

Approximately 40 minutes Expository



Revelation 2 ... “What the Spirit Says to the Churches”

Opening Prayer:

Father God, we come before You in the name of Jesus. We thank You for Your Word, and we thank You that You still speak to Your church. Lord, as we open Revelation chapter 2, give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying. Help us understand these churches historically, prophetically, and personally. Let new believers grasp the truth clearly, and let mature believers be stirred deeply. Above all, let us see Jesus...walking among His churches, knowing all things,

calling us to faithfulness. In Jesus' name, amen.

  **Historical Setting:**





The book of Revelation was given to the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos because of his testimony for Jesus Christ. The Lord gave him this revelation near the end of the first century, during a time when the church was under pressure from both Jewish opposition and Roman persecution.

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus gives seven messages to **seven real churches** in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. These were literal congregations with real strengths, real failures, real temptations, and real needs.

But many Bible teachers in a dispensational and pretribulation, premillennial framework also see something more. These seven churches are not only historical churches.

They also form a prophetic outline of the church age. In other words, they picture the spiritual conditions that would unfold throughout church history from the apostolic age until the coming of Christ for His church.


That does not cancel their literal meaning. It adds another layer. These letters are historical, practical, personal, and prophetic.

Revelation 2 covers the first four churches: Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus**, Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh**, Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum**, and Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**. And together they show us how a church can leave its first love, suffer persecution, tolerate compromise, and drift into corruption.

Yet through it all, Jesus is in the midst of His church.

Before we dive deep into this message let us read God's Word first....

1. Ephesus ... The Church That Left Its First Love:


Revelation Chapter 2:1-7 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus"  EFF-uh-sus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. 1

The first message is to Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus**. This was a strong church in many ways. Jesus commends them for hard work, perseverance, discernment, and doctrinal vigilance. They were not careless. They tested false apostles. They hated evil. They stood for truth.

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 2:1–7.

That sounds like a solid church...and it was.

But then comes the painful word: they had forsaken their first love.

That is sobering. A church can be busy, orthodox, disciplined, and still drift in its heart. It is possible to have correct doctrine and yet lose tenderness toward Christ. It is possible to defend truth and yet lose devotion.

Jesus does not say they had lost their salvation. He says they had left their first love. The warmth was gone. The freshness was fading. The relationship had become mechanical.

Historically, this describes the church at Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus**.

But in a dispensational understanding, many see Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus** as representing the apostolic church...the first-

century church. It began with fire, purity, sacrifice, and love for Jesus. But even in that early stage, decline had already begun. By the end of the apostolic era, the seeds of cooling devotion were already there.

And that is a warning to us. The greatest danger is not always open heresy. Sometimes it is **slow** spiritual drift. We still sing, still serve, still attend, still read...but the heart is no longer burning for Christ.

Jesus gives the remedy: remember, **repent**, and do the things you did at first. That is a gracious call. He does not merely expose. He invites restoration.

Church, Jesus does not want cold duty. He wants loving devotion.


2. Smyrna - The Persecuted Church:

Revelation 2:8-11 ⁸ **“To the angel of the church in Smyrna**  **SMUR-nuh** **write:**


These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

¹¹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. ²


² [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 2:8–11.

Next comes Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh**. This church receives no rebuke. Only encouragement.

Jesus tells them that He knows their afflictions and poverty...yet they are rich. That is beautiful. The world may see suffering, weakness, and loss, but Jesus sees true riches.

Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh** was a persecuted church. They faced slander, pressure, imprisonment, and even death. Jesus does not promise them immediate escape from hardship. Instead, He tells them to be faithful even to the point of death.

That is not a comfortable message, but it is a strong one. Faithfulness matters more than ease. Jesus never wastes the suffering of His people.


In a dispensational view, Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh** is often seen as representing


the persecuted church era, especially the early centuries of Roman persecution before Constantine. The church was hunted, oppressed, and marginalized. Believers paid dearly for their loyalty to Christ.

Yet this was often when the church was spiritually strongest.


That is still true today. A church that has no trials can become sleepy. A church under pressure often becomes pure. When everything earthly is being shaken, the true believer clings harder to Jesus.

