When Faith Must Endure

A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John

Volume 2

Randy Nielsen

A Note from the Author

This book grew out of a journey through the Revelation of St. John that began simply—with a desire to slow down and listen carefully to what John was saying.

Along the way, that study became something more.

In preparing *When Faith Must Endure*, I made extensive use of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI, which I came to call "Atlas." Atlas served as a research, writing, and editorial partner throughout the project. Our work together included exploring the historical and literary context of Revelation, examining Greek words and phrases, developing and testing interpretations, organizing the commentary, and refining the pastoral reflections found throughout these pages.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that contribution openly.

At the same time, the theological judgments, interpretations, editorial decisions, and final form of this work are my own. I reviewed, questioned, revised, accepted, or rejected the material developed through those conversations, just as I would material gathered through other research and study resources.

Artificial intelligence did not replace the study of Scripture. It became one of the tools used in that study.

And perhaps the best description of the process is simply this:

There were many occasions when it felt less like a person asking questions of a computer and more like two people standing at a whiteboard, opening the Scriptures together and asking:

"What is John really trying to tell us here?"

My hope is that what grew from those conversations will now encourage you to ask that same question—and, more importantly, to consider what you will do with the answer.

Dedication

To my loving wife, Marilyn,

who has always stood by me through good times and bad;

who is always seeking to know more about God and His Word;

and whose own desire to understand Scripture has encouraged me along the way.

I dedicate this book to her with love and gratitude,
and with the hope that this commentary may help her—and perhaps others as well—to better understand God's Word and to draw closer to the One who gave it to us.

About the Author

Randy Nielsen began life as a sickly child. His mother prayed that if God would allow her son to survive, she would see that he received a proper Christian education. She kept that promise, making certain that Randy was in church nearly every Sunday and, as he grew, encouraging him to remain close to God.

Later in life, Randy felt God calling him into ministry—a calling he initially resisted. But, as Randy has sometimes observed, God does not take "No" particularly well.

In 2007, Randy finally answered that call. He entered the United Methodist Church's Local Pastor licensing program and became a Licensed Local Pastor. Over the next fifteen years, he served several church appointments, sharing the Gospel, caring for congregations, and helping some of the churches he served experience renewed growth.

During his years in ministry, Randy pursued graduate theological education at Asbury Theological Seminary, completing 54 credit hours toward the 96-hour Master of Divinity degree through online study. Ultimately, he decided that the time and financial commitment required to complete the degree were no longer practical. Content to serve as a vessel for God's Word as a Licensed Local Pastor, Randy continued ministering to the churches entrusted to his care.

Randy retired from pastoral ministry in 2022, but not from his love of Scripture or his desire to understand God's Word more deeply. That continuing journey eventually became *When Faith Becomes a Way of Life: A Pastoral Journey Through the Epistle of James*. Now, that same journey has led him into the Revelation of St. John and *When Faith Must Endure: A Pastoral Journey Through the Revelation of St. John*.

Today, Randy and his family regularly attend a Southern Baptist church, where he continues his lifelong journey of faith, study, and discipleship.

Introduction

When Faith Must Endure

There are books of the Bible that tell us how to live faithfully in the ordinary rhythms of life. The Epistle of James is one of them. James speaks directly and practically. Listen before speaking. Control the tongue. Do not show favoritism. Care for those in need. Do not merely hear the Word—do it. Pray. Be patient. Resist the pull of wealth and selfish ambition. Let the faith you profess become visible in the life you live.

James teaches us what **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like. Revelation asks a different question.

What happens when living faithfully becomes costly?

What happens when following Christ brings opposition rather than approval? What happens when compromise would make life easier? What happens when evil appears powerful, injustice seems to prosper, faithful people suffer, and God appears strangely silent?

What does the Christian need to know then?

That is where the Revelation of St. John speaks with extraordinary power.

Revelation teaches us why faith that works must also become **faith that endures**.

A Book Written for the Church

Few books of the Bible have generated as much fascination, disagreement, fear, speculation, and controversy as Revelation.

Its pages contain extraordinary images: lampstands and thrones, scrolls and seals, trumpets and bowls, angels and demons, a dragon, beasts, Babylon, Armageddon, a millennium, final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and a magnificent city in which God dwells with His people. It is understandable that Christians have wanted to know what all of these things mean.

But somewhere along the way, Revelation has too often become primarily a book about predicting what happens next.

That is not the approach of this commentary.

Revelation is not primarily a timetable. It is not a codebook for identifying today's politicians, nations, wars, technologies, or headlines. It is not intended to frighten Christians into faithfulness. And it is not a puzzle in which the person with the cleverest interpretation wins.

Revelation is **pastoral Scripture addressed to Christians who need to know how to remain faithful when appearances suggest that faithfulness is not winning.**

That distinction matters.

John writes to churches living in the real world. They know pressure, temptation, compromise, suffering, uncertainty, and fear. From their earthly vantage point, the powers surrounding them can appear overwhelming.
Revelation pulls back the curtain.
It allows the Church to see earthly reality from a heavenly perspective.
The Lamb has not lost.
God has not surrendered His throne.
Evil has not escaped His judgment.
The suffering of the faithful has not been forgotten.
And the apparent victories of the powers opposed to God are not the end of the story.
Revelation therefore does more than tell Christians something about what will happen.
It tells Christians what they must know in order to remain faithful when the world around them gives them every reason to wonder whether faithfulness is worth the cost.

The Revelation of St. John

Perhaps the most important thing we can remember as we begin is something Revelation tells us in its opening words.
This is **"The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1).**
Before we encounter the dragon, the beast, Babylon, the mark, the number 666, Armageddon, or the millennium, we encounter Jesus Christ.
That order matters.
The central figure of Revelation is not Satan.
It is not the Antichrist.
It is not the beast.
It is not Babylon.
It is not Rome.
It is not any modern nation, political leader, military alliance, economic system, or technological development.
The central figure is **Jesus Christ**.
He is the faithful witness.
He is the Lamb who was slain.
He is the risen Lord.
He walks among His churches.
He alone is worthy to open the scroll.
He conquers not by becoming like the powers of this world but through His faithful witness, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ultimate victory.
And His people are called to follow Him.

If our reading of Revelation becomes so fascinated with evil that Jesus Christ moves into the background, something has gone wrong with our reading.

First, Hear Revelation as John's Churches Heard It

Revelation was written for us.
But it was not written first to us.
John addressed real Christian communities living in the first-century world. The seven churches of Asia Minor were not symbols floating somewhere in prophetic history. They were churches filled with real people facing real questions about worship, faithfulness, suffering, accommodation, economic pressure, false teaching, fear, and compromise.
Therefore, throughout this commentary we will follow a simple interpretive principle:
First understand what John showed his original hearers. Then understand what it says to the Church in every generation. Only then consider questions about fulfillment.
This does not eliminate prophecy from Revelation.
It protects prophecy from becoming detached from Scripture.
An interpretation that could have meant absolutely nothing to the Christians who first heard Revelation read aloud in their congregations deserves careful examination before we declare it to be John's intended meaning.
Their world matters.
Their struggles matter.
Their Scriptures matter.
And understanding them will often help us understand John's extraordinary visions.

The World Behind the Vision

For that reason, we will occasionally step into the world in which Revelation was first heard.
We will visit Patmos.
We will consider the cities of Asia Minor.
We will examine Roman imperial culture, emperor worship, economic pressure, social exclusion, persecution, public religion, and the difficult choices confronting Christians attempting to remain faithful to Jesus Christ within that world.
But history will never become the destination.
Historical background is useful only when it helps us hear Scripture more clearly.

Our goal is not merely to reconstruct the first century.
Our goal is to understand why Revelation spoke so powerfully to Christians living there—and why it continues to speak to Christians now.

An Old Testament World

Another principle will guide us throughout this journey.
Revelation may be the final book of the New Testament, but its imagination is saturated with the Old Testament.
Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other portions of Scripture repeatedly stand behind John's language and imagery.
John often does not stop and tell us that he is drawing upon an earlier biblical passage.
He simply uses its language.
Readers unfamiliar with those echoes can easily encounter Revelation's imagery and search immediately for a modern equivalent.
But before asking what an image might resemble today, we should first ask:
Where have we seen this before in Scripture?
When Scripture provides the background for John's imagery, Scripture should be our starting point for understanding it.
Revelation did not emerge from the twentieth or twenty-first century.
It emerged from the biblical story.

When Faithful Christians Disagree

We should also acknowledge something before beginning.
Christians have disagreed about Revelation for a very long time.
Faithful, serious, Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions concerning the seals, trumpets, bowls, Babylon, the beast, the mark of the beast, Revelation's chronology, Israel and the Church, the millennium, the timing of Christ's return, and many other questions.
We will not solve every disagreement.
Nor will we pretend they do not exist.
When substantial disagreement occurs, we will slow down.
We will examine the major interpretations.
We will ask what biblical evidence supports them.
We will consider their strengths and difficulties.
And whenever possible, we will distinguish clearly between:
What Scripture actually says
and
what an interpreter concludes from what Scripture says.
Those are not always the same thing.
There will be places where we reach a conclusion.

There may be places where one interpretation appears considerably stronger than another.
And there will almost certainly be places where the most responsible answer is:
We do not know.
There is no failure of faith in admitting that Scripture has not told us everything we would like to know.
We must never manufacture certainty merely because uncertainty makes us uncomfortable.

