



I AM

THE FIRST FOUR CHURCH LETTERS

Revelation 2

The Daily Word from Laura Martin

John followed God's instructions to write and deliver letters to seven churches. As the Lord addressed the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, He repeated Himself with the phrase, "I know your . . ." Yes, the Lord knew their strengths, their works, how they stood strong in the place of suffering or temptation, and how they gave in. *Each church received a different challenge from the Lord.* Some He asked to repent. Others were encouraged to hold strong and be faithful until death because they would be victorious and would be granted a crown of life. John reminded the churches: "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says."

If you have received a convicting message from the Lord, perhaps through a friend, a sermon, or a post you read online, don't be ignorant and turn the other way. *Listen to the Holy Spirit's prompting.* You may be like the churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, or Thyatira, needing to repent and turn back to your first love, Jesus. Remember, God knows you. God knows your works, love, faithfulness, and endurance. He knows your affliction and poverty. He knows the temptations you face, and He knows all you tolerate. If God wrote *you* a letter, what would He say to you? How would you respond?

"Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

— Revelation 2:29

FURTHER SCRIPTURE

- *Psalms 26:2* — "Test me, LORD, and try me; examine my heart and mind."
- *Acts 3:19* — "Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."
- *Revelation 2:4* — "But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first."



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Teaching Notes

INTRO

The truth about studying Revelation is that no matter how long you study the book, you can always go back and learn more. In chapter 2, there are four churches in Asia to cover. In Revelation 1:19, John was instructed to “write what you have seen, things which are and are to come.” The things that ARE were for the church-age and the dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:2). That included the churches of the first century and the churches today. The book of Revelation draws God’s master plan together. God is on the threshold of coming back. From the island of Patmos, John addressed each of the churches of Asia in a way that presented the information to each church in the order each might be visited. John typically used a pattern when writing to each church: (1) the commission to the church; (2) the character of Christ; (3) the commendation of the good things the church had done; (4) the condemnation of the bad things the church had done; (5) the correction of what the church should do; (6) the call to the church to hear what the Holy Spirit was saying, and (7) the challenge the church was to fulfill.

The role of the theologian is to study Scripture and interpret what it means. After having studied through 65 books of the Bible, you have the right to ask what God means in these passages as well.

TEACHING

Revelation 2:1-7: There is much about the details of Revelation that are unknown. Verse 1 addressed **the church in Ephesus**, pointing out that Jesus held the seven stars in His right hand and walked among the seven golden candlesticks (seven churches). John knew the works of the church in Ephesus (v. 2). He knew what they engaged in and were willing to do for Christ’s sake. I believe that every one of these churches, which are all different from each other, were considered to be good churches. The church had endured persecution and yet continued on (v. 3).

Nevertheless, the church in Ephesus had turned away from its first love (v. 4). It was an awesome church, but it had turned from Christ as its priority. John chided them for having fallen away from Christ and instructed them to repent and return to doing “first works” for Him (v. 5). In this case, “repent” meant to turn away from the things that were against Christ and instead turn back to Christ. If the church didn’t repent, Christ would remove their candlestick from the church. That action would kill the church. God does not threaten things that He is unwilling to do.

In verse 6, a reference is made to the Nicolaitans. It is possible they were a heretical sect and practiced sexual immorality, taught false doctrine, and ate meat that had been sacrificed to idols. The church was holding to doctrine but losing passion for the lost. Those that overcome the persecution for Christ were promised eternal life (“to eat of the tree of life”) (v. 7).

Revelation 2:8-11: In verse 8, John wrote to **the church in Smyrna**. Christ knew the church’s works and tribulations. And He knew about the blasphemy of those who claimed to be Jews but were instead of Satan (v. 9). Apparently, strong opposition from the Jewish sect in Smyrna had brought much hardship to the church. John warned that the Christians would suffer, but they should not be afraid. They would be cast into prison, tried, and, ten days later, would be executed. However, they were to be faithful even unto death, and then they would receive the crown of life (v. 10).

Revelation 2:12-17: In verse 12, John writes to **the church in Pergamum** and explained that Jesus’ message was a sharp double-edged sword. Jesus knew the church’s work and that the people lived in the area where Satan’s throne was (possibly the center of the Babylonian cult) (v. 13). John commended the church for their work, and then moved to condemnation. The reference to Balaam and Balak is about the strength within the church. The church cannot be attacked in its strengths, but it can be attacked in its weaknesses (v. 14a). For the early church, those weaknesses were sexual sins, self-indulgence, and meat sacrificed to idols (v. 14b).

In reality, these things are still here for our churches to confront today. What are the strengths of your church and what are the weaknesses? The situation today has not changed from what the first-century churches faced.

The church in Pergamum had not dealt with the Nicolaitans like the Ephesians had, but had allowed their doctrines in the church (v. 15). John called them to repent immediately (v. 16). We don’t know what the phrase “white stone” means, and we don’t need to dwell on it. There are things of prophecy we cannot know.



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Revelation 2:18–29: In verse 18, John writes to **the church in Thyatira**. John followed his pattern, acknowledging their good works, charity, service, faith, and patience (v. 19). They had even gotten better over time. He then gave condemnations. The people were being seduced into sexual sins and eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, without regret or repentance (vv. 20–21). John explained that without repentance, they would face tribulation and death so that all the churches would know that Jesus is *I AM* and is in charge of them (v. 23). John then offered some hope—those who were not guilty of these sins would not face the same tribulations (v. 24). Those who kept God’s commands would be blessed with authority over the nations and would be given the “morning star” (v. 28).

CLOSING

I pray that you would continue to look at this chapter to see what God has to say to you.



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Reading Guide Questions

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1. What did Jesus warn the church in Ephesus about? What had happened to them (Revelation 2:4–5)? What did He tell them to do?
 2. What was happening to the church in Smyrna, and how did Jesus comfort them? Do you ever feel persecuted for your faith? How does it compare to the persecution that the church in Smyrna was experiencing or even how Christians in some parts of the world suffer today (Revelation 2:9–10)?
 3. The church in Pergamum was faithful not to deny Jesus' name, even through the martyrdom of one of their people. What were they doing wrong that many churches do today (Revelation 2:14–15)?
 4. Name some things the church of Thyatira was doing right (Revelation 2:19)? Despite these things, what was their downfall (Revelation 2:20–21)?
 5. Look back at what John said would happen to the churches if they didn't turn from their wrongdoings. Could you possibly be attending one of these churches that fail to love God and people as they should, who compromise truth or are corrupt in their teachings?
 6. What did the Holy Spirit highlight to you in Revelation 2 through the reading or the teaching?

