

CONCERNING THE WAY

June 9, 2009

LESSON 61: THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST



Chapter 2

Jesus' Letters to the Churches

Revelation chapters 2 and 3 contain seven letters to seven specific churches that existed in Asia at the time of the apostle John. They are ancient churches, but in some ways are as modern as churches we find today. The people they were written to are ancient people, but they (or at least some of them) were part of the body of Christ, they were Christians like we are. We may not be able to understand all of the things they were going through, but we can understand and apply the words of Jesus to our own lives today. So, these letters are important for us to read and understand.

As I mentioned in the last study, many Bible teachers think that these seven churches represent seven consecutive time periods of the church age. This is a very interesting view, but I don't find much evidence that this is the case. It's possible, but the problem is that very few teachers agree on what periods in history they represent. If you'd like to explore this theory more, let me know and I can find some good articles for you. And now, here are the words of Jesus to the churches:

The Loveless Church

Revelation 2:1 "To the messenger of the church in Ephesus, write: 'The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lamp stands, says this: (ISV)

Most versions get the translation wrong at the beginning of this verse. The Greek word "angellos" is usually translated "angel", even though it actually means "messenger", so I suppose most translators just assume that angel is meant. But there is disagreement among Bible scholars on whether an actual angel is meant here or if it is just a human messenger that was given the message from John and who then took the message and read it to the church in Ephesus. I think the human messenger makes more sense, because that is the idea that is being conveyed here. Many have used the seven verses that start the letters to say that there must be a guardian angel over each local church. That is very possible, but we don't really know if these were actual angels or not. In any case, this translation (the ISV - International Standard Version) gets it right.

Robert Thomas says: *"The word angellos referred to an envoy meant to carry a message....the same were men who represented their churches, but not in the sense of being sole leaders of the individual churches. These were moral representatives, so to speak, who as individuals epitomized the conditions of the churches they represented. Hence, each letter is addressed to the church's representative, not directly to the church itself."*

Now, we know from the last chapter that "the one" is Jesus, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches, but we're not positive if the seven stars are angels or just human messengers.

Each letter starts with a description Jesus gives of Himself. If you'll notice, the titles basically come from the vision John had of Jesus in Revelation 1:12-18. You'll also find that the choice of title for each letter is related to the situation of each church.

Temple Ruins of Ephesus



Ephesus was a large, important city on the west coast of Asia Minor where the apostle Paul founded a church. The church there started about 50 A.D. and Paul spent about three years there teaching, at which time he wrote the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8). Timothy remained as pastor in the church at Ephesus after Paul left, and he fought against the false teaching that was already springing up there and that Paul had warned about (Acts 20:29, 1 Timothy 1:3, 4:3).

Ephesus was known for the huge temple of Artemis (or Diana, her Roman name), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 columns, each 197 feet high. The worship of Artemis, the daughter of Zeus, was very strong in Ephesus, and this may be one reason why the church there slipped so quickly into false teaching. In the 6th century A.D., the Roman emperor Justinian (527-565) built a magnificent church in Ephesus to honor the memory of the apostle John.

Revelation 2:2-3 'I know your works as well as your labor and steadfast endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have even put to the test those who refer to themselves as apostles (but are not), and have discovered that they are false. (3) I am also aware that you have persisted steadfastly, endured much for the sake of my name, and have not grown weary. (NET)

We see in this verse that Jesus sees everything; He knows everything we do. Jesus recognized that this church had worked hard for the gospel, and was experiencing great difficulty, being a voice of truth in one of the most pagan cities in the Roman Empire. By the end of the 1st century, all the apostles except John had given their lives as a testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ. Apparently some men in this church had claimed to have known and seen Jesus, which was the test of being an apostle. The church challenged them, tested them, and found them guilty of lying.

Jesus gave them credit for suffering for Him in the midst of great immorality and pagan beliefs, and for standing firm against false religion. This church is an example to us today as believers in an ever-increasingly pagan society. We should stand firm in the true faith, and against the immorality and deception in this world, and not compromise. We should work diligently for Christ and not grow weary in serving Him.

