

Chapter Two

One sobering principle found in this and the next chapter is this: *if the church fails to do God's will, He will remove it from the world.* The building may survive, and folks may assemble there, but the light will be gone. Those sitting in the pews will be as if they were sitting in darkness. The church is supposed to be a witness to what God has done for the world through Jesus Christ—the Light of the World. The commission to four of these congregations is this: “Repent, or else.”

Commentators have sought hidden meanings in these letters to the churches. Darby supposed they were representative of the evolution of church through time.¹ This is pure conjecture. At best, all we can deduce is the relevance these problems still hold for congregations today.

2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

Ephesus is situated in modern-day Turkey and was once the metropolis of Asia Minor. Located approximately 50 miles south of Smyrna, it is currently nothing more than a dusty village inhabited by Islamic Turks.

Although the letters in Revelation were to the messengers of each of these congregations, it is apparent that the contents pertained to the assemblies as a whole. The messages can be seen as applicable to all churches, as similar problems still torment the body today.

Angel of the church: Literally, to the *messenger* of the church at Ephesus, who could have been Timothy. (1 Tim 1:3) Since messengers deliver *words*, this was the person appointed to oversee the congregation, and whose job it was to deliver God's word to the flock. Today, we would call him an elder or preacher. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. (Acts 14:23) These early church appointments were of Divine origin. (1 Cor 12:28) Paul himself was appointed to be an apostle. (Acts 22:10; Phil 1:16; 1 Tim 2:7) Having this central point of contact was carried over from the OT, where God worked through a spokesperson. Moses, Joshua, the Judges, some kings of Israel, and the prophets were God's spokesmen to Israel and the nations. It is the Holy Spirit's design that elders manage the church while on earth.

One who holds the seven stars in His right hand; One who walks among the seven golden lampstands: Jesus is presented to each church in a unique description, providing focus on their relationship with Him. To the Ephesians, He is depicted as the One who is the central figure of authority, the Head of the Body. These descriptions relate to their shortcomings and/or strengths. Thus, the Ephesians, who had “forgotten their first love,” are here reminded that Christ is the central figure, the first, who is Head over all. Not surprisingly, Paul had pointed this out three times in his letter to the Ephesians:

He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the

¹ See John Darby's Commentary on Revelation, chapter 2

church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22–23)

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ. (Eph 4:15)

The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Eph 5:23)

2:2–3 I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.

Note that the Savior first points out the positive attributes of each church. The Ephesians were hard workers in the faith and exhibited much diligence. They didn’t tolerate evil doers and seemed zealous in ferreting out false apostles. Perseverance is mentioned twice, underscoring their tenacity. They had endured and not grown tired of the battle. They were what any modern-day church would want to be.

I know your deeds: This phrase is spoken to all seven congregations. The notion that man is saved by faith alone falls on hard times in the face of this repeated phrase. The mistake is in equating *grace only* with *faith only*.

2:4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

First the positive aspects. Now for the bad news. How could have such a zealous group strayed from Christ? When a church forgets the pure Gospel by which they were first saved, and apply themselves wholeheartedly to works, the latter soon supplants the former. A labor of love becomes a mission of zeal. Unity becomes based on works instead of brotherly love. What keeps the congregation together is a common ground of *doing something* instead of being held together in the unity of peace and love. (Eph 4:3; Col 3:14)

I’ve been in many churches, and have seen this time and time again. It’s not enough to devote themselves to prayer or studying the bible. There comes this desire to devise all kinds of group studies, devotionals, and prayer meetings until every day of the week is clogged up with “church stuff.” Then they get behind a microphone just before the “worship” hour and complain that support for a certain events is falling. Men establish “appointed times and places,” urging their members to support the “traditions of the elders.” Consequently, there is no more holding up Christ as Number One.

The Ephesians had been told that their mission was to produce “the growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph 4:16) Instead of devoting themselves to one another, however, they became goal-oriented. Programs became more important than people. To give them credit, these early Christians lived in the midst of blatant paganism and idolatry, a lifestyle prevalent in today’s culture. Every place of trade, education, and government office had gods who demanded obeisance. Christians could not turn in any direction to escape such idolatry. It is no wonder that in their effort to maintain purity, the Ephesians made it their goal to ensure nothing contaminated

their faith. Their medicine against the world? Works.

