

# Book of Revelation: Preliminary Considerations

## *Considerations That Will Impact Our Perspective*

- There are things we do not know, simply because God has not told us everything. One example is the "seven thunders" in Revelation 10:3-4: God mentions them, but withholds from us their meaning. There may be other significant things that he doesn't mention at all. Because of this, some events in prophecy may fit together in ways we don't expect. God has told us what we *need* to know for our strength and encouragement, but not necessarily what we *want* to know for the satisfying of our speculations. (Our job is to trust God, not to speculate on things we haven't been told.)
- Some of the events mentioned in prophecy may be fulfilled in public, so that everybody knows what has happened. Other events may be fulfilled in a less public manner (perhaps by those who do not know the Bible), so that people do not realize that the prophecy has been fulfilled. However, after it is all over, we who belong to Christ will be able to look back and see how God worked, both visibly and behind the scenes, to accomplish his glorious work.
- At Jesus' *first* coming, many things occurred in unexpected ways. We have no reason to rule out the possibility that unexpected things will happen at his *second* coming.
- The popularity of various viewpoints and interpretations does not guarantee that they are correct. Truth is not determined by the number of books a person writes, or by how sensational the viewpoint sounds. Any view that adds to or subtracts from God's Word is, by nature, deficient.

## *Our Focus (as we study prophecy)*

- We should be focusing on what is written in the Scriptures. It is not our purpose to speculate, to invent a timetable, or to develop views based on what is *not* mentioned in the Word.

## *How Should Prophecy Influence Us?*

- Though prophecy (such as the book of Revelation) has a focus on what will happen in the end, it is written in such a way as to show us how to respond when trials occur *even now*.
- Many judgments and distressing things are going to happen - *not only at the end, but also before*. If we focus on the distressing things, we will tend to respond the way the world does - panic, fear, self-preservation, etc. However, if we focus on the *future*, on what will come *afterwards*, we will have every reason to have a positive outlook on things - even when circumstances are bad. With such a focus, we can respond the way Jesus did - with a love for other people, a trust in God, and a willingness to do God's will (even if it results in death). As in everything, we need to take into consideration the promise mentioned in Romans 8:28+. No matter what happens, God will use it to accomplish good in the lives of those who love him. [In other words, if we love him, we don't have to worry!]

- We need to remember that fulfilled prophecy won't necessarily convert people. A person can make up excuses to explain it away - just as they did when Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 28:11-15). In the future, many people will refuse to repent *even when they know it is God who is judging them* (Revelation 16:9, 11, 21).

### ***A Caution About "Escapism" and the Denial of Potential Persecution***

- There is a view which teaches that Christians will not be present on earth, when God's final judgments are poured out. Some adherents of this view (not *all* of them) may be tempted to reach a false conclusion that they will *escape* severe trials in this present life. However, there is no such guarantee in Scripture.
- Interestingly, this "escapism" attitude is more prevalent among people who are used to living under relatively comfortable conditions - such as people who live in "Western" nations. (Many of these people actually think they *deserve* a comfortable life!) This view is not so prevalent among those who are *already* experiencing persecution - such as Christians in many "third world" countries. (In some countries, a *willingness* to suffer for Christ is considered a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Compare to Acts 14:22.)
- Regardless of our views about what will happen to Christians during the *end times* (including whether or not they will be living on the earth, during the final days), we should not be surprised if we have to suffer trials and persecution *even now*. We have no reason to consider ourselves exempt from such circumstances, for genuine Christians have *often* experienced severe trials. (See 1 Peter, which focuses on this fact.)
- Jesus warned us that, *before* the end times, trials would increase (Matthew 24:6-13). The main difference between the trials that will be experienced during the last days and those experienced by Christians down through the centuries is that the persecution will become more widespread. Even today, the amount of persecution is increasing quite rapidly.
- We need to have the attitude that Jesus had, when he was about to face suffering and death on the cross. He looked *beyond* the temporary suffering and focused on the eternal joy that would follow. We need to follow his example (Hebrews 12:1-3).

### ***A Few Interesting Observations about the Book of Revelation***

- Learning the book of Revelation is like learning the English language. You can become quite familiar with it, but you won't reach the point that you have an exhaustive comprehension of everything.
- The issue of "*Deja vu*" or "I've seen this before": Over half of the verses in Revelation make reference to (or are direct quotes of) Old Testament Scripture. Although the types of calamities mentioned in this book may intensify as the end approaches, they have happened before, and may be happening today. Fortunately, the words of encouragement and hope are also applicable today, as they will be in the future.
- An interesting feature: Many things in the book of Revelation occur in groups of three or seven. This includes both the literary structure, as well as many of the events or things which are described in the book. As an example, some of the phrases found in chapter 1 occur in groups of three - such as in verse 3 (read / hear / take heart) and verses 4 and 8 (who is / who was / who is to come). Two examples of "seven" include seven Spirits (1:4) and seven bowls of wrath (16:1).

## Revelation 1:1-3

### John Introduces the Book

<p>[1] The revelation of Jesus Christ,</p> <p>which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.</p> <p>He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,</p> <p>[2] who testifies to everything he saw —</p> <p>that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.</p>	<p><b>A. The MESSAGE</b></p> <p><b>From Jesus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus was given the message, to show it to us.</li> <li>• The events it describes will "soon take place."</li> </ul> <p><b>For his people</b></p> <p>It was communicated to his servants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A heavenly messenger ("angel") was involved in its transmission.</li> <li>• John was the recipient (who would then show it to the rest of God's people.)</li> </ul> <p><b>By way of John</b></p> <p>John was the eyewitness to this message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John testified to the accuracy of what was communicated.</li> <li>• What John saw is an expression of this message.</li> </ul> <p><b>About God / Jesus Christ</b></p> <p>God / Jesus Christ is the focus and source of this message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a message ("word") from God.</li> <li>• It is a message (testimony or witness) from (and about) Jesus.</li> </ul>	<p>The message is about Jesus and his return.</p> <p>If we are willing to serve him, then we are his servants, and the message is for us! If we are not willing to serve him, we do not belong to him.</p> <p><u>Soon</u> - "quickly" or "in a short time." There is a sense of urgency in this word.</p> <p><u>Jesus</u>, the "mediator" between God and people, makes known to us the will and plan of God.</p> <p><u>Angels</u> were sometimes (perhaps often?) present when something was revealed to a prophet or apostle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: When God gave Moses the Law - Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19.</li> </ul> <p>Sometimes they helped the prophet or apostle understand what was being communicated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples: Revelation 17:7 and Zechariah 1:19.</li> </ul> <p><u>John</u> was a "witness" (or eyewitness) to the truth. An eyewitness tells about what he has observed first-hand.</p> <p><u>The message</u> is summarized in verse 7: "Jesus is coming!" The rest of the book gives the details.</p>
<p>[3] Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy,</p> <p>and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it,</p> <p>because the time is near.</p>	<p><b>B. The BLESSING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For those who <b>READ</b> it - which may include reading it out loud for others who cannot read. (Most likely, one person would be reading it to the group.)</li> <li>• For those who <b>HEAR</b> it - those who pay attention to what was read.</li> <li>• For those who <b>TAKE IT TO HEART</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>THE READER</b> - most likely a person who is reading this letter to the whole group. Hence, he would be a person who was <i>sharing</i> the message with others.</p> <p><b>THE HEARER</b> - especially those who pay attention to its message (those who accept it and allow it to change their lives). This would include the whole group.</p>

- This blessing (v. 3) shows that the book of Revelation has value to us even if we *aren't* living at the time of its final fulfillment. It has application to us, in that it should influence how we live. If we *do* live the way it tells us to live, we will be ready for *anything* that may happen to us in the future.

**\*\* We must hear and do what God's Word says. \*\***  
 We must *apply* it to the way we live - Luke 8:21; 11:28; James 1:22+.

<p>[1] ...what must soon take place.</p> <p>[3] ...because the time is near.</p>	<p><b>C. The URGENCY</b> of the message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will SOON / QUICKLY take place.</li> <li>• The time is NEAR / "at hand."</li> </ul>	<p>We need to be in a continual state of preparedness. Being complacent about the issue is <i>not</i> an option.</p>
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We MUST do these things, if we were blessed. Why? Because the time is near. (Also - v. 1 - these things will occur soon/quickly.)



### **Being in a State of Preparedness - Because "the time is near" (Revelation 1:3)**

The issue *isn't* whether or not we think the end will come during our lives. We must *always* be in a state of preparedness.

- 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 [Note - this passage in 1 Corinthians doesn't say we *shouldn't* have the things mentioned in these verses; rather we must not be *preoccupied* with them. They must not be the *focus* of our lives, but must take second place.]

Even if Jesus *doesn't* return during our lifetimes, our state of preparedness (or lack of it) will show our attitude toward him. What do the following passages tell us about this issue? [Note also the warnings found in these verses.]

- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (especially v. 6-8) [Verse 8 is the only logical (and legitimate) response to having the knowledge that Jesus will return. Note its similarity to Ephesians 6:11-18. This must *always* be our attitude.]
- Matthew 24:42-51 [Note: The problem was the servant's attitude, not the fact that he got caught.]

**\*\* Be ready, alert and prepared. \*\***

If you are ready, alert and prepared for Jesus' return, you will be ready, alert and prepared for anything else that may happen in life. You will be able to resist the devil, to do what is right, etc.



### **But What If it Doesn't Seem to Be "Soon"?**

- These events are the *next thing* on God's "agenda" - and they will "soon" happen. Right now, it may seem that it's taking a long time... but in eternity, we will have a different perspective.
- Remember, the Lord is not SLOW in keeping his promise... it *will* happen, at just the right time! [Why hasn't it happened yet? Only because of God's patience - 2 Peter 3:8-9. He has been waiting for people like *us!*]

# Revelation 1:1-3 Supplementary Study Information

## Verse 1

### THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation means "to reveal, to uncover." This book is *not* written to "hide" the truth, but to "reveal" it!

Jesus Christ is going to be revealed. The day is coming in which *every* eye shall see him - v. 7.

### WHICH GOD GAVE HIM [Jesus] TO SHOW HIS SERVANTS

Jesus is the mediator ("go-between") who bridges the gap between God (as creator) and people (as created beings), and makes known to us the will and plan of God.

- Because of this, these details about God's future plans for the world and for the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world must be given through Jesus (the "go-between"). He will show these things (= make them known) to his servants.

This message is for Jesus' *servants*. Jesus is our Master (= "Lord"); we are his "slaves" (or "bond-slaves," as some translations say it). We, his servants, belong to him and are committed to serving him.

- The apostle Paul often calls himself a "slave" of Jesus. For example, most of his letters begin with, "Paul, a servant (slave) of Jesus..."

Being Jesus' servant / slave is a *lot* better than being the opposite: the devil's servant / slave!

- *We will either be the one or the other; there are no other options.*

If we are not serving Jesus, we are, by nature, serving the devil. As the devil's slaves, we may serve him by:

- going *directly against* what Jesus would have us to do, or
- *imitating* those things that Jesus would have us to do, the way a counterfeit would. (This would include doing good things for the wrong reasons.)

### SOON TAKE PLACE / HAPPEN SOON

This can mean "shortly, certainly, suddenly." At times it can focus on the "nearness" of the time ("shortly"), but at other times, it can simply indicate that, *once the event begins*, it will occur rapidly ("suddenly"). [See also the word "near," in verse 3.]

- Illustration: A dam may be in danger of breaking, at any moment. That doesn't guarantee that it will do so, within the next few hours. On the other hand, when it *does* break, the devastation will take place "suddenly."

### OTHER PASSAGES THAT USE THIS WORD "SOON"

1. Examples of how this word was used in daily life - things that were supposed to happen "soon" ("quickly" or "in a short time") - Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4.
2. Passages which use this word in connection with God / Jesus.
  - a. God's justice - Luke 18:8 (read v. 1-8).
  - b. Satan's defeat by God - Romans 16:20. [Not necessarily in reference to the end times; perhaps a general reference to victory over Satan's attacks in the lives of the readers.]
  - c. Jesus' revelation (and the things associated with it) - Revelation 1:1; 22:6.
3. [A related New Testament word] Jesus is coming "quickly" - Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20.

**\*\* There is a sense of urgency in this word! \*\***

## A "DISTANT" vs. A "SOON" FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

There may be an implied contrast between Daniel's prophecy and the book of Revelation.

- Daniel spoke of things that would take place in the *future* (Daniel 2:28-29, 45); John writes about things that will take place *soon*.
- Some aspects of Daniel's prophecies were "sealed" until the end (compare to Daniel 12:9), whereas the book of Revelation was different: Although some things are "sealed" (Revelation 10:4), the primary emphasis is that the message of Revelation is *not* to be "sealed up" (Revelation 22:10).

## COMMUNICATED (made clear) BY HIS ANGEL, TO JOHN

The direct communication of this message was through an angel (one of Jesus' "heavenly messengers" - the word "angel" also means "messenger").

- At times, Jesus was present when John received this revelation (example: chapters 2 - 3).
- At other times, it appears that only the angel was directly involved (example: Revelation 19:10).

The apostle John was the designated recipient or "contact point." He would then communicate this message to the rest of God's people.

## Verse 2

### [JOHN] TESTIFIES / GIVES WITNESS

John would testify/witness to the fact that the message he received (= everything that he wrote down) was from God. He was an *eyewitness* of these things.

Jesus Christ also testifies/witnesses to the "soon-ness" of his coming - Revelation 22:20.

### WORD / TESTIMONY (= witness)

John received a "message" from God, that "testified" about Jesus. There are many details in the book of Revelation, but the main focus is Jesus.

- The book of Revelation mentions people who considered this message (the "word of God" and the "testimony of Jesus") to be so important, that they were willing to suffer or die for it - see 1:9 and 6:9. [How important is it to you?]

## Verse 3

Why does God give us this message? For our good - so that we may be blessed! If we take it to heart, it will encourage us, and will be a source of joy and comfort, even in the worst of circumstances! (It is not merely for people at some unknown time in the future.)

### WHAT IS MEANT BY A "BLESSING"?

The blessing God has for us goes beyond mere "happy feelings" and "nice circumstances." To its recipients belong the highest good - blessings that go beyond one's temporary circumstances or feelings. Circumstances may at times be bad - as evidenced by many of the things that happen in the book of Revelation - but these blessings look beyond those circumstances: they remain and will continue to remain forever.

- Romans 8:28 shows one of the ways that God blesses his people.
- Psalm 1 focuses on these blessings and how we can get them. If Psalm 1 describes us, we *are* blessed (regardless of circumstances); it isn't something we have to wait until later for.

- The world will not understand how we can be blessed regardless of circumstances. But neither can it understand how we can have peace in all circumstances (Philippians 4:7), or how we can rejoice when we experience trials (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-3).

## BLESSINGS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

There are three requirements:

- **THE RIGHT FOUNDATION** - Those who accept (who base their lives on) the message of this book - 1:3; 22:7.
- **THE RIGHT LIFESTYLE** - Those who are ready for Jesus' coming - and their conduct proves it (it's not merely a verbal claim) - 16:15 (alert); 22:14 (clothes washed clean, rather than dirty - compare 7:14 to 3:4).
- **THE RIGHT LOYALTY** - Those who are willing to be faithful even to the point of death, if necessary - 14:13.

The ultimate blessing belongs to such people. They are the ones who are going to be with Christ forever - 19:9; 20:6. (This is only applicable to those who have met the above three requirements.)

## THE ISSUE OF TEMPORARY VS. PERMANENT BLESSINGS

- **IF WE HEAR BUT DON'T TAKE IT TO HEART...** We're blessed with the opportunity to know the truth. But if we don't go beyond that, it's only a temporary blessing. We need to pay attention to the truth and take it to heart.
- **IF WE HEAR AND TAKE IT TO HEART...** If we want the message to be of permanent value, we need the type of hearing that Jesus mentions in the parables - Matthew 13:10-17. We must let the message change us.

**READ / HEAR** (give ear to) / **KEEP** (take to heart, heed or treasure what this prophecy says)

The word "read" is related to the idea of "knowing" or "recognizing" what has been written. However, we must go beyond "mere knowledge" of the printed words, in order for the book of Revelation to accomplish its purpose in our lives. We must hear (give ear or pay attention to) these words and let their message find a place in our hearts. (This means we will let them influence the way we live and the way we respond to the circumstances of life.)

## THE TIME

This refers to a specific "period of time," often characterized by certain features. This is in contrast to:

- 1) a very short, specific period of time, such as in the phrase, "the hour is at hand" (a different word), and
- 2) time in general (which focuses on the duration, length or progression of time). [Each of these is represented by a different word, in the New Testament Greek.]

## NEAR

Focuses on the need to be in a state of preparedness. This "period of time" is ready to come at any moment.

## Revelation 1:4-8

### Prepare to Meet Your God and King!

#### Getting Ready - Receiving Grace and Peace)

<p>[4] John,</p> <p>To the seven churches in the province of Asia:</p>	<p><b>A. INITIAL GREETINGS</b></p> <p><i>The Author</i> - John</p> <p><i>The Recipients</i> - 7 churches</p>	<p>This is the only book where John refers to himself by name, as the author.</p> <p>Though originally written to seven specific churches, this is ultimately written to <i>all</i> of God's people.</p>
<p>Grace and peace to you</p>	<p><b>B. A DESIRE FOR THE READERS TO BE READY</b></p> <p><i>Grace</i> - God's undeserved kindness.</p> <p><i>Peace</i> - A restored relationship with God; the hostility is gone.</p>	<p>John wishes something for the readers that only God can give them (as stated in v. 4b-5)!</p>
<p>from him who is, and who was, and who is to come,</p> <p>and from the seven spirits before his throne,</p> <p>[5] and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.</p>	<p><b>C. THE SOURCE OF GRACE AND PEACE</b></p> <p><b><i>GOD [the focus here is on THE FATHER]</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He exists.</li> <li>• He always did exist.</li> <li>• He is coming.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>THE HOLY SPIRIT</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Or "seven-fold Spirit" - seven manifestations of the one Spirit.]</li> </ul> <p><b><i>JESUS CHRIST</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He faithfully testified to the truth.</li> <li>• He was first to rise from the dead. (In doing so, he guaranteed <i>our</i> resurrection from the dead.)</li> <li>• He is exalted over all.</li> </ul>	<p><u>The Self-Existing God</u> - here focusing on the Father (See also v. 8.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the Old Testament, God is described as "I AM" (Exodus 3:14) - <i>self</i>-existing and <i>always</i> existing.</li> </ul> <p>God is returning to the earth. Not since sin entered the world, in the garden of Eden, has he been here in such a glorious manner.</p> <p><u>The personal manifestation of God's power</u> - not an impersonal force</p> <p>He resides in God's presence, ready to accomplish his will.</p> <p><u>The visible manifestation of God</u></p> <p>Jesus, God in human form (Philippians 2:6+), will be the visible expression of God returning to earth.</p>

**Those who have received God's GRACE and PEACE (v. 4) can eagerly look forward to Jesus' return.**

# The Return of King Jesus

<p>To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, [6] and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father --to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.</p>	<p><b>A. THE GREATNESS OF OUR KING</b></p> <p><i>Why did he do the things listed below?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because he loves us.</li> </ul> <p><i>What did he do?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He freed/released us from our sins.</li> <li>• He has made us to be citizens of his kingdom.</li> <li>• He gave us direct access to the Father and the privilege of serving him.</li> </ul> <p><i>How should we respond?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give him the praise he deserves!</li> </ul>	<p>LOVE - He has a special love for us. It is because of his undeserved kindness ("grace"), and because he restored the relationship between us and God ("peace"), that the following are true of us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We used to be slaves to sin, but not any more (Romans 6:6). Therefore, we have an obligation to <i>not</i> yield ourselves to our former master (Romans 6:16-17; 8:12). [Some mss.: he <i>washed us clean</i> from our sins.]</li> <li>• We used to belong to the "domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). Now we are "aliens" in this sinful world (1 Peter 2:11); we are like ambassadors from another (God's) country (2 Corinthians 5:20).</li> <li>• All citizens of God's kingdom are "priests," in the New Testament sense; all have direct access to God; all have the privilege of serving him (rather than serving the devil and sin - our old way).</li> <li>• We can joyfully acknowledge his glory and power - a glory and power which will never diminish.</li> </ul>
<p>[7] Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.</p>	<p><b>B. ANTICIPATING THE KING'S RETURN</b></p> <p><i>What will happen?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He will come.</li> <li>• All will see him.</li> </ul> <p><i>How will we respond?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All will grieve. Yet...</li> <li>• We who have prepared for his coming can look forward to his return.</li> </ul>	<p>(Compare to Acts 1:9-11.)</p> <p>When he comes, all people, whether living now or in the past, will see him.</p> <p>When we see how wonderful the King is, we will be ashamed that we ever rebelled against him. It will grieve us.</p> <p>However, for us who have been brought into his kingdom, he will take away our tears (Revelation 7:17 and 21:4).</p>
<p>[8] "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."</p>	<p><b>C. THE END RESULT OF THE KING'S RETURN</b></p> <p>God will be exalted as the focus of all reality!</p> <p>Contextually, the focus here is on Jesus Christ, the <i>visible</i> manifestation of God</p>	<p>"From A to Z" - God is the center of everything. (Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This title is also used to describe Jesus in Revelation 22:13.</li> </ul> <p>Compare with 1 Corinthians 15:24, 27-28. (See also verse 4, above.)</p>

**All human pretension will be gone. God will be seen (and acknowledged) for who he is.  
He will be exalted over all.**

## Revelation 1:4-8 Supplementary Study Information

Many people go to the book of Revelation, simply to satisfy their curiosity about the end times. They would prefer to skip the first few chapters of the book. God, however, wants us to first *get ready* for his return, before we concern ourselves with the technical details about it!

### Verse 4

JOHN (the author)

Like many others who were used by God to write Scripture, John did *not* want to direct people's attention to himself. In the gospel of John, he describes himself only as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:7). He calls himself "the elder," in 2 John and 3 John. He never mentions his name, in 1 John. Only in the book of Revelation does he refer to himself *by name* as the author. (In Revelation, his name is found in 1:1, 4, 9; and 22:8.) Considering the unique nature of this book, readers (both then and now) would *have* to know where it came from, so that they would know it was authoritative.

### THE SEVEN CHURCHES

These will be examined in a later study. These churches were located in what is now the western edge of Turkey (near the Aegean Sea). Other churches existed in the area, such as the church at Colosse, which was located about ten miles from Laodicea. However, these seven churches were specially selected for this letter, probably because their strengths and weaknesses were typical of those experienced by churches down through the ages.

[Some believe that there is correlation between the specific *order* that the churches are addressed, and the average trends of the church (as a whole) down through history. They would claim that the earliest churches had a tendency to be like the church at Ephesus, followed, at a later date, by those with characteristics similar to the church at Smyrna. (There could be a time of "transition," during which characteristics of *both* were prevalent.) According to this view, this correlation would continue down through the centuries, with the last church (Laodicea) being representative of the typical church at the time of Jesus' return. (In each "era," all seven types of churches would exist, but one would be representative of the majority.)]

GRACE AND PEACE - God's kindness ("grace") is a prerequisite for genuine, permanent peace with God. This is only possible through Jesus, because Jesus *is* our peace! (Ephesians 2:14)

- The apostle Paul often mentions grace and peace at the beginning of his letters. So does Peter.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE "ONE AND THREE" in Verses 4-8

In Scripture, God reveals himself as both "unity" (there is *one* God) and "plurality" (the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God). Scripture treats these as statements about two *separate* facts, which stand side-by-side and which do not need to be "reconciled." They are *not* considered opposite (contradictory) statements about *one* fact. (If they *were* statements about one fact, then they *would* need reconciled.)

Both unity and plurality appear to be mentioned in this passage - the "three" in verses 4-5 (and to some extent, in verses 6-7), and the "one" in verse 8. We should note that these verses make no attempt to "prove" that God is "one and three" (or "unity and plurality"). Instead, they simply make reference to these concepts as *facts already accepted as true*.

It is interesting to observe how Scripture handles these two concepts. When the focus is on the "unity" perspective (verse 8; also much of the Old Testament), characteristics such as "who is, was, and is to come" are simply attributed to "*God*." In contrast, when the focus is on the "trinity" perspective (verses 4-6; also much of the New Testament), these (and other) characteristics are normally attributed to the *Father*.

- This is not intended as a *denial* that they apply to the Son. (There are many verses which take characteristics applicable to the Father, and apply them to the Son.) Rather, it is because the primary focus, when referring to the

Son, is on what he did as the "God-Man," as mediator between a holy God and a sinful human race - 1 Timothy 2:5-6. (From this perspective, Jesus can even refer to the Father as "my God" or "my Father," in the same way that we humans would - compare to Revelation 3:2, 5.)

- Such characteristics are attributed less frequently to the Holy Spirit. Again, it is not intended as a *denial* that such characteristics apply. Rather, it is because the Holy Spirit often works behind the scenes, like a "silent member" of the "trinity," directing attention toward Jesus Christ.

### "WHO IS / WHO WAS"

This focuses on God as *always*-existing and as *self*-existing. These and similar terms are used in Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; and 16:5-7; and are almost always associated with the title, "Lord God Almighty."

In the Old Testament, God describes himself as "I AM," which focuses on his self-existing character (Exodus 3:14). In John 8:58, Jesus says, "before Abraham came into existence, I exist (I am)." Jesus did not use *past* tense, suggesting that he merely existed (or came into existence) before Abraham did, but *present* tense, suggesting that he always was (and is) in a perpetual state of existence. (Obviously, this does not make reference to his *physical* existence as a human. In this sense, he was born just over 2000 years ago - definitely *not* before Abraham! John 8:56-57.)

### "WHO IS TO COME"

This phrase occurs frequently in the book of Revelation. Sometimes it is used in reference to "the Lord God Almighty"; sometimes it is used in reference to "Jesus Christ." There are some verses in which it is difficult to determine which name ("God" or "Jesus Christ") is being referred to. But since Jesus *is* God, it doesn't really matter! Scripture tells us that God is returning; it also tells us that Jesus, the visible expression of God - God in human form - is returning.

- Some of the verses which focus on the Lord God Almighty returning: Revelation 1:8; 4:8.
- Some of the verses which focus on Jesus Christ returning: Revelation 1:7; 2:5, 16; 3:11.
- Some additional verses: Revelation 1:4; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS - This phrase is found only in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6. Some have suggested that this might have reference to seven heavenly "spirits" who are always ready to serve God. Yet *nowhere* does Scripture suggest that *grace* and *peace* would come from some heavenly being (or "spirit") other than God. More likely, this is a reference to the Holy Spirit, with a focus on the fact that he manifests himself in many ways, in the church. [In the seven letters to the churches (Revelation 2-3), the Spirit manifests itself in seven different ways, strengthening his people so that they can become victorious "overcomers."]

