

Revelation — Lesson 6

1:20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

What does the explanation in verse 20 mean? First, the lampstands depict churches. We have already noticed that a lampstand is used elsewhere in the Bible to denote God's people, but it is a particularly good symbol for the church. Recall Philippians 2:15 —

That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world.**

Although we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), we are *not* the source of that light. Jesus is the true light of the world “which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9, 8:12), and the church is an earthly container for that true light. Christian light is always borrowed light. The church is a lampstand.

Second, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. Who are these *angels* in verse 20? It seems here that perhaps the explanation in verse 20 needs its own explanation!

Some suggest that the angels are men sent to John to inquire about his condition on Patmos and report back to the churches. Others suggest that the angels are the elders or the ministers of the churches. I don't see much evidence for either of these views.

Others suggest that the angels are actual angels who are responsible for the churches. Note, however, that while the letters are addressed directly to the angels, the comments in the letters are addressed directly to the churches. For example, in 2:1-2, we read, “*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:* ‘The words of him who holds the seven

stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. “I know *your* works,” Thus, it appears that the angels *are* the churches, unless, we take the “works” here to be the works of the angels rather than the works of the churches, which would not make much sense. If this is an actual angel, then we would have to conclude that this angel is somehow responsible for what the church has done right or wrong. If the angel is responsible, then don’t we have to conclude that the angel exercises some control over the church? And how would that fit in with our own free will? In short, taking these angels to be literal angels does not fit well with the text and I think is a position that must be rejected.

I think Milligan may have the right explanation. He says that the *angel* of a given thing is that thing itself in its essential nature. When the angel of a thing is discussed, that thing is invested with angelic personality in order to act out its part in the scheme of the book. Later in Revelation we will find rivers, winds, bowls, trumpets, and books that also have angels. Thus, under this view, the angel of a church is the personification of that church so that it can act out its role in this book. This view fits very well with the context of Chapters 2 and 3.

One final question before we reach the letters in Chapters 2 and 3 is *why* the letters are included in this book?

These letters are not an afterthought. They are not separate and unrelated from the rest of the book as many commentators suggest or imply. These letters are an integral part of this book, and any view of Revelation that makes them anything less than integral is an incorrect view of this book. These letters tell us about the initial audience of this book, and these letters are crucial in understanding the rest of the book.

Revelation is primarily about a great threat to church from *without* by the Roman empire, but these letters show us that the church also faced a great threat from *within*. That threat will be different for each of the seven congregations, but taken together they provide a powerful lesson to every congregation of the Lord’s body, even to those today that no longer face great threats from without.

In the remainder of this book, we will see the church largely take on a *passive* role while Jesus takes care of the mighty Roman empire. But in these letters we see the church commanded to take an *active* role when it comes to battling the problems that faced the church from within.

Chapter Two

The Letter to Ephesus

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

The city of Ephesus has been called the “first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” Ephesus had the greatest harbor in Asia, and it was the greatest and wealthiest city in Asia.

Ephesus was one of the few “free cities” in the Roman empire, which means that within its own limits it was self-governing. Ephesus could never have Roman troops garrisoned within it.

Ephesus was the center of worship of Artemis or Diana. The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Acts 19 tells us about Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis and who saw his livelihood threatened by the spread of Christianity. Ephesus also contained temples dedicated to Nero and Claudius. One commentator said that in Ephesus, pagan religion was at its strongest.

Ephesus was also a center for crime and immorality. The Temple of Artemis was filled with hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes. Heraclitus, the weeping philosopher, attributed his tears to the fact that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at the immorality.