Most pagans viewed the Christian god as just another god, and many of them joined with the Christian assemblies as an additional insurance policy against the myriad gods who controlled their destiny.² Once these faux Christians attached themselves to the church, some saw an opportunity to establish themselves as leaders, learning the precepts to imitate what they saw and heard. They learned to “talk the talk,” but did not “walk the walk.” The NT gave ample warning that this would become a significant problem for the church:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)

False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Pet 2:1-3)

Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their deeds. (2 Cor 11:13–15)

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)

The importance of grasping the significance of Judaism within the early church cannot be overstated. These were men who professed Christ but who were also zealous of the law. They accepted Christianity but only as it pertained to national Judaism. Choosing between the two, they chose the Law over Christ and “fell from their first love.” This was the great apostasy Paul said would come before the day of the Lord. (2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1; Matt 24:10-12) John said concerning them,

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (1 John 2:18-19) NIV

While Christians mistakenly look at world events and anticipate a takeover by a future global

² “If (the pagan) could once persuade himself to suspect that the Christian religion might possibly be true, it became an easy task to convince him that it was the safest and most prudent party that he could possibly embrace.” *The Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, p. 550—Edward Gibbon

leader, this “spirit of antichrist” would instead evolve from within the heart of the church. John says, “they went out from us,” the very term used to describe the Jews who went out from Jerusalem, teaching the Gentiles that they had to obey the law:

We have heard that some *went out from us* without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. (Acts 15:24)

The apostasy Paul spoke of was to *provide evidence for* the day of the Lord. John wrote it had “now come” and was evidence that they were in the last hour before that day. (1 John 2:28)

2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Here is the solution to the Ephesians’ sin. They had put Christ behind them, soon forgetting Him. Therefore, they were to *remind* themselves, not that they *had* fallen but from *where* they had fallen. In our desire to reach forward, human beings have a problem with forgetting the fundamentals. The NT points this out:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my Gospel. (2 Tim 2:8)

The apostle Peter gives a thorough outline on remembering these fundamental principles. Note:

Be all the more diligent to *make certain* about His calling and choosing you...I shall always be ready to *remind you* of these things, *even though you already know them*...I consider it right...to *stir you up by way of reminder*...I will also be diligent that at any time *after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind*. (2 Pet 1:8–15)

Peter’s words strike a chord that resounds throughout scripture: left to our own devices and outside influence, God’s people will sooner or later forget.

For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge. Therefore you plant delightful plants and set them with vine slips of a strange god. (Isa 17:10)

Do not give me riches...otherwise, I may have too much and disown you, and say, “Who is the Lord?” (Prov 30:7-9—*paraphrased*)

The Sin: They had left Christ behind—forgotten Him.

The Solution: Remember that they had fallen *from* Christ, and do their first deeds.

The Consequence: *I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place*. In other words, this church would lose its *light of truth*. Since the lampstand represented the church itself, their fate would be extinction. This condition could be applied to some congregations

today. People meet in a building and go through the motions of worship, without remembering the purpose of their calling. Christians were called “with a holy calling, *not according to our works*, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” (2 Tim 1:9) Jesus spoke of those who would remind Him on Judgment Day of their many outstanding religious works. To which, He would reply, “I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matt 7:22–23) Their works had nothing to do with God’s plan, but would be considered “lawlessness.”

Man generally desires to create or do something *tangible*, using it as proof of being right with God. Charitable donations, abstinence from smoking and volunteer work is proof that a person is “good.” Faithful church attendance, scrupulous tithing, and teaching Sunday school classes are evidence of a godly faith. Evangelism is proof of a person’s zeal for Christ. While these things are virtuous and necessary, the danger lies in measuring others by works. The sister who occasionally shows up for church service is “less faithful” than the brother who never misses a service. Instead of using brotherly love as the standard, we embrace parameters that create nothing but problems.

Faith results in obedience, which should result in a fervent love for one another from the heart (1 Pet 1:22), not in acts of “worship.” Christianity is truly a horizontal faith, expressing itself by having concern for other human beings. This attitude of love then rises vertically to God as an acceptable sacrifice. Jesus did not say, “All men will know you are My disciples if you go to the right church.” The proof is in our love for one another. (John 13:35)

Paul said that those without love were *nothing*, even though they may be “super-Christians.” (1 Cor 13:1ff) The Greek word for ‘nothing’ means *nonexistent*. Thus, the leaving of their first *love* was threatening the Ephesian with nonexistence—the removal of the lampstand. When the few faithful souls who are part of a dead church slip away, a congregation has effectively lost what light they had.

2:6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Jesus now praises them again, as if to temper the harshness of His prior judgment. It is hatred of deeds, not people, which is to the Ephesians’ credit.

It is supposed that the Nicolaitans originated from Nicolas, who is found in Acts 6:5. This is pure speculation and cannot be confirmed. *Nicola* means, “let’s eat together.” Note Isaiah concerning those who preferred to eat and drink instead of obeying God:

The Lord God of hosts called you to weeping, to wailing, to shaving the head, and to wearing sackcloth. Instead, there is gaiety and gladness, killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.” But the Lord of hosts revealed himself to me, “Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you until you die,” says the Lord God of hosts. (Isa 22:12–14)

The Israelites were called to repent—weep, wail, shave their heads, and wear sackcloth. However, they wanted to “party it up.” This is the intent of *nicola*. According to the Greek writer Irenaeus, and the Roman Epiphanius, the Nicolaitan sect came from a deacon named Nicolas.³ They taught a community of women that adultery and fornication were natural acts, eating meat

