

REVELATION STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 picks up where chapter 1 left off with the vision of the exalted Christ and His communication with John to write to the seven churches. This is the same experience or vision as chapter 1 and is a continuation of the same conversation that John is having with the one who has the voice that sounds like many waters. It is this voice that communicates each of these words to John about 7 specific churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) during this time frame. The entirety of chapter 2 is filled with red letters because they are the words of Jesus himself. John is not interpreting Jesus' intention or giving the cliff notes of a conversation – these are the Words of Christ.

Jesus tells John plainly at the end of chapter 1 that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:20) Because Jesus says that He is holding the seven stars it is a natural understanding that He is addressing each of the letters to the angel of the church. Some commentaries indicate that this may be referencing the pastors because the word is in its most basic sense “messenger”. I am not sure why Jesus would specifically describe holding the seven angels in His hand and then address the letters to someone else though so I don't believe there is much credence to this interpretation. The more interesting question to me is why Jesus is addressing the letters to the angels – maybe because of their responsibility of stewardship over the churches or possibly their responsibility to ensure the communication of the message, or maybe it's just that a letter is personal and it would be unusual to write it to the church without a personal greeting. Nevertheless, the letters are clearly addressed to the messengers of the churches and not just the churches themselves.

The significance of the seven churches has been widely studied and discussed by commentators and teachers alike. The number 7 is a number of completion and wholeness as we see in the pattern of Creation. John uses the number 7 over 50 different times in the book of Revelation and it is repeatedly communicated by Jesus as the number of churches, angels, seals, trumpets, bowls, etc. Therefore, there are two primary understandings for the significance or completeness of the seven churches. One is the most obvious in that the seven churches are a sample or type of the churches that existed at that time and still exist today. This way to understand the seven churches implies that these messages by Christ are meant to be addressed to all churches for all time (and people too). This is evidenced by Jesus repeated phrase to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (plural). The other common way to understand Christ's message to the churches is to relate each message to the church as a specific time period or historical time frame given for each church. For instance the 1st letter to Ephesus was meant to be for the church of the 1st Century and so on. The 7th letter to Laodicea would be the implied letter for the church today. And all the letters in between would be divided by specific time frames where apparent relevancies are determined. Although, this method could be right and maintains a certain novelty to it, it is much more likely that we are to understand that each letter could be addressed to any church at any time throughout history since its inception at Pentecost.

Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)

Come, Lord Jesus is to be the cry of the church. In the last chapter of Revelation we see that both “the Spirit and the bride say come”. As we prepare to look at the distinctions of the seven

churches it should be understood that there are also commonalities in their errors and in their encouragements. The church in Ephesus has lost its first love. This can be seen as the root of all the churches sins and a natural development or consequence of allowing God to lose first place. One way to evaluate Christ's place is through the desire for His return. We see this throughout the book of Revelation and in several other places in Scripture. Those who maintain Christ as first in their heart desire His return and those that are ashamed, in love with the world, or distracted are apathetic about His return. In 2 Timothy 4:8 Paul puts it like this "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." Are you excited and enamored with the return of Christ or are you apprehensive and afraid? It is important to evaluate your attitude toward Jesus soon return so that if there is a hardness in your heart that it can be removed. Paul makes a clear distinction in this passage about those who are looking forward to Christ's return and those who are not. He indicates in v.10 that Demas had deserted him because of his love for the present world. So, it is this contrast that Paul creates between those that love Christ's appearing and those who love the world. Which do you love? What are you looking forward to more? Are you tempted to ask Jesus to wait to come back until you have... or are you ready and excitedly awaiting His return? This is the seriousness of Jesus accusation against the church at Ephesus and the consequence of being removed as a church or a believer. (Rev. 2:5) His correction is clear "Repent, and do the works you did at first."