Although Ephesus seemed very unpromising soil for the word of God, some of the church’s greatest triumphs occurred there. Trench wrote: “Nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil, strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love.” There is a lesson here for us. Sometimes we are tempted to write off someone or some group because we are sure they will never listen to us or obey the gospel. And yet, as Ephesus shows us, God can reap a wonderful harvest from unpromising soil if we will but plant the seed. **We must never write off anyone for whom Jesus died!**

Of the cities Paul visited on his missionary journeys, Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other. (Acts 20:31 says he was there for three years.) Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos were in Ephesus (Acts 18). Paul’s great farewell address was delivered to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

What had this congregation done that was right? They had worked hard, they had endured patiently, they did not bear evil men, they tested and exposed false teachers, and they had not grown weary.

With all of that going for them, what could possibly be wrong? Verse 4 tells us that the Ephesian congregation had a major problem. They had abandoned their first love.

It is interesting to note how Paul ended his letter to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6:24 — “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” That letter was written about 10 years before this second letter. At some point between the two letters the Ephesians had abandoned their first love. It can happen quickly!

They had lost their proper focus – perhaps their programs and their labors had become an end rather than a means to an end. Their actions were right, but their motivation was wrong.

Listen to what one denominational commentator had to say about this malady in the denominational world. I think his comments can serve as a warning to us as well.

It is one of the remarkable features of contemporary church life that so many are attempting to heal the church by tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face. This is clear evidence that modernity has successfully palmed off one of its greatest deceptions on us, convincing us that God himself is secondary to organization and image, that the church's health lies in its flow charts, its convenience, and its offerings rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral intentions, its understanding of what it means to have God's Word in this world.

The world's business and God's business are two different things. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who

want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds.

The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.

And what would happen to the Ephesian congregation if the situation were not remedied? Jesus says in verse 5 that he would come and remove their lampstand from its place.

What this tells us is that it is possible for an entire congregation of the Lord's church to be plunged into such darkness that it ceases to be a congregation of the Lord's church. They may not change the sign outside the building that says "Church of Christ" – but what you find inside is no longer a church of Christ, a church that belongs to Christ. Its lampstand has been removed from its place.

In verse 5, we see a *figurative* "coming of Christ" of the sort we have already talked about. Here the coming depicts a coming in judgment against this congregation if they do not repent.

Verse 6 is interesting. Jesus says that he *hates* the works of the Nicolaitans.

When Jesus says he *hates* something, it should really get our attention. If Jesus hates it, then we must hate it as well – and if we don't, then it tells us we have a problem. Jesus commended the Ephesians in verse 6 because they also hated the false doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

The Nicolaitans were a sect that some surmise (without much evidence) was started by Nicolas, one of the first deacons in Acts 6:5. Another theory is that the name is symbolic (as most likely is the name "Jezebel" that is used in a later letter). The Greek word "Nikolas" means "destroyer of the people."

This group was known for their “loose thinking and their loose living.” The wolves mentioned by Paul in Acts 20 in his address to the Ephesian elders had arrived. And perhaps it was because of Paul’s warning that the Ephesian congregation was not taken in by these false teachers. They recognized and hated their false teachings.

To love the truth, we must hate what is false. If we do not hate what is false, then we cannot say that we love the truth. Jesus hated this false doctrine, and he commended this congregation for also hating that false doctrine. (We will see a congregation with a different attitude when we get to Pergamum.)

What is the lesson to the church from Christ’s letter to Ephesus? Look at verse 4. This congregation had lost its focus. They were still doing the programs and the activities, but they had forgotten *why* they were doing the programs and the activities. They had left their first love.

The lesson for us today is that the church of Christ must always focus on Christ. He must always be our “first love.”

Remember Paul’s description of loveless works in 1 Corinthians 13:3 — “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”

And remember John 14:15, where Jesus told us what it means to love him: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” There is no such thing as a disobedient love.

The Letter to Smyrna

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil

is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.'

Smyrna was the loveliest city in Asia. It was called the ornament of Asia, the crown of Asia, and the flower of Asia. It stood at a crossroads and was a great trading city, and its harbor was Asia's safest and most convenient.

Smyrna was a center of culture housing a large library and many famous temples. It claimed to be the birthplace of Homer.

