



Revelation 2

Revelation 2
Tape #8241
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn now to Revelation chapter 2 as we continue our journey through the Bible. John was to send the letters to the seven churches of Asia. He was commanded to write the things which he had seen, the things which are and the things which will be after these things. As he writes to the seven churches, actually Jesus dictates to John his messages to the seven churches. And so in each of the messages that Jesus gives to the various churches, there is a common format. First after all, there's a description of Himself that is taken from Chapter 1. Then the letters are each of them addressed to the angel of the church, which angel means messenger; and I take it to mean the pastors of the various churches. In each of the churches, Jesus declares his knowledge of their works. To each church there is a word of commendation as well as a word of condemnation with the exception no words of condemnation to Smyrna, or to Philadelphia, and no words of commendation to Laodicea. In each of the letters there is an exhortation for the people who have an ear to hear what the Spirit would say to the church and to each of the churches there is a special promise to those who will over come. So there is common format, or thread, that we'll find running through the messages to the seven churches.

Unto the angel, [the messenger] of the church of Ephesus, write; These things saith he that holds the seven stars in his right hand who walk in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (2:1);

In the vision of Christ in Chapter 1, John sees Him walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and holding the seven stars in His right hand, and in the last verse of Chapter 1, the Lord explains that the seven golden candlesticks are the seven churches, and the stars are the messengers of those churches, or the pastors of those churches. Comforting to know He's holding them in His right hand. And there we find in Chapter 1 this description of Jesus, and Jesus picks it up in identifying Himself as the author of this letter to the church of Ephesus.

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience (2:2),

Now the commendation to the church in Ephesus, their works, their labor, their patience. These are great traits within a church, a church that is working for the Lord. Now, we do understand that it is not by our works that we are made righteous. It's not by our works that we are saved. But it is also true that when a person is genuinely saved, the evidence of that salvation will be manifested in their works. And so the Lord declares He knows their works. He knows their labor, and He knows their patience. Another commendation,

and how you cannot bare those which are evil: you've tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and you have found them liars (2:2b):

So there was no compromise. They would not tolerate those that were evil. One of the weaknesses of the church today is the fact that we have begun tolerating evil. Evil practices. We are under tremendous pressure to accept and to receive ungodly, unscriptural practices by people forcing us to acknowledge and to recognize their rights to be evil and actually trying to silence us from saying anything against the evil. The church of Ephesus was not a compromising church. They did not tolerate those that were evil. Unfortunately, as we move down in the history of the church, we will find those churches that did compromise on this very issue.

They are a discerning church. That is, they would examine those who said that they were apostles and were not. They found them to be liars. They were discerning. They just did not accept a person because of what they proclaimed to be, but put them to the test to make sure that they were indeed what they proclaimed

they were. A repetition almost,

You have borne, you have patience for my name's sake and you have labored, and you have not fainted (2:3).

So it was from the outward observance, a very well organized, functioning church. It seemed like everything was in order. Looking at it you'd say, "My, that is really a great church. Look at the works. Look at the labor. Look at all that they are doing, their social work and the influence they are in the community. But yet the Lord said,

Nevertheless I have this against thee, because you have left your first love (2:4).

So even though they had all of the motions, they were lacking the vital emotion. Paul the apostle in writing to the Corinthians in First Corinthians chapter 13 speaks about love and how that you can have so many gifted things. You can be so busily involved in the things of the Lord. You can be making such tremendous sacrifices, but Paul declares that "If you have not love, it is nothing." It profits you nothing. It's meaningless. The greatest characteristic of the Christian life is love. There's nothing that excels love. God is love. God has commanded us to love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And He has commanded us to love one another even as He has loved us. And so what service I render to God, what works I do for God, behind them all must be the motivation of love.