Revelation 2:4-5 But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first. (5) Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. (HCSB)

Apparently this church was very active in the Lord's work, but their heart wasn't in it. They had been on fire for Christ at first, but had forgotten the reason why they were doing these works to begin with, they had abandoned their relationship with Christ. (read Jeremiah 2:2)

Christ warned them that if they wouldn't repent, then they would no longer be a beacon light in the city, their witness would be destroyed. *"Without genuine Christians remaining, it is impossible for a church to produce light."* Robert Thomas

Notice the three step process in verse 5 to get back into right relationship with Christ:

1. Remember – honestly assess your past – think of how you loved the Lord at the first and how you have allowed yourself to fall away from Him.
2. Repent – change your mind – this involves both recognizing your wrong-doing and deciding to go in a different direction.
3. Do – change your behavior – do the things you did when you first fell in love with Jesus

"Instantly, let us say, this is not a call to "Christian service" or "renewed activity." Ephesus had toil, patience, intolerance toward evil, patience in suffering,—everything. But the "first works" are the goings forth of affection to Christ, freely, devotedly, as in our first love." William Newell

"The Christian who is unwilling to yield all his talents and capabilities to Jesus Christ has a love problem; that is, he does not sufficiently love Christ." Tim LaHaye

Believers should always be aware of the danger of drifting away from Jesus. It is so easy to do this, with all of the distractions of the world that are available. So often we can get into a routine of day to day life, with work, relationships, and our pursuit of entertainment crowding out time spent nourishing what should be the most important relationship we have, that of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Too many Christians go through the motions of religion - going to church, singing the songs, acting pious, serving on the church committees, doing charity work, etc., and forgetting why we do those things.

The issue is – what is your motivation for doing all these things? Make time for more prayer and Bible study; that is how you grow in your love for the Lord and in your relationship with Him. Read Jeremiah 2:2, Hebrews 10:32-39.

The lampstand at Ephesus was ultimately removed. *"I have before me a picture of the Ephesus of today—a ruined archway, a Moslem dwelling, and a forbidding castle, 'midst desolate hills. No lampstand for Christ where once Paul labored three years, night and day with tears!"* William Newell

Revelation 2:6 Yet you do have this: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (HCSB)

No one really knows for certain who the Nicolaitans were and what their practices were. One theory is that they were a cult that tried to create a ruling class of priests in the church at Ephesus. Others say, and many early church fathers support this, that they were a heretical sect that said that you could do anything you wanted and not sin because what is done in the flesh does not affect the spirit. This is a form of Gnosticism. They may have been an early group of Gnostics. Gnostics even exist today, and they believe in

kind of a mystical version of religion, that they have this secret knowledge, but most of us don't, and can't know it. One thing the Gnostics believed in those days was that Jesus was never here in the flesh, but only in the spirit. They believed that anything of the flesh, and our body itself is sinful. This heretical belief can sneak into churches and does even today.

Whatever they did, the church hated it, and so did Jesus. And notice Jesus does not hate the sinners, but he hates the sin. This is a good example of New Testament teaching – Jesus loves the person, but hates the sin. One church father, Eusebius, said that after John spoke against the Nicolaitans in the book of Revelation, that sect disappeared very quickly.

Revelation 2:7 "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (HCSB)"

This statement closes each of the seven letters. Jesus encourages us all to listen carefully to these words. It is believed that the messengers took the entire book of Revelation to the churches to be read, not just the letter to that particular church. So each church heard all of the letters. The fact that Jesus says "churches" each time tells us it is applicable to all churches, not just the church in Ephesus in John's day.

Some translations use "him who overcomes" instead of "the victor" in this verse, but this is the best translation. Jesus is not saying to a special class of Christians that if they keep on being perfect they will get a special reward, or as long as they don't backslide, they will get to heaven, as some might interpret this. 1 John 5 tells us who an overcomer or victor is:

1 John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. (5) Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (NASB)"

This is what an overcomer is, one who has been born again by trusting Christ. All who have accepted Christ as their Savior, who are truly born again, are victors because of Christ's death on the cross. Obviously there are people in every age who attend church but are not saved, and Jesus is pleading with the unsaved people in the churches to "overcome" the world that was against them, the tug of sin, rebelliousness against God, and to become victorious by accepting Christ as their Savior.

"Tree of Life"

This is the same Tree of Life that was in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). Because of their sin, Adam and Eve were barred from eating from it ever again (Genesis 3:24). Believers in heaven will have access to the tree forever! We'll read more about the Tree of Life at the end of the book (Revelation 22:2, 14, 19).