- In Revelation 5:6, the "seven Spirits" are equated with "seven eyes," possibly an allusion to Zechariah 4:10.
- The Holy Spirit is often symbolically represented by things - examples: a dove (Matthew 3:16) and fire (Acts 2:3).

## Verse 5

### JESUS CHRIST - "THE FAITHFUL WITNESS"

He is trustworthy (faithful), testifying (witnessing) to the truth. (See also Revelation 3:14; 19:11.)

- Jesus was faithful unto death - both in what he *said* and what he *did*. When he was tested (tempted just like us - Hebrews 4:15), he did not give-in to sin or compromise, but continued to do what was right and true: the will of the Father. [Example: Jesus knew that he would one day have to suffer death on the cross. In Matthew 4:8-10, Satan tempted Jesus to *compromise*, so that he wouldn't have to die such a horrible, painful death. Satan claimed he would surrender to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would merely be willing to give Satan a few moments of "painless" worship. Jesus, refused to give-in to compromise, even though it appeared to be to his advantage. (We are to follow his example, and *also* refuse to compromise, no matter how good the consequences may seem to be.)]

### A Few Comments about the Faithfulness of Jesus' Testimony / God's Testimony

- He *faithfully testified* before Pontius Pilate (who sentenced him to death) - 1 Timothy 6:13. He now *faithfully testifies* about what will take place in the future - Revelation 1:2; 22:16-20.

- It is our duty to accept everything Jesus says (his "testimony"), to "hold to it" (Revelation 19:10) and to be willing to suffer (or even die) for it - Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; and 20:4.
- We should remember that everything God tells us about the new heaven and earth is "faithful and true" - Revelation 21:5; 22:6.

#### "THE FIRSTBORN OF (or FROM) THE DEAD"

Jesus, the "faithful witness" was condemned by people and put to death. But he was vindicated (declared "not guilty") by God and raised back to life. Thus, he is the "first born" from the dead. We who belong to him, who remain faithful witnesses for him, will *also* be vindicated (declared "not guilty") by *our* resurrections from the dead. (Our vindication is possible *only* because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We do not deserve it.)

- See also Romans 8:29, where Jesus is described as the "firstborn" among many brothers, and Colossians 1:18, where is described as the "firstborn" from the dead. Jesus is also described as "the firstborn over all creation," in Colossians 1:15.
- As the first to be resurrected from the dead (not just a temporary return, such as what Lazarus experienced - John 11:43-44), he is a guarantee that *we also* will be raised from the dead. We are "the church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23).

#### "THE RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH"

He is called the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. He is also given many other titles of authority, throughout Scripture.

- After Jesus returns, there will still be kings and nations (Revelation 21:24), but Jesus will be the Supreme Ruler.

#### HIM WHO LOVES US, WHO RELEASED/FREED US

Note the contrast. The word "love" describes an *ongoing* relationship; the word "released" (= "freed") describes a *one-time* act.

#### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ABOUT LIFE AS "REDEEMED" FROM OUR SINS (or "washed" from them - KJV)

We are no longer enslaved or dirty - trapped and polluted by sin. Therefore, it is *not* an option for us to go back to our sins, to yield once again to our old "master" (Romans 6:14). We are *not* to be like pigs that, once washed, go back to wallowing in the mud (2 Peter 2:22).

We must also remember that we are not *our own* masters. We are freed from sin, *for a purpose*: that we may serve a different master, namely Jesus.

- This is why Paul often began his letters, by calling himself a "slave" or "servant" of God - example Romans 1:1. Peter also begins 2 Peter that way.

*Everyone* serves someone or something; the only issue is who it will be - whether it will be God, or sin (and the devil). See Romans 6:11-23.

- If we are a citizen of God's kingdom (v. 6), we will serve *God*, for the only alternative to serving God is serving the devil (or sin) - and that is *not* an option in God's kingdom!

#### BLOOD

Our release was made possible *only* through Jesus' sacrifice of himself. This shows us how serious our sin problem is.

#### Verse 6

#### KINGDOM

We are now *aliens* (temporary residents or foreigners) to this world (1 Peter 2:11).

- Being a citizen of God's kingdom is more important than any citizenship we may have in this world's kingdom's - all of which exist only for a short time. Any loyalty we may have to earthly kingdoms must be, by nature, secondary and of comparatively minor significance. Our loyalty to God and to Christians *anywhere in the world* must be greater than our loyalty to any earthly kingdom - even the nation we happen to live in.

## LIFE AS PRIESTS IN THE KINGDOM

All citizens of God's kingdom are priests, in the New Testament sense. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, *all* of God's people have direct access to God. (See 1 Peter 2:9.)

- Note that Jesus Christ is our *high priest* - Hebrews 3:1.

## PRIESTS

In the Old Testament, under the covenant God made with Israel, the priestly duties (sacrifices, etc.) were to be done only by the Levitical priests. See Exodus 19:6. Yet there was a sense in which *all* the Israelites were supposed to be like priests:

- They were *all* supposed to devote themselves to serving God. In every walk of life, they were to live in obedience and service to him. (How they were to do this is described in the 10 Commandments and elsewhere.)
- However, a list of regulations does not change one's *heart*, so most of the Israelites chose rather to follow after their own ways (rather than *God's* ways), for their sinful hearts remained unchanged.

In contrast, the New Covenant, which Jesus brought to us (Hebrews 8:6-13; 12:24), starts with a changed *heart*, which then results in a desire to serve and obey God. Thus, what Israel failed to do (because most of the people's hearts remained unchanged) has now become reality, for those who belong to Jesus.

- Some of the people mentioned in the Old Testament did have changed hearts. Because of this, they wanted to obey the Ten Commandments and other regulations of the Old Covenant. But the commandments and regulations themselves were *not* the cause of their changed hearts. (The people trusted *God*, not their works, for that change.)

## ...TO SERVE HIS GOD AND FATHER

Jesus is "God the Son," the visible manifestation of God, in human form. As the Son, he focuses our attention on "God the Father" - the eternal, self-existing Creator of all. (See also verse 8, as well as comments about the "one and three," in the notes at verse 4.)

## GLORY AND POWER

We will see Jesus return with power and glory (Matthew 24:30). These two terms are attributed, in various passages, both to God (as "Father," or as God on the throne) and to Jesus Christ. Both are mentioned together, in Revelation 5:13.

- In this context, "glory" refers to the expression of his moral and righteous character, and our acknowledgment of it. The day will come when *all* people will "glorify" God (Revelation 15:4). Even those who presently reject him will someday admit the greatness of his character - though in their case, God's greatness will be *contrasted* to their own shame and emptiness.
- "Power" can also be translated as "strength" (especially when displayed in one's actions) or "dominion."

## Verse 7

HE IS COMING WITH/IN THE CLOUDS ... just like he left - Acts 1:9-11; ... and we will meet him there - 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM - Need we say more?

## EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM

This will be a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10: The Jewish nation will acknowledge Jesus for who he is. However, it will be more than that; for according to Jesus' warning in Matthew 26:64, the very people who were responsible for his death will someday see him return.

ALL (of us) WILL MOURN - wailing in grief because of our sins. (See also Matthew 24:30.)

- The unsaved will wail in horror, because they are hopelessly lost.
- The saved will mourn because of sorrow for the sins they have committed. Even though the sins are forgiven, Jesus had to endure great suffering because of them. We will be grieved over the pain we have caused him, but he will turn our sadness into joy - Revelation 21:4.

YES! AMEN! (SO SHALL IT BE!)

God's people may be sorrowful about the suffering that Jesus had to endure, because of their sins. But they can eagerly look forward to the day that Jesus is honored and glorified. This is what they have all been waiting for!

### Verse 8

ALPHA AND OMEGA - first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, like A and Z in the English alphabet. From beginning to end, in *all* of reality, God will have preeminence.

- Revelation 21:6 and 22:13 also use this phrase (applied both to God and to Jesus).
- Other passages use the phrase, "the first and the last" or something similar - Revelation 1:17 and 2:8.
- Jesus is described as having preeminence in Colossians 1:18.

### LORD GOD

He is both Creator (God) and Master (Lord) over all.

### [BEGINNING AND ENDING]

A few translations include the phrase, "the beginning and the ending," in verse 8 - similar to Revelation 21:6. It means approximately the same thing as Alpha and Omega.

### WHO IS / WAS / IS TO COME

This phrase is the same as in verse 4, where the focus seems to be directed toward the Father. Here, however, the connection with verse 7 seems to direct the focus to Jesus, who is the visible manifestation of God.

### ALMIGHTY

This focuses on the supremacy of God. God is ruler over all. The day is coming when this fact will be acknowledged by all.

**>> HE IS COMING! <<**

# Revelation 1:9-17a

## John Meets Jesus

### John - Just Like Us

<p>[9] I, John, your brother</p> <p>and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus,</p> <p>was on the island of Patmos</p> <p>because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.</p>	<p><b>A. John - "one of us"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- our brother</li> <li>- our companion - one who shares with us in the following:</li> </ul> <p><b>B. These are ours, if we belong to Jesus...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suffering</li> <li>- Kingdom</li> <li>- Patient endurance</li> </ul> <p><b>C. The way John was experiencing these three things:</b></p> <p><i>Where he was:</i> on the island of Patmos (in exile)</p> <p><i>Why:</i> because of God's Word (God's message) &amp; Jesus' testimony.</p>	<p><u>Brother</u> - In Christ, we all belong to a new family. Our old family relationships have less meaning.</p> <p><u>Companion</u> - John <i>shares</i> with us the following. All of us who are in Christ have these things in common.</p> <p><u>Suffering</u> - "Our present condition." Compare to 1 Peter 4:12-13. We share in Jesus' suffering now... and will share in his glory later.</p> <p><u>The kingdom</u> - "What we are looking forward to." Some aspects of the kingdom are partially realized now; other aspects will be fulfilled when Jesus returns.</p> <p><u>Patient endurance</u> - "How we get from the one to the other." This is the means by which we gain the "prize" - see Hebrews 6:12; Philippians 3:14, etc.</p> <p>These things are ours to <i>share</i>, because of God's message about Jesus (and the impact it has had on us).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each of us shares in these things, but each of us does so within the context of <i>our own</i> circumstances.</li> </ul> <p>Jesus' testimony - Jesus bore witness (testimony) to the truth (John 18:37) and about himself (John 8:18).</p>
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### Commissioned to Write [John Hears the Voice]

<p>[10] On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit,</p> <p>and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,</p> <p>[11] which said: "Write on a scroll what you see</p> <p>and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."</p>	<p><b>A. John's circumstances:</b></p> <p>The Lord's Day In the Spirit</p> <p><b>B. The Voice Speaks (probably Jesus)</b></p> <p>The sound of his voice - like a loud trumpet. [See also verse 15b, in the description of Jesus (below).]</p> <p>His instructions - write and send to seven specific churches.</p>	<p><u>Lord's Day / in the Spirit</u> - (See the comments given below.)</p> <p><u>Voice</u> - A sudden, loud, clear sound, probably startling him, announcing something very important. [It may have been Jesus speaking, although the verse does not directly state this.]</p> <p><u>Write</u> - John's words will be those of an eyewitness.</p> <p><u>Seven churches</u> - chosen with a specific purpose in mind; representative in nature. [To be examined more fully, later.]</p>
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**Lord's Day / In the Spirit** - The meaning is uncertain. Possible interpretations include:

1. John may have been worshipping ("in the Spirit") on Sunday (the "Lord's day"). [It is uncertain when this use of the term "Lord's day" came into existence. Some believe that it may have come into existence at a later time in history.]
2. John may have been carried away ("in the Spirit" or "by the Spirit") into the future - to the time of the Lord's return (the "Lord's Day").

## Face to Face with the King

<p>[12] I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned</p> <p>I saw seven golden lampstands,</p> <p>[13] and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man,"</p> <p>dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet</p> <p>and with a golden sash around his chest.</p> <p>[14] His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,</p> <p>and his eyes were like blazing fire.</p> <p>[15] His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace,</p> <p>and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.</p> <p>[16] In his right hand he held seven stars,</p> <p>and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.</p> <p>His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.</p> <p>[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.</p> <p>Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[to be continued]</p>	<p><b>A. What John saw</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lampstands [explained later]</li> <li>• Someone "like a son of man" (Jesus)</li> </ul> <p><b>B. A description of the one he saw</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>His clothes</i> - a robe, a golden sash</li> <li>• <i>His head/hair</i> - dazzling bright white</li> <li>• <i>His eyes</i> - blazing fire-like</li> <li>• <i>His feet</i> - glowing bronze-like</li> <li>• <i>His voice</i> - rushing, crashing waters [v. 10 - loud trumpet]</li> <li>• <i>His hand</i> - holding seven stars [which will be explained later]</li> <li>• <i>His mouth [tongue]</i> - sharp two-edged sword</li> <li>• <i>His face</i> - bright as the sun</li> </ul> <p><b>C. What happened, when John saw Jesus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>John's reaction</i> - fall to the ground, as though dead.</li> <li>• <i>Jesus' encouragement</i> - "Don't be afraid."</li> </ul>	<p><u>"See the voice"</u> - Basically, he didn't know what to expect. [He possibly turned while the voice was still speaking.]</p> <p><u>"Like a son of man"</u> - Jesus, who though God, was willing to associate with us people.</p> <p><u>What he saw...</u></p> <p>This is real. The description of Jesus' glory requires figurative language because his glory is far greater than anything we have ever seen; it far goes beyond our comprehension. For us to get even a small idea of what Jesus looks like, John has to compare it to something we <i>can</i> comprehend. This description gives us a brief "glance" at what we are going to see, when we stand face-to-face with Jesus.</p> <p>We are told that we will see him as he is - 1 John 3:2. Do you realize how glorious this will be? Why would any one <i>not</i> want to fall down before him - even now - and to obey him and live for him?</p> <p>We cannot draw this picture on paper, because paper is not bright enough. It would have to be blinding in brightness!</p> <p>-----</p> <p><i>Stars</i> - bright, shining points of light.  <i>Sword</i> - compare to Hebrews 4:12. The focus here is on what he says, not on a piece of sharp metal protruding out of his mouth!  <i>Face</i> - too bright to look at.</p> <p><u>John's Reaction</u>: paralyzing terror.  [How would <i>you</i> react?]</p> <p><u>Jesus Response</u>: a gentleness and encouragement that strengthens John.</p>
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If this is how John - a *saved* person and a close friend of Jesus - would respond to seeing Jesus, how do you think the *unsaved* will someday respond? Jesus won't have any encouraging words for them.

## Rev. 1:9-17a - Supplementary Study Information

### Verse 9

#### BROTHER

In Christ, we have been adopted into a new family (Ephesians 1:5). Those who belong to Christ are all brothers and sisters.

- See Matthew 12:50; Romans 8:29; 12:10; 1 Timothy 6:2; Hebrews 2:11; 1 Peter 2:17.

The apostles and prophets never considered themselves to be "better" than the rest of us. They were simply doing what God called them to do - just like we have an obligation to do.

- They often describe themselves as "brothers" or "fellow workers" to others who served God.
- Look at the way James describes Elijah: a human just like us (James 5:17). He wasn't a "super-spiritual" person who was superior to everyone else!

#### THINGS WE SHARE IN COMMON ("companion")...

In Christ, there are certain things we all share in common. Here John lists three of them: Suffering, Kingdom, and Patient Endurance.

**SUFFERING** - Many passages mention our sharing in both suffering and God's blessings. Some of these passages are: 2 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:10; 4:14; Hebrews 10:33; 1 Peter 4:13. At times, the blessings will accompany the suffering; at other times, they will be the result, or fruit, of that suffering.

- **SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:** Many people want the blessings... but they're not willing to accept the suffering that comes first!
- **SOMETHING TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT:** When you suffer, don't let it be due to sin you've committed - 1 Peter 2:20.

**KINGDOM** - We *now* belong to God's kingdom (Philippians 3:20). This means that, if we are *genuine* disciples, the world is now like a foreign country to us (1 Peter 2:11). The day is coming, in which our king will return and will conquer this world and make it part of his kingdom. (Don't forget that, originally, it was his. The present situation in the world is one of rebellion against the rightful owner and king.)

**PATIENT ENDURANCE / PERSEVERANCE** - This is one of the factors that distinguishes between the genuine and the counterfeit. The genuine Christians will have this patient endurance; the fakes won't. Compare to Hebrews 6:12; 10:36.

#### PATMOS

An island in the Aegean Sea (between Greece & Turkey), about 50 miles from Ephesus. John was in exile here. He was probably forced to work in the mines, in spite of his age.

#### WORD OF GOD / TESTIMONY OF JESUS

Other places in Revelation, where these phrases (or something similar) can be found - Revelation 1:2; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4.

- Similar concepts: "the message about God"; "the Bible"; "the testimony *about* Jesus"; "the testimony *from* Jesus" (that is, given to us, by him).

## **Verse 10**

### IN THE SPIRIT

A condition in which he was controlled by the Spirit. In this context, it may indicate that he was controlled in a special way.

- Here are some of the verses that use this phrase to indicate being controlled by the Spirit in a special way: Matthew 22:43; Revelation 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.
- Note, however, that there is a sense in which we *all* are to be controlled by the Spirit - Galatians 5:16.

### THE LORD'S DAY

This may be a reference to a day of worship (for example, Sunday), although some think it has reference to the future "Day of the Lord," suggesting that John was "caught-up" into the future. (The term, "Day of the Lord" occurs frequently in the Old Testament, in reference to end-time events.)

### TRUMPET-LIKE VOICE

The trumpet is used both as a call to battle, and as a proclamation of triumph. Also seen in Revelation 4:1.

## **Verse 11**

Some translations, such as the KJV, add "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." This is a repetition of phrases mentioned elsewhere: "Alpha and Omega" in Revelation 1:8; 21:6 and 22:13; and "the first and the last" in Revelation 1:17; 2:8 and 22:13.

### WRITE...

This summarizes what John must do. Verse 19 gives more specific details.

## **Verse 12**

In this description (verses 12-16), we see Jesus' greatness as God and King (also in verses 5-8). [In verses 17-18, we have the added dimension of Jesus as friend and Savior.] This description of Jesus has many striking similarities to visions described by Daniel and Ezekiel, in the Old Testament. Compare to Daniel 7:9-10; 10:5-6; and Ezekiel 1:25-28.

### LAMPSTANDS

Olive oil lamps - explained in v. 20 as symbolically representing the churches.

## **Verse 13**

### "LIKE A SON OF MAN"

This phrase is a quote of Daniel 7:13. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Though he was by very nature deity (Philippians 2:6), Jesus chose to associate with us.

### ROBE AND GOLDEN SASH

Comparable to that worn by a priest or king. Jesus is our high priest and our king.

## **Verse 14**

### HEAD/HAIR

The same attributes as belong to the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel 7:9 (the "Father," in the New Testament). This term has a greater focus on his purity and holiness, than on age - although his eternal existence *as deity* may also be implied.

## EYES

This description focuses on his omniscience. He accurately sees and knows all, and can *accurately* judge between what is righteous and what is impure.

## Verse 15

### FEET

Emphasizes his ability to exercise divine judgment. [Note that, in the temple, the altar was made of bronze. So were various other items that were used in connection with sacrifices for sin.] Some suggest that this description of his feet may also symbolize strength.

### VOICE

Majesty, power, authority.

## Verse 16

### IN HIS RIGHT HAND

Represents strength, as well as protection and guidance of those being held.

### STARS

These possibly represent the leaders or pastors, who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the people. Or they could represent heavenly beings - angels - who work behind the scenes to protect and build-up the people of the church. Further explanation is given in verse 20.

- Interestingly, in John's day, Emperor Domitian minted a coin that commemorated the death of his son. Stars were used to symbolically portray his son as having heavenly dominion over the world.

### DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The sword is often used to represent God's *word*. This term would apply to *anything* God says. Two different words for "sword" are commonly used in this type of context. In this specific passage, the reference is to a heavy sword that is used to kill. The focus is on divine judgment, comparable to Revelation 19:15. Jesus will conquer by means of his Word - by what he says.

- This heavy sword is also mentioned in Revelation 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21. It is also mentioned in Luke 2:35.

There is a different word for "sword," which is more commonly found in the New Testament. It refers to a short sword or dagger. Two of the verses that use this second word, in connection with "the word of God," are:

- Ephesians 6:17: The spoken word of God is described as a sword ("the sword of the Spirit").
- Hebrews 4:12: The word of God is described as a double-edged sword - one that can accurately judge the hidden thoughts of a person's heart. In this verse, it is used to expose unbelief (and thus to enable repentance), rather than to destroy the person in judgment (which the "sword" of Revelation 1:16 would do).

### HIS FACE - LIKE THE SUN

A blinding, sun-like light; the brilliant glory of his countenance. A picture of his deity and majesty.

- Someday we who are "in Christ" will also "shine like the stars" - Daniel 12:3. We will reflect his glory.

## Verse 17

### FELL... AS DEAD

When you consider how John reacted, consider this... at the Day of Justice, *heaven and earth* will flee from Jesus' presence (Revelation 20:11). Standing face to face with the King of the Universe is no trivial matter!

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### WHAT IS "GLORY"?

"Glory" doesn't always refer to something like "shining brightness" - although that is often part of what is mentioned, when the *God's* glory is described. When we "glorify" God, we are acknowledging his perfections, and living according to his ways; we are "reflecting" his moral and righteous character.

This is the way **Easton's Bible Dictionary** describes glory:

**GLORY** (Heb. kabhod; Gr. doxa).

- (1.) Abundance, wealth, treasure, and hence honour (Psalm 49:12); glory (Genesis 31:1; Matthew 4:8; Rev. 21:24, 26).
- (2.) Honour, dignity (1 Kings 3:13; Hebrews 2:7; 1 Peter 1:24); of God (Psalm 19:1; Psalm 29:1); of the mind or heart (Genesis 49:6; Psalm 7:5; Acts 2:46).
- (3.) Splendour, brightness, majesty (Genesis 45:13; Isaiah 4:5; Acts 22:11; 2 Cor. 3:7); of Jehovah (Isaiah 59:19; Isaiah 60:1; 2 Thes. 1:9).
- (4.) The glorious moral attributes, the infinite perfections of God (Isaiah 40:5; Acts 7:2; Romans 1:23; Romans 9:23; Ephes. 1:12). Jesus is the "brightness of the Father's glory" (Hebrews 1:3; John 1:14; John 2:11).
- (5.) The bliss of heaven (Romans 2:7, 10; Romans 5:2; Romans 8:18; Hebrews 2:10; 1 Peter 5:1, 10).
- (6.) The phrase "Give glory to God" (Joshua 7:19; Jeremiah 13:16) is a Hebrew idiom meaning, "Confess your sins." The words of the Jews to the blind man, "Give God the praise" (John 9:24), are an adjuration to confess. They are equivalent to, "Confess that you are an impostor," "Give God the glory by speaking the truth;" for they denied that a miracle had been wrought.

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### MEETING GOD IN HUMAN FORM: SOME OF THE TIMES PEOPLE HAVE DONE SO

#### *In the Old Testament: People Who Saw God*

In theological circles, the term "theophany" is used to refer to instances in which God took on a human form in the Old Testament. There are numerous instances in which this happened, and most likely all of them have their counterpart in the New Testament Jesus. In at least one instance, the New Testament makes a direct claim that one of these Old Testament manifestations was Christ. (See John 12:39-41, compared to Isaiah 6.)

#### \* ADAM AND EVE, IN THE GARDEN

Adam and Eve walked with God, in the garden. Before they sinned, this interaction brought joy and friendship. After they sinned, they were filled with fear and shame (an awareness of their sinfulness), when God was present. (Adam and Eve are the ones who caused this shame. They are the ones who broke the fellowship.)

#### \* NUMEROUS PEOPLE WHO SAW "THE ANGEL OF THE JEHOVAH" [Also known as "The Angel of the LORD," in some translations.]

Many Old Testament passages make reference to a specific being, called, "*the* Angel of Jehovah (or LORD)." (In at least one passage, he is described as "the angel of God.") This being is introduced as "the" angel, rather than "an" angel. A comparison of various passages in which this being is mentioned reveals some interesting facts:

- Some passages describe him as *being with* the LORD - as though two different individuals were present. (Example: 2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chronicles 32:21; and Isaiah 37:36 - *Jehovah* sends *the Angel of Jehovah* to kill the Assyrians.)
- Some passages describe him as *being* the LORD - as though one individual was present. (Example: Genesis 31:11+ , in which *the Angel of God* claims to be the *God* of Bethel.)
- Some passages describe him as *both!* This is reminiscent of John 1:1, where Jesus (the "Word") is described as being *with* God, while at the same time he *is* God. (Example: Genesis 16:7+ - *The Angel of Jehovah* talks to Hagar and promises to multiply her seed, and tells her that *Jehovah* has heard her affliction. In v. 13, the Scriptures say that it was *Jehovah* who had been speaking to her.)

This "angel," though a visible manifestation of God, normally looked like a human. When people saw him, they responded in different ways, depending on whether or not they knew who he really was. At times, they acted the way they would normally respond to a mere human, since they didn't know any better. At other times, once they realized who was before them, they responded with reverence and sometimes terror.

#### \* ISAIAH

Isaiah saw the LORD (Isaiah 6) and immediately became aware of how sinful and unworthy he was. His perspective on life was permanently changed. In the New Testament, John tells us that it was *Jesus*, who Isaiah saw (John 12:39-41).

#### \* EZEKIEL

Ezekiel saw God's glory, in the form of a man. His first reaction was to fall face down on the ground. (Ezekiel 1:27-28). This was a finite "appearance" of God's glory, for to see God's glory in all its fullness would have meant instant death. (Note God's comments to Moses, when he asked to see God - Exodus 33:19-20.)

#### ***In the New Testament: People Who Saw Jesus***

Jesus is the radiance of God's glory (Hebrews 1:3), but during most of his time on earth, between his birth and death on the cross, the visible expression of this radiant glory was hidden. To say it another way, Jesus' glory was "veiled." Since people tend to judge others, based on external appearances and other false criteria, most people did not recognize his glory. The demons, however, clearly understood who he was - Mark 1:34. If the people had been willing to look beyond the surface, to his life and teachings, they would have also recognized who he was, but most of them weren't willing to do so. (Some did, however - John 1:14.)

Physically, Jesus looked just like a "normal" person and was not recognized as anyone special. He was a typical "nobody." (See Isaiah 53: 2-3.) He belonged to the "working class" and was *thought* to be a carpenter's son (Matthew 13:55) - though some may have questioned this.