Paul spoke of those in Rome who were motivated by jealousies, motivated by envy. And Paul said it really didn't trouble him inasmuch as Christ was being preached and in that he rejoiced. But, when you stand before God, and when we stand before actually Jesus Christ as Christians to be judged, our works will be judged, it says, of what sort or manner they are. Basically what we will be judged for is the motivation behind our works. You know, we often do things that from the outward, it looks very magnanimous. It looks like we're such wonderful gracious people. But it could be that within our hearts as we are doing these things, our motive is entirely wrong. We may be doing it in order to receive glory and praise from man.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, "Take heed to yourselves that you don't do your righteousness to be seen of men." (Matthew 6:1) Don't let that be the motive. And He spoke about how people often prayed, but their whole thought was to impress people with their spirituality. How they gave to impress people with their generosity. How they fasted in such a way that everybody knew it, and again were impressed with their spirituality. Jesus said, "If that is the motive, then you have your reward." (Matthew 6:2) In receiving the glory, the acknowledgement, the applause of man, savor it because you're not going to get anything from God. You've had your reward, Jesus declares, if you do things in such a way as to draw attention and notice and praise to yourself. He said, "Let your light so shine before men that when they see your good works, they glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) And it is important that realize that one day our works will be judged of what sort they are whether they are motivated by love, and that is the only work that God will accept, that which is motivated by love. Paul the apostle said, "For the love of Christ constrains me." (2 Corinthians 5:14) It is that constraining love of Jesus Christ so that I do not look upon the things that I do as sacrifice. I do not look upon them as work. I look upon them as a privilege, a joy, a blessing to be able to do things for my Lord who loves me so much! And so we are exhorted in what so every we do in word of deed, do all for the glory of Jesus Christ!

That was the problem in Ephesus. The works, the labor, the patience, it wasn't motivated any longer by love. Other motivations had crept in. and so the Lord speaks to correct this situation in Ephesus. And the correction comes in first of all,

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, [remember the first love] (2:5).

Now, notice the Lord didn't say you have lost your first love. You don't lose it. You leave it. Some people say, "Well, I've just lost my love for them." No, no. You didn't lose it. You've left it. You've left the first love. And so the Lord said, "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Remember the original response in your heart when you first realize that Jesus loved you and died in your place to bring forgiveness for your

sins; and the excitement that you had, the joy that you had, the thrill of following and serving Jesus. "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent." As we mentioned this morning the word repent means to be sorry for. But it's more than that. Sorrow isn't always repentance.

I think that probably every fellow in San Quentin today is sorry but not necessarily sorry for the crime that he committed but sorry that he got caught in committing the crime. And there's a vast difference between a sorrow over the consequences and a sorrow because you did it to begin with. Godly sorrow, the Bible tells, works repentance. And so repentance is sorrow, but it is also accompanied by a change. If there is true repentance, then there is a change. You don't go back and do the same thing over again, but you change and you make changes. And so the Lord is calling for them to change from the coldness that had developed in their relationship with the Lord. From sort of the, well you might say a legal relationship because so often people that are doing works for the Lord are doing it out of a sense of obligation or a sense of duty or tragically a sense of earning my salvation.

I feel sorry for these people that go around house to house on Saturday peddling their magazines because they feel somehow that they are earning their salvation. "But salvation is by grace through faith. A gift of God not of works lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:9) But we are his workmanship. It's not what you do for God that is so important as what God has done and is doing for you. And so if you are doing things out of a sense of duty, if that's your motivation, then the Lord doesn't accept that. It becomes a work of the flesh rather than the fruit of the spirit. Fruit is something that just comes naturally. It comes as a result of relationship, and that's exactly what God wants with you, not a legal relationship but He wants a loving relationship with you and He wants that which you do to flow out of your love for Him. A natural response of your heart and life to God, your love being poured back to him and manifested in the things that you do for Him. So repent, the Lord said, and then repeat,

do your first works over (2:5b),

We mentioned this morning that there is a law of psychology that says if you act out a motion, you will soon get the corresponding emotion. Now, when we say law of psychology, don't get all excited and say, "Oh, he's preaching psychology." No, this is just an observance of human nature. Don't let the word psychology throw you. The purpose of psychology is to understand human behavior, to study human behavior. And in the studying of human behavior, they have discovered that a person who is acting out a motion soon gets a corresponding emotion. "Do your first works over." If you will go back and start doing those things again, start reading the Word like you did, leaving the TV off and just spending time with the Lord reading the Word devouring the Word like you once did, you'll find that the love, the flame, will begin to burn again within your heart. God's Word will again light a fire within. And so he encourages them, go back and do the first works over. But the consequences of just continuing in this path is disastrous because the Lord said,

or else [that is if you don't repent and go back to the first works] or else I will come unto thee quickly and remove the candlestick out of his place unless you repent (2:5b).