In a sense, Smyrna had also "died and come to life" as Jesus says of himself in verse 8. Smyrna was founded in 1000 BC as a Greek colony, but it was destroyed in 600 BC by the Lydians. It was rebuilt as a planned city around 200 BC.

Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a free city. It was self-governing and had no Roman troops. The city had cast its lot with Rome long before Rome became the undisputed leader of the world. Smyrna had erected a temple to the goddess Roma as far back as 195 BC.

Having a temple to the emperor was a matter of great pride to the city of Smyrna, and a refusal by any citizen of the city to pay tribute in that temple was seen as a disgraceful lack of patriotism.

The Jews in Smyrna were very influential and numerous, and verse 9 tells us they were slandering the Christians there.

We are willing to suffer for those who we love, and the congregation at Smyrna was willing to suffer for Jesus Christ. As one commentator said: "It was a dangerous thing to be a Christian in Smyrna. There was no knowing what might happen to you." Indeed, Jesus tells them that they could expect poverty, slander, prison, and death.

It was in Smyrna that Polycarp was martyred. When he was commanded to “sacrifice to Caesar or be burned,” he responded, “86 years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?”

To receive a certificate to conduct business, you were required to burn incense on an altar to Caesar once a year. The Jews had received an exemption, but the Christians had not. The persecution against the Christians was apparently being fanned into flames by the local Jewish population, who would throw the Christians out of the synagogue and then inform on them to the local authorities.

Who are the Jews that are not really Jews in verse 9? We find similar descriptions elsewhere.

- In John 8:39 Jesus told some Jews that they were not truly Abraham’s children.
- In Romans 9 Paul explained that all Israel is not Israel.
- In Romans 2:28–29 Paul explained that to be a true Jew one must believe in Jesus Christ.

The Jews of that day who called themselves Jews yet were not faithful to God were no more Jews than are the Christians of today who call themselves Christians and yet are not faithful to God really Christians. God’s people are *faithful* people, or else they are not God’s people no matter what they may call themselves.

Very strong language is used in verse 9 to describe these slandering Jews who were not really Jews. “I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

Synagogue of Satan? Who was the mean-spirited, divisive, unloving, hatemonger who came up with that phrase? Oh. What do you know? It was Jesus. And this was not the first time he had used this description. Listen to what he said to the Jewish leaders in John 8:44.

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth

in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

It doesn't sound much like Jesus thought the Jewish leaders were just on another path to God. But that message does not go over very well in today's modern world. As an example, compare Jesus' description with the following quote from a modern religious scholar:

[Saying that] 'We believe that we know God, and we are right; you believe that you know God, and you are totally wrong,' ... is intolerable from merely human standards. It is doubly so from Christian ones. Any position that antagonizes and alienates rather than reconciles ... is unlovely, is un-Christian. ... I rather feel that the final doctrine on this matter may perhaps run along the lines of affirming that a Buddhist who is saved, or a Hindu or a Muslim or whoever, is saved because God is the kind of God whom Jesus Christ has revealed him to be.

According to this fellow, Christ himself is un-Christ-like!

This author believes that the Muslims and the Buddhists are saved because "God is the kind of God whom Jesus Christ has revealed him to be." But if I can be saved apart from the blood of Christ, then Christ died for no reason. If there is a path to God around Jesus Christ, then his death was not necessary. What would that tell us about the God revealed to us in scripture? What kind of God would he be if he sent his son to suffer and die for no reason?

There is one way to God, and only one way to God, and we do no one any favors when we teach or suggest otherwise.

- **1 John 2:22-23** — Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either.

- **1 Corinthians 3:11** — For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- **Acts 4:12** — Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
- **John 14:6** — Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

And what does the world say in response to that? Rita Gross has written a book entitled “Buddhists Talk about Jesus.” She describes Jesus’ statement in John 14:6 as “dangerous, destructive, and degraded” and “one of the most immoral ideas that humans have ever created.”