"Paradise of God"

Prior to the cross, paradise was a compartment within Hades (Luke 16:22-23). At His crucifixion, Jesus told the repentant thief, "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The location of paradise after the victory of Jesus on the cross moved to heaven, because Paul was "caught up into Paradise" where he heard inexpressible words (2 Corinthians 12:4). In other words, the term "paradise" describes where the righteous will live after they die:

It is a term describing the abode of the righteous ones, no matter where that above may be at any point in time.... from Adam until the Ascension of Jesus, Paradise was in Abraham's Bosom. From the Ascension of Jesus until the end of the Millennium, Paradise is in Heaven. Then, after the Millennium and for all eternity, Paradise will be in the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Arnold Fruchtenbaum

The Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8 "To the messenger of the church in Smyrna, write: 'The first and the last, who was dead and became alive, says this: (ISV)

Temple of Athena in Old Smyrna



Smyrna was another important commercial center in western Asia Minor. They called themselves “the first city of Asia”. The city was a center for the cult of emperor worship – a fanatical religion that caused severe persecutions for the early church under such emperors as Nero (54-68 A.D.) and Domitian (81-96 A.D.). Polycarp, who was converted by John, pastored the church there until he was martyred in 155 A.D. Today the city is known as Izmir, and is one of the strongest cities in modern Turkey.

This church was being severely persecuted, and some were martyred, so Jesus reminds them that He is all-powerful, and that He died but He came back to life. He was encouraging this church, telling them that He was in control, and if they were called on to die for Him, they would live again.

This church, along with others in the period of the 2nd and 3rd centuries were greatly persecuted by the Roman Empire, and it is a miracle that Christianity not only survived, but thrived and spread across the Empire. It has been true of the Church throughout history that when they are crushed with trials, their true faith is squeezed out and grows all the more. The same thing is happening in China today. Though they are persecuted by a Communist government, the church there is growing by leaps and bounds. We may need to be persecuted like that in this country before the church will thrive again. Always pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters around the world!

Revelation 2:9 'I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty (but you are rich). I also know the slander against you by those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (NET)

There were no words of condemnation for this church, Jesus knew they were serving Him faithfully under the most difficult of circumstances. Their property was being seized and they had nothing, but they were

rich in what was important, their faith. They were laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20-21).

Early Christianity had opposition from three main sources: 1) pagan beliefs and practices; 2) heretical teachings; 3) Jews. Of the three, the Jews were the earliest and most vocal (like Saul of Tarsus). True Jews are those whose "circumcision is of the heart" (Romans 2:28-29).

And apparently there was a group of people who may have been physically Jews but were persecuting this church, and they even had a synagogue, but Jesus considered it a synagogue of Satan. Jesus knows His sheep – He knows who are true to Him and who are really serving Satan, and He knows which churches are true to Him and those who are actually serving Satan. I believe there are such churches today.

Many call themselves Christians but are just pretenders, Jesus knows they are members of Satan's church. All kinds of cultic and New Age practices have made inroads into our mainline denominations today, people are trying to bring all kinds of things into the church, and this will grow worse and worse as the end approaches.

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. (NET)

Jesus knew that Satan was about to attack these Christians, and was giving them encouragement. (Matthew 10:28). Having the perspective of God makes all the difference in how we understand trials and tests. This is one of the main purposes of the Book of Revelation.

Satan is allowed by God to test us, but only so we can be strengthened or for other good purposes, such as bringing others to know Him. God makes use of evil for His own purpose. He already knows what is in a person. But does the person? Usually not (Luke 22:31-32). Testing reveals who a person really is. (John 21:15-17).

This is one of two places where a martyr's crown is mentioned as a reward for those who sacrifice their lives for the gospel (also James 1:12).

These ten days could be literal ten days applicable to that local church, but we can also identify ten different periods of intense persecution of the church in history, led by ten different Roman emperors:

1. Nero (64-68 A.D.) – burned Rome and blamed Christians, crucified and threw Christians into pits with wild animals, executed Paul and possibly Peter.
2. Domitian (90-96 A.D.) – killed thousands of Christians in Rome, banished John to the island of Patmos
3. Trajan (104-117 A.D.) – outlawed Christianity, burned Ignatius at the stake
4. Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) – tortured and beheaded Christians
5. Severus (200-211) – burned, crucified, and beheaded Christians
6. Maximinius (235-237) – executed Christians
7. Decius (250-253) – tried to wipe out Christianity and executed all those he found
8. Valerian (257-260) – tried to wipe out Christianity; executed the bishop of Carthage
9. Aurelian (270-275) – persecuted Christians any way he could
10. Diocletian (303-312) – burned the scriptures