Now, again going back to Chapter 1. "Jesus was walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." What Jesus is threatening here is that unless they came back to that first love, again works motivated by love rather than the sense of duty. A loving relationship with Him rather than a legal relationship with Him. He wants nothing to do with a legal relationship. He never wants you to feel duty bound. I've got to do this for the Lord. But I desire to do this for the Lord because I love the lord so much. And those are the works that the Lord is looking for, those that flow forth from the overflowing love of your heart an life for Him. The Lord said, "I won't stay in a loveless church." Not interested in all of the works, labor, patience, discernment if love is not the motive behind it. Then the Lord declares, again some pluses.

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate (2:6).

Just what are the deeds of the Nicolaitans? Often a group gets its name and the name describes the actions of that group. The word Nicolaitan is made up of two Greek words. Niko, which is the priest. Laity or

laitan, which is the laity or the priesthood over the laity. The establishing of a priesthood.

Now, the Lord said that they hated that. He said He hated it too. The priesthood was a part of the old testament arrangement when God was not approachable by man, by sinful man. And the priest would approach God for the people with the sacrifices, then he would come out from the Holy of Holies to pronounce God's blessings upon the people. He was God's representative to the people. He was the people's representative to God. He was a mediator. He was a go between. And that was necessary in the Old Testament period. But Jesus by His death abolished the priesthood. And now there's only one God and one mediator between God and man and that is the man Christ Jesus. He died in order to give you direct access to the Father. Now, He hates anyone who would come in between you and the Father, that your approach to God would have to be through some person. Not necessary, not possible unless that is the person of Jesus Christ. One God. One mediator between God and man. Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by Me. And so the priesthood had already begun to be established. We'll find it when we get to the church of Pergamos. That early in the church this idea of special holy men who can intercede to God for you and would be intermediaries between you and God. Not so. The Ephesians did accept that. In fact, they hated that and Jesus said He also hated it. Then the call,

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches; [and the special promise to the overcomers] To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (2:7).

You remember back in the book of Genesis after Adam and Eve had sinned and were driven out of the garden, God put the cherubim at the gate to protect the garden from Adam and Eve intruding back into the garden and eating of that tree that they should have eaten of, the tree of life. That tree I guess has been transplanted and now is in the midst of the paradise of God. It was once in the Garden of Eden. But we'll be granted to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. That is described further in the book of Revelation when we get to Chapter 20.

As we said the churches represent periods of church history and from a historic viewpoint, the church of Ephesus was the original apostolic church. It is interesting how that church history is not reflective of what God wanted his church to be. I do not think that you can study the history of the church and find God's purposes being fulfilled by the church. I think the history of the church is a history of failure. Failure to be and failure to do what God would have the church to be and do. It is interesting, John here is writing in about the year 96. He is the last of the apostles. He is the last surviving apostle. All of the rest of them had already been martyred. John only is left. This is only around fifty years after the birth of the church, and already we see the problems that have begun to develop. And things only it seems get worst rather than better as we progress through church history. I believe that if you want to know what God intended for the church, you have to study the Book of Acts. I think that there we see the church as God intended the church doing what God intended the church to do. It is interesting to note that the Book of Acts, the church of the book of Acts did reach the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ: Paul when we wrote to the Colossians about thirty years after the birth of the church said, "The word of the gospel as it has come to you as it is in all the world." Thirty years of the birth of the church they had taken the gospel into all the world. There's the church as God intended it to be.

But even before John's death, Jesus in writing to the churches is rebuking them. And to five of the seven churches, he's calling for repentance. And thus I do not look to church history to find the model or the example for the church. I look to the book of Acts, and there I believe that we find God's true model for the church. So by the time of the end of the beginning century, the church of Ephesus is already running into problems. The lack of the love in motivating their works for the Lord.