There was a time that Jesus revealed his glory to three of the disciples, while they were together on a mountain - Matthew 17:1-8. This was a glimpse into the future, to the time when Jesus would come in his kingdom (Matthew 16:27-28). Peter later mentions this event, in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

In some instances, the "glory of the Lord" was visibly present, but it was being reflected from angels, rather than being seen in Jesus. At the time Jesus was raised from the dead, the brightness of God's glory was seen in the angels, and it terrified the guards (Matthew 28:2-5). Jesus' appearance is not described at this point, but later, when he appeared to Mary, he looked like a "normal" human (John 20:14-16). [Sometimes, God's angels could be seen reflecting the glory of the Lord, even when the Lord himself was not visibly present - as in Luke 2:9. At other times, they looked like mere humans, dressed in white - as in Acts 1:10.]

When Jesus appeared to people after the resurrection, before his ascension into heaven, he tended to have the appearance of a "typical" human - so that he was not always recognized as being Jesus. (In that culture, it was considered impolite to look directly into the face of strangers, so it would have been easy for Jesus to remain unrecognized for a while - especially during the time they thought he was dead. See, for example, Luke 24:13-16.) However, he did have capabilities that went beyond what a normal human could do, such as simply "appearing" into a locked room - John 20:19, 26.

After his ascension into heaven, he appeared to Paul, with his glory unveiled - Acts 9. John also saw him, in all his glory - Revelation 1:12-17.

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### **WHAT WILL WE BE LIKE, AFTER OUR RESURRECTIONS?**

In eternity, the righteous will shine like stars - Daniel 12:3. We will reflect the glory of the Lord.

- Moses temporarily reflected the glory of the Lord - see Exodus 34:29-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:7, 13.

In some manner, we will be like Jesus - 1 John 3:2 We won't become deity, but we will reflect his character. (To be "like" him doesn't mean we will be "identical to" him.)

There is much that we don't know, about what we will be like. But we do know that there will be many differences from what we now are. Using the analogy of a plant, our present physical bodies are compared to a "seed," and our resurrection bodies are compared to a mature plant. (See 1 Corinthians 15:35+.) Our present bodies can be described in terms, such as: perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural (empowered by what is physical). Our future bodies will be described in terms, such as: imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (empowered by the Spirit).

# Revelation 1:17-20 (& 2:1a)

## Jesus Speaks to John

### John is Encouraged and Told What to Write

<p>[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.</p> <p>Then he placed his right hand on me and said:</p> <p>"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.</p> <p>[18] I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!</p> <p>And I hold the keys of death and Hades.</p> <p>[19] "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.</p>	<p><b>A. John's Terror</b></p> <p><b>B. Jesus' Encouragement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is preeminent and sovereign over all.</li> <li>• He is self-existing and eternal.</li> <li>• He has conquered death. Because of this, he has sovereign authority over death and everything that happens after death.</li> </ul> <p><b>C. John is told what to write about</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What he saw (Jesus' appearance).</li> <li>• Things related to "now."</li> <li>• Things related to "later."</li> </ul>	<p><u>Why was John afraid?</u> Because he was overwhelmed with the glory, majesty and purity of the one whose righteousness is like a consuming fire.</p> <p><u>Why shouldn't John be afraid?</u> Because this same Jesus, who is terrifying in power, is also gentle to those who humble themselves before him.</p> <p>"Therefore" = because of who Jesus is and what he has done. What John writes will have the authority of God.</p>
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### Jesus Explains the Mystery

<p>[20] The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this:</p> <p>The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.</p>	<p><b>A. His People - symbolized</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mystery - to be explained</li> <li>• The stars</li> <li>• The lampstands</li> </ul>	<p>(Seen in the description of v. 12-16.)</p> <p>"Mysteries" in the Bible are meant to be revealed.</p> <p>Jesus is among his people (lamp stands); he protects and directs their representatives / leaders (stars).</p>
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**The seven lampstands** - These were olive oil lamps on individual lampstands. These lampstands represented the seven churches that originally received this book; yet they, in turn, represent all of us who belong to Jesus, down through the ages. Jesus, the majestic king of the universe, stands among his people; he is willing to associate with them.

**The seven stars** - These are the churches' representatives. The word "angel" also means "messenger," (the same New Testament Greek word is used for both), so many believe that the focus is on the leadership of the church (as a "messenger"), rather than on some heavenly being (an "angel"). Jesus holds them, suggesting protection and guidance.

## Jesus examines the churches

[2:1 (etc.)] "To the angel of the church ... write..."	<b>B. His People - judged/evaluated</b> (chapters 2 and 3)	Jesus fully understands his people - both their strengths and weaknesses. He knows what they need.
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Lamps are supposed to give off light - here representing the way the churches are to reflect the glory of Christ. Jesus is going to examine these lamps (his people). Just as oil lamps need trimmed and maintained, in order to give off a bright light, so also the churches need Jesus' examination, judgment and exhortation, in order that they can properly reflect his glory in a "dark" world. (Compare to Matthew 5:14-16.)

### What types of things does Jesus tell them?

When we compare these seven letters, we discover that there is a pattern in what Jesus says to them. With few exceptions, each of the letters follows approximately this same outline:

1. Something about Christ
2. Commendation, praise (their strengths)
3. Rebuke (their weaknesses)
4. Exhortation (their duty)
5. A promise (applicable to *all* of Jesus' followers)

### What Do These Seven Churches Represent?

- **Seven historical churches** that existed in John's day. This would include all the Christians who lived in that specific city. (Having multiple "churches" in one town was unheard of.) These churches are arranged in an irregular circle (see map). Other nearby towns also had groups of Christians ("churches"), but Jesus selectively picked the churches of these seven specific cities, probably because of their significance to the rest of us.
- **Seven representative types of churches**, which may exist at any time. (Note that the number "seven" is often used in Scripture to signify completeness, or the totality of something.) A present-day church could be described as having characteristics similar to one (or more) of these seven churches. Each of these seven letters has an exhortation for *individuals* - "*whoever* has an ear" - to "hear" what is being said to the "churches" (plural). This indicates that their application goes beyond the specific church that the letter was originally addressed to.
- **The history of the church?** It has been suggested that there may be some correlation between the order in which these seven churches are described, and the historical progression of the church as a whole, down through the ages. This view would claim that the church of the first century was predominantly characterized by the strengths and weaknesses of the church at Ephesus; that the church in the next couple of centuries was characterized by the strengths and weaknesses of the church at Smyrna, and so on. The church at the end, just prior to the return of Christ, would be similar to the church at Laodicea. (At any one point, *all* of the seven types of churches could be present, but one type would tend to be more predominant than the others.) We will have to wait until the end, after all has been accomplished, to know the extent to which this view is accurate, for Scripture does not give us any objective means to determine where we are, in such a time line. Attempting to interpret the churches in this manner is very subjective, with one's preconceived notions influencing his conclusions. Regardless of one's opinion of this view, we must remember that Scripture's *primary* focus is for us to examine *ourselves* - to have "ears that hear" - and to determine the extent that the critiques given to these seven churches are applicable to *us*.



## Revelation 1:17-20 (and 2:1+) Supplementary Study Information

### Verse 17

#### WHEN I SAW HIM

John had never before seen Jesus in *all* his glory. During Jesus' life on earth, his glory was veiled, hidden from sight. (John and two others did get a small glimpse of Jesus' glory, on a mountain near Galilee - Matthew 17:1-8; 2 Peter 1:16-18.) What John now saw was so stunning in majestic greatness, that it totally overwhelmed him. It probably "overloaded" his senses of hearing and sight, the same way that fire might "overload" one's sense of touch.

John responded the same way we would have, if we found ourselves suddenly face-to-face with something so extreme. It took Jesus' strengthening encouragement, for him to recover.

#### PLACED HIS HAND ON ME

The seven stars would have been seven points of light, not large, fiery luminous bodies, such as we view them today. Jesus doesn't necessarily have to move them from one hand to the other, in order to place his right hand on John. They wouldn't even have to be shining at the moment he did so.

[JESUS SPEAKS (words of assurance and encouragement)]

In the book of Revelation, Jesus' words are found only in chapters 1-3 (perhaps also 4:1) and chapter 22. The rest of the book is a record of John's eyewitness account of the things he was shown.

In chapter 1, Jesus is seen as both king and friend; as both terrifying and gentle. Verses 5-8 focus on Jesus as the coming King, and verses 12-16 describe to us the awesome, almost terrifying, appearance of this King. Verses 17-18 reveal Jesus as a friend, as he encourages John.

#### FEAR / BEING AFRAID

Why *shouldn't* John be afraid? Because of who Jesus is, and because of his relationship to Jesus. (If John had been an *enemy* of Jesus, then he would have *plenty* of reasons to be afraid.)

Everyone is going to fear God. The issue is whether it will be the *terror*-type of fear, or the *reverence*-type of fear. Other verses, such as Revelation 19:5, focus on the reverence-type of fear. [The context of the verse will normally show which type of fear it is.]

- Note that the right type of fear will result in a *desire* to obey God. His commands will bring *joy* to such a person - Psalm 112:1.

#### FIRST AND LAST

A focus on his pre-eminence and his presence, in the past, the present and the future - compare to "Alpha and Omega" - v. 8. [This fact should be a comfort to the righteous, but a terror to the wicked.]

- Attributed to God in the Old Testament: Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12
- Attributed to Jesus in the New Testament: here, as well as in Revelation 2:8; Rev. 22:13

### Verse 18

#### THE LIVING ONE / DEAD / ALIVE

Note the verb tenses in the three parts of the sentence:

- I (AM) THE LIVING ONE: Present tense (the word "am" is in v. 17), focusing on his continuous existence; a continuous, ongoing life. Jesus is self-existing: compare to John 5:26.
- I WAS DEAD: For a short time, he *became* something that he wasn't.

- I AM ALIVE: Note the change in verb tense: He *was* temporarily dead, but *is* permanently alive. In him, we also will overcome death and will live. (In some respects, it has already happened - John 3:36, "whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life.")

Because of this, Jesus is sovereign over *both* life and death. It is because of this, that he is qualified to have the "keys" (etc.), mentioned later in the verse.

John 1:1 and 1:14 show the contrast between "to be" (or "to exist") and "to become."

- Jesus *was* (or *existed* as) "with God" and at the same time *was* (or *existed* as) "God" - verse 1:1. This is what he originally was (and continued to be). It was an ongoing, permanent condition; it was never different.
- Jesus *became* human - verse 1:14. He became something he originally wasn't.

## KEYS

Emphasizing his authority or control over death and life after death. Because of this, Jesus is the one who has the power to release us from death's grip. He has conquered death, so he is *no longer able* to die.

- Jesus, the victorious one, is the one who is associated with the lampstands/stars.
- Because we are "in him," we also will share in his victory. (Compare to Hebrews 2:14-15.)

## Verse 19

Two main views about verse 19:

- 1) Some (perhaps most) view it as an outline of the book of Revelation:
  - (a) "what you have seen" indicating the vision of Jesus (chapter 1);
  - (b) "what is now" indicating the condition of the churches (chapters 2-3); and
  - (c) "what will take place later" indicating future events (chapters 4 to end).
- 2) Others see it as simply an expansion of the command given in verse 11, without a focus on a specific time line.
 

According to this view:

  - (a) John was to write what he saw ("what you have seen" simply indicating that the writing would come after he saw the visions), and
  - (b) John's writings would include both present ("now") and future ("later") events. [Some with this view do not necessarily see a clear-cut break in time, between chapters 3 and 4.]

## WRITE

Because of who Jesus is, what he says about the future is trustworthy and reliable (guaranteed to happen). The letters were for the people (the "churches"), but were delivered to their representatives.

- Jesus knows what *is*. Nothing is hidden from his eyes. [Because of this, he is qualified to give us chapters 2 and 3.]
- Jesus knows what *will be*. What he tells us is *certain*; it will come to pass and will not fail. (See Revelation 22:6.) [Because of this, he is qualified to give us chapters 4-22.]

## WHAT WILL TAKE PLACE AFTER THIS / LATER

Also translated as "after these things," this phrase occurs in Revelation 4:1. Many believe that this indicates a break in the account, separating present-day events ("what is now," described in the letters to the seven churches) and the future events directly related to Jesus' second coming. Those who hold to the view that Christians will be taken out of the world before a seven-year period of tribulation often place that event at the beginning of chapter 4. (There is no *direct* statement that indicates the exact relationship between the two events.)

Other people see less significance in the occurrence of this phrase ("after these things") in chapter 4:1, believing that it only indicates that John saw something *after* he saw something else, and that it does not necessarily imply a sequence in the "prophetic timetable." [This phrase occurs several other places, too - Revelation 1:19; 4:1; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; and 20:3.]

## **Verse 20**

### MYSTERY

In the New Testament sense, this word normally indicates something we can't understand on our own, but which must be revealed to us by God.

### CHURCHES

In the New Testament, this term refers to *all* the Christians who live in a specific locality. It does *not* have the modern-day connotation of a building, or of small groups of "believers" that isolate themselves from each other, each calling themselves a "church."

### ANGEL or MESSENGER

In the original New Testament Greek language, the same word means *both* "angel" and "messenger."

- Normally, the context influences which word should be used in a translation. Verses in which most translations use the word "messenger," instead of "angel," include: Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52; 2 Corinthians 12:7; and James 2:25.
- In Revelation 2-3, it is not so clear as to which English word is the best choice. Most translations use the word "angel." However, they often will have a footnote that tells us that the "angels" of the seven churches could be "messengers."

### LAMPSTANDS and STARS:

It is significant that Jesus tells us that we are the *light* of the World, and that we are to reflect *his light!*

The lampstands are a reminder of the golden lampstands that were in the temple, in God's presence. The difference is this: In the temple, there would be one lampstand holding seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-40). In this vision, each of the lamps has its own stand.

## **Verse 2:1 "To the church... write"**

Jesus is going to expose the churches for what they really are.

In chapters 2 and 3, we will see what Jesus says to the churches. Interestingly, in each instance, he ends his words with the injunction, "Listen to what the *Spirit* says." (Jesus' words and the Spirit's words are the same words.)

## **Some General Comments about the Letters to the Churches**

### THE WORD "ANGEL"

This word can mean either "angel" or "messenger."

- If this has reference to a heavenly being (an angel), it may suggest a hidden (heavenly) reality that corresponds to the visible earthly reality called "church." The two would be related in some manner. Perhaps "behind the scenes" events would have some type of relationship to events we can clearly see. (Compare to Daniel 10:12-11:1, which focuses on spiritual realities that were related to various kingdoms during Daniel's day.)
- The alternate interpretation would be that this word refers to a leader in the church - someone who was responsible for the guidance of the people. This leader would exhort the people to pay attention to what Jesus said.

### A STATEMENT ABOUT JESUS

In each of the seven letters, Jesus mentions something about himself. In each case, he mentions a characteristic that has special application to their situation.

### "I KNOW"

Jesus has sovereign knowledge of everything about them.

PRAISE of their strengths (for five of the seven churches)

There is to be a "solidarity" between Christ and his church. Their life and character should be a reflection of his. He knows the extent to which that is true, and to that extent, he gives them praise.

CONDEMNATION of their weaknesses / sins (for five of the seven churches)

Where condemnation occurs, it is because they have broken a prior commitment. They are not doing (or being) something they were supposed to do (or be).

- He needs to point out these issues, because we have a tendency to deceive ourselves into thinking we are *not* doing anything wrong. We must follow Jesus' example by learning to *accurately* distinguish between what is true and what is false.
- The individual, the leader, the group - we are all responsible for each other. None has a "right" to close his eyes to sins committed by another, for in Christ, we are all *one* body.

A CALL TO DUTY

Each church is told to do something. It may range anywhere from encouragement to continue in the way they are going, to a command to totally turn around.

HAVING EARS; HEARING WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS

This goes beyond merely having a body part called an "ear." We must *pay attention* and let what is said impact our thoughts and actions. In order for the proper change, the Spirit must *speak* and we must *listen*.

- This separates the "church" (referring to the whole number of those who *claim* to be part of the church) into two groups: Those who pay attention, who understand and accept what the Spirit says; and those who don't. The one group is "in the faith" (as in 2 Corinthians 13:5); the other isn't.
- The verbs are *present tense*, indicating we must test ourselves *now*. We must deal with our problems *now*.

HE WHO OVERCOMES

This does not refer to a "special class" of Christians. The one who overcomes is the *genuine* follower of God; the others are *false* believers or fakes. [This phrase also can be translated, "he who is the victor" or "he who has the victory."]

- Compare to 1 John 5:4-6: Everyone who is born of God has victory over the ways of the world. Our trust in Jesus is the foundation that makes it possible.
- Seven different promises are given to the to the seven churches. However, it is *one* victory, expressed in *seven* ways.

## Revelation 2:1-7

### To the Church at Ephesus

<p>[1] To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ephesus</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His interest in his people, his authority over them, etc.</li> <li>He is with both the <i>church</i> ("lampstand") and its <i>messenger</i> ("star") - see Rev. 1:20.</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus cares for his people, and is willing to associate with them.</p> <p><i>Hold</i> - authority (to judge); protection  <i>Among</i> - his presence (therefore he knows about them)</p>
<p>[2] I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.</p> <p>I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.</p> <p>[3] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.</p>	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>WORKS:</b> Willing to do lots of hard work, and to do it with persistence.</li> <li><b>DOCTRINE:</b> Quick to examine what teachers claim; unwilling to put-up with those who are false.</li> <li>Willing to do all this <i>for Jesus' sake</i>, without considering it too burdensome of a task. Only one thing was missing... (See below.)</li> </ul>	<p>They have their focus on many <i>good</i> things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They paid careful attention to Paul's warnings, in his farewell address to them - Acts 20:18-35.</li> </ul> <p>Works and doctrine (actions and teachings) are both very important, but <i>all</i> must be done within the context of love. (See 1 Corinthians 13.)</p> <p>A willingness to persevere and endure is a common theme throughout the book of Revelation.</p>
<p>[4] Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lack of love.</li> <li>It's not merely "absent"; it's been "forsaken."</li> </ul>	<p>They have taken their focus off <i>the most important</i> thing - love.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Love for God</li> <li>Love for neighbor</li> </ul> <p>These are the two greatest obligations we have.</p>

<p>[5] Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.</p> <p>If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.</p> <p>[6] But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What they must do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflect on what has happened to them.</li> <li>- Change their ways - go back to the way they were.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• If they don't... they will lose their place in Jesus' presence. (See the note, below.)*</li> <li>• There is still hope. They still hate what God hates. (A note of encouragement.)</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus doesn't tell them to <i>stop</i> having a concern for works and doctrine (v. 2-3), but to have love as their foundation and context - and as a part of <i>all</i> that they do.</p> <p>[This is a love characterized by commitment and loyalty, and by a desire to see honor given to God and good occurring to others. It is <i>not</i> a love of mere friendship or emotion.]</p> <p>There is still hope - they haven't begun to love <i>sinful</i> practices. Their actions are still <i>compatible</i> with love (instead of being <i>contradictory</i> to it).</p>
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\*NOTE (from verse 5): Jesus is not suggesting that they will *lose* their salvation, if they are genuinely saved. People who belong to God (who have a changed heart) *will* take heed to Jesus' warning, and *will* repent. Those who don't (whose professions of faith are merely "skin deep") *won't* do these things. Early church records suggest that the people of this church *did* repent - though in a later century, things may have changed for the worse.

<p>[7] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p> <p>To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is for <i>all</i> who qualify: for all who maintain (or regain) a focus on doing all things in love.</li> <li>• They will experience the eternal blessings of God's love.</li> </ul>	<p>Those whose lives are an expression of love will spend eternity with God, the source of that love.</p> <p>For those who repent (who regain this focus on love for Christ): all their deeds and activities will <i>not</i> be in vain - in contrast to those who <i>don't</i> repent (see v. 5).</p>
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Comment about v. 6: Throughout the book of Revelation, we find direct quotes and allusions to the Old Testament. This includes references to the Genesis account of creation and the original "paradise." What we lost, when sin entered the world, is gained through Christ.



***We need to love the truth,  
but...  
We need to love the truth-giver even more!***

# Revelation 2:1-7 Supplementary Study Information

## A Few Background Comments

The city of Ephesus was a seaport, built at the mouth of the Cayster River. Silt from the river tended to accumulate in the harbor. On a few occasions, this required the city to be moved closer to the mouth of the river. (Thus, the people well understood the idea of the lampstand being "removed" from its location - see verse 5.) Today, the uninhabited ruins of the city are located about 7 miles from the sea.

Paul spent 3 years at Ephesus (Acts 19; 20:31). After that, Timothy stayed there for a while, in order to oppose various false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3). Tychicus was sent there with a letter from Paul (2 Timothy 4:12 and Ephesians 6:21). According to church tradition, the apostle John spent the last years of his life there.

## Verse 1

### HOLDING THE STARS

John 10:28 - from another perspective, *all of us* (not just leaders or representatives) are held!

### AMONG THE LAMPSTANDS

Perhaps also suggesting that he is guarding / protecting them.

## An "interplay" of various words (mostly in v. 2-3)

This is based on the New Testament Greek words. Some of the English words used in various translations are given in *underlined italics*.

### DEEDS

Jesus knows their *deeds / activities / works* - v. 2.

They need to return to the *deeds / works / things* they originally had been doing - deeds that were an expression of love - v. 5.

They hated the Nicolaitans' *deeds / practices / works* - v. 6.

### WEARISOME TOIL / HARD WORK

Jesus knows their *hard work / labor / toil* - v. 2 [noun form].

They did a lot of things (for Jesus), with patience and endurance, and *have not grown weary* or *tired* (they did not consider their work to be too burdensome) - v. 3 [verb form].

### PERSEVERANCE / PATIENCE

Jesus knows their *perseverance / patience / endurance* - v. 2.

Jesus knows they have *persevered / endured*, and that it was for him - v. 3.

[Note: If the word "endure" was used as the translation for this word, it wouldn't be used with the following word.]

### TOLERATING / BEARING WITH (something)

They *did not bear with / tolerate / endure* false teachers/apostles - v. 2.

They *did endure / bear up with* a lot of hardships, for Jesus - v. 3.

## Verse 2

God's people are to be a reflection of his character. As far as their actions were concerned, these people served God well! They were opposed to both theological and moral compromise. The problem is that they became so focused on *what* they were doing, that they began to get their eyes off *why* they were doing it, and *who* they were doing it for. It was becoming a *duty*, rather than an expression of *love*.

### I KNOW

A clear understanding of everything about them. God has a sovereign knowledge of all things (not just about the church at Ephesus, but about all that exists).

### DEEDS / WORK / PERSEVERANCE

They were quite diligent.

### NOT TOLERATING / but TESTING the people's claims

Doctrinal purity - They examined the things that people said, comparing what *they* said to what the *Bible* says. (Compare to Acts 17:11.) In Acts 20:28-30, Paul warned them that false teachers would try to infiltrate their ranks. They did everything they could, to keep this from happening.

- Compare to 1 John 4:1. We are to "test the spirits," to find out if they are from God. There are many false spirits in the world.

## Verse 3

### PERSEVERE / ENDURE / NOT WEARY

(See comments before verse 2.)

### MY NAME'S SAKE

Their motive for doing this. They did it for the sake of the one who was represented by that name.

## Verse 4

### I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU

They were accountable for their actions (just as we are).

### FORSAKE

They left it, neglected it, abandoned it, etc. - though perhaps unintentionally.

### FIRST LOVE

Their original fervency and depth of love was now gone. The object of this love is not defined. Does it refer to love for *Christ*, or love for *people*? Probably both, since it is impossible to completely separate our attitude toward God from our attitude toward people.

Originally, love did not appear to be a problem - see Ephesians 1:15-16, which mentions love for people. But one generation later, things had changed. Their initial zeal had changed into a "cold orthodoxy." As a "church," they had begun as an "organism" (the body of Christ - Colossians 1:18, 24), but had ended up as an "organization."

*Nothing* (not even a "religious" duty) is to be given more love and attention than God; *nothing except God* is to be given more love than other people. This summarizes the two greatest obligations we have (Matthew 22:37-40).

### **Verse 5**

#### **REMEMBER**

A return to their original focus - the one they've forgotten.

#### **REPENT**

A change in their attitude and actions.

#### **DO**

Living their life as an expression (and reflection) of love, not mere duty.

This "work of love" would then become the foundation for all other "works." See 1 Corinthians 13.

#### **IF NOT... COME / REMOVE**

Ignatius (an early church leader, about A.D. 115) commended them for their love, so it seems that they took heed to Jesus' rebuke. However, later the church declined, and finally, those who remained were deported by the Turks, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Today, there is no "lampstand" in Ephesus.

### **Verse 6**

#### **YOU HAVE THIS (to your credit)**

Though love for God and neighbor had diminished, it hadn't yet been replaced with love for sin (a love for what God hates).

#### **HATE**

We must *never* love what God hates! Seven examples of what God hates can be found in Proverbs 6:16-19, although many other things are mentioned elsewhere.

A few more verses which mention things that God hates (read the context of these verses, to get a good understanding of why he hates them) - Isaiah 61:8; Jeremiah 44:4; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17; Malachi 2:16.

There is even a sense in which evil people are to be hated - Psalm 5:5. We want good to happen to them, and we will not choose to do evil to them. But we also will not "reward" them for their sins. And if we have authority over them, we will have to punish/discipline them, when they sin. Our ultimate desire, however, is for them to repent, so that they can receive the blessings of God.

## NICOLAITANS

Scripture (and history) does not tell us the precise nature of this group. This is probably because we are to hate *any* practice that God hates.

Whatever the nature of this group, they were like a cancer that would kill, if not removed. They may have advocated some type of moral compromise - perhaps calling it "freedom." (Some of the other churches were plagued with sexual immorality.) They may have also incorporated idolatrous practices into their worship, or had a focus on pleasure and indulgence. (These sins often tend to go together.)

## Verse 7

### EAR / HEAR

Individual application; each person must respond. This promise is applicable not only to the Christians at Ephesus, but to all Christians everywhere - *any* genuine follower of God.

### I WILL GRANT / PERMIT

Indicating Jesus' sovereignty. Nothing will be able to keep him from doing what he promises.

### PARADISE

Described as located in the "third heaven" - 2 Corinthians 12:3-4.

Where Jesus went, after his death on the cross (as did the one thief) - Luke 23:42-43.

The "Tree of Life" is there - Revelation 2:7.

### MORE ABOUT THE TREE OF LIFE

When Adam and Eve sinned, they were banned from eating from the Tree of Life. This was actually a gracious act of kindness, for had they eaten from it, salvation would have been impossible. (Jesus couldn't have *died* for our sins!) We would have been eternally trapped in sin, with all its consequences - pain, sickness, sorrow, alienation, etc. - forever increasing. We, who have died to our sins and have been raised to life in Christ, will one day be able to eat freely from this tree.

- Originally in the garden of Eden - Genesis 3:22.
- Described as in "Paradise" - Revelation 2:7.
- Ultimately described as being in the "New Jerusalem," which comes down from heaven - Revelation 21:2 and 22:2.