Revelation and the Headlines

Every generation seems tempted to believe that it is the generation that has finally discovered the key to Revelation.
Wars begin.
Governments rise and fall.
New technologies appear.
Economic systems change.
Political leaders emerge.
Natural disasters occur.
International tensions increase.
And someone inevitably opens Revelation and announces:
"There it is."
Sometimes contemporary events may illustrate principles Revelation describes. Human empires still demand allegiance. Economic systems can still become instruments of injustice. Political power can still become idolatrous. Christians can still face pressure to compromise.
But resemblance is not proof of prophetic identification.
We will therefore resist the temptation to read the newspaper into Revelation.
Our task is not to make John's visions fit our headlines.
Our task is to allow John's visions to reshape the way Christians understand the world—including its headlines.
That is a very different undertaking.

More Than a Timeline

We will also be cautious about assuming that Revelation unfolds as a simple chronological sequence.
John's visions sometimes appear to revisit events, themes, and conflicts from different perspectives. Heavenly scenes interpret earthly ones. Images expand upon earlier images. The same struggle may be viewed from another vantage point.
Therefore, when we encounter a vision, we will not automatically ask:
"Where does this fit on the timeline?"
Sometimes the better question may be:

“What is John showing us about reality?”
Those are not necessarily the same question.
Revelation gives us glimpses behind the visible world. It shows earthly suffering from heaven's perspective. It reveals the spiritual dimensions of worship, allegiance, evil, witness, judgment, and endurance.
And sometimes the point of a vision may be less about establishing when something happens than about revealing **what it means**.

When the Chips Are Down

This brings us back to the pastoral heart of Revelation.
James teaches Christians how faith should shape ordinary life.
Revelation speaks when ordinary life becomes extraordinarily difficult.
When the chips are down, what should the Christian know?
Know that God is still on the throne.
Know that Jesus Christ is still Lord.
Know that the Lamb who was slain has overcome.
Know that evil may be powerful, but it is not eternal.
Know that suffering does not mean God has abandoned His people.
Know that faithful witness matters even when faithfulness appears unsuccessful.
Know that compromise is not victory simply because it makes life easier.
Know that death itself does not have the final word.
And know where the story is going.
Babylon falls.
Evil is defeated.
Death is destroyed.
Creation is renewed.
God dwells with His people.
And the Lamb reigns.
That is why Revelation can speak hope even while describing terrible things.
Its purpose is not to convince frightened Christians that they should become more frightened.
It is to tell frightened Christians why they can remain faithful.

How Then Should the Church Live?

That will be the question to which we continually return throughout this commentary.
Not merely:
What does this symbol mean?
Not merely:
When will this happen?
Not merely:
Which interpretation is correct?

But eventually:
How then should the Church live?
Revelation repeatedly calls God's people to worship, witness, endurance, holiness, courage, discernment, and faithfulness.
It warns against idolatry and compromise.
It exposes the seductive nature of wealth and power.
It reminds Christians that earthly empires are temporary.
It insists that God alone deserves worship.
And it calls the followers of Jesus to remain faithful to the Lamb even when following Him carries a cost.
If we finish studying Revelation knowing considerably more about prophetic systems but no more committed to following Jesus Christ, we will have missed something essential.

When Faith Must Endure

This will not be a journey in which every question receives a simple answer.
Revelation is too rich, too deeply rooted in Scripture, too filled with imagery, and too historically debated for that.
There will be moments when we stop and examine a Greek word.
There will be moments when we travel backward into Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Exodus, or Genesis.
There will be moments when we enter the first-century Roman world.
There will be moments when we consider several interpretations and acknowledge that faithful Christians understand the passage differently.
There will be moments when we simply stand before the vision and allow its grandeur to speak.
But through all twenty-two chapters, one truth must remain before us:
Jesus Christ is the center of Revelation.
And one pastoral call must continually return:
Remain faithful.
Faithful when obedience is easy.
Faithful when obedience is difficult.
Faithful when the Church is strong.
Faithful when the Church appears weak.
Faithful when we understand.
Faithful when we do not.
Faithful when victory is visible.
Faithful when victory can only be believed.
James teaches us how **When Faith Becomes a Way of Life** looks like.
Revelation calls us to become a people whose **faith must endure**.

And so, before we attempt to understand beasts, bowls, trumpets, dragons, Babylon, or the mysteries of things yet to come, we begin where John begins:
With Jesus Christ.
Because when everything else has passed away, the Lamb will still be standing.

A Word About the Imagery of Revelation

Throughout *When Faith Must Endure*, we have deliberately resisted the temptation to turn the imagery of Revelation into a catalog of modern people, nations, technologies, weapons, or current events.

That is intentional.

When John describes locusts like horses prepared for battle, creatures rising from the sea, a woman clothed with the sun, Babylon, dragons, beasts, bowls, trumpets, and seals, our first question is not:

"What does this resemble in our world?"

Our first question is:

"What was John communicating through this imagery to the people who first heard these words?"

Revelation was written nearly two thousand years before our newspapers, political boundaries, military technologies, and modern institutions existed. Yet the book was meaningful to the Christians who originally received it. They were expected to hear it, understand its central message, and respond faithfully to what they heard.

That must matter to the way we interpret it.

So, we begin where they began.

With the Scriptures they knew.

With the symbols they recognized.

With the world in which they lived.

With the pressures they faced.

And above all, with the revelation of Jesus Christ that John was giving them.

This does not make Revelation irrelevant to the modern world.

It makes Revelation **more** relevant.

Because once we understand the enduring truth communicated through the imagery, we no longer have to force the symbols into one particular generation.

Empires still demand allegiance.

Power still tempts.

Deception still misleads.

Idolatry still competes for the human heart.

Evil still destroys.

Faithfulness still costs something.

The Church is still called to endure.

And Jesus Christ is still Lord.

Those truths belonged to John's churches.

They belong to us.

And should the Lord tarry, they will belong to Christians living generations after us.

We are therefore not attempting to make John's imagery predict our world.
We are attempting to allow John's imagery to speak from **his world into ours**.
There is an important difference.
The question is not merely:
“Can we identify the locusts?”
The deeper question is:
“Can we remain faithful to the Lamb?”
Because Revelation was never given merely to satisfy Christian curiosity about the future.
It was given to form faithful Christians in the present.
And that is why our approach throughout this journey will remain the same:
We will first seek to understand the imagery in the manner in which it was originally written—and then allow its enduring truth to speak to the world in which we live.

Ephesus — The Church That Lost Its First Love 18

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:1 26

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:2 33

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:3 40

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:4 47

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:5 55

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:6 64

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:7 72

Smyrna — The Church Called to Endure 81

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:8 92

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:9 100

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:10 109

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:11 119

Pergamum — The Church Living Where Satan's Throne Is 128

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:12 139

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:13 149

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:14 160

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:15 170

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:16 179

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:17 188

The Message to Thyatira 200

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:18 211

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:19 219

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:20 228

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:21 238
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:22 246
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:23 254
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:24 263
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:25 273
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:26 283
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:27 293
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:28 302
A Closer Look — Revelation 2:29 311
Sardis — The Church That Had a Reputation for Life 320
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:1 333
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:2 342
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:3 350
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:4 359
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:5 367
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:6 375
Philadelphia — The Church With an Open Door 383
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:7 393
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:8 401
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:9 410
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:10 418
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:11 426
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:12 434
A Closer Look — Revelation 3:13 443

Laodicea — The Church That Needed Nothing and Lacked Everything 451

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:14 460

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:15 467

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:16 474

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:17 481

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:18 490

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:19 499

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:20 507

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:21 516

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:22 526

Ephesus — The Church That Lost Its First Love

Revelation 2:1–7

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;
I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”
— Revelation 2:1–7, KJV

Introduction

The first church addressed by the risen Christ is Ephesus, and there could hardly have been a more appropriate place to begin.
Ephesus was one of the great cities of the Roman province of Asia. It was prosperous, influential, religiously diverse, and deeply connected to the worship of Artemis. The Christian community there had an equally significant history. Paul had ministered in Ephesus for an extended period. The church had known serious teaching, courageous leadership, opposition, and spiritual struggle. By the time Revelation was written, this was not a young congregation trying to discover what Christianity meant. This was an experienced church.
And Christ commends much of what He sees.
They work.
They labor.
They endure.
They refuse to tolerate evil.
They examine those who claim spiritual authority.

They recognize false apostles.
They suffer for the name of Christ.
They have not grown weary.
By almost any outward measure, Ephesus appears to be a remarkably healthy church.
Then comes one of the most sobering sentences in the opening chapters of Revelation:
"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee."
Something has happened beneath all that faithfulness.
They have abandoned the love they had at first.
The tragedy of Ephesus is not that they stopped believing the right things. It is not that they surrendered to false teaching. It is not even that they stopped serving Christ.
They apparently continued doing all of those things.
The danger was more subtle.
They were doing the work of Christ while losing the love that had once animated the work.
That makes the message to Ephesus particularly important for mature Christians, longtime church members, pastors, teachers, and anyone who has served Christ for many years. Faithfulness can become routine. Service can become obligation. Discernment can become suspicion. Defending truth can become more important than demonstrating love.
A person may continue doing everything that once grew naturally from love for Christ long after the heart has begun to grow cold.
Jesus does not tell the Ephesians to abandon doctrine in favor of love. Nor does He tell them that love makes doctrine unimportant. In fact, He praises their discernment and their refusal to tolerate evil.
The problem is that **truth and love have become separated**.
Christ wants both.