As we move on to the church of Smyrna, historically we are dealing with that period of great persecution that ended in the year 315 with Constantine's edict of toleration. The church at this period of history from about 100 to 315 the church was under severe persecution by the Roman government. Foxe in his Book of Martyrs intimates that there were five million Christians who suffered martyrdom for their faith in Jesus

Christ. I recommend highly the book, Foxe's Book of Martyrs. I read it just about every year or so just to remind me of the glorious heritage that we have. Those men and women, boys and girls who gave their lives for their witness and testimony of Jesus Christ, much like the girl in Littleton, Colorado the other day. Standing up and announcing her faith in Jesus Christ in the threat of death and dying because of her professed faith in Jesus Christ.

So to the angel of the church in Smyrna write (2:8);

Now, Smyrna is the modern day Izmir. It's got a beautiful seaport. Ephesus was a great commercial city. Paul spent three years in Ephesus in giving birth to the early church there. Paul wrote a letter to the church of Ephesus. Jesus wrote a letter to the church of Ephesus. North of Ephesus the great city of Smyrna, and it was and is today one of the great cities in Turkey. It is beginning to rival Constantinople as far as size and importance. A great city. But the church in Smyrna was to undergo great persecution. And so as Jesus addresses the church in Smyrna, He identifies Himself as the first and the last, which was dead and is alive. Because they are going to face martyrdom. Because they are going to be put to death for their faith, Jesus identifies himself with them who was put to death but the hope of the resurrection was dead and is alive. He said to his disciples, "Because I live, ye too shall live." (John 14:19) And so the hope of the resurrection. And so to this church that is to under go heavy persecution, martyrdom, Jesus is the first and the last. There was nothing before him. There will be nothing after him. First and the last. The Alpha and the Omega. The beginning, the end.

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (2:9),

Most of the Christians were slaves in the early church. If a wealthy person embraced Christianity, the government would take their property and their wealth from them. And so the people were rather poor financially. But the Lord adds,

I know your poverty but you are rich (2:9).

Rich in the thing that is really count. You can't really measure your riches by your bank account. That's not a true measure of riches at all. The true measure of riches are kept in heaven. The treasure that you've laid up there in heaven, there is the true riches because they are the eternal riches. When we die we will leave everything of the material realm here. Some people who have been rich on earth will be paupers in heaven, so to speak. Others who were poor on earth will be rich in heaven. "Don't lay up for yourself treasures on earth, Jesus said, where moth and rust, corrupt and decay, thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourself treasures in heaven." (Matthew 6:19)

I know thy works and tribulation and poverty but you are really rich. I know the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan (2:9b).

Now, much of the persecution of the early church came from and was prompted by the Jews. And that's just a fact of history. Paul the apostle was constantly being plagued by the Jews who stirred up all kinds of problems for Paul. Wherever he went with the gospel they would come and they would stir up decent and disorder. But Jesus said, "they say they are Jews but they are not. They are the synagogue of Satan."

You remember when Jesus was taking with the Jews and they to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said, "If Abraham was your father, then you would know Me because before Abraham was I AM." And they said, "You're not even fifty years old. What do you mean Abraham knew you?" They took up stones then to kill him. But Jesus said unto them, "You are of your father the devil and his will you do."

Paul said, "Not all of Israel are Israel." In other words just being an earthly descendant of Jacob doesn't make you true Israel. For the word, Israel, means to be governed by God. And unless your life the governed by God you're not really Israel, though you may be a descendant of Jacob. So Paul said not a all who are of Israel are Israel. Not all who are Jews are true Jews. There are those Jews today that have rediscovered that Jesus is the Messiah. They are true Jews because they are following the promises and the prophesies of the Old Testament scriptures of the Messiah that would come and take away the sins. Others have the name of

being a Jew and such was the case in Smyrna, but Jesus said they are not. They are actually fighting against the things of God.

Fear known of those things which you will suffer: for behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison, that you might be tried; and you will have tribulation for ten days: be though faithful unto death, and I will give to thee a counsel of life (2:10).

This tribulation for ten days is thought to refer to the ten emperors of Rome that instigated and carried out the great persecution against the church. There was Nero from 64 to 68. Paul was beheaded under his reign. There was Domitian from 95 to 96. This is the emperor that exiled John to the island of Patmos. There was Trajan, 98 to 117. During his reign Ignatius was burned at the stake. There was Marcus Aurelius from 161 to 180, and under his rule Polycarp was martyred. There was Severus from 200 to 211. Maximin from 235 to 237. Decius from 250 to 253. Valerian from 257 to 260. Aurelian, 270 to 275. And the worst of all was Diocletian from 303 to 313, and of course, at his death there was the relief from persecution under the, I don't know. It will come to me. Let's just go on.