Those who *do* overcome, who have the love of God in them (a love that overflows from them, and expresses itself back to God and to other people): They will share in an eternal, abundant life, with the God who loves them - who is also their source of their life.

Those who *don't* overcome, who don't have (or regain) the love of God in their lives: They may have lives filled with works... but it will all be in vain. Since they did not have this love in their lives, they will not spend eternity with the source of that love, and will not get to enjoy the blessings (or "fruits") of that love - which includes the tree of life.

## Revelation 2:8-11

### To the Church at Smyrna

<p>[8] "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smyrna</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't. (This doesn't seem to be much of a problem for the church at Smyrna.)]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eternally existing and pre-eminent over all</li> <li>• Was temporarily dead, but gained permanent victory over death</li> </ul>	<p>Though eternal and self-existing, Jesus <i>willingly</i> suffered and died for us.</p> <p>Because Jesus had victory over death, those who belong to him will eventually share in that victory.</p>
<p>[9] I know your afflictions and your poverty --yet you are rich!</p> <p>I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.</p>	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak in the world's eyes; strong in God's eyes</li> <li>• Opposed by people who claim to be serving God, but who actually serve Satan</li> </ul>	<p>In both of these things, the perspective of their opponents was the <i>opposite</i> of what was actually true.</p>

Synagogue - The early church normally met in synagogues or houses. Since all Jews who believed the Bible would accept what the Old Testament said about Jesus (compare to Luke 24:27), they would now be called "Christians." The unbelieving Jews - probably a majority - would persecute the *genuine* followers of God's Word.

	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <p>[none]</p>	<p>God uses Satan's attacks to strengthen and purify his people - compare to 1 Peter 1:6-7. Their trials were keeping them pure!</p>
<p>[10] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.</p> <p>I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.</p> <p>Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't be afraid <i>Things will get worse...</i> - but it is just temporary</li> <li>• Be faithful <i>Things will get better...</i> - and it will be permanent</li> </ul>	<p>[Or <i>stop</i> being afraid.]</p> <p>Though <i>people</i> would be involved in persecuting them, Jesus points to the <i>ultimate</i> source of that persecution, the Devil.</p> <p>Compare to Matthew 25:14-30. Being <i>faithful</i> and being <i>fearful</i> are incompatible opposites, with opposite end-results.</p>

A willingness to be faithful (to the point of death, if necessary) -

- A common theme throughout the book of Revelation.
- An obligation for all of Jesus' followers, even those who don't have to go to the "extreme" of death.

<p>[11] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p> <p>He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is for <i>all</i> who qualify, for all who remain faithful, not shrinking back in fear.</li><li>• Even though they may experience the <i>first</i> death, they will not have to fear the <i>second</i> death.</li></ul>	<p>God does not promise that we will "have a nice day," every day of this present life. But he <i>does</i> give wonderful promises to those who are willing to be faithful, rather than fearful.</p>
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An interesting fact...

Those who choose to be fearful now... will have the opportunity to fear forever.

Those who are faithful (not fearful) now... will have the opportunity to be faithful (not fearful) forever.

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## The Example of One Who Chose Faithfulness over Fear

These are the words of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, when he was offered the opportunity to deny Christ, in order to avoid being burnt alive at the stake (around A.D. 168):

“Eighty and six years have I served him,  
and he never once wronged me;  
how then shall I blaspheme my King,  
Who hath saved me?”

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## Of all the churches described in Revelation 2 and 3...

- Only two of the churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) did not have serious weaknesses that required Jesus' rebuke. In both cases, the church was weak *from the world's perspective*. But because of their faithfulness to God and his Word, and their willingness to trust God and to persevere during trials, they were actually strong!
- In contrast, two other churches (Sardis and Laodicea) had *no* strengths that Jesus could praise - only weaknesses. Yet from the world's perspective, these churches had an appearance of strength!
- This shows us that external appearances are not always a good indicator of the true condition!

## Revelation 2:8-11 Supplementary Study Information

### About the Name "Smyrna"

The name "Smyrna" means "myrrh" - a fragrant perfume. In the Bible, myrrh was used:

- as one of the ingredients in the sacred anointing oil used by the priests (Exodus 30:23);
- as a perfume (Esther 2:12; Psalm 45:8; Proverbs 7:17);
- as one of the ingredients used in embalming (John 19:39);
- and as a drug to help deaden pain (Mark 15:23).

It was one of the gifts brought by the wise men who came to worship the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:11).

It was quite fitting for the name "Smyrna" to be associated with these Christians. They were, in a sense, giving themselves as a "fragrant offering" to the one who died for them, and who rose to life eternal. They were following his example (Ephesians 5:2).

### A Few Background Comments

Smyrna was the second-most wealthy city in the area, second only to Ephesus. Like Ephesus, it was a seaport. It was a religious center for emperor worship, and also had a large number of Jews who were hostile to Christianity. The Christians in this city suffered much persecution, sometimes even losing their lives (such as Polycarp, a prominent church leader, around A.D. 168). Yet the church remained pure, and needed no rebuke from Jesus. Today, there is still a Christian influence in Smyrna (now called Izmir) - in contrast to many of the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3.

### Verse 8

#### FIRST AND LAST

Eternally existing and pre-eminent over all. Who is this? God (Jehovah) - Isaiah 44:6; 48:12; Jesus - Revelation 1:17; 22:13.

#### DIED / CAME TO LIFE AGAIN

See also Revelation 1:18. Even though he is eternally existing, Jesus willingly suffered and died for us (= a focus on the cross). And because he had victory over that suffering and death, he now remains alive forever (= a focus on the resurrection). In a sense, Jesus was a companion to these Christians, because he experienced what they were going through - and more.

Because of Jesus' victory (which he had in our behalf), the Christians at Smyrna (and all other Christians) could look forward to also having victory over suffering and death.

### Verse 9

#### I KNOW

Jesus fully knows and understands. This can be a source of encouragement to the person going through trials (as here), or a warning to those who are guilty of sin, and who might think they can hide something from him.

Jesus' knowledge of our trials is not merely "academic knowledge," but an expression of care and understanding.

[The KJV reads, "I know *your works*," which parallels the opening statements found in most of the other letters to the churches. (Whether or not we include the phrase "your works," the over-all message remains the same.)]

## AFFLICTIONS

Troubles caused by their enemies, most likely brought on by the Jews (mentioned below). (This word also occurs in verse 10. It can also be translated as "tribulation" or "persecution.")

The apostle John also shared in suffering for Jesus - see Revelation 1:9.

## POVERTY / RICH

Some of them may have started out as poor (compare to 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 and James 2:5), but their condition was now much worse - and probably the result of the persecution they were receiving from their enemies.

God saw beyond their physical circumstances (which were temporary) to their actual spiritual condition (which would have eternal consequences). They had what he valued most. [Their condition was the *opposite* of the church of Laodicea (compare to Revelation 3:17).]

They loved Jesus so much, that they were willing to suffer for him. Perhaps they had the attitude that the Hebrew Christians had, described in Hebrews 10:34.

Some of the things they could have been "rich" in are:

- 1) faith, or trust, in God (James 2:5)
- 2) good deeds, as an expression of love (1 Timothy 6:18)
- 3) living with a God-centered attitude that influenced everything they did (perhaps the focus of Luke 12:21).

Other verses which mention this contrast (poor vs. rich): 2 Cor. 6:10; 8:9; James 2:5.

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## ABOUT PERSECUTION

Jesus warned us that, if we belong to him and reflect his life in our own lives, people will treat us the same way they would treat him - John 15:20.

## SLANDER

Abusive, false statements; called "blasphemy" in many translations. Their enemies would speak against them, the "Christ-ians," the same way they would speak against *Christ*.

## JEWS / NOT!

Even though the pagans who were involved in emperor worship may have helped in the persecution, the Jews were the main instigators. Because the Jews were so convinced that they themselves were right, they tended to persecute the Christians more than the pagans did! (Compare to what Jesus warned his disciples, in John 16:2.) Having rejected Jesus, they were actually accomplishing the *opposite* of what they thought: They were serving Satan, rather than God. They were doing the devil's work - compare to John 8:44.

It is *not* that the Jews followed the *Old* Testament and the Christians followed the *New* Testament. The Old Testament testifies about Jesus. Jews who accept the *Old* Testament will accept Jesus (and the New Testament); Jews who *don't* accept the Old Testament will not accept Jesus (or the New Testament). Look at the contrast between the Jews at Thessalonica and those at Berea, in Acts 17:1-13. (The "Scriptures" mentioned in Acts 17:11 are the *Old* Testament!)

The unsaved Jews (those who rejected the truth that is proclaimed *both* in the Old and New Testaments) considered themselves to be "the chosen people" simply because of physical ancestry and their participation in various religious ceremonies. However, even in the *Old* Testament, we read that a *change of heart* is also necessary. (See Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4, which makes reference to the ritual of circumcision. This truth is also reiterated in Romans 2:25-29.) Jews who reject the Old Testament (and therefore reject Jesus) are *not* Jews in God's sight. The true Judaism of the Old Testament is the same as the Christianity of the New Testament. Any other form of "Judaism" is a false religion, just like any form of "Christianity" that is not found in the Bible.

## SYNAGOGUE

The modern concept of "church" (= buildings, institutions, religious organizations, etc.) is closer to the New Testament concept of "synagogue," than it is to the New Testament concept of "church" (= all the people of a locality, who belong to Jesus; the body of Christ, etc.). In the first century, the church (= the people who belonged to Jesus) often met in synagogues to worship and pray, until the others who rejected Jesus forced them out. (See Acts 18:1-8 for an example of this.)

## SATAN

Satan (which means "adversary") is the spiritual force behind these persecutors. The Jews who had rejected Jesus (and thus rejected God) were following the example of their "father, the Devil" (compare to John 8:44). And so, they were adversaries of the true followers of God (which included both Jews and non-Jews).

## Verse 10

### AFRAID

They may have already had some fears. In this case, we could read it, "*Stop* being afraid." [Further comments can be found under the section, "TO TEST YOU" (below).]

This command ("do not be afraid") does not refer to the "positive" type of fear, which we *ought* to have: a fear of God, a fear of doing stupid things (such as stepping out in front of an oncoming train), etc. Rather, it focuses on the sinful type of fear - such as the fear of doing what is right, when someone else doesn't appreciate it. Matthew 10:28 gives us examples of "positive" and "negative" fear.

### ABOUT TO SUFFER

For them, things were going to get worse... but there was a hope that they could look forward to - see the verses that follow. [The application to us: These verses don't necessarily mean that things will get worse for *us*. (They might or might not.) But the instructions these verses contain show us how we should respond, *any time* we find ourselves experiencing trials or difficult situations.]

The book of 1 Peter was written to encourage people who were going through trials. In that book, Peter reminds us that Jesus also suffered, and that he left us with an example to follow, so that we would know how to respond. Peter also reminds us about the promise, that we who are willing to share in Jesus' suffering (rather than shrinking away from it - Hebrews 10:39 and Revelation 12:11) will also be able to share in his glory (Romans 8:17 and 1 Peter 5:1).

- Some of the verses in 1 Peter which mention suffering are: 1 Peter 2:19-21, 23; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; and 5:10.

### DEVIL

Used interchangeably with "Satan." ("Devil" means "accuser," in the N.T. Greek. "Satan" means "adversary" or "accuser," in the O.T. Hebrew. Both words are used in the New Testament.)

### PUT IN PRISON / TO TEST YOU

The Devil was going to "put" (N.T. Greek - "cast" or "throw") some of them into prison. He would *try* to destroy them... but if they did these things that Jesus commanded them to do, the devil would not succeed.

The Devil often uses people (in this case, the unbelieving Jews), to accomplish his purposes. However, when we are being persecuted, we must remember that the conflict goes much *deeper* than the people involved. Our real enemy is not the *people*, but the devil and other spiritual forces that work with him, who have empowered the people (Ephesians 6:12) and have blinded them (2 Corinthians 4:4).

"Test" and "tempt" are from the same N.T. Greek word. Satan is the tempter (Matthew 4:3 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5), and wants to make us stumble. God takes these same trials - situations which tempt us to make wrong decisions - and uses them to accomplish good in our lives (1 Peter 1:6-7 and Romans 8:28). For those who belong to God, the Devil's desires will be thwarted, and there will be no permanent harm done. No wonder we have no need to fear!

- Scripture also tells us that we can have an attitude of joy in the midst of trials, because of what God is accomplishing through them - Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-3. (The trials themselves aren't what give us the joy!)

## SUFFER PERSECUTION

A general concept that focuses on "pressure," whether literal or figurative. It is often translated as "affliction" or "tribulation." (Also used in verse 9.)

## 10 DAYS

A comparatively short time - though it would last a while. (It would not merely be "a day.") Though persecution seems quite long, while we are experiencing it, Scripture gives us a more accurate perspective: It lasts only for a while (1 Peter 1:6 and 5:10). Once we have gotten through it, and it is over, we will realize how true this is. In fact, this will be our perspective for all eternity!

Something to remember: It is sure a lot better to go through trials, caused by the Devil, *for just a while*, than it is to be cast into the lake of fire, by God, the righteous judge, *forever!*

[Additional comment: Those who believe that these seven churches are representative of seven different "ages" in church history would suggest that this "10 days" also refers to 10 periods of persecution, in the early centuries of the church's existence.]

## FAITHFUL

You cannot be "faithful" and "fearful" at the same time. You will either focus on God's wisdom and power (and be faithful), or focus on your circumstances (and be fearful).

Because of their emperor worship, the city of Smyrna had a reputation of being faithful to Rome. These Christians were also called to be faithful - but to Jesus Christ, instead. Historically, it seems that the church of Smyrna not only followed Jesus' exhortation to be faithful, but remained faithful long after many of the other churches had lost their testimony.

## POINT OF DEATH

Most trials do not reach "the point of death." But whether or not they do, we are to have a faithfulness that knows no limits, a faithfulness that has a "come what may" attitude. ("I'm going to remain faithful to Jesus, 'come what may.' ")

One of the early martyrs of the church was a bishop from Smyrna, named Polycarp. He was offered the "opportunity" to deny Christ and remain alive, but chose to remain faithful to the point of death - literally. He was burned at the stake (in approximately A.D. 168), because he valued the *eternal* blessings of God more than the *temporary* blessings of Rome.

Jesus, the one who is speaking these words, left them an example, by his own death and his victory over death. These Christians would, if necessary, be following his example. Because of their union with him, they, too, would be guaranteed victory. (See below.)

## CROWN OF LIFE

A reward for faithfulness. Eternal life, contrasted with temporary persecution. Eternal life given to them by God, the source of life. For those who belong to God, death gains a new significance! It is not the end of everything good, nor the beginning of something horrible.

For those who remained *faithful* to God, their present suffering would have no lasting *negative* effect on them. (In contrast: For those who chose to *deny* Christ, in order to avoid suffering, their present *lack of* suffering would have no lasting *positive* effect on them.)

Some interesting connections to the word "crown": 1) Part of the city of Smyrna was built on a large hill. The outline of the buildings on this hill resembled a crown. 2) Some of their coins had a picture of a "goddess" who wore a crown.

## **Verse 11**

### EAR / HEAR

Individual application; each person must respond. This promise is applicable not only to the Christians at Smyrna, but to all Christians everywhere - to any genuine follower of God.

### NOT HURT

By *no* means, and under *no* condition would they experience *any* hurt related to the second death. And this applies to *all* who overcome! (We may get hurt *once* - in this present life - but we won't have to worry about being hurt *twice*.)

[The N.T. Greek has a double negative, for emphasis. Double negatives are acceptable in N.T. Greek. They don't "cancel" each other out, as they might, in the English language!]

### SECOND DEATH

The "overcomers" won't have to experience the second death, because Jesus suffered in their place. In contrast, their persecutors, who have rejected Jesus, have abandoned their only opportunity to escape the second death.

In the Scriptures, "death" does not mean that the person ceases to exist or to have consciousness. Rather, the word has the idea of "separation": separation of the spirit and soul from the body (physical death), or separation of the entire person from the presence of God (spiritual death).

About the "second death":

1. Identified as the "lake of fire" or the "fiery lake of burning sulfur" - Revelation 20:14; 21:8.
2. The "overcomers" will not be hurt by it - Revelation 2:11.
3. It has no power over those who are in the first resurrection - Revelation 20:6.
4. A list that illustrates the types of people who will experience it - Revelation 21:8.

Those who *do* overcome, who do not fear death *now* (and because of this, are faithful to God): They will not have to fear death *later*. They may experience *temporary* suffering now, but it will be eclipsed by the *eternal* blessings they will receive later.

Those who *don't* overcome, who become (or continue to be) fearful of circumstances they may face in this present life: They will have a lot more to fear, in eternity.

## Revelation 2:12-17

### To the Church at Pergamum

<p>[12] To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pergamum</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has the sword, the authority to accurately judge.</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus' very words have the power to accomplish the judgment he pronounces. (See 1:16.)</p> <p>Jesus' judgments would be the opposite of Satan's "judgments." (Satan condemns the righteous; Jesus condemns the wicked.)</p>
<p>[13] I know where you live --where Satan has his throne.</p> <p>Yet you remain true to my name You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city --where Satan lives.</p>	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b></p> <p>Their circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living in "enemy territory"</li> </ul> <p>Their resolve to stand up for Jesus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remaining loyal to Jesus and his teachings</li> <li>• Continuing to trust Jesus, regardless of the circumstances</li> </ul> <p>A praiseworthy example: Antipas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• willing to stand up and live for Jesus</li> <li>• willing, if necessary, to face death in "enemy territory"</li> </ul>	<p>These Christians did not allow circumstances to become an excuse for sin. This "worst case scenario" shows that we, too, can have victory during trials.</p> <p>In this world, controlled by Satan, people who belong to Jesus are like "aliens" in enemy territory - 1 Peter 2:11. This is because they have become citizens of <i>God's</i> country - Ephesians 2:19... and that is what counts!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">**SEE THE NOTE AT THE END OF THE OUTLINE**</p> <p>Satan doesn't mind when the distinctions between his kingdom and God's kingdom are blurred. But he can't stand it, when those distinctions are openly expressed. He hates it, when God's people are willing to stand up and be different.</p>
<p>[14] Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:</p> <p>You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <p>Enemies infiltrating their ranks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some who follow the ways of Balaam... tempting others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to compromise spiritually (attacking the purity of their relationship / union with Christ)</li> <li>- to compromise physically (attacking the purity of their relationship / union with their spouse)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>[Both of these are attacks against purity, faithfulness and loyalty.]</p>	<p>When there is persecution, there will always be the temptation to compromise "principles" for "peace," or to blur the distinctions between right and wrong, in order to gain acceptance. "Peer pressure" is nothing new.</p> <p>These people, who were encouraging attitudes of compromise, were like "secret agents" sent in by the enemy (Satan), for the purpose of destroying the church.</p> <p>We must remember that our <i>views</i> will affect our <i>actions</i>... and others will be tempted to follow our example. These people were like a cancer, destroying the purity of the church, and weakening its resolve to "stand up and be different" in a world that opposes the truth.</p>

<p>[15] Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b> [continued]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some who follow the ways of the Nicolaitans - doing what God hates (see Revelation 2:6)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Note the contrast:</b>          God's people: They were openly opposing Satan's kingdom.          Satan's people: They were secretly infiltrating God's kingdom.</p>
<p>[16] Repent therefore!</p> <p>Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REPENT and deal with the problem...</li> <li>OR ELSE, Jesus will!</li> </ul>	<p>We, as the church, should jealously guard our purity - comparable to Paul's attitude expressed in 2 Corinthians 11:2.</p> <p>The church, as Christ's "bride" (Revelation 19:7; 21:9) is to belong to Jesus alone. If we try to belong both to Jesus and to idols (which includes <i>anything</i> we put ahead of Jesus), we will arouse his jealousy and bring judgment upon ourselves - see 1 Corinthians 10:19-22. "Flirting" with the devil is <i>not</i> an option for Christ's bride!</p>
<p>[17] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p> <p>To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna.          I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <p>These are blessings for <i>all</i> who are willing to remain pure, faithful and loyal to Jesus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spiritual, life-giving "food" from God: an unseen source of strength (given by the Spirit, through the Word)</li> <li>Special approval by God (perhaps also a symbol of victory)</li> </ul>	<p>Those who do not overcome - those who choose rather to compromise - will <i>never</i> experience <i>either</i> of these blessings: The blessings will be hidden and unknown to them.</p> <p>FOOD - God gives what the idol's food will <i>never</i> provide.</p> <p>APPROVAL - God's eternal approval is a lot better than the temporary "approval" that Satan offers.</p>

**\*\* NOTE FROM VERSE 13:**

These trials, deep in "enemy territory," involved a struggle of *eternal* significance. They were much more serious than the merely *physical* trials that most people focus on (and complain about). [Of course, Satan can use physical trials, as one of many "weapons" in his spiritual warfare. But if we fail to see the deeper spiritual issues, we are in danger of losing the battle.]



Though the "Overcomer" may be put to death by Satan's "sword,"  
 it is a death that will have no lasting effect.

However...

Woe to the person who earns the consequences of Jesus' "sword"!

## Revelation 2:12-17 Supplementary Study Information

### Background about Pergamum

Pergamum was a wealthy and cultured city. It was an educational center, with one of the largest libraries of the ancient world located in it. (Coincidentally, parchment, a forerunner of paper, was invented at Pergamum.) This city was also a religious and political center, with a great focus on emperor worship, along with many other forms of idolatry.

Today there is a small village in the area, with a small Christian testimony.

### Verse 12

#### SHARP DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

(See notes for 1:16.) This is the heavy sword of judgment. Each of these words is strongly emphasized, in the original Greek. This sword is definitely no toy! Jesus will use this sword of judgment (his word) to fight against those who refuse to repent (2:16). Though people may try to blur the distinctions between the genuine disciples and the fakes, he will cut through all the pretension and make that distinction visible to all.

### Verse 13

#### I KNOW

He cares and understands; he encourages those who remain faithful, but he is ready to judge those who turn against him. [The KJV adds, "I know *your works*," which parallels the opening statements found in most of the other letters to the churches. (Whether or not we include the phrase "your works," the over-all message remains the same.)]

#### WHERE YOU LIVE

They *live* (v. 13, beginning) where Satan *lives* (v. 13, end). But since Christ *lives* in them (Ephesians 3:17), they can overcome Satan. Such people look forward to the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will *live* (2 Peter 3:13).

This word "live" is also translated as "dwell." The phrase, "those who dwell on the earth" is found nine times in the book of Revelation. In most instances (at least after chapter 4) it is a reference to those who will experience the judgment of God.

#### SATAN'S THRONE / WHERE SATAN LIVES

Like Smyrna, Pergamum was also a major headquarters for emperor worship. (In it was the oldest temple dedicated to emperor worship.) Also, one of the other "gods" worshiped there (Asclepias, the "healing god") was symbolized as a serpent - a term used to describe Satan, in see Revelation 12:9 and 20:2. These Christians were surrounded by evil; yet they did not let their "environment" detract from their loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus.

In later chapters, the "beast" is described as having a throne (13:2 and 16:10), which he receives from the "dragon" (Satan). All other verses about thrones in the book of Revelation make reference to God's throne (the majority, about 30 verses) or to thrones that his servants will have (a few verses).

#### HOLDING FAST / REMAINING TRUE (to something)

This phrase is connected both to the praise and to the condemnation Jesus gives them.

- Connected with praise: The majority of the people were holding on to Jesus' name (and what his name stands for).
- Connected with condemnation: There were some who had let go of Jesus (or who had never held on to him, in the first place) and were holding on to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (see v. 14-15). You cannot hold on to both, though some were apparently trying to do so.

## JESUS' NAME

The name represents the person. Jesus' name stands for who he is. They accepted the full significance of who Jesus is, and refused to say, "Caesar is Lord." For them, saying, "Christ is Lord," was their *only* option.

Remaining true (holding fast) to Jesus would include a willingness to hold fast to Jesus' teachings and to the way of life that comes from those teachings. These people at Pergamum accepted not only who Jesus *is*, but what he *says* - and that impacted their day-to-day living: not just their "religious" activities, but everything that has something to do with the expression of love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40).

## FAITH (TRUST) IN JESUS

They trusted Jesus, not only for their salvation, but also for the outcome of the persecution they were experiencing. They trusted Jesus in *all* of life, no matter what happened to them. They might not have had Romans 8:28 to read (as we do), but the truth of that verse was lived-out in their lives.

## ANTIPAS

Nothing else is known about this person, other than the fact that he was willing to die for Christ. "Antipas" could have been his real name, or it could be a symbolical name given him by Jesus. The name means "against all." He was willing to stand up "against all" that Satan tried to do to him!

- As a witness, he was willing to testify about Jesus and to live a life that was in line with what he testified.
- As one who trusted Jesus, he committed to Jesus the final outcome of all that happened.

Note that this praise wasn't directed only to Antipas, but to *all* in the church, who were willing to hold fast to Jesus and his ways, regardless of the consequences. They had the attitude that Jesus exhorts us to have, in Matthew 10:28.

## Verse 14

### A FEW THINGS AGAINST YOU (as a group)

At this point, this was a small issue, compared to the extent of their faithfulness. However, they needed to deal with it - and they weren't doing so. If they didn't deal with it properly, it would eventually grow into a big problem. It would be like a cancer in their midst.

Purity is a *necessity* in the church; it's not just one of many legitimate options. If those who held to these false teachings refused to repent, they would need to be removed from the church. To be unwilling to remove them would be to dishonor Christ.

## TEACHING

*Each* of us is going to hold on to some type of teaching. The only issue is what those teachings will be. Are you going to take the *time and effort needed*, to make God's Word the basis of the teachings you hold to, or are you going to have something else as the basis of those teachings? (This second option comes, by default, to all who are unwilling to pursue the first option.) Remember that the teachings a person accepts will affect his actions, whether those teachings are knowingly or unknowingly accepted.

- Read Psalm 1. This is how you make God's Word the basis of the teachings you hold to. The word "meditate," found in verse 2, means "to think about it, to reflect upon it and to apply it to your life." (A few translations will use a phrase, such as, "think about," instead of "meditate.")

## TEACHING OF BALAAM

Read Numbers 22-25 and 31:1-16, for the account of Balaam. Balaam *claims* to be faithful to God, and some of his words actually sound quite godly. Yet when we look deeper, we discover that his actual god was wealth (even though he claims otherwise - see 22:18) and his method of operating was through compromise. God used him to pronounce a prophetic oracle against the Moabites (and various other nations), even though Balaam relied on idolatrous techniques (sorcery and divination) to obtain that oracle. (In 24:1, we read that he had been using such practices, but God's Spirit so powerfully overruled, that he stopped doing so, for the rest of the prophecy.)

- It is important to remember that God used Balaam *in spite of* his sin, not *because of* it. Balaam would have brought down curses upon Israel, if he could have done so - and made a lot of money while doing so. But God prevented it, and turned the curse into a blessing. See Joshua 24:9-10 and Nehemiah 13:2.