Revelation 2:11 "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor will never be harmed by the second death. (HCSB)

Just as the Bible teaches that there are two births – our physical birth, and a spiritual birth when a person accepts Christ as their Savior, the Bible teaches that there are two deaths. The first death is physical, and the second death is spiritual. But never think that death is the end of things. Death is a separation. The first death is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body. The second death is a final separation of the soul and spirit from God. This is being cast into the Lake of Fire (which we will see at the end of the book) and being eternally separated from God (Revelation 20:14-15).

To put it simply, if we are born just once, we will die twice, but if we are born twice, we will only die once.

The Compromising Church

Revelation 2:12 "To the messenger of the church in Pergamum, write: 'The one who holds the sharp, two-edged sword, says this: (ISV)

Temple of Dionysus at Pergamum



Pergamos was located about 60 miles north of Smyrna, today it is the modern town of Bergamo. Pergamos was known for its large library of 200,000 books, which were eventually taken to Alexandria. It was a hotbed of pagan idolatry and also had false teachers and false apostles. Pergamos was the Roman capital of Asia and of pagan authority, which is probably why Jesus says that's where Satan's throne is in the next verse. There were three imperial temples there, the temple of Asklepius (the god of medicine and healing), a temple to Athena, and a temple to Zeus which contained the largest altar to Zeus anywhere.

Revelation 2:13 'I know where you live — where Satan's throne is. Yet you continue to cling to my name and you have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your city where Satan lives. (NET)

Jesus knows where His church is, and this one was right in the middle of one of Satan's main power bases. In Pergamum., two saviors competed with the One True Savior. Asklepios, associated with the serpent, was said to be savior because of his healing power. Zeus was also considered a savior. Some believe this reference to Satan's throne described the throne-like altar of Zeus, which was in his temple, was 40 ft high, and was later reconstructed in East Berlin.

"Satan's throne" could also be a reference to the fact that Pergamum was the main center for emperor worship – there were three temples to emperors there. Many different gods were worshipped in that city, and Jesus gets right to the heart of who's behind it. Satan is behind every form of worshipping anything other than the true God. Satan was strong in this city, but the Holy Spirit was stronger. Believers in Smyrna refused to deny the truth of the Christian faith, even though they were constantly threatened with hostility and violence.

We don't really know anything about this martyr named Antipas. He is not mentioned again in the Bible. Church tradition says he was burned to death in a bronze bull.

Revelation 2:14-15 But I have a few things against you: You have some people there who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel so they would eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality. (15) In the same way, there are also some among you who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (NET)

The teaching of Balaam comes from the book of Numbers starting with chapter 24. Balaam convinced a king named Balak to have women of his country intermarry with the Jews. These women would then tempt their husbands to disobey God. Balak used these women to entice the Jews into idolatry and sexual immorality. The church was tolerating something similar to this by some of its members.

The cult of the Nicolaitans is mentioned again as being a problem in this city, although in this case some in the church were following their teachings. As we mentioned before, apparently the Nicolaitans were some sort of Gnostic sect, who held to mystical teachings. This type of thing has crept into some of our churches today, one example being in some Charismatic churches. Some members of charismatic churches believe that you can experience "new knowledge of God" through mystical experiences with the Holy Spirit. They elevate these experiences above the revelation of the Bible, and consider themselves to be on a higher plane spiritually because of this "secret" knowledge. That's not Christianity, that's Gnosticism, and it is heresy.

Revelation 2:16 Therefore, repent! If not, I will come against you quickly and make war against those people with the sword of my mouth. (NET)

So this church was putting up with two cults in it's midst, and obviously they were influenced by the culture of paganism all around them. I believe this is going on today in our churches. We have let the ideas of our culture influence us as believers, and as a result the culture has infected our churches. This is something we all have to check ourselves about. What has the culture influenced you to believe or think that is contrary to the Word of God?

Jesus is telling us here to repent (change your mind) about these things, go in the other direction mentally. If we do not repent, Jesus will come against people who are following these false teachings with the Word of God. The sword of Jesus' mouth is the Word of God, which is appropriate because the Bible must be used to judge these false teachings and heretical practices. The Bible is the effective weapon against sin in the church because it confronts people with their sin. If the Bible is not preached in-depth, what will convict

people of sin? Nothing, and that is what is happening today.