And she’s not finished. Here is what her book says about Christ’s miracles: “Most, and perhaps all, of the extraordinary feats performed by Jesus would be classified by Buddhists as common accomplishments ... requiring a certain degree of meditative competence, but no real degree of permanent spiritual maturity.”

That’s a strong claim – particularly given the fact that Jesus is alive and Buddha is dead and buried!

I have news for these Buddhists. Buddha can meditate all he wants to, but he’s not coming out of that tomb until Jesus commands him to, and when he does come out of that tomb, Buddha will bend his knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That’s true for Buddha, that’s true for Mohammed, and that’s true for every other person who has ever walked on this earth.

The Bible proclaims peace between Jew and Gentile – but that peace exists in the church. It is in the church that the middle wall of partition has been broken down. For those outside of the church to come to the Father – whether they be Jew or Greek – they must find salvation in Jesus Christ. There is no other way. To say otherwise is to call Jesus Christ a liar. (John 14:6)

A few years ago, Mel Gibson produced a movie about the life of Christ. Some at the time expressed worry that the film might some-

how suggest that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. But, of course, if they weren't responsible, then who was? The Romans certainly did not wish to see Jesus dead, as Pilate himself stated at the time. That the Jews killed Jesus is a fact of history that cannot be changed by modern day denials.

Speaking to fellow Jews in Acts 2:23, Peter said: "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."

And again, speaking to fellow Jews, Peter said in Acts 5:30, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree."

Did the Jews murder Jesus? Yes. But here we need to be very careful that we do not judge someone while having a beam in our own eye.

We also had a hand in the death of Christ. How? Because of our sin. We crucified the Son of God by our sin. Hebrews 6:6 tells us that if some fall away and return to their former sins then they "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

Since all men have sinned, all men had a hand in the murder of the Son of God. We should not deny our role in that event – and neither should the Jews deny their role.

The phrase "synagogue of Satan" is strong, but it was fitting. The Jews of that day stirred up a lot of trouble for the early Christians. But the history of anti-semitism shows us that people calling themselves Christians have over the years also stirred up a lot of trouble (and, indeed, a lot *more* trouble) for the Jews. Both sides are wrong.

When it comes to salvation and the great commission, the Gospel of Jesus Christ divides people into two groups and *only* two groups: those in Christ and those out of Christ. Galatians 3:28 could not be any clearer on this issue. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

God wanted peace between the Jew and the Gentile in the first century, and he still wants it today, but that peace is found only in Christ. No man cometh to the Father except by him.

Since there was a “synagogue of Satan” somewhere in the first century, might there be a “church of Satan” somewhere today?

What if there were a religious group somewhere that called themselves a Christian church, and assume that they not only approved of homosexual conduct, but they elected as one of their leaders a practicing homosexual who had left his wife and children to move in with his gay lover. Then assume that after he was elected, a fellow church leader was quoted in the newspaper as saying that this leader’s “consecration would bring in new, youthful members” and that “We have here a wonderful evangelistic tool to strengthen the life of the church.” And then, finally, assume that after he was elected, the homosexual leader himself was quoted as saying “God has once again brought an Easter out of Good Friday.” If that group is not a church of Satan, then I submit that there is no church of Satan.

Verse 9 tells us that these Christians were in poverty yet were rich. Without that certificate we talked about, it was very hard to find work. There are two Greek words for poverty, one that means destitution and another that means having nothing extra. The one used here means destitution. Their homes may have been plundered as well. Recall Hebrews 10:34 —

For you had compassion on the prisoners,
and you joyfully accepted **the plundering of
your property**, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

And yet they were rich! Again, we are called upon to view the situation through God’s eyes rather than through our own. We have *all* spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Recall Ephesians 1:3 —

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

What is the 10 day tribulation in verse 10? It may simply refer to a short period of trial. Recall Daniel 1:12 —

Test your servants for **ten days**; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

This period preceded Daniel's vision as this one precedes John's vision. Recall also Genesis 31:7 regarding Jacob and Laban —

Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages **ten times**, but God did not permit him to harm me.