In each of these churches we see repeatable patterns where the letter to each of the churches can be more easily delineated and understood. We learn through these letters that there are no perfect churches and there are no churches without hope. The pattern for the Ephesus letter follows:

Christ – Holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 2:1)

Commendation – For their good works, toil, and patient endurance. They have a disdain for those who are evil and have exposed false apostles. They have not grown weary and are bearing burdens for the sake of Christ. (Rev. 2:2-3)

Correction – They have fallen away and need to return to their first love. They used to do good works which demonstrated their love. (Rev. 2:4-5a)

Consequence – If they don't repent Jesus will come and remove the church or even their faith completely. (Rev. 2:5b)

Concession – They hate the works of the Nicolaitans. (Rev. 2:6)

Conquering – The one who conquers will eat of the tree of life in the eternal kingdom. (Rev. 2:7)

Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)

The church at Smyrna is evidently not esteemed according to the worlds standards as it is indicated that they are enduring tribulation and poverty. In addition to that there are apparently some false believers that have made inappropriate accusations about their faith. Jesus calls them a "synagogue of Satan" and indicates that they are not genuine Christians. Jesus uses the terminology Jews but we should understand this in the context of His explanation of who a true Jew is. True Jews are not those who have the blood of Abraham, but those who are

covered by the blood of Yeshua. (John 8:39-47; Galatians 3:6-14) This is not meant to be a slight to the Jewish people, but to those who claim to be spiritual without faith in Christ. Any spirituality, religion, tradition, or group that claims to be the true church without authenticity and turns around and slanders the true church is indeed a synagogue of Satan. One of the interesting caveats about the churches in Revelation 2 is that in 3 of the 4 Jesus mentions Satan and his activity in them. We should take note that Satan has always attempted to work within the walls of the church to discourage, attack, and separate. We should not be surprised by this or afraid. Jesus is the Lord of the church and His advice is not to leave the church, find a new church, or move to a neighboring town. Jesus repeatedly gives instruction to patiently endure and repent of any areas that may be allowing Satan to have a foothold in their lives. In the church today we should naturally assume that Satan is at work just as he was in the 1st century church but Jesus is greater and through Him we will overcome. In our churches there will always be some who are faking, some who are hating, and some who are working as agents of evil. This should not surprise us or perplex us, especially since Jesus tells us about it. Jesus sees all and He will judge all. We can't know necessarily in our human lives who are the true genuine believers and who are not. Our command from Christ is to repent, love, endure hardship, and hold on until He comes.

The structure for the Smyrna letter follows:

Christ – The first and the last who died and came to life again. (Rev. 2:8)

Commendation – Jesus knows about their suffering and hardship and calls them spiritually rich (Rev. 2:9)

Correction – They are told not to fear (Rev. 10a)

Consequence – n/a (Possibly the implication being what will happen if they are not faithful unto death)

Concession – They will receive the crown of life if they remain faithful (Rev.2:10)

Conquering – They will not be hurt by the second death (hell) (Rev. 2:11)

Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17)

At first glance it appears that Jesus is being overly harsh or impatient with the church of Pergamum. But we also know that He is the perfect leader so why is He threatening to war against them with the sword of His mouth? (Rev. 2:16) Jesus acknowledges two things that would normally cause extra compassion – one being that the church at Pergamum is stated to be right in the middle of one of the greatest Satanic influences at that time. The other acknowledgement that He makes is that there has been a very public and tragic martyrdom to one of the Christian leaders (Antipas). Both of these statements indicate that they are living in an extremely hostile environment for Christians and it would be challenging to maintain their faith amidst the persecution. With that being said Jesus does not excuse their immoral behavior and very firmly states that He will deal with such sin. This reminds us that regardless of how bad it may get or the external or internal pressures that are applied in any situation - excuses for sin are not to be tolerated. Jesus sees and Jesus understands but He does not excuse. This is a pertinent word for the church today that capitulates with the cultural norms and societal pressures that are exerted against it. Jesus commendation is never to give in and He doesn't even recommend getting out. Jesus expectation is to press in, stay strong, hold fast, be faithful,

don't quit, don't deny and don't be afraid. He wants a spotless bride. Without the grace of God and the encouragement that He provides through His Holy Spirit this would be impossible and yet He expects it nonetheless. There is never a good or acceptable reason to give into sin.

It is our aim to boldly confess and maintain that: I am a Jew loving; one man / one woman for life believing; sin hating; world disdain; Satan fighting; Jesus serving; child of the King.

