

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 3RD–4TH, 2024 // REVELATION

## TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS (REVELATION 2:1–7)

### EPHEBUS: A VERY IMPORTANT CITY

Ephesus was home to perhaps the most influential church in the region. It was founded by Paul, later led by Aquila and Priscilla, and pastored eventually by Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3).

- Jesus revealed Himself as the one “who holds the 7 stars... and who walks among the 7 golden lampstands”. **He’s upholding you and walking among you. He’s with you and watching you!**

### THE “WORKS” OF EPHEBUS

They had ejected evildoers from their church and had tested and rejected false apostles. In the early church, many itinerant preachers and teachers arose who claimed to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit and to speak for God.

- **They were quick to protect and defend the integrity of the Word and their purity.**

### NO FORMAL NEW TESTAMENT—ORTHODOXY

The true apostles were constantly encouraging Believers to “test the spirits” (1 John) to determine whether such teachers were really speaking the word of God (Jesus briefly mentions the Nicolaitans).

- Although Ephesus had faithfully stood for truth, it had “abandoned the love [it] had at first”—**love for Him, and love for others.**

### HARD AS ICE...AND JUST AS COLD

After years of struggling against false teachers and heresy, they had developed a harshness toward others. In standing up for truth they had forgotten how to love people, a common pitfall for many Christians.

- He commands them to remember, repent, and return to works motivated by love. If not, **Jesus would remove their lampstand!**

The commitment Jesus makes at the end of each of the 7 letters always includes 3 parts:

1. The one who **overcomes is praised,**
2. He who **has an ear is told to listen,**
3. And the message is what **the Spirit** says to the churches.

- Jesus promises the faithful, conquering Believers in Ephesus **eternal life with God in paradise** (v. 7).

We are **encouraged and commanded by God to stand for truth, fight for truth,** and be willing to speak truth in the face of a culture that distorts and denies it.

- But if we do this in a way that is **harsh, unloving, detached, and uncaring,** we lose all **credibility and grieve the heart of God** Who died for and loves people (1 Corinthians 13).

## TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (REVELATION 2:8–11)

### A PERSECUTED CHURCH

The Christians in Smyrna receive the shortest of the 7 letters, and Jesus reveals Himself to them as the One Who has power over time (First and Last) and sin (dead and came to life).

- This church was being heavily persecuted and was poor, but Jesus reminded them they’re actually rich. They were most likely being persecuted by the **Jewish community there.**

### A SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

Jesus says that the tribulation these Believers were encountering was at the hands of “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (v. 9).

- He’s implying these Jews were Jews outwardly, not inwardly. They were against Christ and Christians. **Since they were against His Church, they were for Satan!**

### NO ACCUSATION FOR SMYRNA

Jesus only has a command: to not fear. Their suffering will get worse as some church members will be thrown in prison and some will even lose their lives (v. 10).

- The devil, the same Satan that had inspired these Jews to harass Christians, was coming to “test” these Believers with more suffering, and **Jesus tells them to be faithful.**

### AN IMPERISHABLE CROWN

If they are “faithful to the point of death,” Jesus says He will give them “the crown of life.” This is a reference to a victor’s crown given to Olympic athletes who won or completed their events successfully.

- The word picture works—an athletic competition involves some level of **pain that eventually is forgotten upon victory.**

### CONQUERING DEATH

The 1st death is simply the death of the body, but the 2nd death is eternal separation from God (Matthew 10:28). Jesus promises those who conquer will not be hurt by the “second death.”

- The 1st death for the Believer, no matter how painful or bloody, is an upgrade into the presence of God. **Through Him, we too will conquer death!**

We are **not guaranteed health, wealth, and prosperity** in this life; in fact, it’s abnormal that many of us enjoy these blessings here and now. Some may face periods of struggle and others will be for a lifetime.

- Regardless of the amount or severity of trials or persecution, we can hold true to the One Who has overcome, and we will share in His victory!

## TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM (REVELATION 2:12–17)

### A PAGAN CAPITAL

Pergamum was a prominent political and religious city that worshipped Asclepius, had a temple dedicated to the emperor, and a massive altar to the god Zeus that overlooked the city.

- **“Satan’s throne” is most likely referring to the physical and spiritual stronghold Satan had on this city.** It was a difficult place to have a church; **martyrdom was a reality** (Antipas).

## UNLIKE EPHEBUS...

Instead of testing and rejecting false teachers, they received them. This led to many holding to the “teaching of Balaam” and the Nicolaitans.

- Balaam was a false prophet in the OT who attempted to curse Israel and failed, but eventually succeeded in leading the people of God astray into **idolatry and immorality** (Numbers 22–24, 25:1–2, 31:16).

## AT WAR AGAINST GOD

The false teaching happening in Pergamum was that sexual immorality and engaging in pagan practices and idolatry were permissible. Jesus tells them to repent, and if they don’t, He will come and war against them (v. 16)!

- Jesus reminds them that He has a “sharp, double-edged sword.” **He has the power to judge and conquer His enemies.**

## THE VICTORY FEAST

For those who hold fast to the truth and overcome, Jesus will reward them with “hidden manna” and a “white stone.” These are two different symbols for eternal life, one Jewish and one Gentile.

- “Hidden manna” is a reference to the manna hidden in the ark of the covenant and enjoyed at the coming of the Messiah. White stones were used as tickets to festivals.

## COMPROMISE & SYNCRETISM

The **two greatest areas of controversy, division, and debate** in the American church are...

1. **Human Sexuality**
2. **Universalism**

- If we **don’t repent,** Jesus will **war against us.**

## TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (REVELATION 2:18–29)

### EYES OF FIRE; FEET OF BRONZE

Jesus reminds the church in Thyatira that He’s the “Son of God” and that He sees all and has all power (v. 18).

- They were complimented for growing in their “love, faithfulness, service, and endurance” (v. 19); the first two are motives, and the last two are manifestations. But Jesus found a serious flaw—**they had tolerated a false teacher.**

### A FALSE TEACHER

This teacher is called “Jezebel,” but it is probably just a code name associating her qualities with the Jezebel in the OT. The original Jezebel promoted pagan worship of Baal among God’s people, was judged by God, and met a violent death.

- This modern Jezebel was also leading people away from the true God and was under God’s judgment.
- She was calling herself a “prophetess” and leading gullible Christians astray. She was teaching, deliberately leading Christians into sexual immorality, and encouraging them to violate their conscience regarding food sacrificed to idols.
- In the name of being “tolerant” (v. 20), the **Christians in Thyatira were allowing this to happen in their church.**

### GRACE EXTENDED BUT REJECTED

Jesus promises to repay those who refuse to repent because He’s the One Who searches the heart and mind (v. 23). These severe disciplines that were promised were intended to bring these backslidden Believers to repentance.

- Unrepentant and willful sin doesn’t go unnoticed by God. **If we continue to refuse to repent, there will be severe consequences.**

### THE MORNING STAR

To the Believers in Thyatira who conquered and kept the works of God until the end, Jesus promises they will share in Christ’s authority over the nations (vs. 26–27). They’ll also be given “the morning star,” a reference to a time when the night of sin’s rule is over, and a new day is at hand.

- **The morning star** in Revelation 22:16 is Christ Himself, which is **the greatest reward of all!**

### MORE THAN CONQUERORS

- **Ephesus:** overcome the pitfall of harsh, cold, unloving Christianity and **love others** greatly.
- **Smyrna:** overcome the **hopelessness of persecution** and look to your eternal reward.
- **Pergamum:** overcome the temptation to compromise and **hold to the truth.**
- **Thyatira:** overcome the **seductions of sin** and stay **pure** in the midst of immorality.
- **Revelation 12:11**