“What a mistake we make if we think that the Church has the authority to decide what is right and what is wrong. The true Church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ – what scripture calls the Body of Christ. They are to be lights in the world. And if we are going to be lights in this dark world, we need to be careful to identify with the person of Jesus Christ and to recognize, not the church, but the Word of God as our authority.” J. Vernon McGee

Revelation 2:17 "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it. (HCSB)

We have three things promised here to those of us who have become victorious by placing our trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation. We can't be sure about what these mean, but we can make some educated guesses.

1. Hidden manna – could refer to the Messianic feast – As opposed to the manna that fell in the wilderness that had to be eaten every day, Jesus is our manna, our bread of life. Jesus promises that we will never go hungry spiritually because He is always with us (John 6:35).
2. A white stone – these are a few of the many speculations that exist about the white stone:
 - a. This could be similar to the ancient practice of judges reaching a decision by casting stones into an urn. A black stone was for condemnation, and a white stone was for acquittal. So Jesus is promising we who are victors will be declared innocent when God judges all things. The problem with this view is it's based on a pagan practice.
 - b. Another understanding of the white stone is the practice in Roman times of giving free gifts of food or entertainment to people by way of tickets. The tickets were often white stones. A white stone with your name on it gave you admission to special events. Maybe the white stone will be our ticket to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb! But, again, this was a pagan Roman practice, so it doesn't seem likely that the Lord would be referring to something like this.
 - c. The Greek term for white can refer either to the color white or to an object that is bright or shining, so this could actually be some sort of precious stone or diamond. The bright stone could be related to the Urim, which was worn in the high priest's breastplate (Leviticus 8:8). The reward of this stone could be experiencing God's will completely.
 - d. It could be connected to the stone tablets of the Law, and be a reference to the fact that God's Law will someday be actually written on our hearts instead of stone. This view also suits the context of Revelation. The victor honors the value of God's moral law associated with His will. So Christ will honor him with the ultimate enjoyment that relates to knowing and doing God's will.
3. A new name – the Greek word for name here means something that is new or different in nature. There are many interpretations of this. Some think this is a new name that will be given to us reflecting our status as belonging to Christ. Others think it may be a secret personal name of Jesus that he will tell us and no one else will know. I think the idea of us getting a new name is very likely, because God seems to like to do that throughout scripture. He personally named Adam and Eve, Samson, and Jesus, to name a few. And he changed Abram, Sarai, and Jacob's names.

The Corrupt Church

Revelation 2:18 "To the messenger of the church in Thyatira, write: 'The Son of God, whose eyes are like flaming fire and whose feet are like glowing bronze, says this: (ISV)

Excavations at Thyatira



Thyatira was a city in the province of Lydia in western Asia Minor, on the road from Pergamum to Sardis. It was never a large city, but it was a thriving manufacturing and commercial center during New Testament times. Archeologists have uncovered evidence of many trade guilds and unions. Membership in these trade guilds, which was necessary for financial and social success, often involved pagan customs and practices such as superstitious worship, feasts of the union members, who ate foods sacrificed to pagan gods, and sexual immorality. The modern name of the city is Akithar, which means "white castle". This church may have been established from Paul's ministry to Lydia (Acts 16:14).

The eyes like flaming fire indicate Jesus' anger towards this church. His feet like bronze is a reminder that He will judge His Church. Those who bring evil into the Church in the name of Christianity are just begging to be judged by the Son of God.

Revelation 2:19 'I know your deeds: your love, faith, service, and steadfast endurance. In fact, your more recent deeds are greater than your earlier ones. (NET)

This church was doing good works, and it was moving forward. Jesus commends the church for five things, which are works of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23):

1. Good deeds (works) – we are what we do!
2. Love – When people accept Christ they receive the Holy Spirit, and the first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. God is love, and if you belong to Him you will love.
3. Faith – genuine faith produces good deeds. It is how the world sees Christ in us.
4. Service – service is our ministry. The purpose of the church is not for entertainment, gaining a good reputation, making good business contacts, or even making us feel better. Its purpose is service to

God

5. Endurance (perseverance). This is another fruit of the Holy Spirit. People in this church endured great pressure for a long time.