³ See Clarke’s Commentary on Revelation, p. 976

sacrificed to idols was lawful, and also mixed pagan rites with Christian observances. The NT is explicit concerning these individuals. (2 Peter 2:1–19)

To the Ephesians' credit, they were zealous in contending for the faith and remaining on guard for false teachers who plagued the infant church. In their fervor, however, it appears they had forgotten their fundamental purpose: a love for Jesus Christ Himself, which was most likely manifested by a loss of love for one another. (2 John 5, 6)

2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

This phrase, *He who has an ear, etc.*, appears seven times, once to each of the churches in the book. It is the person who actively heeds God's words. The prophet told Israel, "your forefathers did not obey Me, *nor incline their ear to Me.*" (Jer 34:14) The language portrays having an ear with having a sense of understanding. (Isa 64:4) "Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes its food?" (Job 12:11) David asked God to "incline His ear" to hear his prayers. (Psa 17:1; 31:2) Not "giving ear" was considered disobedience. (Neh 9:30) Thus, the Holy Spirit is providing the *direction* to which the ear needs to be tuned.

What the Spirit says: Christians are urged to place their faith in the Word of God, not on the preacher, priest, Pope, or other human authority. This isn't to say that we're to ignore our pastors and elders. Paul said to "join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." (Phil 3:17) It is the Spirit, however, to whom we are to heed. The church's struggle throughout history is its tendency to heed the voice of men instead of the word of Christ.

The *Tree of Life* shows up first in the Garden of Eden. (Gen 2:9) It is a symbol for the source of eternal life. (Gen 3:22) The ancient Jews considered this tree to be the source of the soul's immortality and final state of blessedness. Wisdom and understanding are called a tree of life, (Prov 3:18), as are fruits of the righteous. (Prov 11:30) The tree of life is fulfilled desire (Prov 13:12) and a gentle tongue. (Prov 15:4) Thus, it is *consumed*, resulting in those *fruits* God desires from us. The location of the tree of life is in the God's Paradise—Heaven. (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4) At the end of Revelation, the Tree of Life is a portrayal of Christ Himself. (See notes on 22:1-2)

To him who overcomes is quoted to each of the seven churches, and also appears in the final chapter: He who overcomes shall inherit *these things*, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Rev 21:7)

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:4–5)

The warnings are to the assembly, but the promises are to the individual who overcomes. What is to be overcome is generally before our own eyes and near the mind and flesh.

2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Smyrna (now known as Izmir, Turkey) was, at that time, the most significant and wealthiest city of Asia Minor. It is an area that is continuously ravaged by earthquakes, one of which swallowed up an entire castle with its 5,000 occupants in 1688. In 1758, a plague wiped out nearly every living person in the city.

Christ is portrayed to the Smyrnan congregation as the Eternal One, *the First and the Last*. He is the Holy One who was crucified and resurrected.

2:9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Unlike the Ephesians, where Christ praised their deeds, this church is known for its suffering and poverty. He qualifies the latter to mean, “in My eyes, you are wealthy.” We can only speculate as to the cause of their suffering and poverty. Persecution from Jews without, Gnostics within, and pagans on all sides. The government was dragging Christians into court, confiscating their homes and property if they didn’t renounce the faith. Worse, wives and children were threatened with execution if the head of the household did not renounce Christianity.⁴ Believers were “encouraged” to return to the pagan gods.

There was a *blasphemy by those who say they are Jews*. The reference to blasphemy is only mentioned here and in 13:6. The Jews had ultimately accused Jesus of this deadly crime after they had tried other deceptions. Paul described what being a Jew truly meant:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom 2:28–29)

These Jews in Smyrna were outwardly circumcised and were probably Abraham’s fleshly descendants. However, their hearts were unchanged. By determining to hang on to their identification as God’s chosen people, this amounted to blasphemy in His eyes. More so, they were considered to be *a synagogue of Satan*. Jesus told the Jewish Pharisees,

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies...He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.” (John 8:44–47)

Synagogue of Satan: This expression occurs nowhere in any of the ancient manuscripts, including the Apocrypha, Qumran, *e.g.*). ‘Synagogue’ means ‘gathering place’ or ‘congregation.’ In the OT, God expressed His anger against “the evil congregation,” (Num 14:27, 35) which He

⁴ *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1, pp. 653ff—Edward Gibbon

threatened to consume in the wilderness. Prophesying of Christ, David wrote, “A company (synagogue) of evil-doers have enclosed me.” (Psa 22:16) ‘Synagogue of Satan’ only appears in Revelation. (2:9; 3:9) Three observations are evident as to who made up this group, as we’ve already discussed:

- (1) They claimed to be Abraham’s descendants, laying claim to the blessings promised by God to him and his offspring
- (2) They are not the genuine Israel, but an impostor group headed by Satan
- (3) They persecuted Christians.⁵

