

Chapter 2

Overview of the 7 churches

1. Ephesus – orthodox church yet lost its love
2. Smyrna – suffering church
3. Pergamum – compromising church
4. Thyatira – tolerant church
5. Sardis – dead church
6. Philadelphia – faithful church
7. Laodicea – lukewarm church

Makeup of the letters

1. there is a recognition of the speaker
2. there is a recognition of the church
3. there is an encouragement (except for Sardis and Laodicea)
4. there is a rebuke (except for Smyrna and Philadelphia)
5. there is a chance to change

Theologians have differed on their interpretation of these letters. Some take them to be indicative of 7 eras of church history. Beginning in the apostolic age down to today's church, which the apostate church of Laodicea would represent.

This is not stated in Scripture, but rather deduced from observation.

But we can see aspects of each of these churches in various churches today.

Ephesus

2:1

Jesus holds these 7 messengers (stars) as well as their churches (lampstands) in His right hand. He has sovereign control over all.

2:2,3

This church's doctrine is solid, and they do not tolerate wrongdoing.

They look for authenticating fruit in those who claim spiritual authority. They don't tolerate hypocrisy.

This church is willing to suffer and persevere for what they think is right.

2:4,5

So, their issue was not intellectual nor theological. It was emotional.

What do we do when this occurs?

1. Remember – the importance of remembering is seen in the Eucharist

This is the same church Paul spoke about in

They loved Jesus in Paul's day: (**Ephesians 1:15,16 and 6:24**)

2. Repent – be regretful over the sin of breaking the 1st commandment (Martin Luther)

3. Do – Faith is increased through everyday service (**Luke 17:5ff**)

2:5b

Centuries later, Jesus did remove their lampstand. They remained a church for several centuries, but since its decline began in the 5th century, it now lies in ruins and is uninhabited.

2:6

The deeds of the Nicolaitans are somewhat speculative. Some say they were people conquerors (spiritually), Nico (to conquer) laos (people). Others say its founder is Nicolaus from **Acts 6:5**, a Christian convert perhaps turned apostate.

Still others say that these deeds were deeds that indulged the flesh, like the Gnostics.

2:7

This promise to 'overcomers' is for all believers. See **I John 5:5** "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God".

The One who has all authority (**v. 1**) grants eternal life to all who overcome.

2:8

Smyrna

35 miles north of Ephesus was Smyrna. Modern day Izmir, Turkey's 3rd largest city.

Extra-biblical literature notes this city for its wickedness in the 1st century.

Smyrna means 'Myrrh', a fragrant burial spice. It is the scent of the Jesus' robe in **Psalms 45:8**.

2:9-11

Jesus here presents Himself to this persecuted church as the One who is eternal, the One who was dead, and came to life.

This is the encouragement of those who find themselves in the midst of a society that hates God. Jesus knows their poverty (likely the confiscation of their property).

Yet He calls them rich.

Same words for poverty and riches as **James 2:5**

James prefers riches in faith over riches in money.

Hebrews 11:24-26

This begs the question about our view of the value of life and death.

Death to self as seen in **Galatians 2:20**

Physical death as seen in **Philippians 1:19-23**

These perspectives allow us to agree with **Romans 8:18ff**

Do you have these eternal perspectives that allow you to be faithful come what may?

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna did. He was martyred for his faith in A.D. 155. His Christianity was so despised by the citizens of this city that the Jews gathered the sticks for the fire that would burn him to death on the Sabbath, violating **Numbers 15:32-36**

“Eighty and six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me: How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?” - Polycarp

Polycarp knew “the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”

2 exhortations are given for those who suffer persecution.

1. “Do not fear what you are about to suffer” Refer back to **1:17**

2. “Be faithful unto death” (Columbine)

2:11

Overcomers will not be hurt by the 2nd death.

Our earthly death is the 1st death, the 2nd death is the eternal death.

See Jesus’ comments in **Luke 12:4,5**

The only way that all of this can be wise, is if there is resurrection. Christians call to endure in the face of suffering is buffeted by the perfect justice of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”.

Look to the city whose Builder and Maker is God – Abraham

Endure “as seeing Him who is invisible” - Moses

Pergamos

2:12,13

This church was north of Smyrna about 20 miles from the Mediterranean Sea as we continue our clockwise journey with the angels or messengers of these 7 churches.

Many credit this city with the invention of paper, which was once called pergamena.

Very idolatrous city dedicated to the worship of Zeus, Dionysus, Asklepios, and Athena.

Anthony gifted to Cleopatra a library from Pergamos of around some 200,000 books.

The picture of the 2-edged sword is likely reflecting the outworking of God’s Word, which is grace for those who submit under it, and judgment for those who don’t.

2:13,14

The works of Satan were very evident here as the Lord tells us. We don't know a whole lot about Antipas, but the work of Satan here ended in this faithful man's martyrdom.

Christ comes across very personally to this church "My name... My faith"

Doctrine of Balaam – intermarriage leading to idolatry.
The way of Balaam – receiving pay for wrongdoing (**II Peter 2:15**)

The error of Balaam – Same as above (**Jude 11**)

2:15

Do we hate what God hates? See **Psalm 139:19-24**
Was David right here?

2:16

This would be with the edge of the sword we don't want to experience. Jesus warns them by introducing Himself to them as the One with this sword.

2:17

Hidden manna – our spiritual nourishment. Supernatural strength we need.

White stone - Some suggest white stones would have engravings on them which were invitations to a banquet. That would fit nicely here.

New name – perhaps the way God, and Christ, give new names in the Bible based on their role in kingdom business (Simon to Cephas (stone), to Petros (rock))

It is exciting to think what your name is going to be!

Thyatira

2:18

Located about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum.
Famous for its purple dye, as seen in Lydia of **Acts 16:14,15** whom Paul converted to Christianity.

She may be the reason this church exists, as there is no other evidence of how the gospel got there!

Jesus introduces Himself here as the great Judge, whose eyes can penetrate every soul.

2:19

Their outward appearance is great. If you visited this church, you would want to stay and join.

2:20-23

BUT... on the inside they are filled with private sins.
Private sins cannot be hidden from the One with eyes like a flame of fire (**Psalms 139:1-6**)
If sins could be kept private from Jesus, there would be no justice in the world.

The O.T. Jezebel was known for using her wicked heart to influence her husband, King Ahab. She was so successful, that Ahab's legacy became "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him (**I Kings 16:33**)

The Jezebel of Thyatira influenced God's people to sexual immorality and idolatry.
These sins have been prominent throughout the history of the church.
Does your church not take a stand against sexual immorality? How about the idolatry of the prosperity gospel? (See **Galatians 1:8**)

The U.S. has lost its godly influence in the media and the universities. The church must be kept pure in the fiery eyes of the Sovereign Judge.

2:24,25

These are the deep things of Satan. The deep things of God are also revealed to us. See **(I Corinthians 2:10-12)**

2:26,27

Authority over cities also mentioned in **Luke 19:17** in the parable of the talent

2:28

“Morning star”

Some interpret as Jesus Himself **(22:16)**

Some interpret as resurrection (as the morning star ends darkness and brings light)

Others as the glory that will be given to us

2:29

“ears to hear”

This speaks of the humility of realizing one’s need for the words of Christ.

Compare **Isaiah 6:8-10** with **Matthew 13:10-17**

Do you have ears to hear?