Revelation 2:20 But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. (21) I have given her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her sexual immorality. (22) Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. (23) Furthermore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve. (NET)

Jezebel is probably a symbolic name for some prominent woman in this church. She was like the infamous wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament. So because Jesus is describing this woman as Jezebel, she must have been very evil. History says that she was a priestess at a pagan temple, involved in occult practices such as fortune-telling, and she was passing herself off as a prophetess of God. She was leading people in the church astray.

This is an example of inclusiveness. If, as a church, you are concentrating on attracting people to your church by entertaining them, and making them comfortable, then you're taking the chance that something like this will happen. People may come in that will try to spread their heresies throughout the church, instead of submitting themselves to the Word of God.

Apparently this woman was given the chance to repent, but she refused. Some believe this church represents the Medieval church in the years 800 – 1517. The Church in this period cooperated with false teachers, leading many astray. Some leaders of the Church were corrupt and had true servants of God killed.

Jesus was basically saying here that those who made their bed with this Jezebel woman would have to lie in it. If a church wants to play with fire, He will let it play with fire. If it does not repent, He will eventually let it die out and pay for its sins. This is happening in many of the large denominations today. They let fortune tellers, new agers, mediums, and Muslims come speak in their churches to satisfy their curiosity. They let false teachings and practices come into their church, and they wonder why people are deserting them in droves. God is judging the Church today.

Jesus switches to speaking about all churches in verse 23 and says each of us will be rewarded as our actions deserve. There will be degrees of rewards in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell.

Revelation 2:24-25 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, all who do not hold to this teaching (who have not learned the so-called "deep secrets of Satan"), to you I say: I do not put any additional burden on you. (25) However, hold on to what you have until I come. (NET)

Not all the believers in this church were tolerating this woman's false teachings. There were apparently some who either weren't aware of her teachings, or rejected them, and they were not held responsible for the sin in this church.

Satan is a master at counterfeiting false spirituality. The spirits who serve him can make people believe they are gaining true spiritual knowledge.

“Here reference is made to the satanic system often seen in great detail in false cults which compete with the true Christian faith. Just as there are the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10) which are taught by the Spirit, so there are the deep things of Satan which result from his work.” John Walvoord

Jesus tells the church to actively hold onto the good things they have until the coming of Christ. They must be held despite being opposed by the flesh, the devil, and enemies of the church. Of course, this is a constant theme throughout Scripture for those who seek after God. **The Christian life is like a greased pole in that we are either actively climbing up or passively sliding down. It's not possible to stay in one place.**

Revelation 2:26-28 The victor and the one who keeps My works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations-- (27) and He will shepherd them with an iron scepter; He will shatter them like pottery--just as I have received this from My Father. (28) I will also give him the morning star. (HCSB)

Christ will give believers authority in the Kingdom over the nations. We don't know how that will work, but Jesus is clearly saying it here. And verse 27, a quote from Psalm 2:8-9, tells us that believers will shepherd the nations with an iron scepter!! If the pot made by the potter refuses to serve His purpose, it is His right to break it (Jeremiah 18:1-11).

This is something usually said about Christ, but Jesus is saying we will share in this also. We are not now in the Kingdom of Christ on earth, this promise will be fulfilled in the future.

What is the morning star? Well, it is Jesus Himself (Revelation 22:16). Jesus is promising the victor the gift of Himself. It is a promise that He will never leave us, and will guide us through the dark and difficult times of our lives.

1. **The period between His ascension and Second Coming is the "night" (Psalm 130:5-6; 2 Peter 1:19).**
2. **The Millennial Kingdom is the day (Psalm 46; Isaiah 60:1-3; Malachi 4:1-2).**
3. **The morning star appears to those who watch for it just before the night is through, before the sun rises. This may refer to the catching away of the believer prior to the darkest night (the Tribulation) just before the dawn.**

Revelation 2:29 "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. (HCSB)

Jesus ends every letter with this same exhortation. It is a command telling us to listen and pay attention to what is in these letters. Many churches today are not listening; they are going their own way. But there were some in Thyatira that were faithful, just as there are some today that will be faithful, even unto death. Will you be counted among those?

Questions:

1. What did God hold against the church in Ephesus?
2. What was the affliction of the church in Smyrna?
3. What was the church in Pergamos doing right?
4. Why was God upset with the church in Thyatira?
5. What message should Christians today take from these letters?