Balaam's compromising nature becomes very evident, when we discover that the events of Numbers 25 (where we read about how the Moabites seduced Israel into sin) were instigated by Balaam, according to 31:15-16.

- The WAY of Balaam - 2 Peter 2:15. A focus on his actions: He was willing to commit sin for money. (According to v. 16, such conduct is insanity! His *donkey* was smarter than he was!)
- The ERROR of Balaam - Jude 1:11 A focus on his attitude: He had a love for money, which made him willing to compromise on moral and spiritual issues. (Jesus says we *cannot* love both God and wealth - Matthew 6:24.)
- The TEACHING of Balaam - Revelation 2:14. He led people astray by encouraging them to compromise with sin. (Of course, since he did not view things the way God defines them, he wouldn't have called it "sin.")

People who hold to such views can teach even when they aren't teachers: They can teach by way of example. Their willingness to compromise (especially when they seem to benefit from it) can tempt others to do the same, to "bend the rules" or to "sin a little," whenever they think it would result in personal advantage.

- Most likely, their compromise began subtly and masked with what appeared to be good intentions - and instead of viewing their actions as sin, they would have probably described them in terms that sounded good. (In modern terms, they may have viewed themselves as being "positive" and "open-minded" - in contrast with the others, who they would have labeled as "negative" or "narrow-minded." After all, having *not* accepted God's ways, they wouldn't view their own ways as sinful.)
- How often do we act as though it is OK to sin "a little" - especially when we think it will have "positive" results, or if we think it will cause people to accept us? (This sinning "a little" can include simply *not* doing what is right - see James 4:17. We need to *act* right, not just *believe* right.)

One of the reasons this was a problem at Pergamum: Genuine Christianity will offend those who hate Christ - and those people will often respond to the truth in a hostile manner. When people who are faithful and true to Jesus are being persecuted by their enemies, they may have the temptation to give-in to compromise, to blur the distinctions between Jesus' kingdom and Satan's kingdom, or to yield (even if just a little bit) to Satan's ways, in order to gain acceptance and to lessen the persecution. Those who are *less* faithful (or whose "conversions" were actually superficial) may quickly give-in to this temptation. Their doing so may increase the pressure on the others to do the same.

Eventually, increasing compromise can result in a situation in which the truth is so diluted with error, that it begins to look appealing to those who have no intention of abandoning their sins. Historically, there have been numerous times in which the compromise was so great, that it became popular for people to become "Christians" (in a superficial sense), even though they still had a love for sin, and really had no interest in becoming disciples of Jesus.

WHAT HE TAUGHT BALAK (the Midianite king)

He taught Balak how to ensnare others - to entice or trap them and to cause them to "stumble."

TO ENTICE / TO BE A STUMBLING BLOCK

To be a snare or a trap, to cause someone else to sin. Woe to people who cause others to stumble (Matthew 18:7; Luke 17:1); they will be "weeded out" of the kingdom (Matthew 13:41).

FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

False teaching usually begins with something that is true (or at least partly true). But it fails to give attention to other truths that must be *equally* emphasized, in order to avoid error. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:25-27, Paul tells us that it is OK to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols (= the first truth in our example)... but only as long as we make no association with that idol (= the second truth that must be equally emphasized). Once an association is made between the two (the meat and the idol), we must not eat the meat (1 Corinthians 10:28-29). In Pergamum, they kept the association between the meat and the idol. In the end, they not only viewed the meat as acceptable, but also the idol and other practices associated with it.

Many people make professions of faith *without* having genuine repentance in their hearts. Without this repentance, it is easy for such people to still have an attraction to the sins they used to practice. The compromiser may want "heaven" (however he may define it), but he also wants his old ways - and will find it easy to attempt to go after both. When

persecution arises, the temptation may be even greater for compromise, for the more the person accepts the ways of the persecutors, the less they will be persecuted by them.

### COMMITTING SEXUAL IMMORALITY

God created physical things in a way that would reflect spiritual truths. Even human sexuality was created to reflect spiritual truths. In Ephesians 5, we read that the physical union of husband and wife was designed to reflect the union of Christ and the church (5:22-33). There was a similar concept expressed in the Old Testament, in the intended relationship between God and Israel (Isaiah 54:5-6; Jeremiah 3:14). In both cases, unfaithfulness to God was compared to adultery or prostitution (examples - James 4:4 and Ezekiel 16).

Throughout Scripture, sexual sin (which is unfaithfulness to one's spouse or future spouse) is often associated with idolatry (which is unfaithfulness to the true God). The same heart attitude - the sin of unfaithfulness - is present for *both* of these sins. People who claim to belong to God, but who "flirt" with sin, have the same heart attitude as those who claim to be faithful to a spouse, but who flirt with a person they're not married to.

- Today, we don't tend to bow down to idols... but we do have a tendency to *not* take seriously the things God says - especially when it relates to our need to be *pure* from sin. We tend to develop a "God concept" that allows us to feel comfortable, *without* giving-up the sins we so strongly desire. We justify what we do, rather than turning away from it.
- As far as sexual sin is concerned, it is no coincidence that it occurs so frequently among people who *claim* to be "Christians."
- *Many* passages in the Bible emphasize the absolute need to strive for a *pure* life, one that is *separated* (or set apart) from sin.

### Verse 15

#### TEACHING OF THE NICOLAITANS

The Ephesian Christians hated the ways of the Nicolaitans; the Pergamum Christians accepted them. It was the issue of opposition (the good example of Ephesus) vs. tolerance (the bad example of Pergamum).

In 2:6, the focus was on their *deeds*. Here the focus is on what they *teach*. Again, this teaching can be by way of example. Though there may have been teachers that held to such views, people can be role models for others, without ever expressing a "teaching." The things we do can teach principles and attitudes, that can influence the way others live.

In this passage, the focus is on their influence - which would include actions, as well as attitudes. Certain people had accepted the Nicolaitans' practices as their perspective on life. Though we don't know the specific details of their view, it probably involved some type of focus on pleasure and indulgence - perhaps under the guise of "Christian freedom."

### Verse 16

#### REPENT (or else...)

Jesus speaks to the entire group. Not only are those directly involved in these sins required to repent, but the others in the church are not to tolerate or accept such sin in their midst.

Five of the seven churches have sins that they need to deal with. In each instance, they are told to *repent* - to change not just their *ways*, but also their *attitudes* about those sins. Repentance involves a complete turn-around.

#### I WILL COME

Literally, "I am coming." It could happen at any moment, without further warning - just like Jesus' second return!

Three times in these seven letters, Jesus mentions that he will come. Twice, it is a warning for those who need to repent (2:5 and 2:16); once, it is an encouragement for those who are faithfully living for him (3:11). Jesus' coming can be something to look forward to, or something to dread - depending on whether we are living for, or against, him.

## FIGHT AGAINST THEM...

Here, Jesus' warning focuses specifically on those who were directly involved in the sin. If they repent, there will be hope for them. If not, the consequences will be horrible. For those who refuse to repent, it means war! (The word "fight" means to "wage war," and is translated that way, in Revelation 19:11.) They can try to fight and argue against God... but guess who will win in the end! Once again, a reference is made to Jesus' sword of judgment. The very words that come from his mouth have a power that surpasses any power on earth.

Jesus warns us that, in the end, there will be many wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6). However, the only war we need to "worry" about is the one in which *Jesus* is our opponent. Make peace with him, while you can!

## THE SWORD OF MY MOUTH

Refer to v. 12. Jesus' very words will accomplish justice: The Word of God will save us or destroy us, depending on how we respond to Jesus - who he is and what he has done. (Here the focus is on destruction of those who have turned against Jesus, through compromise.)

## Verse 17

### EAR / HEAR / OVERCOME

As with all the other letters, the principles taught in this letter apply to *all of us*. We must *overcome*, either by avoiding this sin, or (if we are guilty of it) by repenting of it.

People who are willing to compromise might not experience the persecution that others may have to endure. But at the same time, they will never receive the blessings given in this promise. The "manna" will remain hidden from them, and the white stone (with a new, or special, name on it) will never be received by them.

### HIDDEN MANNA

This refers to the spiritual sustenance given us by the Spirit, as he uses the Word of God to build us up in our salvation. It would be a source of strength and life for those who remained faithful, and would help them to grow in Christ, but it would be something that the compromisers would never see (or obtain). (Note the contrast: The compromisers get to eat the idol's food - something that would have no eternal benefit to them; the overcomers get to eat "bread from heaven" - spiritual nourishment that builds them up for eternal life.)

This "hidden manna" does not refer to physical food - not even to the bread of the "Lord's supper: (which can be seen by anyone who has eyesight). Instead, it refers to a "spiritual food" that the compromisers *can not see* (or comprehend) - perhaps even to Christ himself, in the sense of John 6:32-33.

"Manna" originally referred to the bread-like food that God sent his people, Israel, as they were traveling through the desert wilderness (on their journey from Egypt to the promised land). [Read about it in Exodus 16.] This, along with many other things that happened on their journey, were intended to teach them spiritual principles. These events would have taught them things about God and their relationship to him - *if* they had been willing to listen.

- A different example: Physical circumcision was supposed to teach them about their spiritual needs - needs which Moses described as a "circumcision of heart" - Deuteronomy 10:16 and Romans 2:29.

As far as the manna was concerned, their need to rely on God for their *physical* food (in order to stay alive physically) was intended to remind them of their need to rely on God for their *spiritual* food (in order to stay alive spiritually) - see Deuteronomy 8:3. And just as this was true in the wilderness, so also it was true in the days of Jesus (and in our day).

- Example: John 6:25-59. The people wanted Jesus to give them physical food, just like they received manna in the days of Moses (John 6:31). But Jesus told them they needed to have a different focus. Physical food (even manna) would have only a temporary value - they would still die (John 6:49). They needed to focus on Jesus, the "bread of life," in order that they might live eternally.

After the Israelites had entered the promised land, the manna stopped forming (Joshua 5:12). However, a jar of manna was kept in the presence of God, in the tabernacle and later in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 16:32-33; Hebrews 9:4), where only the high priest would be able to see it. As a result, this physical manna (which was in God's presence) was "hidden"

from the people. Even this can serve as an illustration of a spiritual truth: In Christ, we now have access to God - from whom we can receive the spiritual nourishment (symbolized in the manna) that was once hidden from us!

- A similar thought: The treasures and teachings of the kingdom of God are *hidden* from those who reject that kingdom - Matthew 11:25; 13:35, 44.

#### WHITE STONE

A small pebble-size stone of special significance. Historically, white stone was imported into Pergamum, for the native rock was a pink granite. This means it would have been more costly, and would have been used for special purposes.

The fact that it is white may mean it is a symbol of purity, innocence or victory. However, there are two uses of white stones, common in Jesus' day, that may have special significance here:

The first use of white stones is referred to in Acts 26:10, where the word is used in reference to stones used in voting. The people "cast their votes (stones)." This stone would have indicated *approval* of something. In Revelation 2:17, this concept may be part of what is implied here - indicating that God would express his approval of those who remained faithful. Even though the whole world (including the compromisers) seemed to express *disapproval* of them, they had the only approval that counts for eternity.

Sometimes, in voting, a white stone would indicate approval; whereas a black stone would indicate disapproval. If, in Antipas' case, stones were used to indicate his fate, he would have received a *black* stone. We don't really know what happened, but if something like this *did* happen, then the concept of a *white* stone would have had an even greater significance to the Christians of Pergamum.

#### A NEW NAME ON IT

The second use, which is probably significant to our understanding of this stone, has to do with the inscription on the stone. Special stones were sometimes used as awards, perhaps like a trophy might be used, today. In such cases, something related to the award might be engraved on the stone.

Those who regarded Jesus' name (all it represents) as special (v. 13), will someday receive from Jesus a name that is special (v. 17). What will this name be? Some suggest it could be God's name, and would, therefore, indicate that the person belonged to God. Others suggest that it may be a special name given to the person himself. (Either way, it indicates a special relationship with God.)

- Sometimes such stones were used to invite people to special banquets. Whether or not this stone has that significance, we do know that all overcomers (all genuine Christians) will have a place at the "wedding supper of the lamb" (Revelation 19:9)!

There may be an allusion to prophecies in Isaiah, in which he mentions a future day, in which those who turn back to God and become his servants will receive a new name. This new name will be one that will describe their new character. See Isaiah 56:5 (a name that will last forever); 62:2 (given by God; see also verse 4); and 65:15 (the contrast between those who rebelled and those who chose to serve God).

Another example of names on stones: In the Old Testament, some of the priest's garments had stones (gems) sewn into them. These stones had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 39:6-14).

#### KNOWN ONLY TO HIM WHO RECEIVES IT

Only those who overcome will know and experience God's favor. If each name is unique to the individual overcomer (the second view, mentioned above), it could suggest that *each* overcomer will experience God's favor in a special way. In contrast, the compromiser will never experience it.

## Revelation 2:18-29

### To the Church at Thyatira

<p>[18] "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thyatira</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p> <p><b>"Son of God"</b> - He has the right to rule the universe. (See 2:27, a quote which relates this concept to Psalm 2.)</p>
<p>These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who he is: the Son of God</li> <li>• Two of his characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eyes like fire</li> <li>- feet like bright polished bronze</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>"Blazing eyes"</b> - This represents his ability to see and understand all things accurately. (See 1:14.)</p> <p><b>"Bronze feet"</b> - This represents his authority and ability to judge rightly. (See 1:15.)</p>
<p>[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.</p>	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b></p> <p>A strong emphasis on actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were doing many good things: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- love                      - faith</li> <li>- service                   - perseverance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• They were doing these things increasingly so.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Love</u> for God and neighbor summarizes all of our obligations.</p> <p><u>Faith / trust</u> in God, and in his wisdom, strength and power; a willingness to obey him.</p> <p><u>Service</u> - a willingness to put the needs of others ahead of our own interests.</p> <p><u>Perseverance / steadfastness</u> - not giving-up when things get difficult.</p>
<p>[20] Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <p>Little concern over what others were teaching (no focus on doctrinal purity).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What they were doing: Ignoring a false teacher, one who was comparable to Old Testament Jezebel</li> <li>• What this teacher was doing: Leading God's people astray. [See the note.] →</li> </ul>	<p>People have a tendency to focus on either truth (doctrine) or love (deeds). Jesus requires us to emphasize <i>both</i>: Love in our actions must reflect truth in our hearts.</p> <p>Today, many people have the attitude that each person should be allowed to do whatever he wants, without anyone else "interfering." God, however, says that we, as a group, are responsible for each other. As a group, we must maintain truth and purity in our midst.</p> <p>[Note: This "Jezebel" may, or may not, have been an "officially recognized" teacher. Either way, what she was saying was being learned by the people.]</p>
<p>[21] I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling</p> <p>[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.</p> <p>[23] I will strike her children dead.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <p><i>The duty of those who have sinned:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>"Jezebel"</u> (who was teaching error and encouraging others to sin) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [She needed to repent, but already refused to do so.]</li> <li>- Therefore, she would suffer severe judgment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Her partners</u> (who tolerated her sin) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They needed to repent.</li> <li>- If they don't, they would experience severe judgment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Her "children"</u> (any who followed her example) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They would die.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>"Jezebel,"</u> who is encouraging this sin, has rejected the truth, and is unwilling to change (repent). Therefore, there is nothing left for her, except judgment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She <i>refused</i> to do her duty of repentance.</li> </ul> <p><u>Her partners,</u> who are tolerating and ignoring her sin, are also considered guilty, by God. If they are unwilling to repent (and to exercise the judgment against sin, which God requires of them), they will share in "Jezebel's" judgment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They <i>need</i> to do their duty of repentance.</li> </ul> <p><u>Her children:</u> If this sin is not stopped, there will be people who are led astray, who will never become disciples of Jesus - simply because they were exposed to falsehood, rather than to genuine Christianity. If those who were tolerating the sin (who appeared to be genuine Christians) had done their duty, these people would have had the opportunity to be saved. As it is, they only have death - the worst type possible (eternal) - to look forward to. (See the NOTE, top of next page.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because they were never exposed to the truth, they <i>never learned</i> about their duty of repentance.</li> </ul>

NOTES for v. 23:

1) Those who *withhold* the truth will be judged for doing so, and for the effects of their actions on others. Their judgment will be *more severe*. 2) Those who *never learned* the truth will be judged based only on what they *do* know, and how they respond to that knowledge. (All people have some comprehension of right and wrong built into their consciences, and all have chosen to do things that they know are wrong. But the judgment of those *not* exposed to God's Word will be *not as severe* as that experienced by those who have been exposed to it, and have rejected or ignored it. See Luke 12:48b; Romans 2:12-16; compare to James 3:1.)

<p>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.</p> <p>[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] Only hold on to what you have until I come.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty (continued)</b></p> <p><i>Concerning these judgments against those who have sinned:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will be a warning to all: - Jesus knows all about us. - Jesus will accurately reward each of us, based on what we have done.</li> </ul> <p><i>The duty of those who have not committed these sins:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No additional responsibilities (other than opposing these sins).</li> <li>“Keep up the good work!” They must not let go of what they already have. (This would happen if they closed their eyes to sin.)</li> </ul>	<p>If we learned nothing else from this church, we should learn the following:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Ignoring false teaching results in sin, and sin has consequences - not just on ourselves, but on others.</b></p> </div> <p>We cannot ignore sin and expect it to go away - and we are foolish if we think that it <i>won't</i> do any harm!</p> <p>The fact that Jesus will repay <i>each</i> of us should mean something <i>fearful</i>, to those who take their stand against him. They will be rewarded for their <i>evil</i> deeds/actions.</p> <p>For those who belong to Jesus (who do not choose to indulge in sin, or close their eyes to it), this fact should be something to look forward to. The day will come, when they will be rewarded for their <i>good</i> deeds/actions. For them, it can be a <i>comfort</i> to realize that Jesus will someday come.</p>
<p>[26] To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--</p> <p>[27] 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'--</p> <p>just as I have received authority from my Father.</p> <p>[28] I will also give him the morning star.</p> <p>[29] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This promise is for <i>all</i> who are willing to judge sin (rather than ignore it).</li> <li>They will one day rule over the nations. [Verse 27 is a quote from Psalm 2:9, and is a description of <i>Jesus'</i> rule. The "overcomers," those who are willing to exercise their authority <i>now</i> (in obedience to Jesus) will also be able to do so in <i>eternity</i>.]</li> <li>They will have Jesus himself as their guide. [The phrase "morning star" appears to connect with Revelation 22:16.]</li> </ul>	<p>Those who are <i>not</i> willing to obey Jesus in this matter will <i>not</i> be among the “overcomers.”</p> <p>Those who are willing to follow Jesus' example <i>now</i> (and "to the end"), will be able to keep on doing <i>so for eternity</i>.</p> <p>They will continue to rule with him:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They will rule under Jesus' authority, just as he rules under the Father's authority.</li> <li>They will rule like shepherds, protecting the righteous and destroying the wicked.</li> </ul> <p>Jesus will be with them forever, as the "light" of their lives.</p> <p>This promise is for <i>all</i> who are willing to pay attention to what Jesus says.</p>

If we don't judge sin that exists in our midst, God will. And if he has to, the consequences will be much worse than if we had dealt with it ourselves. The Corinthians learned this the hard way, when they failed to deal with a serious sin that existed within their group: God sent sickness and death to some of those who were guilty. (See 1 Corinthians 11:30-32.)

## Revelation 2:18-29 Supplementary Study Information

### Background about Thyatira

Thyatira was a small trade center that was famous for a unique type of bronze, that was made by the city's bronze guild, using a secret method. The city was also known for a royal purple dye - and this is why Acts 16:14 mentions Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, who sold purple fabric. [The bronze ties-in well with Jesus' description of himself, as having feet like burnished bronze. Perhaps the purple ties in with Jesus' royalty, as the Son of God. (Purple was often a color worn by royalty and those who were wealthy - examples: Judges 8:26; Daniel 5:7; Mark 15:17; Luke 16:19.)

### Verse 18

#### THE SON OF GOD

This is the only time in the book of Revelation, that Jesus is described as the "Son of God." The term "like a Son of man" (a quote of Daniel 7:13) is found twice (in 1:13 and 14:14).

- During Jesus' ministry on earth, he occasionally used the term "Son of God" (John 11:4, for example). However, he more frequently used the term "Son of Man."

Jesus is both "Son of God" and "Son of Man."

- As "a son of man," he has the authority and right to judge the "sons of men" (compare to John 5:27). He has experienced all the types of temptations that "sons of men" experience, and has done so without sinning (Hebrews 4:15).
- As the "Son of God," he has the right to be the judge (since he is the owner of the universe), and he has the ability to judge accurately and fairly. (This is further expressed in the rest of this verse.)
- Matthew 26:63-64 uses both of these terms ("Son of Man" and "Son of God") in the same context.

In this passage, the following two characteristics are mentioned from the perspective of Jesus being the Son of God. (Note that, in 1:13, they were mentioned from the perspective of "Son of Man.")

#### EYES LIKE FLAMING/BLAZING FIRE

A reference back to 1:14. See also 19:12. Jesus "sees" (knows and understands) all; nothing can escape his awareness. He has a "penetrating" knowledge - he searches the heart and judges accurately and righteously.

- Fire is often used in reference to purification: After the evil is "burned away" in judgment, only what is pure will remain.

#### FEET LIKE BURNISHED BRONZE

A reference back to 1:15. A focus on judgment; perhaps also on his strength and his sovereignty (as king) over all the peoples of the earth. Jesus is the righteous judge.

- The "feet" are often associated with authority and judgment. Compare to Joshua 10:24; Psalm 8:6; 1 Corinthians 15:25; and Ephesians 1:22.

### Verse 19

#### I KNOW

Literally, "I see," but used in the sense of perceiving or understanding. Jesus introduces all seven letters with this word, but here it is reinforced by the description Jesus gives of himself, as having eyes like blazing fire.

#### DEEDS

In five of the letters, Jesus' first comment is that he knows their deeds - a focus on their *actions*. For the churches of Smyrna and Pergamum, Jesus says that he knows what is happening to them - a focus on their *circumstances*. [For these two churches, the KJV translation also includes a reference to their deeds, but the main focus is still on their circumstances.]

This word *deeds* is used five times in Jesus' letter to Thyatira. The entire letter has a strong focus on the church's deeds or actions.

- Verse 19 (twice) - A reference to the people's deeds/actions: God knows their deeds/actions, and he praises the church because their deeds/actions are increasing. They were doing *many* good things.
- Verse 22 - A reference to Jezebel's *ways* (deeds/actions): Those who were ignoring or tolerating her ways (allowing her to continue) needed to repent.
- Verse 23 - A warning that God will judge each person according to his own deeds/actions.
- Verse 26 - A promise of blessing to those who do *God's* deeds/actions (= those who obey him, those who do his will).

Jesus praises the Christians at Thyatira, because the deeds/actions he refers to were increasing in excellence. He specifically points out that they were growing in their expression of love, faith, service and perseverance/endurance (each described below).

- This was *genuine* spiritual growth and its outworking in their lives. (This is how genuine salvation expresses itself.) It was not a pretension - such as what was present in the church at Laodicea - Revelation 3:14-22.
- Note that *God* defines which deeds/actions are good and which are evil - summarized here by these four words: love, faith, service and perseverance. We don't invent the definition, based on things that *we* want to do - and woe to those who try! See Isaiah 5:20.

## LOVE

A commitment-type love, which places God first in our lives, and others ahead of ourselves.

- Love is the primary characteristic of a disciple of Jesus - John 13:35. Without it, everything else loses significance - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.
- Our two primary obligations are summarized by this word: (1) Love for God and (2) love for neighbor (including our enemies) - Matthew 22:37-40; 5:43-48. In one way or another, everything in life is related to this word - 1 Corinthians 13.

## FAITH (TRUST)

In most passages, this word focuses on our trust in God. This is a trust that is reflected in our actions and by our faithful obedience to him - faithful even though we may be tempted to choose a different way. This trust goes beyond our *initial* acceptance of what the Bible says about God. It impacts our day-to-day choices and values.

- Faithfulness or trustworthiness, as a character quality, is required of a servant (disciple) of Jesus. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), so if the Spirit is in us, it must/will characterize our lives. [God is faithful and trustworthy. As his servants, we must also be faithful and trustworthy.]
- Most likely, this word connects with the *first* of the two great commands regarding love for God and neighbor. (See above.)

## SERVICE

A willingness to serve others, to take care of their needs, and to do things for *their* good. This focuses on the second greatest command - our obligation to love our *neighbor*.

- Sometimes this service can have an emphasis on *spiritual* matters. Acts 6:4 mentions the "ministry" (service) of the Word of God. [In this context, the person might be called a "minister."]
- At other times, this service focuses on helping others who have *physical* needs. Acts 6:1 mentions the "distribution" (serving) of food to the needy widows. [The word "deacon" is related to this word. It normally refers to a church leader who focuses on the physical needs of the people: He is a "server."]

## PERSEVERANCE

Patient endurance and steadfastness. They were willing to continue in their "spiritual walk," even when the journey became tough. They did not give-up quickly. They remained steadfast, even when they did not immediately see the desired results.

- Perseverance is an integral part of salvation - Romans 2:6-7; 5:3-4; 15:4.
- Our ability to persevere is made possible by God - Romans 15:5.

## YOUR PRESENT DEEDS/ACTIONS - GREATER THAN WHAT YOU DID AT FIRST

When the Spirit causes us to be "born again," we begin a new life. Spiritual life, if it is genuine, will *grow*. This is one of the reasons that Jesus praises the Christians at Thyatira for what they were doing. (They were doing what Paul exhorted the people at Thessalonica to do. See 1 Thessalonians 4:1.)

Some other verses which focus on growth or increase:

- Growth in one's salvation - 1 Peter 2:2.
- Grace and knowledge - 2 Peter 3:18.
- The increasing presence (and expression) of godly character traits in one's life - 2 Peter 1:3-11. [Note that three of the four characteristics listed above (faith, love and perseverance) are directly mentioned in this passage.]

## Verse 20

YET

Their good, great as it was, does not "cancel" the evil that was in their midst.

## I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU

Regretfully, there were others in the church, whose deeds/actions were not so pleasing to God (verses 20-22). They needed to repent of their sinful deeds (verse 22) and begin to do *Jesus'* deeds (verse 26). Why? Because each of us will be judged according to our deeds/actions (verse 23).

- Judgment based on our deeds/actions is a common theme in Scripture. See, for instance: Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6; Revelation 20:12; 22:12.
- This does not mean that salvation is the result of deeds; rather the deeds are the result of salvation! When God saves us, he *enables* us to do the things that please him. (He also gave us the desire to do them.) In salvation, he *created* us for good works! (See Ephesians 2:8-10.)

