

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 3RD–4TH, 2024 // REVELATION

## EPHESUS: YOUR FIRST LOVE (REVELATION 2:1–7) FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

The 7 letters John wrote to the 7 churches of Asia Minor were specifically for them but also represent Christianity throughout time. The letters warn us **to evaluate our personal walks of faith and our public witness.**

- They are addressed to the “angels,” which here seems to allude to pastors.

### WALKING AMONGST THE LAMPSTANDS

In ch. 1, He was among the churches; now He moves between them so He can evaluate them. **7 points are addressed in each letter:**

- 1) An address 2) Attributes of God 3) Approval 4) Accusation 5) Advice 6) Assurance (obedience) 7) An appeal (disobedience)

### EACH LETTER CONTAINS “I KNOW...”

This shows that no matter how “religious” of a façade we create, **nothing is hidden from the eyes of God.**

### THE APPROVAL OF THE EPHESIANS

They were busy doing good things for the community, they persevered in their faith, and rejected false teachers.

### FAITH SUPPORTED BY ACTION

We seem to shy away from quantifiable evidence of faith, but here we clearly see that **what we do matters greatly to God!**

- Not only service and hard work, but also testing teachers and not tolerating “evil people” is praised by Jesus. **Revelation will affirm us to back up our beliefs with action!**

### “...YOU HATE THE PRACTICES OF THE NICOLAITANS”

This is more than likely referring to a Christian who went heretical named Nicolaus of Antioch. This was a group of “Christians” that believed in unrestrained indulgence and idolatry.

- Think of how many non-biblical, deceptive leaders claim Christ as their Savior. This is why **the Bible must always be our anchor.**

### THE ACCUSATION

Ephesians had “abandoned the love [they] had at first.” This isn’t their love of Jesus, but their love for each other. People’s faults caused them to be cynical and skeptical.

- **Christians are marked by their love for others, but sometimes good works become obligations rather than acts of love.**

### THE ADVICE

Jesus advises them to “Remember... how far [they’ve] fallen; repent, and do the works [they] did at first.” Christ considered **improper motive to be a sin that needed forgiveness.**

- **We need to periodically step back and ask ourselves, “Why?” Why are we here right now? Why do we do the things we do?**

### THE APPEAL

If they chose to listen to Jesus, they would have “the right to eat from the tree of life...in the paradise of God,” but if they refused, their “lampstand” would be taken from them.

- Tragically, the Ephesian church ultimately didn’t change, and neither a strong church presence nor a city exists today.

### SMYRNA: DON'T GIVE UP (REVELATION 2:8–11)

#### THE APPROVAL OF THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

This is the shortest of all 7 letters. Jesus commends Smyrna for their endurance during “affliction and poverty.” Though they may look poor to the world, Jesus says they “are rich.”

- The slandering from the “synagogue of Satan” were Jews who thought they were doing God’s work but were acting like Satan.

### THERE IS NO ACCUSATION FOR SMYRNA

Of the 7 churches, only Philadelphia and Smyrna escape criticism.

### “DON'T BE AFRAID...”

The Smyrna church was about to suffer more persecution, but Jesus tells them not to fear. The persecution will come in short spurts (10 days) but will also extend into being martyred.

### “BE FAITHFUL” AND DON'T GIVE UP

Their suffering would refine and show them that the great inheritance of **the “crown of life” is not just given to anyone, but to the faithful followers of Jesus.**

- Though Christians will experience the 1st death, **if we’re faithful, we will escape the 2nd death; eternal separation from God.**

### PERGAMUM: HOLD ON TO THE TRUTH (REVELATION 2:12–17)

#### THE CAPITAL CITY ALLOWED FALSE TEACHING

Jesus opens this letter with a reminder of His “sharp double-edged sword” that comes out of His mouth. He did this because many in Pergamum had fallen prey to false teaching.

- **False teaching misleads. Jesus takes this seriously and deals with it with His “sword” (word, truth, judgment).**

### THE APPROVAL OF PERGAMUM

Jesus mentions the presence of Satan twice, specifically his “throne” in Pergamum. This is probably a reference to the huge altar to Zeus that overlooked the city.

- Though this city exuded demonic activity, these Christians never wavered from their faith. Some even gave their lives (Antipas).

### THE ACCUSATION OF PERGAMUM

Though they had remained Christians, the false “teaching of Balaam” had crept in and people who believed heretical teachings of the Nicolaitans had been accepted.