2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Jesus didn’t mean that Satan would physically appear to throw them in jail. He had just mentioned the false Jews of Satan’s synagogue. Now He warns them that Satan will also test them. Satan works *indirectly*—through men and their institutions—never directly. The Jews were doing the persecuting in Smyrna, but they were tools of Satan. The only exceptions were Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden and Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. (Matt 4:1ff) Folks are quick to blame Satan for every evil, both imagined and real, when in fact, it comes from the human heart. The devil may be the source of all evil, but the actual instrument for carrying it out is the heart. (Matt 15:19)

Tribulation 10 days: The number 10 implies sufficiency or completeness. The Israelites tested God 10 times, indicating a sufficient number of times that should have brought about their repentance. (Num 14:22) God gave Jeroboam 10 tribes, completely removing the kingdom from Solomon’s hand. (1 Kgs 11:31) Israel argued their superiority against Judah, saying they had “10 parts of the king.” (IE, 10 tribes as opposed to Judah having only Simeon) (2 Sam 19:43, 44) The number is, therefore, a euphemism for self-sufficiency. For example, “Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than 10 rulers who are in a city.” (Ecc 7:19) Elkanah said to his wife, “Am I not better than 10 sons?” (1 Sam 1:8) Today, we use similar expressions to denote sufficiency (“I’ve told you 10 times...!”) Note the following scriptures:

“...your father has cheated me and changed my wages *ten times*...” (Gen 31:7)

In other words, Jacob’s wages were *frequently* changed, or *many times*.

“Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these *ten times* and have not listened to My voice.” (Num 14:22)

In other words, Israel completely tested God.

⁵ Polycarp wrote that as late as 155 AD, Jews were still persecuting Christians, and were, in fact, demanding his head (Polycarp *Mar.* XIIIff.17.2)

As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them *ten times* better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. (Dan 1:20)

The most obvious reference to self-sufficiency is seen in the 10 Commandments, which summed up the Law and *completely* condemned sin. The other significant use of the number was in the ten plagues God poured out on Pharaoh. They were considered *sufficient* to show God's mighty hand to the Egyptians. (Exo 7:3-5)

Whether or not the Smyrnan Christians would be thrown into prison for ten literal days is open to conjecture. If we take it as a symbol, it would mean "you will be completely imprisoned." Scholars believe that Christian persecution under the Roman dictator Diocletian is intended here, a period which supposedly lasted 10 years.⁶

A *prophetic* day is supposed to equal a literal *year*. However, care must be exercised not to apply this to all scriptures. Daniel understood Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 25:11) of Israel's 70-year captivity to be 70 *literal* years. (Dan 9:2) Learned men have wasted a lot of time deducing "times and seasons." I take '10 days' to mean a *sufficient* time of testing, probably resulting in martyrdom. The important issue is that those who remained faithful would be rewarded.

Be faithful unto death. Scripture abounds with admonitions to the Christian to "hang in there" to gain the Life promised, be it 10 days or 50 years. The doctrine of Once-Saved-Always-Saved (OSAS) contradicts personal responsibility for remaining faithful *unto death*.

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, *He takes away*...If anyone does not abide in Me, *he is thrown away* as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and *they are burned*. (John 15:2, 6)

Proponents of the OSAS doctrine do not believe that those who fall away were Christians to begin with, proclaiming that *true* believers don't fall away, nor can they be snatched from the Father's hand. (John 10:28–29) However, Jesus' description of the vine is clear: unfruitful branches *in Him* (IE, Christians) who don't bear fruit are hacked off and tossed into the fire.

2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

He who has an ear...See notes on 2:7.

The Second Death is the final judgment represented by the Lake of Fire. (21:8) *Second death* implies the existence of a first death, which is discussed in chapter 20.

2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

Pergamum (or *Pergamus*, meaning *parchment*) was a town of ancient Mysia, in Turkey. The

⁶ Diocletian reigned for 21 years. Although he was a cruel persecutor of Christians, historians cannot determine how long that persecution lasted. (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, p. 457—Edward Gibbon)

finest Pergamenian writing skins were manufactured here. These parchments contributed to their ancient library, which allegedly boasted 200,000 volumes. The Pergamites were apparently the academic elitists of Asia Minor. It was a university town, where education reigned supreme.

In such an atmosphere of worldly learning, Christ presents Himself to the church as the Author and Holder of the Living Word. He is the Word, the true source of authority and knowledge. (John 1) The emphasis is on the *sharp* sword, the *double-edged* sword. God's Holy Word is sharp and therefore able to pierce the innermost being, and can easily divide soul and spirit. (Heb 4:12) It is two-sided because it can both heal *and* destroy. As a weapon, it exposes sin and destroys the unrighteous. Like a scalpel, it is salvation to the penitent, removing cancer caused by sin.

It was an apparent misunderstanding of God's Word that was causing problems in the Pergamum church. Gnostics⁷, who believed that the flesh and its lusts had nothing to do with man's "true" spirit, were promoting hedonism as a legitimate distraction. They had adopted the teaching of the Nicolaitans (vs. 15) instead of the true and pure Word of God. Instead of using Christ's teaching to promote freedom from sin, they were mishandling the Word to support "doctrines of devils."