The Movement of the Passage

The message to Ephesus follows a pattern we will see repeatedly in the letters to the seven churches.
Christ first identifies Himself using imagery already introduced in the opening vision. He is the One who holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands. The churches therefore do not exist at a distance from Him. Christ is present among them.
Then comes His evaluation.
First, commendation:
"I know thy works."
Nothing about the life of the church escapes Him. He knows their labor, endurance, discernment, suffering, and perseverance.
Then comes correction:

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.”
Their theological vigilance has not protected them from spiritual decline.
Somewhere along the way they have abandoned their first love.
Then comes the remedy:
Remember.
Repent.
Return.
Remember from where you have fallen.
Repent of what has happened.
Return to the works that once flowed from that love.
The warning is severe. Unless they repent, Christ will remove their lampstand. A congregation may retain its building, organization, reputation, programs, and religious activity while losing the very thing that makes it truly a church bearing the light of Christ.
Finally comes a promise.
Those who conquer will eat from **“the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”**
Revelation has barely begun, yet John is already pointing us toward its conclusion. The tree lost to humanity in Genesis will appear again in Revelation. What began in Eden will ultimately be restored in the new creation.
The journey from Genesis to Revelation is therefore already visible in these few verses:
Humanity lost access to the tree of life.
Christ promises it again.

1. A Church That Looked Strong

Perhaps the most unsettling feature of this passage is how much Ephesus was doing correctly.
Imagine evaluating this congregation from the outside.
Its members work hard.
They understand doctrine.
They expose false teachers.
They endure persecution.
They refuse to compromise morally.
They remain publicly identified with Jesus.
Most church leaders would be delighted with such a report.
Christ is pleased with those things too. He does not dismiss them.
But Christ sees something an outside observer cannot.
He sees the heart.
That distinction runs throughout Scripture. Human beings naturally evaluate what can be seen. Christ evaluates what produces what can be seen.

The Ephesian church teaches us that **correct behavior does not always reveal the true condition of the heart**.
We can sing hymns without worshiping.
We can read Scripture without listening.
We can pray without expecting God to answer.
We can serve without compassion.
We can defend Christian doctrine without displaying Christian love.
We can even become so occupied with protecting the church that we forget why the Church exists.
And because all the outward activity continues, spiritual decline may remain hidden for a very long time.

2. “I Know”

There is another phrase that deserves attention before we move further: **“I know.”**
Jesus will repeat this language throughout His messages to the churches.
Those words can be comforting.
They can also be frightening.
To the suffering believer, **“I know”** means that Christ sees what others overlook.
To the faithful servant, it means that no act of love or obedience is forgotten.
To the persecuted church, it means that suffering has not escaped heaven's attention.
But to the complacent church, the same words mean something else.
Christ also sees what we have learned to hide.
He knows what lies beneath appearances.
The churches of Revelation are not grading themselves. Neither are they grading one another.
Christ evaluates His Church.
That becomes one of the central pastoral truths of Revelation 2–3.

3. When Discernment Loses Love

The Ephesians had learned to recognize falsehood.
That was necessary.
The early Church lived in a world filled with competing religious claims, traveling teachers, false apostles, cultural pressure, and teachings that threatened to distort the gospel.
The Ephesians tested those who claimed authority and discovered some of them were false.
Jesus praises them for it.
Christian love therefore does not mean accepting every teaching or approving every behavior. Discernment matters.
But discernment carries its own danger.

When we spend enough time identifying what is wrong, we can gradually become defined by what we oppose.
A church can become very good at identifying error and very poor at demonstrating grace.
A Christian can become skilled at winning theological arguments while becoming increasingly unlike the Christ being defended.
Ephesus appears to have guarded truth faithfully.
But somewhere in the guarding, something precious was lost.
The love that once characterized their relationship with Christ—and therefore their relationships with one another—had diminished.
The solution was not less truth.
The solution was **truth restored to love**.

4. Remember, Repent, and Return

Christ gives Ephesus a remarkably practical path toward restoration.
First:
Remember.
Memory can become a spiritual discipline.
Remember when prayer was conversation rather than obligation.
Remember when Scripture seemed alive rather than familiar.
Remember when worship was gratitude rather than routine.
Remember when serving another person felt like serving Christ Himself.
Remember when grace amazed you.
Then:
Repent.
Repentance is more than regret.
Regret says, *I wish things were different.*
Repentance says, *By the grace of God, I will turn around.*
Then:
Do the works you did at first.
Christ does not tell them to manufacture an emotion.
He tells them to return to faithful practices.
Sometimes the road back to love begins with doing again the things love once naturally produced.
Pray.
Serve.
Forgive.
Worship.
Give.
Listen.
Spend time with Christ.
Love often deepens again when we intentionally return to the places where love was once expressed.

5. The Lampstand

The warning concerning the lampstand should not be softened.
Christ says that if Ephesus refuses to repent, He will remove its lampstand.
The lampstand represents the church as a bearer of Christ's light.
This means something more serious than institutional decline.
A church can continue to exist organizationally while ceasing to fulfill its spiritual purpose.
There may still be meetings.
There may still be budgets.
There may still be committees.
There may still be sermons.
There may even still be crowds.
But the presence of religious activity does not necessarily mean that the lamp is still burning brightly.
The Church does not possess its lampstand independently.
Christ does.
The One who walks among the lampstands also has authority over them.
That is both a warning and a comfort.
The Church belongs to Christ.

6. The Promise of the Tree of Life

The passage ends not with judgment but with hope.
"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."
The language reaches backward to Eden and forward to the New Jerusalem.
The biblical story begins with humanity losing access to the tree of life.
Revelation ends with that tree standing beside the river of the water of life, its fruit available and its leaves bringing healing.
What humanity lost through sin, God ultimately restores through Christ.
And notice to whom the promise is given:
"To him that overcometh."
In Revelation, conquering will not primarily mean overpowering enemies through force.
Jesus has already shown us what victory looks like.
The Lamb conquers through faithful obedience, sacrificial love, suffering, death, and resurrection.
His followers conquer by remaining faithful to Him.
That brings us directly to the heart of our journey through Revelation.
Faith must endure.
Not merely when persecution comes.
Not merely when suffering comes.

Not merely when the world opposes us.
Faith must also endure the quieter danger of familiarity—the slow cooling of a heart that still believes, still serves, still works, and still attends church, but no longer loves Christ as it once did.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something deeply pastoral about Christ's words to Ephesus.
He could simply condemn them.
Instead, He calls them home.
Remember.
Christ remembers what they were.
And He wants them to remember too.
The words are stern because the situation is serious, but the warning itself is an expression of grace. Jesus exposes the problem because He has not abandoned the church.
He is still walking among their lampstands.
He is still speaking.
He is still calling.
He is still offering restoration.
That is good news for churches.
And it is good news for individuals.
There are seasons when faith burns brightly and seasons when faith seems to survive mostly through discipline. There are times when prayer feels intimate and times when prayer feels difficult. There are moments when Scripture seems to leap from the page and others when we read faithfully without feeling much at all.
Christ's answer is not:
Pretend.
His answer is:
Remember. Repent. Return.
The road home remains open.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers facing mature Christians is not that they will suddenly abandon their faith.
It is that they will gradually become accustomed to it.
The extraordinary becomes ordinary.
Grace becomes familiar.
Worship becomes routine.
Scripture becomes information.
Service becomes duty.
And Christ—the One who once captured the heart—can slowly become merely the reason behind all the religious activity.
Ephesus reminds us that Jesus does not merely want faithful workers.

He wants faithful hearts.
And perhaps that is why the first message to the churches begins here. Before Christ speaks about surviving persecution, resisting compromise, confronting evil, or enduring the trials that Revelation will soon unveil, He asks His Church something much more fundamental:
Do you still love Me?
Because endurance without love eventually becomes mere stubbornness.
Doctrine without love becomes cold orthodoxy.
Service without love becomes exhausting obligation.
But when truth, obedience, endurance, and love remain together, the Church becomes what the lampstand was always intended to be:
a light in the darkness.

Ask Yourself This

If Jesus were to look beyond everything I do for Him and examine why I do it, would He find the same love for Him that once set my faith in motion?
And if that love has grown quieter over the years, what might Christ be asking me to **remember, repent of, and return to**?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:1

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;”
— Revelation 2:1, KJV

The first message to the seven churches begins not with the condition of the church, but with **Christ Himself**.
Before Jesus tells the believers in Ephesus what they are doing well, before He identifies what has gone wrong, and before He calls them to repentance, He reminds them **who is speaking**.
That order matters.
The Church does not ultimately answer to public opinion, cultural expectations, denominational structures, influential personalities, or even its own assessment of how well it is doing.
The Church belongs to Jesus Christ.
And the One speaking to Ephesus is not absent from His Church.
He holds its messengers.
He walks among its lampstands.
He knows what is happening within it.

1. “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus”

The identity of the “angel” has been discussed for centuries.
The Greek word *angelos* simply means **messenger**. In many places in Scripture it clearly refers to a heavenly being, but the word itself can also describe a human messenger.
Because these messages are directed to actual congregations, some interpreters have understood the “angel” as a human representative or leader of the church. Others understand the angel as a heavenly representative associated with each congregation.
The text does not resolve the question completely, and perhaps we should resist insisting that it does.
What matters most is clear:
Christ has a message for His Church, and He intends His Church to hear it.
This is reinforced at the conclusion of every letter:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Notice the plural.
The message is addressed specifically to Ephesus, but it is not meant only for Ephesus.

Smyrna needs to hear what Christ says to Ephesus.
Pergamum needs to hear it.
Thyatira needs to hear it.
Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea need to hear it.
And so do we.
These seven messages are not simply ancient correspondence preserved for historical interest. They are Christ's continuing call for His Church to examine itself.

2. Ephesus

Ephesus was an appropriate place for the messages to begin.
It was one of the most important cities of Roman Asia and a major commercial and religious center. Its famous temple of Artemis dominated the religious identity of the city, and Acts 19 gives us a vivid picture of the tension created when the gospel began challenging the religious and economic structures surrounding that worship.
Paul knew Ephesus well.
He ministered there extensively, taught there, faced opposition there, and warned the church's elders about dangers that would eventually arise from false teachers.
That history makes Christ's later commendation especially striking.
The Ephesian believers had taken the danger of false teaching seriously.
They had learned to test those who claimed spiritual authority.
They had protected the truth.
Yet the church that had learned so carefully to recognize error would soon hear Christ say:
"Thou hast left thy first love."
Their history reminds us that yesterday's faithfulness does not guarantee today's spiritual health.
Every generation of the Church must remain attentive to Christ.