It could be a literal 10 days. The language in these letters is not all apocalyptic. The churches and all or most of the names are literal. The main vision does not begin until chapter 4. Interestingly, Walvoord says the 10 days here is figurative and yet the 1000 years in Chapter 20 is literal!

What about the second death in verse 11? Stay tuned! We will discuss that when we get to Chapter 20.

What is the lesson to the church from Christ's letter to Smyrna? Look at verse 9. The lesson for the church today is that Christ is not just a way – Christ is *the* way. The modern world gnashes its teeth and recoils at the idea that there is one and only one path to the Father – but we must never cease to proclaim it, no matter the cost.

The Letter to Pergamum

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: “The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan

dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality. 15 So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.'

Historically, Pergamum was the most famous city in Asia. It had been a capital city for 400 years. First, it was the capital of the Seleucid kingdom that appeared after Alexander the Great. Next, it was the capital of the province of Asia formed by the Romans. It was situated on a hilltop from which the Mediterranean Sea could be seen 15 miles away.

Pergamum was a center of culture surpassing even Ephesus and Smyrna. It had a library that was second only to that in Alexandria. (200,000 volumes copied by hand!)

The word "parchment" is derived from "Pergamum." In the third century BC, a Pergamene king attempted to lure away the librarian at Alexandria. The Egyptians imprisoned the librarian and banned the export of papyrus to Pergamum. Pergamum, in response, invented parchment (or vellum) from animal skins.

Pergamum was also a great religious center. The city contained a great altar to Zeus that was set 800 feet up on the side of a hill. The altar looked very much like a large throne. This altar is most likely

what is called “Satan’s throne” in verse 13. The city was also a center of Caesar worship.

Roman governors were divided into two groups – those with the right of the sword and those without. The governor of Pergamum had that right, which meant he could execute Christians for any reason. And yet Christ in verse 12 refers to himself as the one with the “sharp two-edged sword.”

The word “witness” in verse 13 in Greek is “martus” from which we get martyr. The Greek word did not mean “martyr” until New Testament times.

In verse 16, we have yet another figurative *coming* in judgment.

Jesus promises them a white stone in verse 17. What does that mean? Stones were given to indicate a verdict at a trial, with a white stone denoting an innocent vote and a black stone denoting a guilty vote. Stones were also given as a reward for heroism or victory, as passes to enter the games, and sometimes exchanged between friends. Here it seems to indicate a reward or an indication of innocence or acquittal.

Also, in verse 17, Jesus says that there will be “a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.” What does that mean? Later in 19:12, we will be told that Jesus has a name that no one knows, and yet that name is given in verses 13 and 16. Names in the Bible have a special significance. We know that names were often changed to indicate a change in status or circumstances, as for example with Abram and Jacob. To have a name that no one else knows means that you have a status or a relation that no one else can share. That is true of those who conquer.

Pergamum was locked in a battle between truth and error. As one commentator reminds us: “Christ is deeply concerned about the preservation and propagation of the truth. This whole letter is devoted to that theme. ... Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth. He loves the truth. He speaks the truth. He is the truth. How can we be indifferent to it?”

The Pergamum congregation had some within it who held to the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. **It is worthwhile noting that what was hated in Ephesus was being tolerated in Pergamum.**

Many commentators believe that the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans were one and the same. It is generally identified with the group mentioned in Jude 1:4, 11 and alluded to in Romans 6:1. (See our website for notes on Romans and on Jude.)

Jude 1:4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. ... 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

We have already discussed the Nicolaitans. But why also the reference here to Balaam? In Numbers 25, the Israelites played the harlot with the daughters of Moab, who then caused the Israelites to turn to false gods. Later in Numbers 31:16 we learn that these women along with the Moabite king Balak acted under the influence of Balaam.