2:13 I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Satan's throne: It was understood by the ancient Jews that any place where God's word was not in evidence, either through the existence of a synagogue or public acknowledgment, there Satan reigned as ruler. The throne was the chair of the king and is understood to mean that Satan's authority and power resided in Pergamum. Philosophers and men of worldly wisdom dominated the city.

On college campuses today, more effort is spent denying God and promoting the world's ways than in any other social arena. A look at U.S. Supreme Court rulings testifies that the learning institutions are where God has been evicted from American thought.

- 1962: Prayer in schools was banned.
- 1963: Bible reading and voluntary prayer were removed from the schools. Even silent prayer was forbidden at graduations.
- 1980: The 10 Commandments were removed from Kentucky schools bulletin boards.
- 2002: The Pledge of Allegiance was not allowed in schools because of the phrase, "under God."

It goes on even now—the complete eradication of anything Christian. The Holy Spirit through Paul spoke:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1 Cor 1:20)

⁷ Consult any decent bible dictionary to get a more thorough treatise on Gnosticism.

Living among the godless, the Pergamite Christians held fast to their faith, *even in the days of Antipas*. Nothing is known about this person, except that he was a Christian, apparently martyred for his testimony.⁸ “You will be hated by all for My name’s sake, but he enduring to the end, that one will be kept safe.” (Mark 13:13)

2:14–15 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality. Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Some of these Christians had been taught that certain sins were OK. This is similar to what happened at Corinth, where that congregation tolerated an incestuous relationship in their midst. Paul reprimanded them for condoning and even bragging about the affair. (1 Cor 5:6) Some were eating meat sacrificed in idol temples to show their supposed strong faith. (1 Cor 8) This error is still extant, where Christians think they can embrace the world and remain unstained by it. Unfortunately, they end up in such a worldly state of mind and being they’re no longer useful to Christ.

Balaam and Balak: Balaam was a prophet who worked for the True God, but did side jobs to make extra money. He was a fortuneteller or diviner. (Josh 13:22) Balak was the Moabite ruler who sought to hire Balaam to curse Israel near the end of their wilderness sojourn. Balaam was hesitant on doing this. God told the prophet to tell Balak “the words I tell you to speak.” (Num 22:20) The NT mentions Balaam in two other passages. Peter speaks of false teachers who “have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam.” (2 Pet 2:15) Jude mentions backsliders who “have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit.” (Jude 11) Balaam’s error was greed—he was paid to bring a curse upon God’s chosen people. It appears that he told the Moabite king that Israel could be defeated if they were seduced into worshipping Baal, “to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality,” which is the sin those in the church at Pergamum had committed.

The people (of Israel) began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifice of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. (Num. 25:1–3)

In condemning “the way of Balaam,” scripture thus condemns those who solicit Christians to compromise and abandon their faith. Also, Christians sometimes think that being free in grace (Gal 5:1) is a license to sin. Paul succinctly denounces such an attitude. (Rom 6:1–2)

2:16 Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

⁸ Many Christian traditions believe Saint Antipas to be the Antipas referred to in the Book of Revelation as the “faithful martyr” of Pergamon, “where Satan dwells.” According to Christian tradition, John the Apostle ordained Antipas as bishop of Pergamon during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. The traditional account goes on to say Antipas was martyred in 92 AD by burning in a brazen bull-shaped altar used for casting out demons worshiped by the local population. –*Wikipedia*

In other words, “turn around and change your direction, or else I will fight them with the Word of God.” The church at Corinth was under indictment by Paul for condoning the sin of one man. So even though *some* in the Pergamum church were holding to false teachings, Christ says “I am coming to *you* (the entire congregation) quickly, and I will make war against *them*.” Since the weapon to be used against this false teaching was the Truth, we may assume that Christ would come through prophetic utterances dispensed as one of the spiritual gifts common to the early church. “I am coming to *you*, the church, in order to fight *them* with my Word.” Or, He may have meant that He would send someone with the power of the Holy Spirit to bely this sin, as did Paul with the Corinthians:

...in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst...In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan... (1 Cor 5:2–5)

2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

He who has an ear...He who overcomes... See notes on 2:7

Hidden manna: The word *hidden* is a verb, not an adjective. It means, *to conceal, to make secret*. In fact, *manna* means, “What is it?” implying that which is unknown (hidden).

In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers *did not know* (understand), that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. (Deut 8:16)

Manna was considered to be the bread of angels. (Psa 78:24–25) Christ said, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh.” (John 6:51) Why is this manna hidden? The scripture speaks of “the hidden treasures of the sand.” (Deut 33:19) We now know that sand is used to make everything from glass to computer chips. It also hides oil reserves. Such technology was unknown in ages past—it was hidden. Wisdom is hidden, and must be “searched for.” (Prov 2:4)

The manna is Christ, and “eating” His flesh is the way to eternal life. (John 6:53) This flesh originated as the Word. “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became *flesh*...” (John 1:1) Thus, the Word was *hidden* in flesh. Paul spoke of Christ, “in whom are *hidden* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col 2:3) Just as sand must go through many processes to become a computer chip, so too must God’s Word be absorbed, meditated upon, and applied to make the Christian stronger. The hidden manna then is Christ Himself:

If our Gospel is veiled (hidden), it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the Gospel. (2 Cor 4:3–4)

The Levites did not inherit any of the physical Promised Land. Instead, God Himself was their inheritance. (Joshua 13:33) In the same way, Hidden Manna—Jesus Christ—is the Christian’s inheritance.