3. "These things saith he"

This expression carries a sense of authority.
What follows is not John's personal evaluation of the Ephesian congregation.
John is the messenger.
Christ is the speaker.
That distinction becomes extremely important throughout Revelation 2–3.
These churches are not being evaluated by neighboring congregations.
They are not comparing attendance numbers.
They are not measuring budgets.
They are not conducting surveys to determine whether people are satisfied.

They stand before Christ.
And His evaluation sometimes differs dramatically from how a congregation sees itself.
Later, Sardis will have **"a name that thou livest"** while Christ declares it dead.
Laodicea will consider itself rich and in need of nothing while Christ describes it as spiritually impoverished.
Human reputation and divine evaluation are not always the same.
That is why the identity of the One speaking matters.

4. "That holdeth the seven stars in his right hand"

We have already encountered these stars in Revelation 1.
John saw the risen Christ holding seven stars in His right hand, and Revelation 1:20 identified them as **"the angels of the seven churches."**
But notice a subtle strengthening of the image.
In Revelation 1:16, the stars are described as being **in His right hand**.
Here Christ is described as the One who **holds** them.
The image suggests possession, authority, security, and control.
Whatever difficulties these churches face, they have not escaped Christ's grasp.
The Roman Empire may appear powerful.
Local authorities may threaten believers.
False teachers may infiltrate congregations.
Persecution may intensify.
Some believers may even die.
But the Church has not slipped from Christ's hand.
That becomes enormously important as Revelation unfolds.
The churches are about to hear warnings of suffering, persecution, deception, compromise, and death.
Yet before any of that is described, Christ presents Himself as the One who **holds** His Church.
Their security ultimately rests not in their ability to hold onto Christ, but in the fact that **Christ holds them**.

5. "Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks"

This may be the most beautiful image in the verse. The KJV's "candlesticks" are the lampstands that hold the lights.
Revelation 1:20 has already told us:
"The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."
Christ does not merely observe the lampstands.
He **walks among them**.

The image is intimate and active.
Jesus is not an absentee Lord governing His Church from some unreachable distance.
He is present among His people.
He sees their worship.
He knows their struggles.
He knows their faithfulness.
He sees their compromises.
He knows their suffering.
He recognizes their perseverance.
And He knows when their hearts have begun to grow cold.
That makes the words coming in verse 2 inevitable: **"I know."**
Of course He knows.
He walks among the lampstands.
There is both tremendous comfort and tremendous accountability in that truth.
For the suffering church, Christ's presence means:
You have not been forgotten.
For the faithful servant whose work goes unnoticed:
Christ sees.
For the believer quietly enduring hardship:
Christ knows.
But for the complacent church, His presence means something else:
Nothing is hidden.
We sometimes speak about inviting Christ into our churches.
Revelation turns that thought around.
They are His churches.
We do not bring Christ into them.
He already walks among them.
The question is whether we recognize His presence and listen when He speaks.

6. The Lord of the Lampstands

There is another implication in this image that will become important in verse 5.
The One who walks among the lampstands also has authority over them.
Jesus will warn Ephesus:
"I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."
The Church does not own the lampstand.
Christ does.
A congregation exists as a light-bearing community because Christ has called it to bear His light.

That means the Church's primary responsibility is not simply institutional survival.
Churches can survive organizationally long after they have ceased fulfilling their spiritual purpose.
Buildings can remain.
Budgets can remain.
Committees can remain.
Programs can remain.
Traditions can remain.
Even worship services can remain.
But Revelation asks a more important question:
Is the lamp still giving light?
And the answer cannot ultimately be determined by the congregation itself.
The One walking among the lampstands decides.

Pastoral Reflection

There is profound comfort in knowing that Christ walks among His churches.
Pastors sometimes carry the burden of a congregation as though everything depends upon them. Church members can do the same. We worry about attendance, finances, disagreements, declining participation, younger generations, changing communities, and whether the church will still be there years from now.
Those concerns are real.
But Revelation 2:1 reminds us of something easily forgotten:
The Church was Christ's before it was ours.
We may serve it.
We may teach within it.
We may preach to it.
We may lead it.
We may sacrifice greatly for it.
But we do not own it.
Christ does.
And perhaps that truth should relieve some of the burden carried by those who love the Church deeply.
The risen Christ has not delegated His Church to us and then walked away.
He still walks among the lampstands.
That means the pastor standing before a struggling congregation is not standing there alone.
The Sunday school teacher wondering whether anyone is listening is not teaching unnoticed.

The elderly member praying faithfully for a church she has loved for decades is not forgotten.
The small congregation wondering whether its ministry still matters is not invisible.
Christ walks among His churches.
But His presence also asks something of us.
If Christ is truly present, then church can never merely be something we **attend**.
We gather in the presence of the One who holds the stars in His hand.
That should change the way we worship.
It should change the way we serve.
It should change the way we treat one another.
And it should certainly change the way we think about whose church it is.
The question is not merely:
"What do we want our church to become?"
A better question may be:
"Lord, since this is Your Church and You are already walking among us, what do You want us to become?"

Something Worth Pondering

We often ask where Christ is when the Church is struggling.
Revelation 2:1 gives a surprisingly simple answer:
He is walking among the lampstands.
He has not abandoned His Church.
He has not lost sight of His people.
He has not become distracted by the events of history.
He is present.
But His presence is not merely comforting.
It is searching.
The same Christ who walks beside the suffering believer also walks through the congregation that has become comfortable.
He sees what outsiders cannot see.
He knows what statistics cannot measure.
He knows whether our service comes from love.
He knows whether our worship comes from the heart.
He knows whether our doctrine produces holiness or merely pride.
And He knows whether the lamp is still burning.
Before Jesus says to Ephesus,
"I know thy works,"
He gives them the reason He knows:
He walks among them.

Ask Yourself This

If Christ truly walks among His churches—and therefore sees beyond appearances into the life and heart of His people—**what would He see if He walked through my church today?**
And perhaps the more personal question is this:
What would He see if He walked through my heart?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:2

“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:”
— Revelation 2:2, KJV

Two words open Christ's evaluation of the church at Ephesus:
“I know.”
Those words will echo throughout the messages to the seven churches.
Christ knows.
Before the Ephesians can explain themselves, defend themselves, describe their accomplishments, or present their difficulties, Jesus tells them that He already knows.
He knows their works.
He knows their toil.
He knows their endurance.
He knows their discernment.
He knows what they have confronted.
He knows what they have refused to tolerate.
And soon we will discover that He also knows what is missing.
There is no part of the life of His Church hidden from the One who walks among the lampstands.

1. “I know thy works”

Christ begins with commendation.
That is important.
Jesus is about to confront a serious spiritual problem within this congregation, but He does not allow their failure to erase their faithfulness.
He sees both.
There is something profoundly pastoral in that.
We sometimes allow one weakness to define an entire person. One failure can overshadow years of faithfulness. One mistake can become the lens through which everything else is viewed.
Christ does not do that with Ephesus.
Their first love has diminished, and He will confront it directly.
But their works still matter.
Their labor still matters.
Their endurance still matters.
Their defense of truth still matters.

Christ does not flatter them, but neither does He ignore what is worthy of praise.
There is an important lesson here for the way Christians correct one another.
Truth does not require us to become blind to goodness.
Correction does not require condemnation of everything.
Christ can say:
“I know thy works.”
And later:
“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.”
Both can be true at the same time.

2. “Thy labour”

The KJV’s word “labour” points **to toil** that costs something.
This was not casual Christianity.
The believers in Ephesus had worked hard.
Their service had required effort.
Perhaps there had been long days.
Perhaps there had been difficult conversations.
Perhaps ministry had brought opposition.
Perhaps caring for one another had required sacrifice.
Whatever forms their service took, Christ knew that following Him had not been easy.
And He noticed.
That is worth lingering over.
Much of the work done for Christ is never publicly recognized.
There are people whose names will never appear on a church sign.
There are prayers nobody hears.
Meals prepared quietly.
Hospital visits few people know about.
Money given without recognition.
Children taught week after week.
Buildings cleaned when everyone else has gone home.
Phone calls made to lonely people.
Hands held beside hospital beds.
Funerals attended.
Families helped.
Forgiveness extended.
Encouragement offered.
Years of service carried out without applause.
The world may never know.
The congregation itself may never fully know.
But Christ says:

“I know.”
There may be no earthly recognition for some acts of Christian faithfulness.
There is no such thing as unnoticed service in the Kingdom of God.

3. “Thy patience”

Here we encounter a word that belongs at the very heart of our journey through Revelation.
Endurance.
The Greek idea behind the word is not passive resignation. It describes steadfastness—the ability to remain faithful under pressure.
This is the kind of endurance that does not simply survive hardship but continues faithfully through it.
The Ephesians had it.
They had encountered difficulties and remained.
They had faced opposition and remained.
They had confronted false teaching and remained.
They had grown tired and continued anyway.
Christ recognizes that perseverance.
And once again we find ourselves standing directly beneath the title of our study:
When Faith Must Endure.
Revelation is not primarily a handbook for calculating when events will happen.
It is a pastoral summons teaching Christians **how to remain faithful when faithfulness becomes difficult**.
The Ephesian church understood something about endurance.
Their problem was not that they had quit.
In fact, the opposite appears to be true.
They kept going.
And that makes what Christ says in verse 4 even more sobering.
It is possible to endure in Christian activity while something inside us is slowly changing.
We can keep serving after joy has faded.
We can keep working after love has cooled.
We can keep defending the faith after tenderness has disappeared.
We can keep going long after we have forgotten why we started.
Endurance matters.
But endurance alone is not enough.
Christian endurance must remain rooted in Christian love.