And notice something important in a pretribulation, premillennial framework. The church is not promised freedom from all tribulation in this present world. Believers suffer now. Christians are persecuted now. But that is different from the coming Tribulation...the future outpouring of divine wrath described later in Revelation.

The church may endure persecution from the world, but it is not appointed to God's wrath. That distinction matters. Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh** suffered as part of living faithfully in a fallen world. The future Tribulation is a unique period of judgment upon a Christ-rejecting world.

So Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh** reminds us: suffering is real, but Jesus is greater. The suffering church is never forgotten by the Savior.

3. Pergamum - The Church That Married the World:

Revelation 2:12-17 ¹² **"To the angel of the church in Pergamum**  **PER-guh-mum** **write:**

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ **I know where you live—where Satan has**

his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.


¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.


¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a



new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. ³

Then we come to Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum**. Jesus says this church dwells **“...where Satan has his throne....”** (v.13) It was a dark place spiritually. Pagan worship was everywhere. Idolatry was normal. Pressure to compromise was intense.

And yet some in Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum** held fast to Christ’s name. Even in a hostile culture, there were believers standing firm. That is encouraging.


But Jesus says they also had serious problems. They tolerated false teaching. Some held to the teaching of Balaam, leading people into spiritual compromise and immorality. Others held to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 2:12–17.

  The Nicolaitans taught compromise. They tried to make sin acceptable inside the church. They turned Christian liberty into permission for immorality, idolatry, and worldliness. Jesus hated their practices because they corrupted His people and weakened the witness of the church.

Here we move from persecution to compromise.


Satan's strategy often changes. If he cannot destroy the church from the outside, he will try to corrupt it from the inside. If he cannot crush believers by force, he will seduce them by mixture.

In a dispensational outline, Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum** is often seen as representing the church after Constantine, when Christianity became politically accepted and outwardly honored by the Roman Empire. Instead of persecution, the church began to enjoy state favor. But with

that favor came corruption. The church and the world began to mix.

That was a turning point in history. The danger was no longer merely the lion outside the church. The danger became compromise inside the church.

And that is still one of the greatest dangers **today**. The church is not called to isolate from the world, but it must never imitate the world. We are to love people without borrowing the world's values, its morals, its pride, or its rebellion.

When the church starts craving acceptance more than holiness, it becomes Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum**.

Jesus calls them to repent. He warns that His Word is a sharp sword. That means the answer to compromise is not human cleverness. It is the piercing truth of God's Word.

Brothers and sisters, we do not help the world by becoming like it. We help the world by being faithful to Christ in the middle of it.

4. Thyatira - The Corrupted Church:

Revelation 2:18-29 ¹⁸ **“To the angel of the church in Thyatira**  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh write:**

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ **I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.**


²⁰ **Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of**

food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

²⁴ Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, ²⁵ except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

²⁶ To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—²⁷ that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery' ^z—

just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ I will also give that one the morning star. ²⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ⁴


Then Revelation 2 reaches Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**, the longest letter in the chapter. Jesus begins by describing Himself as the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. That picture matters because Thyatira was dealing with deep corruption, and Jesus sees right through it.

Now to their credit, this church had love, faith, service, and perseverance. In fact, Jesus says their later works were greater than the first. That means they were active and growing in certain ways.

⁴ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Re 2:18–29.

But there was a tragic flaw: they tolerated **“...that woman Jezebel,...”** (v.20) a symbol of false religion, false prophecy, and seductive corruption. She led people into immorality and idolatry. Instead of confronting evil, the church made room for it.

That is always dangerous. A church can be known for service and still be spiritually compromised if truth is being tolerated away.

In a dispensational and prophetic reading, Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh** is often seen as representing the medieval church era...the period of deep institutional corruption, unscriptural traditions, spiritual bondage, and mixture of religion and power. Many dispensational teachers connect this with the rise of the Roman system in its most corrupted forms, where man-made authority, ritualism, and spiritual

immorality overshadowed the simplicity of Christ.

Now we must be careful here. There were true believers during those centuries. God always has His **remnant**. Even in the darkest ages, the Lord preserved faithful souls.