White stone, a new name that no one knows: This symbol is not found in scripture. History reveals that in ancient times, judges would place white or black pebbles inside an urn. Putting in a white stone meant acquittal of the accused, while a black stone meant condemnation. When all the stones were counted, the greater number of one color over the other became the verdict.

The Greek word *psephos*, rendered ‘stone,’ actually means ‘voice.’ Thus, the stone was the ‘voice’ used to acquit or condemn. This highly poetic language suggests almost the same thing as what Jesus told the church at Sardis: “I will confess his name before My Father and the angels.” A new name is engraved upon this ballot, which no one *perceives* or *understands* except the person to whom it is given. It implies the pre-existence of an old name, just as there once was an old nature. (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22, Col 3:9) This coincides with Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Jerusalem:

...the nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will designate...It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,” nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolate”; but you will be called, “My delight is in her,” and your land, “Married”; for the Lord delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. (Isa 62:1–4)

‘Forsaken’ and ‘Desolate’ were descriptions of the nation’s spiritual condition. So God promised her new names, literally, a new spirit: ‘My delight is in her,’ and ‘Married.’ The reason no one knows this name except for the recipient may be viewed in light of Paul’s description of the Gospel’s salvation:

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man (*name which no one understands*), all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit (*except he who receives it*); for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Cor 2:9–10)

2:18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

Thyatira—now Akissat or Ak-kissar—was a city of ancient Asia (Turkey), bordering upon Mysia on the north and Lydia on the south. It was a trade center from where Lydia, “a seller of purple,” came. (Acts 16:14) Whether this woman was responsible for bringing the Gospel to Thyatira is uncertain. Christ is portrayed here as one who judges what He sees and walks on the firm foundation of salvation. (See notes on 1:13 and 1:15)

2:19 I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

Here was a growing congregation. Their love of God and man, their faithfulness to the word, their service to the widows and orphans, and perseverance in the midst of trials was greater now than in the beginning. This is a state many churches of today strive to attain. Instead, they lose their zeal and fall into the rut of ritual worship.

2:20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

The woman, Jezebel: *Woman* is the Greek word *gunay*, which can find its English equivalent as *woman*, *virgin*, or *wife*. Since the letter is to the church's leader, it's possible that this was the "preacher's wife." *Jezebel* has several attributes, all finding their genesis in the infamous wife of Ahab:

- She was a person of power and influence, as Jezebel, the queen of Ahab corrupted the children of Israel. (2 Kgs 9 & 10) A preacher's wife may have more influence and self-assumed authority than other women may have in a congregation.
- She was not a prophetess but *called* herself a prophetess. She set herself up as a teacher, leading Christians into believing that sinful acts were legitimate.

Fornication and idolatry are used interchangeably in scripture. It is unlikely that this woman was teaching them the art of fornication, but instead, to commit idolatry. If she was the wife of a church leader, he and the church were allowing her to get away with these things based on her husband's stature. Committing the error of the Corinthians, they had not cast her out, which is what Christ had against this church.

Most churches today would not quibble over throwing out a wayward Christian who sits in the back pew—a "nobody" discovered in some dreadful sin. Dealing with an errant preacher's wife, however, can get dicey, and sin may be glossed over for political expediency.

2:21 I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

God sent Elijah to pronounce judgment upon Ahab for his evil ways. Ahab gave a token repentance and judgment was delayed. Since Ahab was married to Jezebel, God's mercy also extended to her. This demonstrates God's amazing grace.

Punishments under the Mosaic Law were carried out immediately. However, Solomon wrote, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, the hearts of men are therefore fully devoted to doing evil." (Ecc 8:11) God, in His infinite mercy, gave Jezebel time to repent, but she had no desire to change. God's mercy allows wayward children to turn from their sin. Those foolish enough to ignore that opportunity will suffer. "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Rom 2:4-5) A look at the Pharaoh of Egypt, whose heart was hardened, is an excellent example of arrogant pride working against heavenly grace. (Rom 9:16ff)

2:22 Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

Literally, *I will cast her upon a bed*. The words, *of sickness*, have been added since *bed* in scripture typically refers to a “bed of affliction.”