4. “Thou canst not bear them which are evil”

This statement can sound uncomfortable to modern ears because Christians rightly emphasize patience, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

But love does not require moral indifference.
The Ephesians understood that there are behaviors and teachings that damage people and distort the gospel.
Jesus praises them for refusing to accept evil as though it did not matter.
Notice carefully what the passage does **not** say.
It does not say that the Ephesians hated evildoers.
It says they could not tolerate evil.
That distinction matters.
Christians are called to love people without pretending that everything people do is good.
Grace does not require calling evil good.
Compassion does not require abandoning discernment.
Forgiveness does not require pretending sin is harmless.
Jesus Himself embodies both grace and truth.
The challenge for the Church is to do the same.

5. “Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles”

The Ephesian church did not accept every spiritual claim simply because someone attached the name of Christ to it.
They **tested** those claims.
That is biblical discernment.
The early Church faced traveling teachers, prophets, missionaries, and individuals claiming apostolic authority. Some were genuine.
Others were not.
Ephesus had learned to tell the difference.
This is particularly interesting in light of Paul's earlier warning to the Ephesian elders.
In Acts 20, Paul warned that after his departure false teachers would arise and attempt to draw disciples away.
Years later, Revelation shows a church that appears to have taken that warning seriously.
They tested those claiming authority.
They examined their teaching.
They compared claims with truth.
And they discovered false apostles.
There is an important principle here for every generation:
A Christian should never surrender discernment merely because someone speaks confidently about God.
A title does not guarantee truth.
A pulpit does not guarantee truth.
A large audience does not guarantee truth.
Popularity does not guarantee truth.

Charisma does not guarantee truth.
Even claiming divine authority does not guarantee truth.
Teaching must be tested.
The question is not merely:
Does this sound spiritual?
The question is:
Is it faithful to Christ and consistent with the truth God has revealed?

6. “And hast found them liars”

The Ephesians did not merely suspect falsehood.
They investigated and reached a conclusion.
Some who claimed to be apostles were not apostles at all.
This tells us something important about Christian discernment.
Discernment is not cynicism.
Cynicism begins by assuming everyone is false.
Discernment begins by asking whether something is true.
Those are very different attitudes.
The Ephesian believers tested the claims placed before them.
That required knowledge.
It required courage.
And it required a willingness to say **no** when something claiming to be Christian was not faithful to Christ.
Jesus praises them for doing so.
But Revelation is about to expose the danger that can accompany even a good gift.
A church that spends years detecting falsehood can gradually become suspicious.
A church trained to identify error can begin seeing enemies everywhere.
A congregation devoted to defending truth can slowly become better known for what it opposes than for the Christ it loves.
And that may help us understand the tension developing within Ephesus.
They had learned to guard the truth.
Christ would now call them to guard their hearts.

Pastoral Reflection

There are few words more comforting to a weary Christian than these:
“I know.”
Sometimes we want God to change our circumstances immediately.
Sometimes He does.
Sometimes He does not.
But Revelation reminds us that God's apparent silence never means God's ignorance.
Christ knows.

He knows when ministry becomes tiring.
He knows when faithfulness costs more than expected.
He knows when doing the right thing makes life harder rather than easier.
He knows when we continue serving while nobody seems to notice.
He knows when we are misunderstood.
He knows when we are exhausted.
He knows when we quietly wonder whether what we are doing makes any difference.
He knows.
And sometimes that must be enough to carry us through another day.
But there is another side to those words.
If Christ knows our toil, He also knows our motives.
If He knows our endurance, He also knows what our endurance is doing to our hearts.
If He knows the truth we defend, He also knows whether we defend it lovingly.
That makes Christian service more than a question of how much we accomplish.
The question becomes:
What are we becoming while we accomplish it?
We can become so committed to doing the Lord's work that we neglect our relationship with the Lord whose work it is.
That is the danger beginning to emerge at Ephesus.
They were busy.
They were discerning.
They were persevering.
They were doctrinally alert.
And Jesus commended all of it.
But something essential was disappearing beneath all that activity.
The lesson is not:
Work less.
The lesson is:
Do not allow the work you do for Christ to replace the love you have for Christ.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a quiet danger hidden inside successful Christian service.
The longer we serve, the easier it becomes to measure faithfulness by activity.
We ask:
How much did we accomplish?
How many people attended?

How many programs did we run?
How many problems did we solve?
How many false teachings did we identify?
How much did we endure?
Those questions may have value.
But Jesus asks something deeper.
What happened to your heart while you were doing all of it?
Ephesus teaches us that a church can be hardworking without being wholehearted.
It can be doctrinally careful without being spiritually warm.
It can endure without loving as it once loved.
And perhaps that is why Christ begins with:
"I know."
Because only Christ can see all of it at once.
He sees the work.
He sees the sacrifice.
He sees the perseverance.
He sees the truth we defend.
And He sees the heart beneath it all.
The good news is that when Christ looks at His people, He does not overlook their faithful labor.
Every prayer matters.
Every act of kindness matters.
Every quiet sacrifice matters.
Every moment we remain faithful when walking away would be easier matters.
Christ knows.
And when nobody else notices, that may be one of the most beautiful promises hidden within the letters to the seven churches.

Ask Yourself This

If Christ were to say to me today, **"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience,"** what acts of faithfulness would He see that perhaps no one else knows about?
And then comes the harder question:
While I have been busy working for Christ, what has been happening to my love for Christ?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:3

“And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”
— Revelation 2:3, KJV

Christ continues His commendation of the church at Ephesus.
Verse 2 praised their works, toil, endurance, and discernment. Verse 3 goes further by telling us **why they endured**.
They were bearing up:
“for my name's sake.”
That changes the character of their perseverance.
This was not mere stubbornness.
It was not simply institutional survival.
They were enduring because they belonged to Jesus Christ.
Verse 3 continues the commendation that began with Christ’s words in verse 2.
“I know thy works.”
He knows not only that they are enduring.
He knows **why** they are enduring.

1. “Hast patience”

We encountered endurance in the previous verse, and its repetition deserves attention.
Jesus could have mentioned it once.
Instead, He emphasizes it.
The Ephesian Christians were living in an environment where remaining faithful to Christ could carry real social, religious, and economic consequences.
Ephesus was not spiritually neutral territory.
Its religious life was deeply connected with the worship of Artemis. The city also existed within the larger political and religious world of the Roman Empire. Christianity's declaration that **Jesus is Lord** was therefore more than a private religious preference.
It was a claim of allegiance.
The Christians in Ephesus had apparently maintained that allegiance.
They had endured.
That is one of the great themes of Revelation.
The question Revelation repeatedly places before believers is not merely:
Do you believe?
It is:
Will you continue believing when believing becomes costly?

There is faith that begins.
And there is faith that remains.
Revelation is deeply concerned with the second.

2. “And hast borne”

There is something wonderfully human about this expression.
Bearing up.
It does not necessarily describe dramatic heroism.
Sometimes endurance looks remarkably ordinary.
You simply keep going.
You pray again.
You worship again.
You forgive again.
You serve again.
You trust again.
You get up tomorrow morning and follow Christ again.
There may be no dramatic victory.
There may be no miraculous change in circumstances.
There may not even be a feeling of spiritual triumph.
But you remain faithful.
That too is endurance.
We sometimes imagine strong faith as faith that never struggles.
Scripture gives us a different picture.
Strong faith may struggle greatly.
It simply refuses to let the struggle have the final word.
The Ephesian Christians were **bearing up**.
The pressure had not disappeared.
They had learned to live faithfully beneath it.
That distinction matters.
Sometimes we pray for God to remove the burden.
Sometimes He does.
At other times, God strengthens us to carry what has not yet been removed.
And there are seasons of Christian life when the miracle is not that the burden disappeared.
The miracle is that we are still standing beneath it.

3. “For my name's sake”

Here we reach the heart of the verse.
The Ephesians were not enduring merely because they valued endurance.
They were enduring:
“for my name's sake.”
In Scripture, a name represents more than a label. It carries identity, character, authority, and reputation.

To bear the name of Christ means to identify oneself with Him.
The Ephesian Christians had done exactly that.
They were willing to accept hardship because belonging to Jesus mattered more than escaping hardship.
That is easy to say when faith costs little.
It becomes something very different when discipleship demands sacrifice.
Throughout Christian history, believers have discovered that following Jesus can cost reputation, relationships, opportunities, possessions, freedom, and sometimes life itself.
Revelation was written for Christians learning what such allegiance might require.
And Jesus tells Ephesus:
I know what My name has cost you.
There is tremendous comfort in that.
Christ never asks His followers to endure something for His name and then forgets what their faithfulness cost.
Every sacrifice made for Him is known.
Every rejection endured because of Him is known.
Every moment when compromise would have been easier is known.
Every quiet decision to remain faithful is known.
Christ knows.

4. The Name Worth Enduring For

There is another question hidden within this phrase.
Why would anyone endure suffering for the sake of Jesus' name?
Because the Christian faith is not ultimately centered on a set of principles.
It is centered on a Person.
The Ephesians were not merely defending Christianity.
They were remaining faithful to **Christ**.
That distinction becomes especially important when we consider what Jesus will say in the next verse.
It is possible to become deeply committed to defending the Christian faith while slowly losing intimacy with Christ Himself.
We can defend His name while becoming distant from His heart.
We can protect correct teaching about Jesus while our love for Jesus grows cold.
That seems to be the tragedy developing in Ephesus.
They were willing to suffer for His name.
Yet somehow the love they once had was disappearing.
That should make every mature Christian stop and think.