And Jesus says that to the faithful remnant in Thyatira 🗣️ **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**: hold on to what you have until I come.

That is precious. Even in a corrupt age, Jesus knows those who are His.



And notice that phrase: **“...until I come...”**

(v.25) In these church letters, there is an increasing forward look. For those of us who hold to a pretribulation, premillennial view, that expectancy matters. The church age moves forward with watchfulness toward Christ's coming. The church is not



waiting for the Antichrist. The church is waiting for **Jesus Christ**.

That does not mean we ignore prophecy. It means our hope is centered in a Person, not merely in events.

5. What These Churches Mean in a Dispensational Framework:





  So what do these churches mean in a dispensational and pretribulation, premillennial theology?

They mean several things at once.

- First, they were literal churches in John's day.
- Second, they represent types of churches that can exist in any age. At any moment you can still find an Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus** church, a Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh** church, a

Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum** church,
or a Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**
church.

➤ Third, many see them as a prophetic
view of church history:

- **Ephesus**  **EFF-uh-sus** - the apostolic
church that began to cool
- **Smyrna**  **SMUR-nuh** - the
persecuted church
- **Pergamum**  **PER-guh-mum** - the
worldly, state-married church
- **Thyatira**  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh** - the
corrupted and compromised church

And as Revelation continues into chapter 3,
that prophetic scenery moves closer to the
end of the church age.




This fits naturally into a pretribulation and
premillennial understanding because
Revelation 1 to 3 focuses on the church,
while chapter 4 and beyond shifts into the
future events that follow. The church is


seen on earth in these early chapters, but the great judgments of the Tribulation belong to a later phase in God's prophetic program.

In other words, the church age has a beginning, a development, and an end. Christ knows every stage of it. He evaluates it. He warns it. He comforts it. And He will come for His own.

6. The Message for Us Today:

So what should we take from Revelation 2?

- If you are like Ephesus  **EFF-uh-sus**, come back to your first love.
- If you are like Smyrna  **SMUR-nuh**, do not fear suffering. Jesus sees you.
- If you are like Pergamum  **PER-guh-mum**, stop compromising with the world.

- If you are like Thyatira  **THIGH-uh-TIE-ruh**, do not tolerate what Jesus condemns.

And for all of us, remember this: Jesus walks among His churches.

- He is not distant.
- He is not confused.
- He is not impressed by appearances.
- He sees the heart.
- He knows the truth.

That should both comfort and challenge us.

Invitation to Be Born Again:

Maybe as you hear this, you realize that your problem is deeper than church attendance or religion. Maybe you know about Jesus, but you do not truly belong to Him.

The letters in Revelation are not just warnings to churches. They are calls to individuals. Again and again Jesus says, **“Whoever has ears, let them hear.”**

 Have you heard Him?

The good news is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again from the grave. He is alive. He saves. He forgives. He changes hearts.

You cannot earn salvation by good works, church activity, or religious effort. **You must be born again.** That means turning from sin and trusting in Jesus Christ alone as your Lord and Savior.

If you have never done that, call on Him now.

- Tell Him you are a sinner.
- Tell Him you need mercy.

- Ask Him to forgive you and save you through His blood and resurrection.
- Put your trust in Him.

And Christian, if you already know Him, then hear what the Spirit is saying. Stay close to Jesus. Stay faithful to His Word. Stay separate from compromise. Stay full of hope. The King is coming.

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, we thank You for Revelation chapter 2. Thank You that You love Your church enough to correct it, warn it, comfort it, and call it back to Yourself. Search our hearts, Lord. Show us where we have cooled, compromised, or tolerated what we should not tolerate. Give us grace to repent and strength to remain faithful.

And Lord Jesus, for anyone hearing this who has never truly been saved, draw them now. Open their heart. Bring them to repentance and faith. Let them be born again by the power of Your Spirit.

Keep us watchful, holy, and full of expectation. We thank You that You are in the midst of Your churches, and we thank You that one day You are coming for Your people. In Jesus' name, amen.



Matthew 28:19-20