As far as the sins of the church go at Pergamum the accusations are primarily two things. One is that they are holding to the teachings of Balaam who tried to play both sides of the fence and help Israel's enemy while not officially cursing them. He recommended to Balak the king of the Moabites that he should try and defeat Israel by enticing them to do evil. This meant practicing sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. The other accusation was most likely similar in nature in that they were putting up with the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are thought to be a sect within the early church that taught that immorality was irrelevant and that the law was disposable. In essence it is believed to be the beginning of the hyper grace movement that emphasizes freedom in Christ even to the point of accepting sinful behavior. By Jesus actions we can see that immorality whether it comes through enticement and deceit or through the public teachings of the church is never acceptable.

The structure for the Pergamum letter follows:

Christ – The one who has the sharp two-edged sword (Rev. 2:12)

Commendation – Jesus acknowledges that they live in a hard place and that they have held fast and not denied their faith. (Rev. 2:13)

Correction – They have some who follow the teachings of Balaam and they have some who follow the teachings of the Nicolaitans. (Rev. 2:14-15)

Consequence – Jesus will come to war against these individuals with the sword of His mouth if they don't repent. (Rev. 2:16)

Concession – n/a Jesus doesn't appear to provide any concluding concession indicating His seriousness with the church.

Conquering – The one who overcomes will get hidden manna and also receive a white stone with a new name. (Rev. 2:17)

Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)

One of the emphasis that Jesus provides in this letter is that He is the one who sees and knows everything. He says "I know your works"; "He is the one who searches mind and heart"; and "I will give to each of you according to your works". It is very clear that Jesus knows exactly what is happening behind the scenes and His stance is that He is getting ready to do something about it. In Pergamum, Jesus presented himself as the one who holds the two-edged sword which would provide more of an emphasis on establishing the truth. But in Thyatira, He indicates that He is the one whose eyes are flames of fire and whose feet are burnished bronze which are both highlighting His ability to judge. The main issue is that the church tolerates the teaching and practices of Jezebel which encourages sexual immorality. When I study Jesus words to this church, I am reminded of the current churches in our society that teach and practice homosexuality is ok. I don't know of any churches that publicly teach that sex outside of marriage is acceptable, but I know plenty that teach acts of homosexuality are acceptable.

The accusation against this church is not that they are participating in immoral activities but that they are tolerating this teaching and actions in their midst. Certainly, one of Satans primary tactics is to make sin appear more tolerable. In our society it is seen as inappropriate to be intolerable, but in Jesus eyes we are never to tolerate sin or the teaching of it. I for one do not want Jesus to have anything against me.

As far as the consequences go for those inside the church who are instigating these false teachings - Jesus is clear that the judgment will be severe. Not only does Jesus show that He will deal with this Jezebel by throwing her on a bed of sickness but He indicates that it will affect those who she is immoral with and even her children. Jesus says that the purpose for this is so that all the churches will know that He knows everything and that there are consequences for immoral behavior.

It is also notable that Jesus refers to these teachings and works as the deep things of Satan. (Rev. 2:24) It is in indication of how serious this is and where the syncretism, tolerance, and immorality truly come from. I think about the encounter that Eve had with Satan in the garden and how it relates to this situation. As shown in the garden and also by Jesus implication in this passage there are certain things that Satan knows which we do not. God has not given us knowledge of them for our own benefit. We must never give into the temptation to usurp God's authority and we must trust that He has established in us everything that we need for life and godliness. The only secrets that Satan knows bring suffering, death, and eternal damnation. We must trust in God's Word and His leading through His Holy Spirit to be sufficient for our lives and our conduct.

The structure for the Thyatira letter follows:

Christ – Eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze (Rev. 2:18)

Commendation – Jesus recognizes their good works, their love, faith, service and patient endurance. He also specifically mentions that they continue to do more and more good. (Rev. 2:19)

Correction – His correction is regarding the tolerance of the teaching, influence, and actions of Jezebel. (Rev. 2:20)

Consequence – The consequences are primarily aimed at Jezebel and those who are involved with her. (Rev. 2:21-23)

Concession – Jesus closing encouragement is that He is not providing any additional burden for them and tells them to hold tightly to their faith. (Rev. 2:24-25)

Conquering – Authority over the nations, ruling with a royal scepter, and reception of the morning star. (Rev. 2:26-28)