5. “Hast not fainted”

This is an extraordinary commendation.
They had worked.
They had toiled.
They had confronted false teaching.
They had endured pressure.
They had borne hardship.
And still:
“Hast not fainted.”
Or perhaps more precisely, they had not become weary **in the sense of giving up**.
Surely they experienced ordinary human tiredness. The language does not require us to imagine Christians who never became physically or emotionally exhausted.
Rather, they had not allowed weariness to cause them to abandon their calling.
They remained.
They continued.
They persevered.
There is an important distinction between **being tired** and **giving up**.
Faithful Christians become tired.
Pastors become tired.
Teachers become tired.
Caregivers become tired.
Parents become tired.
People who spend years serving others become tired.
There is nothing spiritually defective about needing rest.
Even Jesus withdrew from crowds.
The danger comes when weariness begins convincing us that faithfulness no longer matters.
Ephesus had resisted that temptation.
They had not quit.

6. When Faith Must Endure

Few verses could fit the title of our journey through Revelation more naturally.
When Faith Must Endure.
Verse 3 shows us what that looks like.
Endurance is not primarily dramatic.
It is continued allegiance to Jesus.
It means bearing His name tomorrow because we bore His name today.
It means refusing to allow hardship to decide whom we belong to.
It means continuing when the easier path would be compromise.

But Ephesus also teaches us something we must not overlook:
Endurance itself must be guarded.
We can endure outwardly while becoming depleted inwardly.
We can continue serving while losing joy.
We can continue working while becoming resentful.
We can continue defending truth while becoming harsh.
We can continue attending worship while our hearts become distant.
And that creates the remarkable tension between verses 3 and 4.
Verse 3:
"Hast not fainted."
Verse 4:
"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."
They had not stopped.
They had not surrendered.
They had not compromised.
They had not walked away.
But something had happened.
Their hands were still working.
Their feet were still walking.
Their minds were still discerning.
But their hearts were no longer where they once had been.
That may be one of the most important pastoral lessons in the message to Ephesus.
Perseverance is essential.
But Christianity is not merely about continuing to perform Christian activities.
Christ does not simply want us to endure **for Him**.
He wants us to endure **with Him**.

Pastoral Reflection

There are Christians who need to hear the words of Revelation 2:3 today:
Christ knows you are tired.
You may have been serving for years.
Perhaps you have cared for people who never thanked you.
Perhaps you have prayed for something that has not changed.
Perhaps you have remained faithful through disappointment.
Perhaps you have watched people you love walk away from faith.
Perhaps you have carried responsibilities nobody else completely understands.
And still you remain.
You may not feel particularly heroic.
You may simply feel tired.

But Christ sees perseverance differently than we often do.
We tend to notice dramatic victories.
Christ notices **faithfulness**.
He sees the person who gets out of bed and faces another difficult day.
He sees the pastor who prepares another sermon after a discouraging week.
He sees the caregiver who quietly serves someone who cannot repay the kindness.
He sees the Christian who refuses compromise when nobody else would know.
He sees the person who continues praying even when heaven seems silent.
He sees the believer who says:
"I still belong to Jesus."
That is endurance.
But Ephesus also gives us permission to examine ourselves honestly.
There is a difference between faithful endurance and simply running on spiritual fumes.
Sometimes Christians take pride in never stopping.
We can begin to believe that exhaustion itself proves faithfulness.
It does not.
Jesus praised the Ephesians for not giving up, but He was also about to tell them that something essential needed restoration.
Perhaps there are times when the most faithful thing we can do is stop long enough to ask:
Why am I still doing this?
Is it love?
Is it calling?
Is it gratitude?
Or has faithful service quietly become obligation?
Christ does not merely want exhausted servants who somehow reach the finish line.
He wants disciples whose endurance continues to flow from relationship with Him.
The goal is not simply:
Keep going.
It is:
Keep going with Christ.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a kind of faithfulness that nobody celebrates because it does not look spectacular.
It simply refuses to quit.

No headlines.
No applause.
No dramatic testimony.
Just another day of trusting Christ.
Another prayer.
Another act of obedience.
Another temptation resisted.
Another person forgiven.
Another Sunday worshiped.
Another burden carried.
Another morning when someone quietly decides:
"Today I will follow Jesus again."
Revelation calls that endurance.
And Christ notices it.
But Ephesus also warns us that endurance can become mechanical if love is not continually renewed.
Perhaps the question is therefore not simply:
Can my faith endure?
Perhaps it is:
Can my faith endure without losing the love that made me want to follow Christ in the first place?
That is a much deeper kind of endurance.
And it may be exactly the kind Revelation intends to teach us.

Ask Yourself This

When following Christ becomes tiring, disappointing, costly, or simply difficult, **what keeps me going?**
And as I endure for the sake of His name, am I merely continuing the work—or am I still walking closely with **the One whose name I bear?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:4

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”
— Revelation 2:4, KJV

One word changes the direction of the message:
“But.”
Until now, Christ's evaluation of Ephesus has been remarkably positive.
They work.
They toil.
They endure.
They reject evil.
They test false apostles.
They bear hardship for Christ's name.
They have not given up.
If the message ended with verse 3, we might consider Ephesus an exemplary church.
Then comes verse 4:
“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.”
Suddenly we discover that a church can be faithful in many important ways and still have something seriously wrong at its center.
That should make every congregation—and every Christian—listen carefully.

1. “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee”

Jesus does not soften the words.
He does not say:
There is one small area where you might consider improving.
He says:
“I have somewhat against thee.”
The language is serious because the condition is serious.
Yet notice again the pastoral order Christ follows.
He first acknowledges their faithfulness.
Only then does He confront their failure.
Christ's correction is therefore neither flattery nor cruelty.
It is truth spoken by the One who loves His Church enough to tell it what it needs to hear.
That is an important distinction.
There is a kind of criticism whose purpose is merely to wound.
There is also a kind of silence that disguises itself as love because it refuses to say anything uncomfortable.

Jesus demonstrates another way.
Love tells the truth for the purpose of restoration.
That principle extends far beyond Ephesus.
Healthy Christian relationships require the ability both to affirm what is good and to confront what is harmful.
Healthy pastoral leadership requires the same courage.
And healthy churches must be willing to hear both.
A congregation that only wants encouragement will eventually become blind to its weaknesses.
A congregation that hears only criticism will eventually become discouraged.
Christ provides both truth and grace.
He says, in effect:
I see what you are doing well.
And:
I also see what must change.

2. "Thou hast left"

The wording is important.
Jesus does not say that their love was accidentally misplaced.
He says they have **abandoned** it.
There is movement in the language.
Something once possessed has been left behind.
That suggests the Ephesian church had not always been this way.
There had been another time.
A warmer time.
A time when their faithfulness and their love existed together.
A time when their work for Christ flowed naturally from their love for Christ.
Somewhere along the road, something changed.
Perhaps not suddenly.
Spiritual decline often does not happen suddenly.
Very few Christians wake up one morning and deliberately decide:
Today I will become spiritually cold.
It usually happens gradually.
Prayer becomes shorter.
Scripture becomes familiar.
Worship becomes routine.
Service becomes obligation.
Grace becomes something we understand rather than something that amazes us.
We still believe.
We still attend.

We still serve.
We still know the language.
We still do the work.
But something that once burned brightly has grown dim.
That may be exactly what happened at Ephesus.
Their faith had not disappeared.
Their **love had changed**.

3. “Thy first love”

What exactly is this “first love”?
Interpreters have offered several possibilities.
Some understand it primarily as the Ephesians' original love for Christ.
Others emphasize their love for one another.
Still others understand the phrase more broadly as the love that characterized the congregation during its earlier life—love for Christ expressed through love for one another and for others.
These possibilities do not need to be forced apart.
In the New Testament, love for Christ and love for His people are deeply connected.
Jesus taught that love for God and love for neighbor belong together.
The First Letter of John makes the connection especially strong: genuine love for God necessarily shapes the way we love one another.
It may therefore be best to understand Ephesus as having lost something in the **whole character of its love**.
Their devotion to Christ had cooled.
And as devotion to Christ cooled, their relationships with others may have changed as well.
That possibility fits what we have already seen.
Ephesus had become very good at identifying what was false.
They knew how to test teachers.
They knew how to confront evil.
They knew how to defend truth.
Those are necessary abilities.
But a congregation that spends years examining error can become hard if it does not also remain deeply rooted in love.
Discernment without love can become suspicion.
Orthodoxy without love can become coldness.
Truth without love can become a weapon.
And Christian service without love can become duty.
The Ephesians had guarded their doctrine.
Christ now tells them that they had failed to guard something equally precious:
their love.

4. When First Love Becomes Familiar Love

There is something about the phrase **"thy first love"** that many longtime Christians understand immediately.
Early faith often carries a sense of discovery.
Scripture seems new.
Prayer seems remarkable.
Grace seems astonishing.
Worship feels like privilege.
Talking about Christ comes naturally because we have discovered something wonderful.
Then years pass.
We learn more.
We mature.
We serve.
We experience disappointments.
We see failures in churches.
We encounter difficult people.
We experience unanswered prayers.
We bury people we love.
We discover that following Jesus does not protect us from suffering.
Faith becomes deeper.
But if we are not careful, familiarity can also make faith less wondrous.
The danger is not maturity.
Mature love should be deeper than first love.
A marriage that has endured decades should possess something richer than the excitement of courtship.
The same should be true of our relationship with Christ.
Jesus is not asking Ephesus to manufacture youthful religious excitement.
He is calling them back to **love**.
Mature Christian love may look different from the enthusiasm of conversion.
It may be quieter.
It may have survived suffering.
It may carry scars.
It may know questions that younger faith never considered.
But it should still be love.
The tragedy comes when familiarity becomes indifference.

