

# The Book of Revelation

## Lesson 2: Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum -- Revelation 2:1-17

Imagine the mail arriving. A courier walks into the assembly at Ephesus, then Smyrna, then Pergamum, carrying a letter dictated by the risen Christ Himself. These are not legends or abstractions. They are real congregations, with real names, real elders, real struggles, gathered in real cities you could have walked into on a Roman road. And the One who walks among the lampstands knows each of them by name. He knows their addresses. He knows their secrets. Before a single seal is broken or a single trumpet sounds, the Lord turns His searching eyes on His own people and says, I know your works.

That phrase repeats like a heartbeat through these letters: I know. Christ is not a distant landlord checking on a property He rarely visits. He is the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (2:1). He sees Ephesus laboring hard and refusing false teachers, yet He also sees a coldness that has crept into a once-warm heart. He sees Smyrna poor and slandered and afraid, yet rich in ways the world cannot count. He sees Pergamum holding His name even where Satan keeps his throne, yet tolerating poison at the supper table. Nothing is hidden from Him. Nothing is hidden in your congregation either.

Each letter follows the same pattern, and the pattern preaches. Christ identifies Himself with an image from the vision of chapter one. He commends what is good. He names what is wrong. He calls for repentance. And He closes with a promise to the one who conquers. That last phrase frames the entire book of Revelation. The crown, the tree of life, the hidden manna, the white stone, none of these are handed out automatically. They are promised to the one who overcomes, the one who endures, the one who stays faithful to the end. The Christian life is not a single transaction but a lifelong conquest, and the Lord who fights for us also calls us to fight.

So read these letters as if your name were on the envelope, because in a sense it is. The God who searched Ephesus searches you. The Lord who comforted Smyrna in the furnace stands ready to comfort you. The Christ who warned Pergamum to clean house warns us not to make peace with sin. These are letters of love, even when they sting, because love tells the truth. Hear what the Spirit says to the churches, and let Him do in your heart exactly what He came to do.

**Group Discussion:** When the risen Christ examines our congregation the way He examined Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, what do you think He would commend, and what do you think He would call us to repent of?

**Personal Reflection:** Has there been a season when your love for Christ burned hotter than it does now? What were you doing then that you have quietly stopped doing, and what would it look like to return to it?

*Read Revelation 2:1-17*

## Study Questions

1. How does Christ describe Himself to the Ephesians as the One who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands (2:1), and what does this picture of His present nearness say about His relationship to His congregations today?
2. Christ commends the Ephesians for their hard work, patient endurance, and refusal to bear with evil men (2:2-3). Where in your own walk are you working hard and standing firm, and is it possible to do all the right things and still drift from the right heart?
3. What does Christ mean when He says to Ephesus, "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (2:4), and why would He treat the cooling of love as a serious offense in an otherwise sound congregation?
4. Christ tells Ephesus to "remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first" (2:5). What specific "first works" of love did you once do that you could deliberately take up again this week?

5. To Smyrna, Christ presents Himself as “the first and the last, who died and came to life” (2:8) and calls them rich in their poverty (2:9). How does the resurrection of Christ reframe the way a suffering, slandered, impoverished church should understand its true wealth?
6. Smyrna is told, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer” (2:10). What are you most afraid of suffering for the sake of Christ, and how does His command not to fear speak to that exact fear?
7. Christ urges Smyrna, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10), and says the tribulation will last “ten days.” Reading Revelation symbolically, what do the “ten days” and the “crown of life” teach us about the limited length of suffering and the certain reward of endurance?
8. Pergamum dwells “where Satan’s throne is” (2:13), yet Antipas held fast and did not deny the faith even when it cost him his life. Where do you live, work, or move among people who are hostile to Christ, and what would holding fast to His name look like for you there?

9. Christ rebukes Pergamum for tolerating “the teaching of Balaam” and “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (2:14-15), and warns Ephesus and Smyrna that the promises come only “to the one who conquers” (2:7,11), telling Ephesus to repent “or I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (2:5). Taking these conditional promises and warnings together, what do they teach about whether a Christian who falls into sin or false teaching can simply presume to be eternally secure?
  
10. Looking back across all three letters, where Christ commends, corrects, comforts, and calls each congregation to conquer, name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you into a more faithful overcomer, and what is the first step you will take?

### **Digging Deeper**

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 10:26-31, the danger of deliberately continuing in sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth; Galatians 5:4, fallen from grace by seeking to be justified apart from Christ; 2 Peter 2:20-22, those who escape the world’s corruption and are again entangled; Numbers 25:1-3, the sin of Balaam that ensnared Israel at Peor; Revelation 22:14, blessed are those who do His commandments and may enter the city.

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