* authority and is invested with the power of life and death (Rom. 13:4). Let his enemies beware, and let those who have offended him not delay repentance, lest the sword fall on them quickly in punishment (Rev. 2:12, 16; cf. 1:16).”<sup>4</sup>

“Life in Pergamos was not favorable to Christianity. Satan’s ‘seat’ was there. It will not do to think here only of ‘the power or influence that withstands the Church and all who belong to it,’ or ‘the official authority and power which stands in opposition to the Church. (Ramsey, p. 293.)’ The Bible speaks of a personal being, not simply a power or influence, when it uses the name ‘Satan’ (Rev. 2:9; Job 1:6ff). Pergamos was a center at which he 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,

## Revelation 2:12-17 – Pergamum

with its reputation for ‘dream cures,’ and a serpent, the Christian symbol for Satan (Gen. 3), as its distinguishing emblem. There were temptations to violate the apostolic decree of Acts 15:29 (Rev. 2:14, 15) and to believe false doctrine. It was a place where the devil was active with a vengeance through various agencies which lent themselves to his use and purpose.”<sup>5</sup>

### II. The character (**Reference to Son of Man from Revelation 1** - Christ’s self-description in Rev 1:12-20 [v. 12])

- <sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”



### III. The commendation (Laodicea lacks this [vv. 12, 13])

- <sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”
- <sup>13</sup> “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

“The church was praised by Jesus for holding fast amidst Satan’s throne, surely a reference to emperor worship. The martyrdom of Antipas was mentioned specifically. We don’t know who this was, but surely this was a significant event resulting in its mention. Surely others had been martyred as well, not just Antipas.”<sup>6</sup>

### IV. The correction (Smyrna and Philadelphia lack this [vv. 14-16])

- <sup>14</sup> “But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”
- <sup>15</sup> “So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”
- <sup>16</sup> “Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”

They were “going along to get along.” They compromised the truth for cultural relevance. The challenge is present in every culture and in every age. I would not argue that what confronts us today is any different than what has been and will be. But our days are morally precarious.

What are our “issues?”

1. LGBTQ, morality, and marriage
2. Islam – [Chrislam]
3. Politics, believing a government apart from Jesus can bring in hope and change
4. Racial Reconciliation apart from the gospel
5. Consumerism, when things become more important than relationships
6. Technology, where Facebook, tweets, and email replace real people
7. Lack of “real” community where human autonomy replace interdependent community/family

These are the “things” pushing against us. Things we must push against in order to maintain gospel purity. Does the gospel speak to these things? Yes, in that it saves the sinner from sin and death and for joy and glory. The gospel recalibrates our worldview so that the things of this world begin to grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

“Both Smyrna and Pergamum were experiencing tribulation, but unlike the former city, the latter is condemned by Jesus for a few things. First, some in their midst held the teaching of Balaam, who led Israel to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit acts of immorality. These acts were most likely being committed by some in the church as well. The church also had some who were holding to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. In essence, Jesus is rebuking the church for being impure. He doesn’t just condemn those who were holding to these heresies, the entire church was also being held accountable for not confronting them and leading them to repentance.”<sup>7</sup>

They were called to repent.

“If they failed to repent, Christ would come and would make war with them with the sword of His mouth (**a double reference to the first chapter of Revelation and the city’s sword given by Rome**). Now, this might seem like a good thing. Wouldn’t the genuine believers want Jesus to purge those who were holding to heresies from their midst? But think about it practically. If you have ever been involved in church discipline or a church split, you know how painful this can be.”<sup>8</sup>

V. The challenge (“to him who overcomes” [v. 17b])

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

“They reflect the special relationship [His people will] have with them. Just thinking about how Jesus has a special name for each believer reminds us of the special, personal relationship we each have with Him.”<sup>9</sup>

“Jesus promises the overcomers of Pergamum “hidden manna” and a “white stone.” The hidden manna is often linked with the manna stashed away in the ark of the covenant.”<sup>10</sup>

## Revelation 2:12-17 – Pergamum

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“The best theory regarding the meaning of the white stone probably has to do with the ancient Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors of athletic games. The winner of a contest was awarded a white stone with his name inscribed on it. This served as his “ticket” to a special awards banquet. According to this view, Jesus promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven. The “new name” most likely refers to the Holy Spirit’s work of conforming believers to the holiness of Christ (see Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10).”<sup>11</sup>

### VI. The call (“He who has an ear, let him hear...” [v. 17a])

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

### **Shepherding the Sheep:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

#### Pergamum: The God who Wars

*“But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:4).*

### I. God is a dividing sword (v. 12)

- <sup>12</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”

It is almost impossible not to recall Hebrews 4:11-16 and the reference to “two-edged sword.”