- This included a **subtle inclusion of other religions, a lack of sexual boundaries, and a**

**violation of conviction.**

### REFUSING TO LISTEN IS A SIN

Sexual sin and particularism are taught (though often ignored) in church, but what about a violation of conscience and conviction?

- This means **God will sometimes ask us to do things that don’t apply to everyone else. If we fail to listen to and obey that instruction, we’re sinning.**

### THE ADVICE AND APPEAL TO PERGAMUM

Jesus says, “repent.” If they would humble themselves, confess, and turn from sin, they’d receive “hidden manna” (sustenance) and a “white stone,” symbolic of an admission ticket.

- If they refused, God would “fight against them.” **God is quick to forgive, but ultimately He resists the proud** (James 4:6).

### THYATIRA: RESIST TEMPTATION (REVELATION 2:18–29)

#### THE LONGEST LETTER TO THE SMALLEST CHURCH

Jesus tells the church in Thyatira that He is the “one whose eyes are like a fiery flame,” meaning there is anger in His eyes and that He knows all (omniscient). We’re also reminded of His omnipotence because His feet are like “fine bronze.”

### THE APPROVAL OF THYATIRA

Jesus commends this church for their “love, faithfulness, service, and endurance” and that their “last works are greater than the first.”

- This meant that they were maturing in their faith and doing good works for others. They also **had good intentions but forgot that the Word of God is our anchor.**

### THE ACCUSATION OF THYATIRA

The criticism of this church is severe. The success of Thyatira was overshadowed by their tolerance of “the woman Jezebel.”

- Jezebel (1 Kings) was an evil woman who promoted **worshipping other gods and engaging in boundaryless sexual sin.**

### TWO SEVERE SINS OF THE CHURCH

“Jezebel” in Thyatira was either a false prophet or false teaching. Whoever “Jezebel” was, they/it were **convincing the church to fit in with the non-Christian society around them.**

- Thyatira was **accepting of open sexual expression and universalism in the name of tolerance.** Sound familiar?

### THERE WAS ALSO DABBING IN THE OCCULT

Paul said that food sacrificed to idols doesn’t hurt mature Christians (1 Corinthians 8), but in Thyatira, they were dabbling in the occult by striving to eat food sacrificed to false gods.

- **Spiritual immaturity will inevitably open the door for “demonic doctrine”** (1 Timothy 1). We must know truth to avoid distortions.

### THE ADVICE AND APPEAL IS STERN!

Like Jezebel, Thyatira was given the chance to repent. God sternly says if “Jezebel” refuses, she will be thrown “into great affliction” and “I will strike her children (followers) dead.”

- **Tolerance of evil must be repented for and we must not entertain non-biblical teaching and “so-called secrets of Satan.”**

### ENCOURAGEMENT TO PUSH FORWARD

Thyatira was encouraged to go back to the truth and hold on to it. If they do, they’ll have “authority over the nations” and will receive the “morning star.” In order to inherit what God has, they must **endure** until He returns.

- **True Christians hold on to the truth until they die or see His return.**

### PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS OF THE KINGDOM

- Jesus tells us He is **“the one who examines minds and hearts, and [He] will give to each of [us] according to [our] works.”**
- This should remind us that how we think and act not only matter to God, but **He will righteously judge (reward or punish) us based on how we have lived.**

### COMMON THINGS WE FALL TO

- Losing our love of people and doing things, even good things, with improper motives
- Ignoring personal conviction from God
- Allowing false teaching to slip in
- Condoning anti-biblical sexual expression
- Dabbling with the occult
- In essence, blending into the “world”

### ACKNOWLEDGING AND RESPONDING

- Jesus appeals to and advises us to turn from anything that separates us from Him.
- To properly acknowledge and respond to the warnings of God, **we must be humble, repent of all sin, and take action through prayer, reading, and obeying.** If we will do this, we will **mature** into strong Christians.

### ENDURANCE

- Jesus calls us to “conquer” evil and “hold on to” His teachings and works until “the end.”
- Spiritual victory & endurance are only possible through maturation. Spiritual maturation is only possible by **leaning on a loving Savior, relying on the Bible as our anchor, and having the support of a church community.**

### “LET ANYONE WHO HAS EARS... LISTEN”

- Every letter Jesus has John write ends with a call for “anyone who has ears” to listen.
- **Are we positioning ourselves to not only hear the Word but also to be willing to alter our lives to be in alignment with Jesus?**
- **It is only when we’re willing to “lose our lives” for Jesus’ sake that we discover life** (Matthew 16:25).