## YOU TOLERATE THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL

There was sin in the church, and people were not doing anything about it. Someone was having a strong, destructive influence on the church, comparable to the influence that the Old Testament Jezebel had on the northern kingdom of Israel. It may have been a specific influential woman - perhaps even a female leader or (some have suggested) a pastor's wife. However, as a principle, this statement by Jesus would be applicable in any church, to *anyone* (regardless of gender) who did such things. Some believe that the name "Jezebel" referred to an entire faction of people (in addition to a leader).

- Many people connect this "Jezebel's" actions with those of the Nicolaitans - see 2:6, 15.

The word translated as "tolerate" has a range of meanings: "to send away, to leave alone, to permit." As used in this verse, they weren't "sending her away," in the sense of getting rid of her, but they were "leaving her alone," in the sense of ignoring the sin that was being committed. Indirectly, they were "permitting" her to continue in her deceptive way. They were closing their eyes to the problem... but Jesus, who has "blazing eyes" (v. 18), wasn't.

Note that the focus of Jesus' praise (v. 19) is on their *actions*. It may be that they had a lack of emphasis on *teaching* (*doctrine*) - which would have made it easier for false teaching to creep in among them. They may have been content to focus on their own *good* actions and to ignore the *evil* she was doing (or teaching). If she was a leader, they may have been wary of saying anything against her.

- In the issue of "teaching vs. actions," people have a tendency to emphasize one of them and to ignore the other. The church at Ephesus appeared to have the *opposite* problem, with a greater focus on *teaching* (*truth*), and a neglect of *love* (*actions*).
- We need a strong emphasis on *both* teaching and actions.

Their unwillingness to deal with the problem implied acceptance of her ways. Others would see that they permitted her to be an influence, and could ultimately be led astray because of it.

- There is no such thing as "neutrality." We must expose those who try to introduce sin and error into the church. For a group to welcome such a person into their midst (instead of opposing him) implies acceptance of that person's ways. In God's eyes, those who welcome such people are *sharing* in their sins - see 2 John 1:7-11 (especially v. 11). [2 John 1:10 makes reference to receiving such a person onto one's house. This refers to accepting him and having fellowship

with him. This passage is quite significant when considering this issue, because in John's day, most "churches" (groups of Christians) met in people's houses.]

- God requires the church to judge sins and disputes that may exist within it - 1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:2. When a church refuses to do so, it brings Jesus' condemnation upon itself - such as what the church of Thyatira was now receiving.

### CALLS HERSELF A PROPHETESS

This was a false claim - just like the claims of various other people or groups mentioned in these seven letters to the churches:

- 2:2 - Those who claimed to be apostles, but were not; they were tested/examined and found to be false.
- 2:9; 3:9 - Those who claimed to be Jews, but were not; they were liars; they were a "synagogue of Satan." [The word "Jew," as used here, is not a reference to mere biological ancestry. Rather, it is being used here in the sense of a *genuine* Jew - one who is willing to accept what *Moses* taught - which means that he would accept *Jesus* for who he is. Compare to John 5:46.]
- 3:17 - Those who claimed to be spiritually healthy, but were actually the opposite.

People can call themselves anything they want, and even convince themselves that their claims are true. But Jesus' penetrating eyes can see past their pretension and self-deception.

This "Jezebel" claimed to be a spiritual leader, one who spoke on God's behalf. As a supposed "prophetess," she may have claimed to be revealing truth that the apostles and other leaders had not revealed - "new" (or perhaps "deeper") "spiritual truths." [Verse 24 describes her teachings or ways as "deep," and as having their origin in Satan.]

- Communicating God's message was the primary function of a prophet. Since This "Jezebel" did not communicate *God's* message, she was, by definition, a false prophet.

### BY WHAT SHE TEACHES, SHE MISLEADS MY SERVANTS

In the church at Pergamum, the people who held to Balaam's sinful teachings may have *indirectly* encouraged others to sin (by way of example). Here at Thyatira, "Jezebel" *directly* teaches others to commit the sins that she herself is doing. She even claims to have divine authority to do so! (Compare to the Old Testament Jezebel, who tried to extinguish worship of the true God - and she did so in the name of her false gods.)

Warnings and other statements related to false teachings:

- Man-made teachings - Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:22.
- Teachings taught by demons - 1 Timothy 4:1.
- Teachings that "blow us around," like wind - Ephesians 4:4.
- Contrasted with "sound teaching" or "good teaching" - 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1.

Note that teachers will one day face a stricter judgment - James 3:1.

To "lead astray" - to mislead, to deceive (by means of those false teachings).

- People who are misled *do not know it*. (They may have known it at first, but by repeatedly failing to deal with the problem, their sense of awareness would have deadened.)
- The only way to avoid (or to get out of) deception is to allow the Word of God to *open* and *change* our minds - compare to Matthew 22:29 (where the word "deceive" is often translated as "mistaken" or "in error").

Deception has been occurring ever since the very first sin (Genesis 3:13). It can happen to both saved people (as in this verse) and unsaved people. In the end times, deception will have a major role in what happens:

- Some verses which focus on the role of deception in the end times: Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 13:14; 18:23; etc.
- Those who are unwilling to accept the truth of Scripture will be judged by God himself. God will send them a "delusion": If they are determined to reject God's truth, he will let them believe the devil's error - 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. Note that, having rejected the truth, *they won't know that they have accepted the devil's error*. They will think it is the truth.

### "MY SERVANTS"

This refers only to those who are *Jesus'* servants. It does not include this "Jezebel," who is considered an infiltrator. She is an enemy who tries to mislead God's servants.

About being a "servant" or "slave" of Jesus: Jesus is the "Lord" or "Master" of *all* genuine Christians. (The word "Lord" means "Master.")

- The word "slave" occurs approximately 120 times in the New Testament. In perhaps half of these instances, the word is used to describe our relationship to God (if we belong to Jesus).
- All people who are *not* slaves to God are *still* slaves to sin and the devil. This slavery can occur in many forms, some very obvious, involving direct opposition to anything good; others less obvious, perhaps even involving an appearance of righteous conduct. (Sometimes the devil uses people who openly *oppose* what is right; at other times, he uses *counterfeits* who imitate it with something false.)
- Jesus frees us from this slavery to sin, so that we can become *his* slaves, slaves to true righteousness. *He did not free us so that we could indulge in further sin, and call it "freedom."* See Romans 6:16-20; Galatians 5:1, 13; 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 2:19.
- Note: We are also called "sons" of God (through adoption - Ephesians 1:5) and "brothers" of Jesus (Hebrews 2:11-12). The word "slave" focuses on just one specific aspect of our relationship to Jesus.

#### SO THAT THEY COMMIT SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND EAT FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

She was misleading others into thinking that these sins were acceptable practices; she tried to get people to *continue* in their pagan ways, rather than abandoning them.

*What was she teaching?*

- She may have taught them that these practices were more "spiritual" or even "free" - though they would have actually turned the people into slaves of depravity and sin (2 Peter 2:19).
- In this passage, sexual immorality is mentioned first; in 2:14, at the church in Pergamum, things related to idolatry came first. This could suggest that the sins crept into these two churches in different ways. In the one, they may have first gone into *spiritual* compromise, which eventually led to *physical* (sexual) compromise. In the other, they may have first gone into *physical* compromise, which eventually led to *spiritual* compromise.
- [See also verse 22, where the word "adultery" occurs. See also the notes on 2:14 (the church at Pergamum), for more about these two types of sins (sexual immorality and idolatry).]

*How were these "servants" affected?*

These people are not the "children" of verse 23, but "servants" of Jesus, who still have time to repent. They do not fully *accept* her teachings as their own perspective; rather, they *tolerate* them. However, in God's eyes, tolerating sin is a form of participation in them. It also suggests (to others) an acceptance of those evil ways, and encourages others to adopt them as their own. (This is one of the ways she would get "children" - verse 23.)

These people have now been warned by Jesus. They may have "fallen asleep" in a state of deception, but they now have been "awakened" by Jesus. If they are genuine servants of Jesus, they will repent of their sins - verse 22. (If they don't repent, they are probably Jezebel's "children," rather than Jesus' servants.)

#### Verse 21

I GAVE HER TIME TO REPENT (of her immorality)

She was given many opportunities to change her ways (and her attitude), but she was unwilling. Interestingly, this word "repent" is in *past* tense, and is not directed toward the others in the church.

- God often delays judgment, as an expression of patience, kindness and mercy - Romans 2:4-6. However, judgment *will* eventually come to those who are unwilling to change. See also 2 Peter 3:9.

#### SHE IS UNWILLING TO REPENT

Repentance goes against her will. Remaining in this sin is a conscious decision on her part - of course, she wouldn't call it sin! And so, because she has rejected God's ways, God has also rejected her (v. 22).

- This verse shows that it is possible for infiltrators or "enemy agents" to creep into the church. The next verse shows that God *will* eventually judge those who do so.
- This "Jezebel" is as stubborn, in her refusal to repent, as were the religious leaders of Jesus' day - Matthew 23:37.

## Verse 22

Three groups - or individuals - are involved in this judgment: (1) "Jezebel" (who is encouraging the sin), (2) her "partners" (who are tolerating it), and (3) her "children" (who have adopted it as their way of life). Just as with the Jezebel of the Old Testament, all three groups will face judgment, if they do not repent. In fact, some who have adopted her ways are in danger of *never* having the opportunity to repent - see v. 23. (This shows how serious the sin actually is - though it may *appear* to be relatively harmless, so some.)

What if some of the people refuse to repent? They may have, at one time, looked like disciples of Jesus. But as the apostle John reminds us, their departure from the truth proves that they were never *genuine* disciples (1 John 2:19).

### SO I WILL CAST HER ON A BED [OF SUFFERING]

(A focus on her impending judgment.) Does she and her "participants" like to sin on a "bed" (sexual immorality)? Then God will give them a "bed" - not a "bed" of pleasure, but of pain. He will "throw her down" onto this "bed," along with those who are sharing in her sins, and together they will suffer.

### I WILL BRING INTENSE SUFFERING ON THOSE WHO COMMIT ADULTERY WITH HER

Those who have joined her in this "sin-bed" will share in her "judgment-bed," if they don't repent. This applies to those who are tolerating (or closing their eyes to) her sin. (They "join" her in this sin by closing their eyes to it.)

Adultery focuses on the sexual sin of one spouse against another. This is the only place in the book of Revelation, where the word "adultery" occurs. It focuses specifically on the conduct of the participants.

- *Genuine* disciples of Jesus - as a group - are described as the "bride" of Christ - Revelation 19:7; 21:9. See also: 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33.

Elsewhere in the book of Revelation, the word "fornication" - normally referring to sexual immorality outside of marriage - is used. Note that this is the word that was used to describe "Jezebel's" conduct - v. 21. (The word "fornication" is also related to the concept of prostitution - which is mentioned several times in Revelation 17.)

- This "Jezebel" is not "married" to Christ, but those who are guilty of participating with her in this sin *are* - at least they claim to be. (Their repentance, or lack of repentance, will prove whether they belong to Christ, or not.)
- Verse 20 uses the word "fornication" as a general description of the *conduct*, and would be applicable to *all* involved, not just the servants (who are directly mentioned here).

There is a strong similarity between sexual immorality and idolatry. Both involve the violation of a relationship of *union* - whether that relationship involves a spouse or God. Both involve the expression (or violation) of trust, faithfulness, purity, loyalty, etc.

- In the Old Testament, tolerance or acceptance of false gods was likened to sexual immorality. (Examples: Judges 2:17; 1 Chronicles 5:25) In the New Testament, acceptance of the world's ways is likened to adultery. (Example: James 4:4; see also 2 Corinthians 11:2.) Throughout Scripture, physical adultery (or fornication) is often connected with spiritual adultery (or fornication).
- Here at Thyatira, their "adultery" is more than physical adultery. They are violating their covenant relationship with God, who demands purity of heart and mind, not just outward piety and good deeds.

"Intense suffering" = "great tribulation." This is a judgment for their sin.

- This phrase also occurs in 7:14, where the focus is different, being a reference to the intense trials and afflictions that some of God's people will experience as *persecution* (not as judgment from God). In 7:14, God's people are victorious in their struggle against those trials.
- Statements such as this help make a distinction between genuine disciples who are sinning (and who need to repent) and the fakes. The genuine Christians will eventually repent (or experience a discipline that could include physical death); the others won't repent, *whether or not their judgment results in death*.
- Here in verse 22, those who refuse to repent will *never* recover, but (assuming that they are genuine servants) will experience some form of ongoing judgment. [The exact details of this judgment are not mentioned. Perhaps this is because, as a principle that is applicable to people in other contexts, the specific type of judgement may vary from situation to situation.]

## UNLESS THEY REPENT OF HER WAYS [= her deeds]

This is the only way that her participants can escape judgment. They must turn against her ways, both in attitude and actions. They must reject her ways, rather than tolerating them. (As already mentioned in v. 21, "Jezebel" has rejected repentance... so she *can't* escape judgment.)

Some N.T. manuscripts say "unless they repent of *their* ways," perhaps focusing more on their attitude of toleration, rather than on their participation in this sin. (The overall message is the same.)

### A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT DISCIPLINE:

- There are some sins which are so intolerable to God, that he will discipline those who claim to belong to him, even to the point of death, if necessary. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32 illustrates this.) More often, God will discipline the person in a way that does *not* result in such severe consequences.
- Our attitude toward God's discipline should be one of gratefulness, and should result in our repentance. When God disciplines us, it proves that we are his children (Hebrews 12:5-11)! [Of course, if we are his children, we will respond like his children: sooner or later, we will start to pay attention to what our "daddy" is teaching us. A person who continues to stubbornly reject discipline is probably *not* one of God's children - with the possible exception of those who are disciplined to the point of death.]
- God's discipline of his children is *not* the same as his judgment against unrepentant "Jezebels." [How do we know whether it is *discipline* or *judgment*? Our response to it is a good indicator. If we are willing to repent (and learn), so that we can share in God's holiness - Hebrews 12:10b - then we know we are responding as his children. If we stubbornly refuse to repent, then we are acting more like "Jezebel."]
- There are different types of discipline - not just punishment, but also training and instruction. (Here, there is a greater emphasis on the punishment aspect of it.)

## Verse 23

### I WILL STRIKE (KILL) HER CHILDREN DEAD

Those who have adopted her ways will be "killed with death" - a very strong emphasis on the severity of their judgment. It will be an act of God - a judgment that *he* will accomplish.

- These people are different from those already mentioned, who haven't *adopted* her ways, but simply *ignore* them (when they should be opposing them, instead).
- Rather than being "born" into life, in Christ's family, these people will enter a "deader" state of death.

"Children of Jezebel" vs. "children of God" - The apostle John frequently describes God's people as "children of God" - see 1 John 3:1-2, as an example. To *not* be a child of God is to be a child of the devil - 1 John 3:10. Here, in 2:23, those who follow God's ways (those who do his "deeds") are God's children; those who follow Jezebel's ways (deeds) are Jezebel's children. (Of course, they are *also* the devil's children, in the sense of 1 John 3:10.)

This judgment parallels the judgment experienced by the Old Testament Jezebel's children. They also died as the result of judgment against their sins, because they followed in Jezebel's evil ways.

- Ahaziah, king of Israel (son of Jezebel, successor to Ahab) - died from injuries after he fell through the lattice of his upper room. God would not heal him, because he chose to follow Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron - 2 Kings 1. (He followed after his parent's evil ways - 1 Kings 22:52-53.)
- Joram, king of Israel (successor to Ahaziah, his brother) - killed by Jehu - 2 Kings 9:21-26. (He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but was not quite as bad as his parents - 2 Kings 3:2-3.)
- Jehoram, king of Judah (married Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel) - stricken with sickness and died a painful death - 2 Chronicles 21:18-20. (He was evil, just as his wife's family was - 2 Kings 8:16-18.)
- Ahaziah, king of Judah (son of Jehoram and Athaliah) - killed by Jehu's soldiers - 2 Kings 9:27-28. (He was evil, just like his mother's family - 2 Kings 8:26-27.)
- Athaliah, queen of Judah (daughter of Jezebel) - killed when Joash, the rightful heir to the throne, began to reign (2 Kings 11). (She was an evil person, who attempted to murder all the rightful heirs to the throne - 2 Kings 11:1.)
- [Also, Ahab, Jezebel, 70 other sons of Ahab were killed (1 Kings 22:34-38; 2 Kings 9:30-37; 2 Kings 10:1-10).]

Because this "Jezebel" was being tolerated (rather than judged), horrible consequences were about to occur. ***We should never forget that sin has consequences!*** Those who accept "Jezebel's" ways (her "children") may never even reach the point that they comprehend what *genuine* Christianity is all about... so for them, the concept of "repentance" may remain meaningless. (Note that repentance is not mentioned in this verse.)

- It is a horrible thing to live a lifetime in the church, and to never realize what repentance is all about. But this becomes a real possibility, when sin is tolerated by those who *do* know the truth.
- Those who die in this condition will be judged for their own sins, based on whatever truth they *did* know. (Compare to Romans 2:12, 14-15, which shows that even those with *no* exposure to God's Word will be judged - but based only on what they already know in their consciences.)
- Scripture warns us that horrible things such as this will happen... but *woe to the person who causes them to happen*. Their judgment will be far worse. (Compare to James 3:1; Matthew 23; Luke 17:1; etc.) If they repent, Jesus will take their punishment upon himself, but their actions will still influence what happens to them in eternity - the types of rewards they get (not just "crowns," but probably gifts, skills and abilities).

#### ALL THE CHURCHES WILL KNOW

God will use this judgment as a warning to *others*.

- In keeping with Romans 8:28, this judgment will accomplish good in the lives of those who love God - not just at Thyatira, but elsewhere, as well.

It will be obvious to others! They will take note of this judgment and will know that *God* is involved in it.

#### I AM THE ONE WHO SEARCHES MINDS AND HEARTS

This is very emphatic: It is Jesus, not someone else, who is examining us. If we compare this to Jesus' description of himself (2:18), we could say that Jesus has "penetrating eyes." He searches our innermost beings, our desires and thoughts.

- Compare this with the effects of God's Word (the Bible) - Hebrews 4:12-13.

#### I WILL GIVE (reward) EACH OF YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR DEEDS

This applies to each of us, not just to the people in Thyatira. Those who have changed hearts will have deeds that honor God; they will do God's will, as "overcomers" - v. 26. The others, with unchanged hearts, will have the deeds of the devil. (Compare to John 8:41, 44. See also 1 John 3:7-10.)

This promise can be a warning or an encouragement, depending on what one's deeds are. We must not forget that *none* will be able to escape this "day of payment."

- This "payment" will be based on our deeds, *the way Jesus sees them*. (All prehension will vanish away.)

#### Concerning our works and our future judgment:

- Salvation is a "gift," not a "wage" or "payment" for what we have done - Romans 6:23. However, our salvation (or lack of it) will influence our conduct. This is why Jesus tells us, "by their fruits you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:16-20) [Sometimes a person may be more easily recognized for what he is, than at other times, depending on the extent that his "fruit" is visible.]
- People will choose to act in a way that is compatible with their nature. And so, though salvation comes by trusting in what *Jesus* did, Scripture also says that our judgment will be based on what we do - our works (Romans 2:6-11).
- Revelation 20:11-15 mentions both the Book of Life (which lists those who are saved), as well as books which record the things we have done in this present life. Each will have a specific role in determining what type of existence we will have in eternity.

The book of Jude mentions a different situation in which people secretly crept into the church, in order to destroy it. (They, of course, would claim that they had *other* intentions.) Jude reminds us that God will eventually judge and destroy such people. The last verses of Jude show us how we should respond in such situations, and focuses our trust on God, the one who can (and will) protect his people.

## Verse 24

### TO THE REST OF YOU IN THYATIRA... WHO DO NOT HAVE (HOLD TO) THIS TEACHING/DOCTRINE

This encouragement is for those not involved in the judgment of v. 22-23. These people do not hold on to Jezebel's teachings, in any way (whether by accepting it, or by tolerating it).

### YOU WHO HAVE NOT LEARNED SATAN'S "DEEP SECRETS"

To know by experience. (Remember that learning and lifestyle are connected.)

There are two groups in this church: The one group has been influenced by "Jezebel" and knows (or at least tolerates) Satan's "deep things." The other group has been taught by the Spirit and knows the "deep things" of God (1 Corinthians 2:10).

- False teachers often claim to have "knowledge" that others in the church lack - perhaps even calling it a "deeper knowledge." (Few would admit that their "knowledge" comes from Satan!)
- This is an instance in which ignorance is a good thing! We must strive to know the ways of *God*, rather than the ways of the *devil*.

### I WILL NOT PLACE (impose/put) ANY OTHER BURDEN ON YOU

They only need to continue in what they have already been doing (v. 25) - and those things are not necessarily a burden.

A burden: something that is heavy, that weighs us down. The context will show whether it is good or bad to have this burden. Some other verses that focus on this concept:

- The trials of life may be a "burden" to us, but they are nothing, compared to the "weight" of glory that we look forward to - 2 Corinthians 4:17. (The word "weight" is the same word, in the original N.T. language. But in this verse, it sure has a different connotation!)
- Everyone has burdens in his life. Paul tells us that we should help carry each other's burdens - Galatians 6:2.
- In Jesus' day, the religious leaders "burdened" the people with their man-made teachings - Matthew 23:4 ("heavy" loads placed upon people).
- In contrast, *God's* commands are not burdensome - 1 John 5:3; Matthew 11:28-30. (Of course, people who do not know God might *call* them a burden.)
- Many religious leaders also tried to burden the non-Jews with Jewish rituals, when the non-Jews became Christians. However, in Acts 15:28-29, the only "burdens" God gave to the Gentiles (non-Jews) were the avoidance of: immorality, idolatry, and certain practices related to the eating of strangled animals and blood (perhaps associated with certain idolatrous practices).
- In another sense, we should consider things such as justice, mercy and faithfulness as being "heavier" (= "more important") than things such as ceremonial regulations - Matthew 23:23.

## Verse 25

### HOLD TIGHTLY TO WHAT YOU HAVE

Their only requirement: Hold on to all the good things they have. Considering the focus of the previous verse ("Jezebel's" teachings), Jesus may be emphasizing the teachings they have received from the apostles, which they were to cling tenaciously to. However, we cannot totally remove their actions (praised in v. 19) from this exhortation, since there is such a strong connection between what a person truly *believes* and what he *does*. [Today, many "fakes" try to separate the two, but Jesus never does.]

- This would include a willingness to oppose sin that tried to creep into their midst. Since this was something they were already doing, a failure to continue doing so would be the same as letting go. It would have placed them under the same judgment as what Jesus had just pronounced upon the others.
- This same basic encouragement is given to the faithful at Philadelphia (3:11).
- We must remember that the principles stated in these seven letters have application to *all of us*. *We also* are told to hold on to what God has given us, and to not let go of it - either directly (through our own sins) or indirectly (by tolerating or ignoring the influence of other people's sins).

This word "hold" is *not* the same as the word "have/hold" in verse 24. Here the word is also used in the sense of "to seize" something - *to grab hold of it and not let go*. (Example: The guards "seized" Jesus, when they captured him in the garden - Matthew 26:50.)

- We are to "hold fast" to the teachings we received from the apostles - 2 Thessalonians 2:15.
- We are to "hold fast" to the truths we claim to possess - our "confession" - Hebrews 4:14.
- Other places this word is used in the book of Revelation: 2:1, 13-15; 3:11; 7:1; 20:2.

#### UNTIL I COME

In this passage, Jesus' reference to his coming is an *encouragement* - to those who had remained faithful to him and were ready for his return. Jesus had already said that he would reward each person according to his deeds (v. 23).

- In contrast, the reference to Jesus' coming, in Revelation 3:3, is a *warning*, because, at Sardis, their deeds were *not* good.

There may be an initial reference in this verse, to Jesus' coming to judge "Jezebel." But as a principle, it would serve as an illustration of a judgment that is yet to come - the Great Day of Judgment, at Jesus' future coming. All of God's people are told to hold on to what they have received from God, until Jesus returns. [See also the phrase, "to the end," in v. 26.]

#### Verse 26

##### TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES

This promise applies to *us*. It applies to *all* who are willing to face the sins that may be present in the church (rather than closing their eyes to them), and are willing to deal with them properly.

- People who are willing to do this are merely acknowledging what Jesus *already* sees... and they are dealing with the sin in the manner that Jesus *requires*. They are not being "judgmental" (as those participating in the sin might claim), but are simply being obedient.
- Of course, we must first deal with our own sins - Matthew 7:5. Otherwise, we *also* deserve God's judgment - 1 Corinthians 11:31.

##### AND WHO DOES MY DEEDS (= who obeys Jesus) TO THE END

Whoever does Jesus' "deeds" (the things that he "wills") and doesn't quit doing them. Basically, they were to do what he encouraged them to do, in verse 25. And so are we. [This same word ("deeds") is mentioned several times previously - see the comments at verse 19.]

"Whoever does" = Whoever "keeps" or "watches over" his deeds (like a guard).

- The Christians at Philadelphia were praised for "keeping" Jesus' *word* (his teaching). Here at Thyatira, the focus is on Jesus' *deeds*.
- Jesus' deeds were to be seen in their lives. This means they were to live as *he* would, morally and upright, with a love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40) that was visible in their lives.

One important factor: There is an aspect of "keeping" Jesus' deeds that goes beyond the *individual*. We must be willing to "keep" his deeds *as a group*. To ignore what everyone else is doing, and to focus on just our own actions, would make us guilty of the very sins that some in this church were guilty of! As a group of people who claim to be Jesus' followers, we need to be "guards," making sure that the "deeds of the devil" are not in our midst.

"To the end": Until death, or until Jesus comes back - whichever happens first. This requires an ongoing need for faithfulness - something which people guilty of spiritual adultery (v. 22) do not have.

- Consider Matthew 24:13 - It is the one who endures or stands firm "to the end" who is saved. This is because genuine children of God *will* stand firm. The devil will *not* successfully deceive them - compare to Matthew 24:22, 24.
- Hebrews 6:12 - It is through faith and *patience* that we inherit what God has promised for us. We keep on trusting and obeying, rather than becoming spiritually lazy. Though we may struggle with old habits, we don't surrender to them. For we have a new nature - one that will never be satisfied until we are with our Savior.

## I WILL GIVE HIM POWER/AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS

Jesus is the ultimate ruler, but we will rule (and judge) with him.

- We will also have authority over angels - 1 Corinthians 6:3a.

### Verse 27

This verse contains a quote from Psalm 2:9. "The Son (of God)," in Psalm 2:7, connects with Jesus' description of himself, in Revelation 2:18. According to this psalm, Jesus (the "Son") will rule with justice. The rebellious people (mentioned in this psalm and in Revelation 2:27) will be crushed like pottery. The only proper response, if we want to be wise, is to submit to Jesus' authority (Psalm 2:10-12).