- <sup>11</sup> “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:11-16).

Similar to what one reads of Thyatira, God knows intimately and flawlessly all that unfolds. He is able to accurately and infallibly divide the wrong from right, the unrighteous from the righteous. He KNOWS who are His AND those who reject His person and work.

### II. God sustains those who are His (v. 13)

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

Although humanity's "sword" cuts the righteous as if they are unrighteous, God's "sword" certainly sets such wrongs right. Just as Jesus is the faithful witness, so also are His people. He sustains those who are His even to the point of martyrdom and death.

### III. God knows the struggles of His people (vv. 14, 15)

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

God is fully aware of the struggle facing His people. They do grow weary in well-doing. Compromise and tolerance replace steadfastness and resistance. His people do grow weary in well-doing. The "sword" of God knows the struggles confronting His church. Satan's seed actively and relentlessly seeks to overthrow God's *Story* and destroy the offspring of God's Seed.

### IV. God fights for His church (v. 16)

- <sup>16</sup>"Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."

Despite the seemingly endless assault against His church and Satan's siege of God's righteous strong tower, God is fighting for His people, His Church. His word to His church has always been one of comfort and encouragement. "Hold the fort for I am coming!" "Do not fear for I am with you." God has "our back." He is behind us, beside us, and in front of us.

### V. God gives the spoils of His enemies to His church (v. 17)

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

When the war is fully finished and the dust settles, His people will celebrate the spoils of His victory and they will dwell in His presence for their joy and His glory. They will eat of the hidden manna, they will receive a white stone with the new name written. That name will be one of unbridled joy and unchanging victory.

## Revelation 2:12-17 – Pergamum

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>2</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Luther Poellot, *Revelation*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 41.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://theopolisinstitute.com/white-stone/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/white-stone-new-name.html>

Date: November 8, 2017  
 Title: Thyatira: Weakness Made Strong and the God who judges righteously  
 Text: Revelation 2:18-29  
 Theme:  
 Introduction:

**THE BIG PICTURE:**

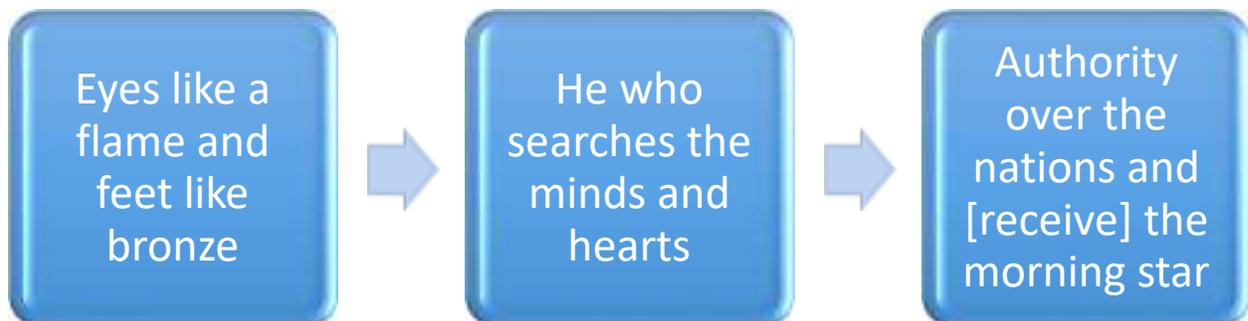
**Outline:**

“Thyatira was a weak, pretty much defenseless city on a plain. As such, the city’s purpose was to slow down an invading army, allowing time for forces to be concentrated beyond it. Basically, it was a chess pawn. It is no wonder that this produced a general feeling of weakness, subjection, and dependence in those who lived there.