Man is also chastened with pain on his bed and with unceasing complaint in his bones. (Job 33:19)

As often as it passes through, it will seize you. For morning after morning it will pass through, anytime during the day or night. And it will be sheer terror to understand what it means. The bed is too short on which to stretch out, and the blanket is too small to wrap oneself in. (Isa 28:19-20)

Two groups are caught up with this so-called prophetess: (1) Those who “commit adultery” with her (those in collusion with her designs); (2) Her “children,” illustrating those brought to birth by her false doctrine. She is cast into affliction, but her disciples are punished with “great tribulation” unless they repent. This woman is thrown into some kind of trouble, either as a result of persecution or direct intervention by Satan. (1 Cor 5:4-5)

The fellow-believers who were sleeping with her—tied close together spiritually—are also punished, *unless they repent*. The co-supporters of her teachings are given a chance at recovery, while the preacher’s wife is not. This is probably due to her attitude of rejecting God’s grace and refusal to repent.

2:23 And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Here is the second group tied to this person—her *children*. They are the offspring of her false doctrines. Jezebel’s sons, Ahaziah and Joram, were kings killed under God’s instructions to wipe out Ahab’s household (2 Kgs 9:4–10), along with Ahab’s other 70 sons. (2 Kgs 10) These were Jezebel’s “children” because of her position as queen. This same principle is applied here in the church at Thyatira. *Her children* were her disciples. Although children don’t suffer for the sins of the parent (Deut 24:16), they were guilty of *following* in her footsteps.

Apparently, this church had divided into several factions, involving both those in authority and the parishioners. The preacher’s wife had convinced some elders and deacons that Gnostic teachings were pertinent to the Christian walk. Meetings had been held, prayers said, solemn nods of approval given. They had no New Testament to consult, relying solely on prophetic messages. When the elders climbed into bed with her on these issues, the next step was to introduce them to the church. Some of the common folk had no better sense than to swallow these teachings hook, line, and sinker. They dived into immorality with gusto. “If the preacher says so, it must be OK!” I’ve been in several churches where questioning anything coming from the pulpit was seen as almost unforgivable.

I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. Scripture abounds with evidence that reward and punishment are (and will be) determined by how much good or evil a person has done. Jesus spoke of those who were least and greatest in the kingdom of heaven, implying an order of rank based on reward. (Matt 10:41; 16:27, etc)

All the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. There are those who engage in certain practices of which they believe God is unconcerned.⁹ God told Ezekiel to break open a wall to see the sons of Israel secretly worshiping their idols. They thought they were hidden from God's sight by being inside of a wall. (Ezek 8:8–12) Their destruction proved that He knew about them all along. This coincides perfectly with Christ's description of this church of His eyes being a flaming fire, a symbol of discernment. Regardless of the goings-on behind closed doors, God sees it all, and will render reward and punishment in the end.

2:24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the “deep things of Satan,” as they call them—I place no other burden on you.

The rest...who do not hold this teaching shows the split in the congregation. This was the part of the congregation that refused to adopt the Gnostic teachings. Attending church services must have been a miserable affair to these folks. There were children of Jezebel who were facing punishment while others were under *no other burden*.

The Gnostics called their teachings *the depths of God*, signifying profound secrets of God's wisdom. Christ called them *the depths of Satan*. In their ignorance, they probably thought the doctrines to be God-breathed. The essence of deception lies in the fact that those doing the deceiving believe themselves to be right. “Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Tim 3:13)

No other burden: Paul told the Romans that he was convinced that they were “able to admonish one another.” (Rom 15:14–15) This is perhaps the intention here; that the rest of the congregation, who had not fallen for the Gnostic teachings had the burden of getting rid of the yeast before it corrupted the whole lump of dough. (1 Cor 5:6–7) The burden referred to may also have to do with Ahab's burden. (2 Kgs 9:25) *The Lord laid this burden upon (Ahab)*, which was a term used by prophets to imply punishment from God.

2:25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

Thyatira crumbled into decay centuries ago, so we have to assume that Christ made good on His promise to “come.” The Lord didn't say He would come *only* if the church didn't repent. His coming here is not mentioned in the context of judgment at all but of rewards to those who overcame. It was to be in this church's lifetime, not in the far future.

To apply the Jezebel situation to the distant past and the “holding fast until Christ comes” to the future is bad exegesis. (See notes on 1:7) The reason for mishandling the verse is from seeing

⁹ I knew a self-proclaimed preacher who used profanity when he was “off the clock.” When I asked him about it, he became quite angry, saying, “I don't think our salvation is based on the kind of language we use.” I also knew of a preacher and elder in a small denominational church who got together on a regular basis to copy (pirate) movies. They were like one of my sons, who laughed at the thought of God concerning Himself with “little” sins.