### RULE WITH A ROD OF IRON

"Rule" = "to be a shepherd" over them, to take care of them, as a guardian.

- Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron - Revelation 12:5; 19:15; we will rule with him - Revelation 2:27.
- Even now, leaders in the church are to be like shepherds, as they lead (take care of) Jesus' "sheep" (the church). See John 21:16 (an example of Peter being told to do this) and Acts 20:28. They are to do so willingly (not as though forced) and with the right motives - 1 Peter 5:2. They are *not* to "lord over" the flock - 1 Peter 5:3.
- In contrast, fake leaders only "shepherd" (care for) themselves - Jude 1:12.

"Rod (of iron)" = a "staff" or "scepter."

- Jesus' scepter is one of righteousness - Hebrews 1:8. Those who are righteous will have nothing to fear. But his scepter can (and *will*) destroy those who are his enemies.
- "Iron" - it will be strong and invincible. (This does *not* mean that it will be cruel or tyrannical, rather, it will be the expression of righteous justice.)

### [Being] BROKEN TO PIECES (LIKE POTTERY)

Crushed, battered, broken to pieces. This focuses on the fate of his enemies.

- Romans 16:20 is another passage in which this word is used in connection with power and judgment against an enemy. Paul refers to Satan as being "crushed" under the people's feet. (Note that Jesus mentions his own feet in connection with judgment, in verse 18.)

### JUST AS I RECEIVED AUTHORITY FROM MY FATHER

Jesus' authority to rule is from the Father. (Note the connection back to verse 18, where Jesus is described as the Son of God.) In the same way, our authority to rule will be from Jesus.

We must remember that this authority belongs only to those who are the "overcomers," - those who pay attention to the warnings and encouragements found in the previous verses. This means that *we have an obligation to exercise Jesus' authority even now* - and failure to do so will result in the type of judgment seen in verses 22-23.

- We must be willing to oppose (rather than tolerate) sin that is in our midst. (Also, compare to 1 Corinthians 6:3b-4.)
- Note, however, that we must exercise this authority within the context of whatever authority we *rightfully* have. It is not our duty to try to exercise authority over people we have no authority over! (Example: The church, as a group, must judge *itself*, rather than those focusing on those who are *not* a part of it - 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.)

### Verse 28

#### I WILL GIVE HIM THE MORNING STAR

In nature, the term "morning star" refers to Venus, which under the right circumstances, can be very bright, just before daybreak. (At other times of the year, it can look like an "evening star.") Here, this term is used to symbolize one of the blessings that belongs to the "overcomer."

A suggested explanation of this blessing is found in Revelation 22:16, where Jesus says that *he* is "the bright morning star." If this is the meaning of "morning star" in 2:28, then we are being told that Jesus gives *himself* to the "overcomers."

- The word "star" (v. 28) and the word "scepter" (v. 27) are both used in Numbers 24:17, in reference a future ruler who would come from Jacob/Israel (a reference to Jesus). (Ironically, this verse was spoken by Balaam, a false prophet, after God overruled Balaam's desires to curse Israel, and told him specifically what to say!)

Some additional comments related to stars and light:

- Throughout these verses, the leaders or representatives of the churches ("angels" or "messengers") are described as "stars" (see 1:20). As in nature, the "morning star" (Jesus) is brighter and greater than all the rest of the stars (representatives of the church).
- God's people are the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16). They follow the example of their Savior, who is also called the "light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).
- The term "morning star" is also found in 2 Peter 1:19. In that verse, it seems to be related to the coming of salvation/redemption - the final realization of everything that is a part of it. For us, the future day of judgment will bring us bright daylight, rather than "utter darkness." Even now, the light of this hope "shines" brightly in our hearts.

### Verse 29

HE WHO HAS AN EAR...

This promise applies to *everyone* who is willing to pay attention to it (to accept it and live up to its requirements).

## Revelation 3:1-6 To the Church at Sardis

<p>[1] "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sardis</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He holds the source of their power ("seven spirits").</li> <li>• He holds and protects those who represent the church ("stars").</li> </ul>	<p><u>Seven Spirits</u> - Probably a reference to the Holy Spirit, who manifests himself in many ways among his people.</p> <p><u>Stars</u> - A reference to one (or both) of the following: 1) heavenly representatives of the church, or 2) leaders within the church (those whom <i>God</i> would consider to be leaders, not necessarily the "official" leadership.</p>
	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b> - [none]</p>	<p>The world looks at what it can see (their deeds), and reaches a false conclusion about their hearts.</p>
<p>I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reputation: Alive.</li> <li>• The reality: Dead.</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus looks at their hearts and clearly sees its condition. He sees their deeds for what they really are - the expressions of deadness. (See verse 2.)</p>
<p>[2] Wake up!</p> <p>Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.</p> <p>[3] Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <p><b><i>The Obligation:</i></b> They must wake up (from their "sleep of death")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because their deeds (which Jesus knows all about - v.1) are "not complete."</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remember what they have forgotten: The message they had been given.</li> <li>-Accept it into their lives: Let the Word influence (change) their attitude and actions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Jesus doesn't tell them that it is already too late for them. He still offers them hope, until the very last flicker of potential life is gone.</p> <p>Because they are spiritually dead, their deeds are <i>not</i> an expression of life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To the world (which is spiritually dead), their works look as though they are filled with life.</li> <li>• To Jesus, the source of <i>genuine</i> life, their works have something missing.</li> </ul> <p>This church once had the truth... but they have forgotten it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their <i>past</i> knowledge will have no value for their <i>present</i> situation, unless they turn back to it.</li> </ul>

<p>But if you do not wake up,</p> <p>I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.</p> <p>[4] Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.</p> <p>They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b> (continued)</p> <p><b>The Consequences:</b></p> <p>For those who stay asleep:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus will come.</li> <li>• They won't be ready, and they will suffer loss.</li> </ul> <p>For those who <i>are</i> awake:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These people have not polluted themselves with "incomplete" deeds.</li> <li>• They will have fellowship with Jesus; they will be associated with him.</li> </ul>	<p>The recurring theme of Revelation (as seen in 1:1-3) is that we must be alert and ready for Jesus' coming, not in a "sleep of death."</p> <p>These "few people" (v. 4) belong to God. They are described as wearing clean white clothes, rather than the polluted clothes that the others have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The white symbolizes purity and righteousness, and by implication, the true nature of their deeds.</li> </ul> <p>Note the verb tenses. Their willingness to live "worthy" lives <i>now</i> is the reason they will be able to walk with Jesus <i>in the future</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In contrast, the others will suffer loss (v. 3); instead of being able to "walk with Jesus" (v. 4).</li> </ul>
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### Comments about our "walk":

The word "walk" is often used figuratively, in reference to lifestyle, or the way we are to live. Many passages in Scripture instruct us on how to "walk" (or "live") in this present life. A few examples:

- We are to "walk" worthy of our "calling" to salvation (Ephesians 4:1+) and in a manner that pleases God (1 Thessalonians 4:1), following Jesus' own example (1 John 2:6).
- We are to "walk" in love (Ephesians 5:2) and good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Those who are willing to "walk" in this manner *now* will get to walk with Jesus *in eternity*.

<p>[5] He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.</p> <p>I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.</p> <p>[6] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <p>These blessings will be shared by <i>all</i> "overcomers" - all who follow the example of the "worthy ones" at Sardis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They will be dressed in white (and by implication, able to walk with Jesus).</li> <li>• They will have an assurance that the others don't have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They <i>will not</i> lose their citizenship in God's kingdom - as determined by the Book of Life.</li> <li>- Jesus <i>will</i> acknowledge that they belong to him.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>This promise applies to all who are willing to pay attention to the Spirit, and do what he says.</p>	<p>These people have <i>white</i> clothes because they have been washed in something <i>red</i> - the blood of the Lamb! (See 7:14.)</p> <p>About those who are <i>not</i> "overcomers":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are <i>not</i> citizens in God's kingdom (their names are <i>not</i> listed in the Book of Life).</li> <li>• They will not be acknowledged as belonging to Jesus (since they <i>don't</i> belong to him).</li> </ul> <p>In this present life, these people are willing to admit (acknowledge) that Jesus is theirs - Matthew 10:32.</p> <p>In the future, Jesus will be willing to admit (acknowledge) that they are his.</p>
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# Revelation 3:1-6 Supplementary Study Information

## Background about Sardis

A city that had a good reputation, but which was evil to the core.

It was a wealthy city, because it was located on a commercial trade route; but it was saturated with pagan worship and immoral idolatry. The city was well situated for military defense, but twice it was caught off-guard and fell because of overconfidence and carelessness. Like the city, the church at Sardis was in danger of being caught off-guard.

## Verse 1

HIM WHO HAS (= holds)

- When writing to the church at Ephesians, Jesus mentions the stars (leaders or representatives) and the lamp stands (people) - verse 2:1. He *holds* the leaders and *walks* among the people.
- Here, at Sardis, Jesus mentions the seven Spirits and the stars - both of which he is *holding*. He mentions *walking* with the people in verse 4, but it is in reference to only a minority of those who are in the church.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD

Probably a reference to the Holy Spirit. These letters mention *seven* different ways that the Spirit manifests himself, enabling God's people to "overcome" the trials and temptations they may face. To him (Jesus) belongs the Spirit, in all its perfection.

AND THE SEVEN STARS

Represents the leaders or representatives. In chapter 1, we are told that the "stars" represent the leadership or heavenly representatives. The word "angel" is used - a word that literally means "messenger." It could refer to either a human leader (as a messenger from God) or a heavenly messenger (commonly called an "angel").

- The Spirit speaks to the churches and instructs them in how to "overcome." He does so through these "messengers."
- Note that God's human "messengers" are not always the "official" leadership of the church. The true leaders, in *God's* eyes, are not always the leaders chosen by the *people*. Throughout history, when the "official" leadership was "dead" - in the sense mentioned in this verse - God has raised up others who were willing to speak the truth.

I KNOW YOUR DEEDS

He sees their deeds for what they are. They have an *appearance* of godliness, but they are dead to the core.

- Contrast this to the deeds of the Christians at Thyatira, who were praised for their deeds, and were encouraged to continue in them.
- The people at Sardis were like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who looked good on the outside, but were dead on the inside - Matthew 23:27-28.

YOU HAVE A NAME ("REPUTATION")

- Jesus sees their heart and describes it as it is: dead. Their reputation (literally, "name") does not match reality.
- The world, which itself is spiritually dead, wrongly interprets this deadness as "life." They do not know how to recognize a genuine expression of life.

## About "Names"

Names were intended to represent the person/people. It was to symbolize who they were; it was to be a description of their character - hence their "reputation." (When applicable, it would also represent their authority, such as, "in the name of Jesus.")

- In this case, their name did not match their character, but was the total opposite of their actual condition.

The concept of "name" is found quite frequently in these letters to the seven churches. Verse 4 mentions that there were a few people (or "names") in the church, who were worthy of praise. (The word "name" occurs in v. 4, but since that word is not normally used this way in the English language, many translations use the word "people," instead.)

#### OF BEING ALIVE, BUT YOU ARE DEAD

In the New Testament, there are a few different words that are translated as "life." Here, the focus is *not* on their biological life, but on the moral and spiritual aspects of their lives - on life in its completeness (as God defines it).

God sees the heart. He is not deceived by a false "image." The world may look at the people in this church as a source of life... but God knows them as an expression of death.

- The world may consider this church to be a very living, outgoing church... But God sees the truth... and it is the *opposite* of the world's view. These people may look alive on the outside, but on the inside, they were dead.
- For some of these people, their condition might not have been hopeless, *yet*. But if they failed to heed Jesus' warning, it would soon become hopeless. (For others, it may have been already too late - suggested by the phrase "strengthen what remains," in verse 3.)

Both of these words, "alive" and "dead," have a focus on their spiritual (not physical) condition.

- Jesus was dead, physically, but his death also had a spiritual dimension, for he received upon himself the penalty that *we* deserve. He is now alive, in the fullest sense of the word, so that we who were dead (spiritually) could also become alive - both spiritually and (after the resurrection) physically. Revelation 1:18; 2:8.
- Here at Sardis, most of the people were *still* dead.

#### Verse 2

##### WAKE UP!

They were to be awake and alert, in contrast to what they were: in the "sleep of death." [Interestingly, the word translated "wake up" is related to the word related to the word "rise up" - which is used in some verses to describe what will happen at the resurrection.]

##### STRENGTHEN WHAT LITTLE REMAINS AND IS ABOUT TO DIE

Strengthen whatever is left, that hasn't yet died.

- Jesus offers them hope, but it is also a warning that it is *almost* too late..
- For some, it may be too late, but if so, it will be due to their unwillingness to pay attention to Jesus' command to "wake up."

##### I HAVE NOT FOUND YOUR DEEDS COMPLETE IN THE SIGHT OF MY GOD

- The church at Thyatira was praised for their deeds, but condemned for their toleration of false teaching - which could result in people in their midst, who did not know the truth of the gospel ("good news" about salvation).
- At Sardis, the truth was no longer being obeyed (verse 3) and their works - though generating a lot of praise from others - had become a meaningless pretension, of no value in God's sight.

"In God's eyes" - God sees things accurately.

- Hebrews 4:13 - God sees the "naked truth" about everything.

They are just doing a lot of actions, but their actions are *not* an expression of life.

- Hebrews 6:1 and 9:14 - both mention the need to turn away from "dead works."

### Verse 3

#### REMEMBER WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND HEARD

This is just the first step. An awareness of the truth is not enough... but it is a necessary beginning!

- These things must be our *focus*, not must some "dry facts" hidden somewhere in the back in our minds. (Note: Our response to these facts will influence whether we view them as "the very words of life," or as "dry facts.")

#### OBEY IT AND REPENT

- They need to "build" their works on the foundation of God's Word, for this is the only way that their deeds can become "complete" in God's sight.
- Note that God's Word is of no value to us, until we are willing to obey it and change our ways. If we *do* change our ways, then the nature of our deeds will also change. (They will become "complete.")

#### IF YOU DO NOT WAKE UP

What about those who *don't* wake up and repent? In reality, they are not genuine followers of Jesus. Instead, they are mere "religious church goers."

- People tend to overlook the *fact* that one's lifestyle will reflect his heart. They tend to forget *God's* part in salvation... which *guarantees* that "changed" people will begin to act "changed"!
- People also tend to overlook the fact that "religious activities" is not the "fruit of salvation" that God requires. It's *easy* for a "dead" person to do "dead" works of a "religious" nature. But it takes the Spirit of God to enable a person to love God with all his heart/soul/strength/mind and to love his neighbor as himself (Matthew 22:37-40).

#### I WILL COME LIKE A THIEF

He will come in judgment (in *contrast* to what will happen to those mentioned in verse 4).

- Just like the city was caught unprepared when it was attacked, so will these unrepentant "church-goers" be caught unprepared when Jesus comes to judge them.
- There is a *final* judgment that we shall all face. However, there are also other forms of judgment that Jesus does (or has done) to deal with sin within the church. Even the trials of life can be used as a form of judgment - and those who are unprepared will not have Jesus to get them through the trials victoriously.

#### YOU WILL NOT KNOW AT WHAT HOUR I WILL COME TO YOU

We must be in a *constant* state of preparedness - alert and ready for Jesus' coming. This is an *ongoing* attitude. Those who are not ready (who have chosen the "sleep of death") will experience horrible consequences.

- The issue is our *attitude*, not the timing of his return. It doesn't matter whether or not he returns during *our* lifetime; we must still be ready.
- The person who has life in Christ (described in verse 4) will heed his warning, and will be ready; the person who is permanently dead (verse 1, if they don't repent) won't.

### Verse 4

#### YOU HAVE A FEW PEOPLE IN SARDIS WHO HAVE NOT SOILED THEIR CLOTHES

Most of the people in this church are described as wearing seriously polluted clothes. (See the comments about WHITE clothes, below.)

The clothes represent the people's condition.

- At Sardis, the people have a reputation; we could say that the world sees them as wearing clothes (rather than being naked). However, this is not enough; we need the *right* kind of "clothes," namely *white*. At Sardis, God sees that their clothes are *polluted*. Their deeds are incomplete: they lack the life of Christ.
- In contrast, at Laodicea, the people have convinced *themselves* that everything was fine with them. Yet others (including Jesus) saw them as *without clothes*. (They have fooled only themselves.) Jesus describes himself as standing *outside* of their group, waiting for them to invite him in!

- In *both* instances, the righteous, those who are the "overcomers" are described as wearing white clothes. Not only do they have clothes *on* (in contrast to those at Laodicea), but their clothes are clean, pure and *white* (in contrast to those at Sardis).

The "solution" to the problem - for both Sardis and Laodicea:

- "Pollution" at Sardis - they need to wash their "clothes," if they want to have a part in the eternal kingdom - Revelation 22:14.
- "Nakedness" at Laodicea - they need to wear their "clothes" or they will be unprepared for the judgment - Revelation 16:15. (Note the phrase, "I will come like a thief," which is mentioned both in 3:3 and in 16:15.)

### THEY WILL WALK WITH ME

They are walking with Christ *now*, so they will have the opportunity to walk with Christ *then*.

- Genuine salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9) will result in a genuine change in conduct (Ephesians 2:10), because God is involved in *both*. That is why they will be able to walk with Christ.
- You can't walk with Christ when you are going in the opposite direction! If you aren't willing to walk *with* him now, you won't have an opportunity to change your direction, at the Day of Justice. You will be told that you had your chance... and that you threw it away.

### DRESSED IN WHITE

In the book of Revelation, *white* is often used to describe the clothes of the righteous. (Other terms, such as "bright" and "clean" are also used.) Throughout this book, white represents righteousness and purity.

- Some of the other passages which mention *white* clothes (or in a couple instances, *clean linen* clothes) include: Revelation 3:18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8, 19:14.

### THEY ARE WORTHY

Jesus looks at their willingness to remain pure (including a willingness to be awake and alert) and calls them worthy. They have chosen to follow his example.

- Interestingly, those who belong to God will claim that *Jesus* is worthy of all praise, honor and glory. They won't be looking at themselves and praising themselves.

## Verse 5

### HE WHO OVERCOMES

This promise applies *only* to those who are willing to be awake and alert.

### BE DRESSED IN WHITE - LIKE THEM

This indicates that this is a general promise that applies to *all* who are willing to be like the "faithful few" at Sardis. (See comments in v. 4, about white clothes.)

### I WILL NOT BLOT OUT HIS NAME FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE

This applies *only* to those who are dressed in white. It does say *or even imply* anything about those who are *not* dressed in white.

From *God's* perspective, the Book of Life is a list of those he has called to salvation. He knew (and chose) these people before the earth was even created (Ephesians 1:4). From *our* limited perspective, it might seem that a name is being added, each time a person claims to become a child of God. Furthermore, if we see someone abandon the faith (after they claimed to believe it), we would probably view it as a name being blotted out of the book. (God, on the other hand, knew their hearts and was never surprised at their departure.)

## I WILL ACKNOWLEDGE / CONFESS HIS NAME BEFORE MY FATHER / HIS ANGELS

When we see the word "confess" or "confession" in the Bible, we should remember that it simply refers to admitting or acknowledging something. It does *not* refer to a religious ritual that some groups practice. Often (as in this verse), it is a *public* acknowledgment.

Because genuine salvation involves a change in the *heart*, it will result in a change in *conduct*.

- When the devil was our "father" (compare to John 8:44), we used to follow his ways. (This would even include doing what the *world* would call "good" - like the church at Sardis did.)
- When we become saved, we have a *new* Father... and will want to be like him (rather than like our *old* "father"). We will begin to respond the way our new Father would respond... and the way we would *want* him to respond to us.
  - This is why Scripture can tell us that we must be willing to forgive the way we want forgiven. (Matthew 6:14-15). Forgiven people *will* learn to treat others the way they want their Father to treat them. (They have a changed heart that makes them receptive to doing so.) Unforgiven people will ignore this obligation.
  - The same thing applies to confessing or acknowledging God before people - Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9.

## Verse 6

### HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES

As with the promises given to the other churches, ...

- ... this promise applies *only* to those who are willing to pay attention to what God says.
- ... it applies to *anyone* who is willing to do so.

## Revelation 3:7-13

### To the Church at Philadelphia

<p>[7] To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philadelphia</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't. (This doesn't seem to be much of a problem for the church at Philadelphia.)]</p>
<p>These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.</p> <p>What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <p>Two character qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holy (set apart from all that is evil and impure)</li> <li>• True (real, genuine)</li> </ul> <p>He has all power and authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He has the "key" that makes it available.</li> <li>• What he does for his servants <i>cannot</i> be undone by his enemies.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Holy and True</u> Throughout this letter, these two character qualities are evident in the lives of the Christians at Philadelphia.</p> <p><u>Key of David</u> (An allusion to Isaiah 22:20-24) - Jesus, the "root and offspring of David" (Revelation 5:5; 22:16), has authority not just over the city of Jerusalem, but over all creation.</p>
<p>[8] I know your deeds.</p> <p>See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.</p> <p>I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.</p> <p>[9] I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars-- I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.</p> <p>[10] Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.</p>	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b></p> <p>A door of opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A door that could not be closed by their enemies.</li> <li>• It was opened, <i>not</i> because of their <i>strength</i>, but because of their <i>faithfulness</i> to Jesus and his Word.</li> </ul> <p>Victory over their enemies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These enemies claimed to be the true followers of God (though they actually <i>weren't</i>).</li> <li>• These enemies would have to admit that Jesus loved the church.</li> </ul> <p>Protection during "the hour of trial."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why? Because of their faithfulness (willingness to patiently endure).</li> <li>• Trials will come to the whole world, but they (the church) would be protected.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Open Door</u> An expression of Jesus' love for them - a love that even their enemies would have to acknowledge. (See verse 9.)</p> <p><u>Synagogue</u> - a place of worship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the days of the apostles, the Christians would have met in synagogues or in houses. To them, the word "church" referred to the <i>people</i>, not to a building or an institution.</li> <li>• These false "believers" (who were Jewish) would have claimed that they themselves were "God's people," and they would have expelled (from the synagogue) those who were <i>truly</i> faithful to God.</li> </ul> <p><u>Kept ... keep</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This word means: "to guard, pay attention to, watch over"</li> <li>• They "paid attention" to Jesus' word (v. 8) and his command (v. 10)... so Jesus will "pay attention" to them during their trials.</li> <li>• Perhaps a better translation: "I will keep you safe." The emphasis is on <i>protection</i>, not <i>escape</i>. (Even though escaping trials might sometimes be a part of the protection, it isn't always that way.)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>4. Their Weakness - [None]</b></p>	<p>Though the world views them as weak, their trust in God is their strength.</p>

<p>[11] I am coming soon.</p> <p>Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <p>Remember the facts (implied)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus <i>is</i> coming soon!</li> </ul> <p>Keep on being faithful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who do so will have a reward reserved for them.</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus is coming! Be prepared; be ready! This is a constant theme throughout the book of Revelation.</p> <p>"<u>Holding fast</u>" - an <i>ongoing</i> way of life. We cannot use our present strengths as an excuse for future laziness. We don't quit the "race" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8) until the "race" is over.</p>
<p>[12] Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it.</p> <p>I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.</p> <p>[13] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A permanent place in God's presence; they will never be forced to leave.</li> <li>• A permanent place (citizenship) in God's kingdom (city).</li> <li>• A special (new) relationship to Jesus - one that goes beyond what they already have.</li> </ul> <p>These blessings are for <i>all</i> who are willing to take heed to what the Spirit says in this letter to Jesus' people in Philadelphia.</p>	<p><u>Temple (etc.)</u> - They will have a permanent part in the <i>eternal</i> temple of God, where false believers will <i>never</i> be able to expel them!</p> <p><u>Name</u> - It <i>represents</i> the person who is named.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They will belong to God (with all the honor and privileges that belong to God's children).</li> <li>• They will be recognized as citizens of God's eternal city - with all the rights and privileges that belong to citizenship.</li> <li>• They will have a special relationship to Jesus and will belong to him.</li> </ul> <p>These things are promised to <i>all</i> who are willing to remain faithful to Jesus and true to his Word.</p>

### Additional Comments about Revelation 3:10

The word "trial" also means "test" or "temptation." Christians aren't told they will *never* have trials or periods of testing. Rather, they are promised the power and "open door" to get out of the trials (we would say "get *through* them") with Jesus' protection.

This verse is simply stating that God will guard and protect them. It doesn't say that they *won't* experience trials - otherwise they wouldn't have needed the patient endurance!

Historically, the church of Philadelphia *did* experience persecution. For some, it even meant death. But God gave them the strength they needed to come out of it victoriously.

- In John 17:15, Jesus prays that his followers would be "kept from" the evil one, yet he specifically states that he is *not* asking for them to be taken out of the world. His prayer is that the evil one will not gain the victory over them. (The phrase, "keep from" is identical to what is found in Revelation 3:10.)
- In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we are promised an "escape" or a "way out" from temptation. However, when we read the entire verse, we discover that this escape is *not* so that we *won't* have to experience temptations, but so that we will have the strength to "stand up" under them, or to "endure" them.

It is true that some trials aren't experienced by God's people, simply because they have chosen to follow God, rather than the world. On the other hand, there are times that their trials may be *greater*, because the world tends to hate the person who is loyal to Jesus (and who, therefore, hates what the world values).

As far as severe persecution is concerned, many Christians have suffered severe trials, down through the ages. The difference between the suffering at the "end times" and what Christians experience now *won't* be the painfulness of the suffering. It will be the worldwide extent of it.

## Rev. 3:7-13 Supplementary Study Information

### Some Background Comments about Philadelphia

Several times, this city was almost destroyed by earthquakes. Often, the buildings would be destroyed, and only the pillars would be left standing. This may be of significance, when Jesus describes the people of the church as "pillars" in God's temple - v. 12. Though they were weak and experienced many trials, they would never lose their place in God's presence.

### Verse 7

#### HOLY AND TRUE

In everything, the Christians at Philadelphia attempted to be like Jesus. They based their *lives* (as well as their doctrine) on Jesus' Word.

- "*Holy*" indicates being "set apart" *from* what is evil and *to* what is good and pure.
- "*True*" focuses on being real or genuine. There is a permanency to it; it stands opposed to what is fake (though the fake may temporarily look genuine). This concept is often associated with *faithfulness* (examples: 3:14; 19:11).

#### KEY OF DAVID

An allusion to Isaiah 22:20-24, where Eliakim (the palace administrator) was given power and authority over Jerusalem, comparable to what King David originally had.

### Verse 8

#### OPEN DOOR

This does *not* mean that trials will be absent. Persecution is often present when God opens "doors" for his people. (Compare to 1 Corinthians 16:9.) We are to remain faithful, holy and true, *regardless of* our circumstances.