**While the city didn’t have much to offer from a military position, it did have much to offer in an economic sense. The city was a working industrial town filled with factories of all sorts. Pottery, glass, crystal, iron, bronze, and linen were significant industries.** With all of the activity in the various factories, it is not surprising that the city was burned down at one point.”<sup>1</sup>

- I. The commission - Greeting (“To the angel of the church in...” [v. 18])
  - <sup>18</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:”
  
- II. The character (**Reference to Son of Man from Revelation 1** - Christ’s self-description in Rev 1:12-20 [v. 18])
  - <sup>18</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:”

“The local deity in the area, who was the patron deity of the bronze trade, was ‘Apollo Tyrimnaeus’, who appeared on local coins together with the ‘son of god’, that is, the Roman emperor. Granted these associations, there is particular power in the letter’s beginning, as it announces ‘the words of the son of God, whose eyes are like flaming fire and whose feet are like exquisite brass.’”<sup>2</sup>



## Revelation 2:18-29 - Thyatira

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### III. The commendation (Laodicea lacks this [v. 19])

- <sup>19</sup>“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”

“Jesus praised the church for their works, love, faith, service, and endurance. They were also praised for their increasing works.”<sup>3</sup>

### IV. The correction (Smyrna and Philadelphia lack this [vv. 20-23])

- <sup>20</sup>“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup>Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup>And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds” (Rev. 2:20-23).

“The church is rebuked for tolerating the woman Jezebel. The story of Jezebel is found in 1 and 2 Kings and her name has become synonymous with blatant idolatry. Whoever this woman was in Thyatira, she called herself a prophetess and seduced people in the church to commit acts of immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. Those who were not seduced by her tolerated her instead of confronting and dealing with her false prophecy and enticement of others to sin. Those who did not hold to Jezebel’s teaching were instructed to hold fast until Jesus comes. This implies that those who were tolerating Jezebel would repent of that. Jezebel and those who committed adultery with her would be cast upon a bed of sickness and suffer great tribulation. In addition, her children (most likely those who taught what they learned from her) would be killed with pestilence. Jesus would give to each one according to their works.”<sup>4</sup>

### V. The challenge (“to him who overcomes” [vv.24-28])

- <sup>24</sup>“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them--I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup>Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. <sup>26</sup>He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup>AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup>and I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2:24-28).

“The one who overcomes would receive authority over the nations and the morning star, which perhaps could be a reference to Jesus Himself.”<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars consider the reference to be to Christ himself. Professor Andrew Hill has written: “Jesus Christ is described as the ‘morning star’ in 2 Peter 1:19 (phosphoros) and in Revelation 2:28 (aster proinos), and He identifies Himself as ‘the bright morning star’ (ho aster ho lampros ho proninos) in Revelation 22:16” (413).’ He goes on to point out that this “star” symbolism reflects the Old Testament and inter-testament emphasis on the “celestial” nature of the coming Messiah (cf. Num. 24:17; Mal. 4:2).<sup>6</sup>

VI. The call (“He who has an ear, let him hear...” [v. 29])

- <sup>29</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

**Shepherding the Sheep:** (What is the NEXT STEP?)

Thyatira: The God Who Judges Righteously (Ps. 50:1-5 <<A Psalm of Asaph.>>).

<sup>1</sup> “The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. <sup>2</sup> Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth. <sup>3</sup> May our God come and not keep silence; Fire devours before Him, And it is very tempestuous around Him. <sup>4</sup> He summons the heavens above, And the earth, to judge His people: <sup>5</sup> Gather My godly ones to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” <sup>6</sup> And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge” (Ps. 50:1-5).

Often, it is said, “Justice is blind.” However, it is only God’s justice that is truly blind. He alone sees everything as it truly is. Everything before Him is transparent and exposed. Nothing escapes Him. He is attentive to everything. He searches the minds and hearts. Moreover, He alone can give to each one the appropriate consequence for the choice.

This text marks this quality of God. What is the Word to His Church both past, present, and future?

I. God knows our successes (vv. 18, 19)

- <sup>18</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:<sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”

II. God knows our failures (vv. 20-23)

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

It is of interest to note how His awareness of our inability to persevere perfectly does not bring upon us His judgment, but upon “the woman Jezebel” and “those who commit adultery with her” and “her children.”

III. God calls us to persevere in our successes and failures (vv. 24, 25)

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

The one who judges righteously calls His people to hold fast. Keep keeping on.

#### IV. God assures us of His victory (vv. 26-29)

- <sup>26</sup> “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup> AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The “prize” awaiting His people is Himself. He is the “morning star.” Their alignment with Him, their union in Him guarantees their co-regency with Him.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>2</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for everyone*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gospelproject.com/2015/08/15/gods-warning-to-the-churches/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1105-what-is-the-morning-star-of-revelation-2-28>