Christ's "coming" as a *physical* one. *Parousia* (pare-oo-SEE-ah), translated 'coming,' means 'presence.' It's a noun, not a verb. Misconceptions surrounding the Second Coming doctrine have led some to conclude that Christ dangled a carrot on a stick to "motivate" Christians into remaining faithful until the end of time. The basis for remaining faithful to Christ is found in our love for what God did for us on the cross, not in some mind-blowing Second Coming that only a handful will see at the End. The Jews failed to recognize Jesus when He came the first time, so it's no surprise the church has followed in the same error as they wait for Him in the "second" coming.¹⁰

The motivation for differentiating the coming mentioned in the letters to the churches from those mentioned elsewhere in the book is transparent enough: It is an attempt to put off the fulfillment of Christ's second coming to the future. Not because the prophetic text of scripture permits or requires such, but because of the preconceived notions of men that prohibit them from understanding and accepting what is stated in black and white...Not once in scripture is it suggested that the coming was to be postponed for countless ages and centuries. To the contrary, every passage of scripture declares that the coming was at hand would come upon that generation. Yet, the commentators forge blindly ahead, "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."¹¹

2:26–28 **And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.**

Jesus just told them, "what you have, hold onto until I come." Now, He talks about overcoming "to the end," implying the end of life, as seen in the other church letters. Is this a contradiction? Was Jesus coming, or were they to overcome? Some say it couldn't be both. Add to this the false assumption that every time the phrase "the end" appears, it automatically means the "end of the world."

The two thoughts are divided by the conjunction 'and.' "What you have, hold fast to the end, *and* he who overcomes..." These are two different events separated by 'and.' In other words, "Hold fast until I come again. Those who overcome *after* I come, *and* who follow My commands until death, will be rewarded." The difficulties in understanding are because of what we've been taught on the subject. Christ's coming "in the clouds" was not to mean the end of the world—two events that have nothing to do with one another. The Second Coming had to do with the removal of the rebellious Jews and the firm establishment of the church—the kingdom—upon the earth.

Authority over the nations: The first of two things promised to this church. This is similar to the promise made to the children of Israel, provided they followed God's commandments:

For the Lord your God shall bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. (Deut 15:6)

¹⁰ Don't confuse the Second Coming, which happened in 70 AD, to Christ's coming at the end of time, where He destroys the world and commences the Great Judgment.

¹¹ *The Consummation of the Ages*, p. 97 & 98

Concerning Egypt, we have the following:

I shall scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands...they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowest of the kingdoms; and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I shall make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. (Ezek 29:12–15)

To this day, Egypt has never regained its former glory or status in the world as a significant power. The spread of Christianity eventually conquered the ancient world. Rome was toppled, and Constantine helped crush the widespread paganism by introducing Christianity into government. Though his efforts eventually introduced Catholicism, Christians finally began to enjoy an era of peace and prosperity under his rule.

Peter said, “the end of all things is at hand.” (1 Pet 4:7) So here, Jesus affirms that the end is at hand and the Thyatirans need only to hold fast until He comes.

Rod of Iron: The tool used to destroy nations who don’t honor the Son:

I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.” Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psa 2:7–12)

This rod of iron was made for dealing with the unrighteous:

The worthless, every one of them will be thrust away like thorns, because they cannot be taken in hand; *but the man who touches them must be armed with iron* and the shaft of a spear, and they will be completely burned with fire in their place. (2 Sam 23:6–7)

Paul said, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2) This rod of iron then depicts the judgment and punishment aspect of ruling over the nations. The mechanics of this rule must be considered in light of the New Testament.

God...made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus...(Eph 2:4–6)

Where is Christ?

He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand *in the heavenly places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named,

not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And *He put all things in subjection under His feet*, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:20–23)

As part of Christ's body, we rule with Him as kings and priests *in a legal capacity, not a literal one*. (Rev 5:10) Christ's (and our) kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36) On a physical plane, Christians may not appear as royalty. Christ's earthly ministry did not impress the world rulers at that time. He had no home, income or possessions. Regardless of their conclusions, however, He was Creator of the Universe. We are in this world, but the world doesn't see us as kings and priests. Spiritually, we have been raised from the dead, seated with Christ, and above those principalities and powers. It is in this sense that we "rule over the nations."

The Morning Star: Jesus is called the "bright morning star." (Rev 22:16) The name 'Lucifer' is also translated *Morning Star*. There is no scriptural basis for Lucifer being Satan's name. Isaiah 14—the only place in the bible that mentions Lucifer—alludes to the Garden of Eden. However, it is speaking of the king of Babylon, not Satan. It is a descriptive title.

A star typifies a leader appointed by God, signified by its lofty and permanent position in the heavens. (See notes on 1:20) In Deborah's song, she said, "The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera." (Judges 5:20) However, in verse 19, she identified them as *kings* who fought Sisera. Stars rule the night. (Psa 136:9) The stars in Jesus' right hand in chapter 1 were seven *angels* or *leaders* of churches. Note Peter's words:

We have the prophetic word made surer, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2 Pet 1:19)

Peter alludes to studying the Word, where eventually, a Christian would mature (the day dawning) and someday ruling (morning star arising in the heart). Giving the morning star is another way of saying what is said to the Ephesians—eating from the Tree of Life; to the Pergamum church—given the Hidden Manna. All these things are metaphors describing Eternal Life with Jesus Christ.

2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

See notes on 2:7