It's like the fellow who, well there are two guys they were talking together about getting old and having memory lapses, not being able to recall a name immediately. And the one fellow said well, I used to have that problem but I found this tremendous doctor and he's cured me. No problems anywhere. I remember names just great. And the fellow said, what kind of medication did he put you on? He said no medication. He just taught me how to associate. And so I can just recall names because I associate the name with something. And the fellow said well, that sounds great. You mean you really don't have problems? No, no problems. He said, well what's the name of your doctor? And he said well, it's pink and it has petals with a green stem and thorns. And the fellow said, rose? He said yeah. Rose, honey, what's the name of that doctor I've been going to? Now, if you don't get it now, it's like Social Security. You'll get it when you're 65. Constantine! That was it. Someone gave it to me from the audience.

"Fear none of those things that you're going to suffer. The devil will cast some of you into prison, you'll be tried, you'll have tribulation for ten days, but be faithful unto death, I'll give to you a crown of life."

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; he that overcomes will not be hurt of the second death (2:11).

If you're born twice, you'll die once unless you're alive when the rapture takes place. Then you'll never die. But if you're only born once, you'll die twice. When we get to the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation, you'll see the great White Throne of God. And those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into Gehenna. It says this is the second death. The final disposition of the unrighteous dead we'll find when we get to the 20th chapter. So those that receive the crown of life, those martyred for Jesus or those who die in Christ those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, the second death will have no power over them.

The church of Pergamos is the state church that was developed by Constantine. It was one of the most tragic periods of church history because here is where the world became a part of the church. And they began to almost legislate Christianity making it a state religion. And with that marriage came a lot of evil and a lot of problems.

To the angel of the church of Pergamos where; these things saith he which has the sharp sword with two edges; [now this is a description of Jesus again in chapter one and the word that went out of his mouth, a sharp sword with two edges. The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword. And so when he says the sharp sword, you know that we are going to be dealing with judgment, the cutting away.] I know thy works, and where you dwell, even where Satan's throne is (2:12-13a):

Now Pergamos was a very luxurious city, and it was filled with temples to the pagan gods, and most of the pagan religions involved Satanic worship. And so speaking to Pergamos,

I know where you dwell where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast my name, [This is a plus. They held to the name of Jesus.] you've not denied my faith [They did believe in Jesus that he was the Son of God. These are pluses.] even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. [So a reference to one of those in Pergamos that was martyred.] But I have a few things against thee, first after all because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam who thought Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to submit fornication (2:13-14).

The doctrine of a Balaam. When Balaam could not curse the children of Israel who were coming through the land of Moab, the king of Moab, Balak said to bay Balaam, "I intended to prompt you to great riches but your god has kept you from riches." But Balaam greedy for rewards that the king was offering said to the king, "I told your servants to begin with that there was no divination or enchantment that I could bring against these people because they are God's people. They are blessed of God. But you can bring a curse on them." And this is the doctrine of Balaam. Cause the people to turn from God and to begin to worship idols. Let the people go down and meet them and invite them to their homes, and when they come into the house, have the people bring out your gods, show them your gods. And invite them to worship your gods with them. Have the girls go down, flirt with the guys, get them all excited and when they get into bed have the girls bring out their little Aphrodite, their little fertility goddess and say would you like to see how we worship our god? The sexual rights that were involved with the worship of Aphrodite. And when they turned and began to worship these other gods, their God who is a jealous God will smite them. That was the doctrine of Balaam. Bring in idolatry. Cause them to worship God in unprescribed ways. Develop the priesthood, which we find was developed here. And so as they began, the children of Israel, to worship the gods, the judgment of God came upon them.