- These Christians were probably experiencing trials at the time they received this letter. This is suggested by verse 9 (a reference to opponents of the truth) and verse 10 (a reference to patient endurance).

#### LITTLE STRENGTH

What makes them strong? *God's* strength!

- God's strength is best seen when we are weak. (See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)
- When we are willing to remain faithful to Jesus and true to his Word, our *little* strength, can be amplified by God's *great* strength.

## Verse 9

SYNAGOGUE - a place of worship.

(To the early Christians, the word "church" referred to the *people*, not to a building or an institution.)

There have always been people in places of worship, who were merely "religious." They would *claim* to be God's people - though they did not trust God *alone* for their salvation and righteousness (and perhaps saw no need to do so). Such people often oppose those who have a *genuine* relationship with God (and who exhibit the changes that accompany genuine salvation). They even expel them from the "church" (the building or synagogue). [An example of this is found in 3 John 1:9-10.]

- These false "believers" would have considered themselves loved by God, and the others cursed. Since, in this case, they were Jews, they may have even tried to link themselves to the promises and authority given to David - promises which Jesus alone can claim (see verse 7).
- In reality, these false "believers" would one day admit that *they* were the "fakes" or imposters. They were not genuine followers of God, but served Satan, instead. (For some, this admission might not occur until the Day of Justice.)

## Verse 10

### KEPT / KEEP

- The emphasis here is on Jesus' protection, not on an "escape" from trials. Sometimes, we *do* escape trials that the people of the world have to endure. But even if we experience them, they will not have the same effect on us (Jesus' disciples), as they have on the people of the world. (We, his disciples, have been given promises that the world knows nothing about.)

Some believe that God will remove his people from the world, before the final judgments at the end of this age. Though this verse does not deny the possibility, it does not affirm it, either. It is simply stating that God will guard or protect them.

- When trials come ...
  - Those who are faithful to Jesus will experience protection and victory.
  - The others (those *not* faithful to Jesus) won't.
- At the Day of Justice, those who do not belong to God will experience a "testing" that God's people will never have to experience.

Since this letter was written to *all* who are willing to "hear what the Spirit says," it has application that goes beyond just the Christians at Philadelphia. It has applied to Christians down through the centuries. It applies to us living today, and will apply to the faithful who will be alive during the trials that may come in the future.

### THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE EARTH

This may have a specific reference to the unsaved, as it does other places in the book of Revelation (such as in 6:10 and 13:8). If so, it would be implying a *contrast* with those who have made the "New Jerusalem" (v. 12; also Revelation 21) their home.

- Those who belong to God are *even now* citizens of a different kingdom. They are now "aliens" (1 Peter 2:11), temporarily living among the kingdoms of this sinful world!

## Verse 11

Jesus is coming! Be prepared! This is a constant theme throughout the book of Revelation.

- Trials may come... but Jesus will also come. This makes all our patient endurance (v. 10) worthwhile.
- *All* who are willing to be faithful and patient can look forward to his coming - 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 6:12; Revelation 21:7; etc.
- "Holding fast" is an *ongoing* way of life. We cannot use our present strengths as an excuse for future laziness. We don't quit the "race" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8) until the "race" is over.

There are many similarities between these Christians and those at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

- Both were insignificant, from the world's perspective, but great from God's perspective: 2:9 (poverty vs. rich); 3:8 (weak vs. strong in the Lord).
- Both experienced opposition from false "believers" - Jews who rejected Jesus: 2:9; 3:9 (implied by context).
- Both situations required patient endurance and faithfulness: 2:10 (they needed to patiently endure); 3:10 (they *were* patiently enduring).
- Both were promised crowns, if they would remain faithful and not deny Jesus: 2:10; 3:11.

## Verse 12

TEMPLE (etc.)

These specific Christians (which would have included both Jews and non-Jews) may have been expelled from the local synagogue by the false "believers" (a group of Jews who rejected Jesus). Jesus reminds them that they will have a part in the *eternal* temple of God, where they will *never* be expelled! They will be as permanent as the pillars themselves!

- We, too, are guaranteed a permanent place in God's presence, if we are willing to do what he told them to do - verse 11.
- God's people are sometimes symbolically described as a building or temple (Ephesians 2:20-22). So it is quite fitting for Jesus to compare them to a "pillar" in the temple. [Note that this use of the word "temple" may be symbolic, representing God's presence, rather than a specific building, since Revelation 21:22 says that there will be no temple in the "New Jerusalem."]

NAME

The "name" represents the person who is named.

- The "overcomer" will belong to God. God himself will claim him as his own - a child of royalty. As such, he will have all the honor and privileges that belong to God's children.
- The "overcomer" will be recognized as a citizen of God's city - with all the rights that belong to that citizenship. (The city mentioned here is the *eternal* Jerusalem, which will exist on the *new* earth - Revelation 21 and elsewhere.)
- The "overcomer" will have a special relationship to Jesus and will belong to him.

Jesus himself will have a new name, perhaps representing the honor and glory he will have, as all heaven and earth bows down before him and acknowledges him for who he is.

## "MY GOD"

Jesus interacts with us both as the Creator God and as the sinless man who took our place, to pay the penalty for our sins. Thus, he is able to be the mediator (the "go-between") between a holy, righteous God and a sinful humanity. This phrase "my God" is spoken from the perspective of Jesus as a man. It does *not* deny Jesus' nature as God - a fact frequently mentioned in the book of John, and elsewhere.

- Note that this phrase, "my God" is *definitely not* being used in the trivial, debased way that so many people use God's name, today.

## Verse 13

These promises apply to *all* of Jesus' followers (all who have "ears to hear" - verse 13), not just to those who initially received this letter. They have an identity and a significance that the others (the fakes) will never have.

## Revelation 3:14-22

### To The Church at Laodicea

<p>[14] To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:</p>	<p><b>1. The Church</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laodicea</li> </ul>	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.</p>	<p><b>2. About Christ</b></p> <p>He is, by nature, "Amen."</p> <p>He testifies to what is faithful, true and certain.</p> <p>He is the supreme ruler over all creation.</p>	<p><u>Amen</u> - "So be it," or "it is true." His nature is the very expression of truthfulness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He testifies in accordance with his "Amen" nature.</li> </ul> <p><u>Ruler</u> - can also be interpreted as pointing to Jesus as the <i>source</i> or <i>originator</i> (the "beginning point") of Creation. Both interpretations show that all creation is dependent on him who is faithful and true.</p>
	<p><b>3. Their Strength</b> - [None]</p>	<p>[They have no genuine strength, even though they claim that they do - v. 17.]</p>
<p>[15] I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!</p> <p>[16] So, because you are lukewarm— neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.</p>	<p><b>4. Their Weakness</b></p> <p>What they are <i>not</i>: cold or hot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Either</i> of these would be preferred.</li> </ul> <p>What they <i>are</i>: lukewarm.</p> <p>Jesus' reaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This makes Jesus want to vomit them out, to reject them with extreme disgust. (The word "<i>spit</i>" actually means "<i>vomit</i>.")</li> </ul>	<p>The allusion is to water, which tastes much better, when either hot or cold. The city's water supply had to travel several miles through stone pipes. By the time it reached the city, it was lukewarm, mineral-laden (from the stone pipes), and barely palatable.</p> <p><u>Hot / Cold</u> - probably spiritually alive vs. dead. Either is better than: <u>Lukewarm</u> - claiming to be spiritually alive, but living by the world's values (= spiritual deadness).</p>
<p>[17] You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'</p> <p>But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.</p>	<p>They boast that they have <i>everything</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They claim to have attained so much, that they no longer have any needs.</li> </ul> <p>They actually have <i>nothing</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have nothing that <i>God</i> considers important - <i>and they don't even realize it!</i></li> </ul> <p>They have focused on the world's cheap imitations of what God offers!</p>	<p>Like the city of Laodicea, these people had a proud and self-sufficient attitude.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They boasted a life enriched with countless blessings.</li> <li>• Yet their blessings were superficial and worldly - things the <i>world</i> values.</li> <li>• Theirs' is actually a horrible, wretched condition, worthy of everyone's pity.</li> </ul> <p><u>Poor / Blind / Naked</u> - These correspond to the 3 parts of Jesus' counsel (v. 18), and parallel the three main things the city boasted about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material <i>wealth</i>, black wool (for <i>clothes</i>) and a medical school (with a famous healing <i>eye salve</i>).</li> </ul>

<p>[18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.</p>	<p><b>5. Their Duty</b></p> <p>What they need they can get only from Jesus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Riches available only through Christ, and which last forever.</li> <li>The "clothes" of righteousness and purity.</li> <li>Spiritual insight that transforms their perception of reality.</li> </ul>	<p>Instead of being <i>self</i>-sufficient, they need to be <i>God</i>-sufficient, valuing what <i>God</i> values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A "gold" that cannot be taken away (Matthew 6:19-21). This would include spiritual riches <i>now</i> (and forever), as well as material riches in <i>eternity</i>. (See comments at v.21.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Refined: made pure, perhaps by trials - 1 Peter 1:6-7.</li> <li>&gt; The riches of this present life are only <i>temporary</i>. Don't become preoccupied with them!</li> </ul> </li> <li>"White clothes," which clothe one's innermost being with <i>righteousness</i> and <i>purity</i>, so that they will never stand before God, with their sinfulness shamefully exposed.</li> <li>"Eye salve" which can transform one's very <i>perception of reality</i>, so that they can see truth and life the way it really is. (Compare to Romans 12:2.) This will impact every aspect of their values, choices and attitudes.</li> </ul>
<p>[19] Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.</p>	<p>Jesus' words are an expression of love.</p> <p>They need to recognize it and respond appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genuine love rebukes and disciplines, when necessary. (Or else it is not genuine love!)</li> <li>The only proper response to such love is to accept the rebuke and change one's ways.</li> </ul>
<p>[20] Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.</p>	<p>They call themselves "Christians," but Jesus is <i>not</i> really a part of their lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They need to pay attention to what Jesus says.</li> <li>They need to let him be a part of their lives.</li> <li><i>Only then</i> will intimate friendship be possible.</li> </ul>	<p>Jesus is just an "outsider," trying to get their attention! ("Look! Here I am!")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They need to accept his rebuke, repent of their ways (their attitudes and actions), and let him into their lives.</li> </ul> <p><u>Eating together</u> - This symbolizes fellowship. Yet <i>genuine</i> fellowship is much more than just food! It involves the sharing of one's <i>life</i> with others.</p>
<p>[21] To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.</p> <p>[22] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."</p>	<p><b>6. A Promise to All</b></p> <p>They must heed Jesus' warnings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They must follow his example.</li> </ul> <p>Those who do this will rule with Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This includes all the rights and privileges of royalty - honors that far surpass what this world can offer.</li> </ul> <p>This promise is for <i>all</i> who are willing to pay attention to what the Spirit says. It is not just for people who lived in Laodicea!</p>	<p>Who will rule? Those who are willing to follow Jesus' example (<i>not</i> those who are involved in spiritual compromise).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus overcame the world - its ways, its false values, and everything else that pertains to it.</li> <li>He asks his people to be <i>like him</i>, to follow his example.</li> <li>This is what it means, to be a genuine "Christian."</li> </ul>

The OVERCOMER is ...

... the VICTOR!

... the WINNER!

## Rev. 3:14-22 Supplementary Study Information

### Background information about Laodicea

See comments at v. 17-18. It is mentioned there, because it so strongly parallels the conditions of this church (described in those verses).

### Verse 14

"AMEN" - an expression of unchangeable truth, something that is faithful and certain.

WITNESS (etc.)

Since Jesus will speak in a manner that is consistent with his "Amen" (faithful and true) nature, we can be guaranteed that his testimony about this church will be accurate and true. He will speak the final (and unchangeable) word.

- Jesus' nature and actions stand in radical contrast to the indifferent, compromising nature of the people he addresses in this letter.
- Jesus will speak authoritatively. As the supreme ruler and judge over all (and as the one who will judge in accordance with his "Amen" nature), he is fully qualified to tell them (and us) these things.

RULER

This can also be interpreted as pointing to the *source* or *originator* - the "beginning point" - of something.

- Jesus is the ultimate source of everything these people have (as well as being the source of the people themselves), so he is fully qualified to know the extent to which they have *genuine* wealth.

### Verse 15

"I KNOW" is, literally, "I see" (in the sense of *understanding* what is seen). Their true character cannot escape Jesus' "all-seeing" eye.

HOT (BOILING) vs. COLD (FRIGID)

Most believe that these two terms are used to describe two spiritual conditions:

- HOT: Spiritually alive and serving the Lord; zealous for Christ. Interestingly, this word "hot" is related to the word translated as "earnest" (or "zeal"), in v. 19.
- COLD: Spiritually dead and unconscious; having no interest in the *true* God, as he has revealed himself in Scripture, and perhaps even *hostile* to him.
  - > They may be willing to follow *false* gods.
  - > They may claim to follow the *true* God, but actually cling to a false concept of who he is ("defining" him, based on what they *want* to believe).

Others view both *hot* and *cold* as positive characteristics, in this sense:

- Cold water can be quite refreshing, such as a cup of cold water - Mat. 10:42.
- Hot water can be quite refreshing or soothing, such as a hot bath, or when used in a hot drink.

With either view, lukewarm is quite disgusting and repulsive.

## Verse 16

LUKEWARM - claiming to be spiritually alive, but living as though dead; no positive value in the Kingdom of God.

- Their relationship with Jesus is superficial, not living and personal.
- They may boast of extreme spirituality (and be convinced of it - see verse 17), but their lives prove the opposite. Their lives are saturated with the world's values.
- From Jesus' perspective, they have no positive effect on the world.

### "SPIT YOU OUT"

The word is actually *vomit*. Translators normally use the word *spit* because the other word is too distasteful for most readers!

- When Jesus thinks about these people who call themselves "Christians," it makes him want to vomit.

### JESUS' REACTION: IMPENDING JUDGMENT

Throughout Scripture, God opposes those who claim to follow him, but who actually live "in the middle." He hates it, when people boast of a spirituality that they don't actually have.

- To Jesus, they are as disgusting as vomit... *and they will be treated as such, if they are unwilling to repent* (v. 18+). Jesus will totally reject those who claim to follow *him*, but who continue to accept the *world's* values. [Scripture repeatedly says that a most horrible judgment is reserved for such people.]
- It would be better to *openly* admit no interest in the truth, than to boast of a "spirituality" that doesn't really exist. (These people think it *does* exist, because they have based their views on a false perception of spirituality. Unless they become willing to humble themselves, to search the Scriptures and to adopt *Jesus'* way of life, they will *never* recognize their condition, until it is too late.)
- Such people often hinder others from becoming disciples of Jesus - either by deceiving them with a false perception of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, or by causing them to turn away in disgust.

## Verse 17

They have focused on wealth and success *as the world sees it*. They have everything that the *world* values and nothing that *God* values.

- The city of Laodicea was proud of its wealth and self-sufficiency. These people carried this attitude into the church. Even though they claimed to be followers of Jesus, they followed the ways of the world around them.
- These people did not see the difference (distinction) between the world's *temporary* blessings (which they themselves could work for), and Christ's *eternal* blessings (which Christ alone could make available).

THEIR TRUE CONDITION? Instead of being *enviable*, they were *pitiable*. They have no comprehension of their true condition. Their *self*-evaluation is not "faithful and true"; but Jesus' evaluation of them *is*. (After all, it is his *nature* to be faithful and true - see v. 14.)

- They are most wretched. This refers to their *condition*, not to an *awareness* of that condition - which they didn't have. They were *unknowingly* in a grievous, miserable condition - one of impending judgment.
- They deserved the greatest pity. Why? They were so focused on *temporary* things (things that they could provide by their own efforts), that they could not see their true spiritual condition (which only *Jesus* could remedy). It is most pitiable, when a person is fully convinced he is saved, though he is not.

How pitiable it is, when someone throws away riches which are *permanent*, in exchange for "toys" that will soon fade away!

- The treasures they were clinging to (and which they devoted so much time and energy to attain) were only temporary - things which they would eventually lose.

## THESE PEOPLE COULD BE DESCRIBED WITH THE FOLLOWING THREE WORDS:

- *Poor* - A spiritual poverty that they did not recognize (otherwise, they could have accepted the riches of Christ); no holiness of heart. They may have had everything that the world could offer, but they had nothing that they truly needed. [Note the contrast to the church at Smyrna, where the people experienced temporary poverty, yet in the long run, they were extremely rich - Revelation 2:9.]
- *Blind* - Spiritual darkness; unable to see their true condition.
- *Naked* - Lacking the righteousness of Christ, and without holiness or purity; their sin is exposed and uncovered in God's sight. [Basically, their "salvation" is only "surface-deep." God can see the real condition of their *hearts*.]

We need to remember that: (1) eternal life starts *now*, and (2) if this eternal life is present, it will affect the way we live.

- If we belong to God, the blessings of Christ belong to us even *now* - even though we won't be able to fully enjoy some of these blessings until later, after the resurrection. Most of the material blessings are reserved for the *future* - v. 21. [Note that these blessings *aren't* for people who merely desire *blessings*, but for people who desire a friendship relationship with Jesus, and who are willing to develop that relationship.]
- When genuine salvation takes place, our dead *spirits* are made alive immediately (Ephesians 2:1-5+). However, our dying *bodies* won't be replaced with eternally living ones until the time of the resurrection.

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They think they see their condition clearly... they are blind.  
They think they have everything... they have nothing.  
They think they are "well covered"... they are totally exposed for what they are.

They do not recognize what is genuine.  
They are looking at their condition on the *outside* (their external circumstances); Jesus tells them to look at their condition on the *inside* (their relationship to Jesus, their attitudes and values, etc.).

## Verse 18

Note the parallel between their boasts and Jesus' rebuke.

- Laodicea boasted about its wealth, its black wool, and its medical school (a school which was famous for producing a medicinal eye salve). The church had adopted this boastful attitude.
- Jesus made reference to the very things they boasted about - gold, clothes and eye salve - to show them their deepest needs.

## WHAT DO THEY NEED?

They need everything they think they already have! They have become so preoccupied with *physical* blessings (which would be eventually lost), that they no longer recognize their lack of *spiritual* blessings (which would last forever).

- A gold that enriches *materially*, contrasted to an eternal richness and wealth that can *never* be taken away (not even in death). What Jesus offers would include both spiritual blessings (both now and in eternity) and material blessing (in eternity).
- Luxurious clothes which cover only one's *physical* body, contrasted to clothes that cover one's *innermost being* with righteousness and purity.
- An eye salve which restores one's *physical* ability to see, contrasted to a salve that changes one's values, choices and attitudes, both now and in eternity - it makes a person to "see" things correctly.

## WHAT SHOULD THEY DO ABOUT THEIR CONDITION?

- Look to the source of *genuine* riches and wealth. Their relationship with Christ (the source) must come first.
- Buy something the world cannot sell them - Isaiah 55:1.
  - They must give-up what they *do* have (things which have no lasting value), in order to gain what they *do not* have - Matthew 13:44.
  - They must give-up their false perceptions, their self-sufficiency and the things they cannot keep; they must surrender *all* to Jesus and follow him.

## MORE ABOUT THE GOLD / CLOTHES / EYE SALVE

When received from Christ, these things represent far more than the mere physical objects themselves.

Gold - genuine and everlasting; proven pure in the ultimate sense. The world's gold remains only for a while - it's like "fool's gold," in comparison.

- A *genuine* relationship with Jesus, a true and living faith (trust) in him, is of more value than all the riches that the world can offer. Compare to 1 Peter 1:7.
- Those who belong to God can look forward to genuine, tangible riches in eternity. However, the emphasis here is on the riches of our *relationship* with Jesus, which is of far greater worth, and is a *prerequisite* for any material riches we may enjoy later.

White clothes - Clothing (or lack of clothing) is often used in Scripture to represent one's spiritual condition.

- The church at Sardis had a reputation (a *false* reputation) of being "clothed" in holiness and righteousness. In reality, their "clothing" (their righteousness) was polluted - Revelation 3:4.
- In contrast, the people here at Laodicea are described as having no "clothes" at all - *except in their own eyes*. Their spiritual nakedness was obvious to everyone except themselves.

Note that "shame" does not refer to a *feeling*, but to a *condition*. It can exist even if we are not aware of it ourselves (or if we have *suppressed* our awareness of it). Our moral and spiritual "nakedness" may be visible to others, whether or not we are aware of it ourselves.

- They are naked, in Jesus' sight, though wearing the finest of woolen clothing! (Quite fittingly for the illustration, the wool of Laodicea was *black* in color!)

Eye salve - so that they could see their *true* spiritual condition, and so that they could comprehend the true source of genuine healing and wealth.

- Because they are focused on the world's values, their present perspective leaves Christ *outside* their lives (v. 20) - and they can't even see it.
- The *ability* to see one's true condition requires dependency on Jesus. The Holy Spirit (also called the "Spirit of Christ" - Romans 8:9) gives us the ability to see and to change... *if* we accept what Jesus says (without "redefining" it, or modifying its message, to make it more "acceptable" to us).

## Verse 19

### RECOGNIZING JESUS' LOVE

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to accepting Jesus' rebuke is our own inability (or unwillingness) to recognize it for what it is. When we take our worldly attitudes and view *them* as an expression of "Christianity," even *godly* opposition to our views becomes automatically dismissed as wrong, as some type of "fanaticism," or even as "unchristian."

- Ever since sin entered the world, there has always been a tendency for people to *not* want to hear the truth. Even people who *claim* to belong to God will often respond with hostility to truth that is *unpleasant* to their ears. (Compare to 2 Timothy 4:3-4.)
- People often try to silence those speaking the truth, by accusing them of being "negative." These opponents may claim that they aren't *opposed* to the truth (though in reality they are), but that the others, who are speaking, should be more "positive" in what they say.

- Genuine love speaks truthfully, even when the truth is unpleasant, and when the hearer (though religious and *claiming* to belong to God) rejects it. (Look at Matthew 23, for an instance in which Jesus spoke this way. The people didn't like what he said, and decided to kill him!)

#### ABOUT THE LOVE THAT JESUS OFFERS THIS CHURCH

In the New Testament, there are two main words that are normally translated as "love." The one used here refers to a *friendship-type* of love. These people may boast about great "spirituality," they may even be quite religious; but they have never developed a friendship relationship with Jesus (which is what genuine salvation is all about). At this point, Jesus isn't even a part of their lives (v. 20), and all he can do is *ask* them to be friends!

- This church had everything the world could offer. The only thing they lacked was Jesus. Yet without Jesus, everything else has no value!
- Jesus wants to treat them as friends, yet they treat him like an "outsider" (v. 20). They are so focused on the world's values, that they cannot even see what they are doing!

#### REBUKE AND DISCIPLINE

- God's Word is intended to teach, rebuke, correct and train - 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- God disciplines those he loves. This will include training and instruction, not just punishment for sin - Hebrews 12:6.

#### "EARNEST"

This word, which can also be translated as "zealous," is related to the word "hot," in verse 15! Both come from the same root word, which means "to boil."

- They were to "boil up" against their present lukewarm condition, *and stay "boiled-up" against it.*
- They were to repent *quickly*, before discipline and judgment fell upon them. They needed a *turning around* in their attitude and lives. (This is what "repentance" means.)
- They needed to respond *eagerly*. They needed to take seriously Jesus' condemnation, and change their ways.

#### Verse 20

In verse 20, what Jesus says is a rebuke, *but it is also an expression of love!*

- Jesus wants to be a part of their lives He offers himself to them, but they must be willing to let him in.
- Jesus' words illustrate the nature of salvation:
  - Jesus takes the initiative. It's not that we chose to offer *him* fellowship with us, but that he chose to offer *us* fellowship with him.
  - The Spirit uses the Word to get our attention and to draw us to Jesus. However, salvation is not "forced": We must be willing to respond to Jesus' offer.
- Intimate and close friendship is possible *only for those who take heed to Jesus' words.*
  - This is why most "religious church-goers" *don't* have an intimate and close friendship with Jesus. They are *not* eager to become like Jesus (to be his disciples and follow his example).
  - This is also why many people wrongly equate Christianity with knowing a list of facts, or having some type of emotional experience.

Note that Jesus doesn't "ask" them to let him in, because he is lonely. It's not because he "needs" them... rather, they need him!

Note that this fellowship (illustrated here by the shared meal) is not a "one-way" activity; it is "reciprocal." Those who have Jesus in their lives enjoy the fellowship they have with him. However Jesus also enjoys it!

- We can have fellowship with him *now* (1 John 1:3, 6-7).
- We look forward to an even greater fellowship, which we will have in the *future*, and which will begin at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:6-9)!

\*\* Isn't fellowship with the KING worth more than all the riches of the world? \*\*

## Verse 21

Jesus overcame the world - its ways, its false values, and everything else that pertains to it. He asks his people to be *like him*, to follow his example.

- This is what it means, to be a genuine "Christian."

In Revelation 4, we are given a glimpse of the majesty and glory of God's throne.

- Jesus shares in this majesty and glory.
- We, too, will share in it, *but only if we are Jesus' friends.*

### FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE

Jesus, the one who is the ruler over all creation (see v. 14), invites us to rule with him! *Now* is the time to become friends with him.

- Our willingness to have fellowship with him *now* will determine whether or not we will have fellowship with him *in the future.*
- If Christ is a part of your life *now*, you will be a part of his life *in the future!*

All Jesus asks us to do is to follow his example! We are to overcome, just as he also overcame. He is asking us to do *for him* only what he himself was willing to do *for us*. (He willingly did a lot more than that for us, when he died in our place.)

- Jesus is an overcomer. We must be willing to be overcomers like him, if we want to share in the blessings *he* received as an overcomer!
- Many passages in Scripture tell us that we must be willing to share in Jesus sufferings *now...* if we want to share in his glory *in the future.*

### OUR ULTIMATE CHOICE

Do we want to "sit" with Jesus (v. 21) or be "spit" (vomit) from his mouth (v. 16)? Those who heed Jesus' warning will be saved; the others won't.

- Only the *overcomer* will be willing to open the door (v. 11) to genuine fellowship.
- Only the *overcomer* will sit with Jesus on his throne.

## Verse 22

What Jesus says, and what the Spirit says, is the same message - and it is applicable to all of us.

- The greatness of the promise given to the overcomers of this church shows us that there is hope even for the worst of churches... *if they are willing to change their ways.*

In Christ, we will have authority over *everything*,  
not just the few riches we may be able to cling to, in this present world.  
How sad it is, that people are willing to throw away the riches of eternity,  
for the few temporary possessions they may be able to get in this present life!

God does not give us possessions - now or in eternity - for the purpose of  
indulging in self-gratification and frivolity.

Even now, everything we have (everything we "rule over") is given so that  
we can express love to God and neighbor - in the manner that Scripture defines love.

*This is the way Jesus lived, and this is the way he expects us to live.*