One commentator wrote that “pagan women and pagan food were his weapons against the rigid Mosaic code.” Balaam is a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betray believers into a fatal compromise with the world. **Balaam worked from *within* to do what had not been possible to do from *without*.** (Recall our comments about Constantine.)

As we study the entire book of Revelation, we will discover that a major theme of this book is a warning against compromise with the world.

Listen to what Martin Luther said about compromise:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the Devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

What is the lesson to the church from Christ's letter to Pergamum? Look at verse 15. The lesson for us today is that Jesus cares very deeply about the doctrine that is taught and proclaimed by his church.

Jesus tells us in verse 15 that he hates this false doctrine that was being tolerated in Pergamum. The servant is not greater than his master. (John 15:20) If Jesus hates this false doctrine, then so must his church. We must not tolerate that which our Master hates.

The Letter to Thyatira

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her children

dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay upon you any other burden; 25 only hold fast what you have, until I come. 26 He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The least important city got the longest letter. What little importance Thyatira had came from its location. It was on a road connecting Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. This location made Thyatira a great commercial town. It was also strategically important because it was a gateway to Pergamum, the capital of the province.

The city had no particular religious significance. It was not a center of persecution of the church.

Thyatira was a center of trade for dye and wool. Lydia, the seller of purple in Acts 16:14, came from Thyatira.

The city had a large number of trade guilds. These guilds held meals in the temples, where meat that had been offered to idols was served. Those at the meals often engaged in drunkenness and immorality. The Christians refused to participate and thus suffered commercially.

Here we have a very important lesson for modern business men and women. It is often tempting to follow a crowd to do evil when that

crowd offers a great deal of “client development.” We must remain true to our Lord, even if doing so causes us to suffer commercially.

Thyatira had what Ephesus lacked. Verse 19 tells us that Thyatira rivaled Ephesus in busy Christian service, but it also tells us that Thyatira had the love that the Ephesians were lacking. In fact, Jesus tells them that their latest works exceeded their first works, which means that while Ephesus was backsliding, Thyatira was growing and maturing.

And yet verse 20 tells us that they had a serious problem. There was a malignant cancer growing in the body and they were permitting it to continue unchecked. Verse 19 tells us that they had been patient. Verse 20 tells us that perhaps they had been too patient!

The Ephesians could not bear false prophets, and yet they lacked love. Thyatira had love, but they tolerated false prophets. We must seek both love and truth, or we will eventually end up having neither.

The threat against the church in Thyatira came from within. There was always a temptation to put business interests ahead of Christ's interests, and apparently there was a group within the church led by a false prophetess referred to as Jezebel that wanted to compromise with the trade guilds by participating in their immorality and idolatry.

The confession that Caesar is lord was often required before one could buy or sell. Some, no doubt, would compromise and make this confession for business reasons. Historians tell us that the slogan of those who compromised was “A man must live.” You can imagine the rationalizations that must have gone on with some.

And yet the text implies that these compromisers saw themselves as deeply spiritual people. The “deep things of Satan” in verse 24 is thought by many to refer to those who felt they had a duty to experience every kind of sin. Their goal was to wallow in sin yet keep their soul unaffected. And they could accomplish this feat, no doubt, because of their deep, deep spirituality.

Jesus told them in verse 24 that were deep alright, but they were experiencing the deep things of Satan. Their spiritual *depth* was really spiritual *death*.

For a modern example, have you ever noticed the outward display of deep spirituality among those who promote the homosexual agenda in the denominational world? They are so much more enlightened, so much more mature, and so much more knowledgeable than the rest of us. That is the same attitude that Jesus is referring to in this letter. These people think they are spiritually *deep*, but in reality they are spiritually *dead*. **They have cast God behind their backs!**

Ezekiel 23:35 “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Because you have forgotten Me and **cast Me behind your back**, Therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness and your harlotry.’” (Compare Romans 1:27.)

Luke 16:15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is **abomination** in the sight of God.