Now, with Pergamos there were those who were beginning to introduce, and in this period of church history, idols, icons began to be developed within the churches. Sacred relics. The church of Saint Ambrose, I think it is in Italy has in a case what is purported to be the skull of Peter, and it's worshipped. It's an icon, worshipped. Of course, I understand that in another church they have a skull of Peter also. And one of the tourists was commenting that he had been at Saint Ambrose and saw that skull there and he sees this skull in this case, and he said, "This one seems to be a lot smaller than the one in Saint Ambrose. How come?" He said, "Well, this one was Peter when he was a boy." But the worship of relics, the doctrine of Balaam.

And then also you have those that hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, [and again the lord declares] which thing I hate (2:15).

The call to repentance. Notice there wasn't that call in Smyrna. No call to repentance. It was a church that was going through heavy persecution.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth (2:16).

Not only will the Lord remove his presence, but He will begin to fight against this system because of their embracing of things that He hated.

He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches; to him that over come will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows except he that receives it (2:17).

You won't be blackballed. The white stone was the stone of acceptance. The new name. You know it is interesting how the Lord so often changed names. Abram to Abraham. Sarai to Sarah. Saul to Paul. Barnabas his name was changed, son of consolation. It was changed to Barnabas. I think it was Ditisimus or something changed to Barnabas. And so often a new name from the Lord that describe the new character. Jacob the name means heel catcher. One who takes advantage, trips someone up over comes them by tripping them up at the heel. A heel catcher. His name was changed to Israel, governed by God. Fabulous change. And God often would change the names. And God has a new name for you that probably is associated with the future,

what God has in store for you. And the things that God has for you. "So the new name no man knows except he that receives it." A special name that the Lord has for you. I like that.

Now, we move into the period of history with Thyatira that goes from 500 to actually the present time. When we get into the next four churches, the descriptions of these four churches, they all are existing, they started earlier in history, but all exist to the present time. We're going to be seeing some things that Jesus said that will be upsetting to some of you who have a Catholic background. But don't worry. Next week when we get to the church of Sardis, we'll really be laying it heavy upon the Protestant reformation and its failure. And by the time we get to Laodicea, the last and final church, there's nothing good to say about it. So don't say, "Well, he's picking on the Catholics." The Lord's picking on everybody. There are things wrong in each of the systems, and it is wrong and it is to be deliberately blind to not see the errors within a system. And so we're not picking on anybody. We're picking on everybody. And I don't want you to feel that I'm trying to be anti-Catholic. Actually the Lord has a lot of wonderful things to say about this church. He has nothing good to say about the modern day church that is apostate.

So unto the angel after the church of Thyatira write; these things saith the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass (2:18);

Back in chapter one, the description of Jesus, his eyes like a flame of fire, his feet like brass that were glowing in the heat. Brass in the scriptures is a metal that symbolizes judgment. The altar upon which the sacrifices were burned was a brazen altar. Brass--symbol of judgment. You remember when the plague came upon Israel because of their murmuring and these fiery serpents began to bite the people and they began to die as a result of these serpents biting the people. The Lord commanded Moses to make a brass serpent. Put it on a pole and put it up in the middle of the camp. And it shall come to pass that when ever a person is bitten, if they will look upon this brass serpent they shall live. And so Moses followed. But you see the brass serpent on the pole was a symbol that their sin had been judged. If you'll look upon this brass serpent, your sin has been judged and you will live. And of course Jesus said, "For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have every lasting life." And so it became a symbol of Jesus dying for our sins upon the cross. Our sins were judged there on the cross. And so the feet of fine brass would be speak the judgment that he is going to speak against this system.

I know thy works, thy love, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first (2:19).

A church that emphasizes good works. A church that emphasizes love and loving works. I think of Mother Theresa and her tremendous work in the slums of India and how many have dedicated and devoted their lives in Christian service working among the poor and all of the marvelous works that have been done by the church. Jesus said I know them, the service, the faith. And of course, the people are taught a tremendous faith in God and in Jesus Christ the Son of God. The strong faith in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Those were the pluses but yet there were some problems too.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, first of all because you have allowed that woman Jezebel, which called herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (2:20).