5. Doing Everything Right for the Wrong Reason

Ephesus forces us to confront an uncomfortable possibility:

We can do the right things after the right reason has disappeared.
We can preach because Sunday is coming.
We can teach because someone expects us to teach.
We can sing because we are on the schedule.
We can serve because nobody else will do it.
We can give because we always have.
We can attend worship because that is what we do on Sunday morning.
We can defend doctrine because winning the argument has become important to us.
All those activities may continue long after love has stopped being their primary source.
That is why outward activity alone cannot measure spiritual health.
Ephesus was active.
Christ was looking deeper.
He was looking at the heart.
This connects directly with the question we raised in verse 3:
What are we becoming while we accomplish the work?
The Ephesian church had endured without giving up.
But apparently it had endured without sufficiently tending the heart.

6. Orthodoxy Is Not Enough

This verse must not be misunderstood as though Jesus were minimizing doctrine.
He has just praised Ephesus for testing false apostles.
Verse 6 will praise them again for rejecting the works of the Nicolaitans.
Truth matters.
Doctrine matters.
Discernment matters.
But Revelation 2:4 destroys the idea that **correct doctrine alone constitutes Christian faithfulness**.
A church can have an excellent statement of faith and an unhealthy heart.
It can explain theology accurately while treating people poorly.
It can defend Scripture passionately while failing to demonstrate the character Scripture commands.
It can expose every error outside its walls while remaining unaware of lovelessness within them.
Jesus does not ask Ephesus to choose between truth and love.
He calls them to recover what Christianity requires:
truth held in love.
A healthy church needs both.
Truth without love becomes cold.
Love without truth becomes directionless.
Christ calls His Church to neither extreme.

7. The Danger of Becoming Professional Christians

There is another danger here particularly relevant to pastors, teachers, church leaders, and longtime servants.
We can become very good at Christianity.
We know what to say.
We know when to stand.
We know the hymns.
We know the Scriptures.
We know how committees work.
We know how worship services work.
We know how to prepare lessons.
We know how to pray publicly.
We know how to minister to grieving families.
We know how to answer theological questions.
And familiarity can become dangerous because we can perform all those responsibilities competently even when our own hearts need attention.
We can become professionally proficient at things that once arose from deep devotion.
Ephesus warns every mature Christian:
Never confuse competence in Christian activity with intimacy with Christ.
The two are not the same.

8. Christ Notices What Is Missing

Perhaps the most striking thing about verse 4 is that Christ notices an absence.
People usually notice what is present.
Christ notices what should be present but is not.
The works are there.
The toil is there.
The endurance is there.
The discernment is there.
The doctrinal vigilance is there.
But Christ looks at everything the church possesses and says:
Something is missing.
Love.
That means spiritual health cannot be measured merely by adding up visible accomplishments.
Sometimes the most important question is not:
What are we doing?
It is: **What have we lost while doing it?**

Pastoral Reflection

This verse should probably be read slowly by anyone who has followed Christ for many years.

There is no shame in admitting that our relationship with Christ has known seasons.

There are mountaintops and valleys.

There are seasons when prayer seems effortless and seasons when every prayer feels difficult.

There are times when worship overwhelms us and times when we sing mostly because we have decided to remain faithful.

Mature faith does not depend upon constant emotion.

But Jesus' words to Ephesus tell us not to ignore the condition of our hearts simply because we continue doing Christian things.

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves questions we would rather avoid.

When did prayer become mostly requests?

When did worship become mostly routine?

When did Scripture become something I study rather than somewhere I meet God?

When did serving Christ begin feeling primarily like responsibility?

When did I become better at recognizing what is wrong with everyone else than recognizing what is happening within me?

Those are uncomfortable questions.

But Christ's confrontation with Ephesus is not intended to shame them.

It is intended to **bring them home**.

That distinction matters enormously.

Jesus does not point out their lost love and then walk away.

In the next verse He will give them a path back:

Remember.

Repent.

Return.

That means verse 4 is actually an expression of grace.

Christ notices the cooling heart before the flame disappears entirely.

He speaks while restoration is still possible.

Perhaps one of the greatest evidences of Christ's love is that He refuses to leave His Church comfortably unhealthy.

Christ loves His Church too much to flatter it.

He tells us the truth because He wants us near Him.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the opposite of love is not always hatred.

Sometimes it is **familiarity without wonder**.

We can become so accustomed to Christ that we stop being astonished by Him.

Think about what Christians confess.
The God who created everything knows us.
The Son of God entered human history.
Christ bore our sin.
The tomb was empty.
Death was defeated.
Grace is offered.
We are forgiven.
God calls us His children.
Christ promises never to leave us.
And eternal life awaits.
There was probably a time when some of those truths overwhelmed us.
Then we heard them a thousand times.
And extraordinary grace became familiar theology.
Ephesus warns us never to allow familiarity with the gospel to rob us of wonder at the gospel.
The goal is not to return to spiritual immaturity.
It is something far better:
to know Christ more deeply and love Him more deeply because of what we have come to know.
After decades of walking with Jesus, our love may not look like it did at the beginning.
It should be richer.
It should be tested.
It should be seasoned.
It should have survived disappointment and suffering.
It may have scars.
But beneath everything else, there should still be something within us that can say:
"Lord, after all these years, I still love You."
Perhaps that is the kind of endurance Revelation ultimately seeks.
Not merely faith that survives.
Love that survives with it.

Ask Yourself This

If Christ looked beyond everything I believe, everything I know, and everything I do for Him, **would He find that I still love Him?**
And if I recognize that something has grown cold, can I hear His correction not as condemnation, but as the voice of the One who loves me enough to call me **home**?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:5

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”
— Revelation 2:5, KJV

Christ has identified the problem.
Now He gives the remedy.
The Ephesian church has abandoned the love it had at first, but Jesus does not leave them wondering what to do next.
His instructions are remarkably clear:
Remember.
Repent.
Return.
Three movements toward restoration.
There is no complicated program.
There is no elaborate formula.
There is simply an honest recognition of what has been lost, a turning away from the path that led them there, and a return to the life that once flowed from love.
But the tenderness of Christ's invitation must not cause us to overlook the seriousness of His warning.
If Ephesus refuses to return, Christ says:
“I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.”
The church is loved.
But the church is also accountable.
Grace does not make repentance unnecessary.
Grace makes repentance possible.

1. “Remember therefore”

The first command is surprisingly simple:
Remember.
Memory becomes a spiritual discipline.
Jesus asks the Ephesians to look backward—not because the past was perfect, but because remembering what once existed may help them recognize what has been lost.
There was a time when love characterized this congregation differently.
Remember it.
Remember when following Christ was not merely responsibility.
Remember when worship carried wonder.

Remember when prayer was more than habit.
Remember when Scripture was not merely something to defend but something through which God spoke deeply to the heart.
Remember when serving another person felt like serving Christ.
Remember when grace seemed astonishing.
Remember when being forgiven produced gratitude rather than familiarity.
Remember.
There are times when spiritual renewal begins not by discovering something new but by remembering something we already knew.
The Old Testament repeatedly calls God's people to remember.
Remember what God has done.
Remember how He delivered you.
Remember His covenant.
Remember His faithfulness.
Remember where you came from.
Forgetfulness is spiritually dangerous because when we forget what God has done, we gradually lose sight of why we trusted Him in the first place.
Christ therefore begins the restoration of Ephesus with memory.
Remember.

2. “From whence thou art fallen”

This phrase tells us how seriously Jesus views their condition.
He does not say:
Remember how things used to feel.
He says:
“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.”
Something significant has happened.
They have fallen from a place they once occupied.
That is remarkable when we remember everything Christ has just praised.
They are still working.
Still enduring.
Still discerning.
Still resisting false teachers.
Still bearing hardship.
Still identified with Christ.
And yet Jesus says they have **fallen**.
That means spiritual decline cannot always be measured by visible inactivity.
Sometimes we fall while remaining extremely busy.
The calendar may still be full.

The church may still be active.
The ministry may still be functioning.
The sermons may still be preached.
The lessons may still be taught.
The hymns may still be sung.
Everything visible may continue.
And Christ may still say:
Remember from where you have fallen.
That is sobering.
It means the condition of a church cannot ultimately be determined by activity alone.
The deepest question remains the condition of the heart.

3. "Repent"

Then comes the second command:
Repent.
Repentance is one of those biblical words that can become so familiar that we forget its force.
Repentance is not simply feeling bad.
It is not embarrassment.
It is not guilt.
It is not regret.
A person can regret the consequences of something without actually turning away from it.
Biblical repentance involves a change of direction.
The Ephesians are moving away from something they once possessed.
Christ tells them:
Turn around.
That is good news.
Because if Christ tells them to turn around, then the road home still exists.
Repentance is sometimes presented almost entirely as a threatening word.
In Scripture it is also profoundly hopeful.
God calls us to repent because change is possible.
Christ could have said:
You abandoned your first love. It is over.
He does not.
He says:
Repent.
There is still time.
The lampstand is still standing.
Christ is still walking among them.

The Spirit is still speaking.
The church can still return.
That is grace.