Jezebel was the Old Testament wife of King Ahab, and she was the one that brought the worship of Baal unto the northern kingdom of Israel and all of its results and evils that came as the people worshipped Baal, to commit spiritual fornication. You see, the church is to be married to Jesus Christ even as Israel was to be married to God. And married to Jesus Christ we're to be totally faithful to Him and worshipping Him. And the worship of anything else constitutes spiritual fornication. Now, God said to the children of Israel, thou shalt have no other gods before me. You're not to make any graven image or likeness of things that are in heaven or things that are on the earth to bow down to them, to worship them. In other words, the prohibition of icons under the law. Now, with Jezebel she brought in all of these little idols of Baal. People had them in

their homes. The introduction of little idols. And the worship, the looking to them for help for guidance. And so we see the introduction of images, idols that are set up within the church, around the church. Likenesses of Jesus, likenesses of Mary, likenesses of the saints venerated by the people.

The Lord said I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she did not repent. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that submit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds (2:22).

Notice that this church, unless there is a repentance and a turning from their deeds, will enter into the Great Tribulation period. I will cast her into great tribulation unless they repent. But you see the inference is if they do repent, they'll escape the great tribulation. That's the definite inference here. I do not believe that the church will go through the great tribulation, and as we move into Revelation a little further, in fact next week in Philadelphia and then in three weeks as we get to chapter five, we will see where the church is when the great tribulation comes upon the earth. So here though the warning. But yet the inference in the warning, unless they repent they'll be cast into the great tribulation. A repentance will allow them to escape the great tribulation.

And I will kill her children with death; and all of the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and the hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works (2:23).

God said he searches the innermost part of a man and his heart. God said man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. David said, "Thou has searched me and known me. You know my downittings, my uprisings. You know my thoughts afar off. Such knowledge is too great for me. I cannot attain it." But then he prayed, "Search me oh God and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there's some way of wickedness in me and lead me in the way everlasting." Through Jeremiah the Lord said that "Man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" But then God said, "I the Lord do search the heart." So here the Lord again is declaring that he searches our hearts. He knows our thoughts. He knows our innermost beings. He knows the motives that prompt the things that we do. "I search the innermost being, the reins and the hearts and I will give unto every man according to your works." The judgment of God will be absolutely fair because the motives will be judged more than the actions.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine and which have not known the depths of Satan as they speak; I will put upon you no other burden (2:24).

This period of church history did produce many wonderful saints. Savonarola and so many other glorious saints. Men of God. And we are blessed because of these men of God that lived during this period. Not all were corrupted. And of course it was also one of the blackest periods of church history. You that are students of church history know of how even the position of the pope was so desecrated at many times during this period of history. Some of the vilest men bought their way into power by purchasing the position of pope. And at one time it was auctioned off to the highest bidder. These things are all a part of church history. There's no sense of putting your head in the sand and pretend they didn't happen. And yet there's the contrast. There are those wonderful saints that love to do Lord completely. And there are today within the Catholic church marvelous people who love our Lord Jesus Christ. We're not trying to make a blanket indictment against the church itself. In fact, Jesus addresses the overcomers in the church.

That which you have already just hold fast, the Lord says, until I come. [But you see, here's again a reference to His coming. So this church does exist to the present time.] And he that overcometh, and keeps my works unto the end, to him I will give power over the nations: [Now the blessed promise to the overcomers.] And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I have received of my Father. And I will give to him the morning star (2:25-28).

Unto him who loved us and gave himself for us the promise is that we will be a kingdom of priests. We read how the church will live and reign with him for a thousand years upon the earth. Hear the promise

to the overcomers to rule with the Lord over the earth during that thousand-year millennial reign of Christ. The power that will be given to enforce righteous rule upon the earth.

And he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Once again, listen to what God has to say. So many lessons in these messages for us. Going back to Pergamos, the Lord said He knew where they dwelt, even Satan's throne. I think Satan has moved his throne to Washington D.C. A lot of things that you can pick up in this area of scripture.

Father, we thank You for Your Word and the privilege of being able to study it. Lord, give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church today. How important, Lord, that we hear from You. And Lord, its our desire as much as possible to be freed from the wrongs of the past, the traditions that have developed, and to serve You, Lord, in spirit and in truth from a heart of love. Lord, we desire to be like the church in the book of Acts led by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, doing the work of God, motivated by love. Help us, Lord. We realize we fall short. Speak to our hearts, Lord. Show us Your ways. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.