4. “And do the first works”

Now comes the third movement.
Remember.
Repent.
Then:
Return.
Interestingly, Jesus does not tell them merely to recover the feelings they once had.
He tells them to **do** something.
“Do the first works.”
That is pastorally important because love cannot always be restored simply by commanding ourselves to feel differently.
Sometimes we return to love by returning to the practices love once produced.
Pray again—not merely because you must, but because you are seeking Christ.
Open Scripture again—not merely to prepare a lesson, prove a point, or defend a doctrine, but to hear God.
Serve someone again without needing recognition.
Forgive again.
Give again.
Worship again.
Spend time with Christ again.
Do the things that once naturally flowed from love.
There is wisdom here for long relationships of every kind.
Sometimes affection follows faithful action.
A marriage does not survive decades because two people constantly feel exactly what they felt on their wedding day.
Love matures through continued acts of love.
Christian discipleship can work similarly.
When our hearts grow cold, Christ does not tell us to manufacture emotion.
He tells us to return faithfully to the life that love once produced.
And sometimes, along that road, the heart awakens again.

5. Remember. Repent. Return.

These three words provide one of the simplest patterns for spiritual renewal anywhere in Scripture.
Remember what has been lost.
Repent of the direction that led away from it.

Return to the practices that once expressed it.
There is no need to pretend.
There is no need to manufacture spiritual excitement.
There is simply a willingness to admit:
Something has changed.
Then to hear Christ say:
Come back.
That may be one of the most beautiful truths hidden inside one of Revelation's strongest warnings.
The risen Christ does not merely diagnose spiritual decline.
He provides a path toward restoration.

6. “Or else”

Then the tone changes.
The invitation carries a warning.
“Or else…”
The Ephesians have a choice.
Christ calls them to repentance, but He will not treat their refusal to repent as though it does not matter.
Grace must never be confused with indifference.
Jesus loves this church.
That is precisely why He confronts it.
And because the church belongs to Him, He takes its spiritual condition seriously.

7. “I will come unto thee”

The language of Christ's coming appears throughout Revelation, but we should not automatically assume that every reference describes His final return at the end of history.
Here the context suggests a coming in judgment against this particular congregation.
Christ already walks among the lampstands.
If Ephesus refuses to repent, He will act.
That means the greatest danger facing this church is not ultimately Rome.
It is not Artemis worship.
It is not false apostles.
It is not persecution.
The greatest danger is refusing to listen when **Christ speaks**.
That is a striking reversal.
The Ephesians had become experts at identifying external threats to the church.
Jesus tells them that their most serious danger is now internal.
They have guarded themselves against false teachers.

But who will guard them against a loveless heart?

8. “And will remove thy candlestick out of his place”

Here the warning becomes unmistakable.
Revelation 1:20 has already identified the lampstands as the churches.
Christ therefore warns Ephesus that its continued existence as a genuine light-bearing church is not guaranteed merely because it currently exists.
This is not necessarily a statement about the eternal salvation of individual believers.
The focus is the congregation and its calling as Christ's lampstand.
A church exists to bear His light.
If it ceases to fulfill that calling and refuses His correction, Christ can remove its lampstand.
That should cause every congregation to think carefully.
No church has a permanent guarantee based upon its history.
Not because it has existed for fifty years.
Not because it has existed for a hundred years.
Not because generations of one family have worshiped there.
Not because great pastors once preached there.
Not because revival once happened there.
Not because the building is beautiful.
Not because the congregation was once large.
Not because the church once transformed its community.
Yesterday's faithfulness cannot substitute for today's obedience.
The lampstand belongs to Christ.
And the One who walks among the lampstands has authority over them.

9. When a Church Exists but the Lamp Is Gone

There is a particularly sobering implication here.
An organization may continue after its spiritual purpose has been lost.
The building may remain.
The sign may remain.
The denominational name may remain.
The bank account may remain.
The committees may remain.
The Sunday service may remain.
People may continue saying:
“This is our church.”
But Revelation asks another question:
Is it still Christ's lampstand?
That is much harder to answer.

A church's goal cannot merely be survival.
The purpose of a lampstand is not to preserve the lampstand.
The purpose of a lampstand is to hold the light.
That distinction is enormously important.
Churches sometimes become consumed with institutional survival.
How do we keep the doors open?
How do we maintain the building?
How do we preserve our traditions?
How do we keep the programs running?
Those concerns may be legitimate.
But none of them is the Church's ultimate purpose.
The question Christ asks is not simply:
Can this congregation survive?
It is:
Will this congregation continue bearing My light?
A lampstand that no longer bears light has forgotten why it exists.

10. “Except thou repent”

Then, almost as though Christ refuses to allow the warning to have the final word, He repeats the invitation:
“Except thou repent.”
There is still a way back.
That phrase changes the entire character of the warning.
Judgment is not inevitable.
Restoration remains possible.
Christ does not want to remove the lampstand.
He wants Ephesus to repent.
The warning itself therefore becomes an act of mercy.
Imagine a physician discovering a serious disease and refusing to tell the patient because the diagnosis might be upsetting.
That would not be compassion.
Love tells the truth because healing matters more than temporary comfort.
Christ does the same with His Church.
He says:
Something is wrong.
Then:
Here is the way back.
Remember.
Repent.
Return.

Pastoral Reflection

There may be no more hopeful command in this passage than:

Remember.
Because sometimes people who have walked with Christ for many years become discouraged when they recognize that something has changed.
They remember earlier seasons of faith.
Perhaps there was once greater joy.
Greater hunger for Scripture.
Greater intimacy in prayer.
Greater excitement about worship.
Greater compassion for people.
And when they compare that earlier season with the present, they may conclude:
Perhaps I can never get back there.
Jesus says otherwise.
Remember. Repent. Return.
He does not demand that we recreate the past.
We cannot.
Life has happened since then.
We have changed.
We have suffered.
We have learned.
We may carry wounds we did not carry when our faith was young.
Christ is not calling us backward into spiritual adolescence.
He is calling us forward into **renewed love**.
Perhaps mature love will look quieter than first love.
Perhaps it will carry scars.
Perhaps it will ask harder questions.
Perhaps it will know more about grief and disappointment.
But it can still burn.
And there is something else pastors and churches should hear in this verse.
Christ's warning about the lampstand means that preserving a congregation at any cost cannot be the ultimate goal of ministry.
Our calling is not simply to keep churches alive.
It is to keep them **faithful**.
Sometimes that requires uncomfortable conversations.
Sometimes it requires repentance.
Sometimes it requires changing practices that have existed for decades.
Sometimes it requires admitting:
What once worked no longer serves the mission Christ has given us.
A healthy church must care more about bearing Christ's light than preserving its own comfort.
Because the lampstand does not exist for itself.
It exists for the Light.

Something Worth Pondering

There is something remarkable about the fact that Jesus warns Ephesus before removing the lampstand.
He could simply act.
Instead, He speaks.
He gives them an opportunity to hear.
An opportunity to remember.
An opportunity to repent.
An opportunity to return.
That tells us something about divine correction.
A warning from Christ is itself an expression of grace.
When Scripture unsettles us, perhaps we should not immediately rush past the discomfort.
When a sermon exposes something in us, perhaps our first instinct should not be defensiveness.
When another believer lovingly points out something we need to examine, perhaps we should listen before explaining ourselves.
Sometimes the uncomfortable word is the merciful word.
Ephesus could have responded:
But look at everything we're doing right!
And they would have been correct.
They were doing many things right.
Christ had just told them so.
But all their accomplishments did not make His correction unnecessary.
That may be one of the clearest marks of spiritual maturity:
Can I receive correction without allowing my accomplishments to become my defense?
The Ephesian church had much to be proud of.
Jesus asked them for something better than pride.
He asked for repentance.
And beyond repentance waited restoration.

Ask Yourself This

Is there some part of my relationship with Christ where I need to **remember, repent, and return**?
And when Christ lovingly shows me something that needs to change, will I defend what I have been—or trust Him enough to become what He is calling me to be?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:6

“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.”
— Revelation 2:6, KJV

After one of the strongest warnings Christ has given the Ephesian church, something unexpected happens.
He commends them again.
“But this thou hast.”
That small sentence tells us something important about the way Christ evaluates His people.
He has confronted their loss of first love.
He has commanded them to remember.
He has called them to repent.
He has warned that their lampstand can be removed.
But none of that causes Him to forget what remains faithful within them.
Christ sees the whole church.
He sees what needs correction.
And He sees what deserves affirmation.
Once again, His evaluation is both truthful and gracious.

1. “But this thou hast”

There is something deeply pastoral about these words.
Christ does not define Ephesus entirely by its failure.
That is worth remembering because human beings often do exactly that.
Someone disappoints us, and suddenly everything about that person is viewed through the disappointment.
A church experiences failure, and its entire history can be dismissed.
A pastor makes a mistake, and years of faithful ministry may suddenly be forgotten.
A Christian stumbles, and sometimes other believers remember the stumble longer than they remember the faithfulness that preceded it.
Jesus does not evaluate Ephesus that way.
He can say:
“I have somewhat against thee.”
And then:
“But this thou hast.”
Both statements are true.
The church needs repentance.
The church also deserves commendation.
That is an important model for Christian correction.

When we confront what is wrong, we do not need to pretend that nothing is right.
And when we celebrate what is right, we do not need to ignore what is wrong.
Grace and truth can occupy the same sentence.
Christ demonstrates how.

2. “Thou hatest the deeds”

This language can initially sound harsh.
Jesus says the Ephesians **hate** something—and then says that He hates it too.
That requires careful reading.
Notice what the text says:
“Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes.”
The focus is upon their **works**.
The verse does not tell Christians to hate people.
That distinction is essential.
Scripture consistently calls God's people to love others, including enemies. Yet biblical love never requires moral indifference.
There are things love should hate.
Love for the abused should hate abuse.
Love for truth should hate deception.
Love for the vulnerable should hate exploitation.
Love for holiness should hate what destroys people.
Love for God should hate what distorts His character.
There is therefore no contradiction between Christian love and moral opposition to evil.
In fact, sometimes genuine love requires us to oppose what harms those whom God loves.
The difficulty lies in maintaining the distinction.
Christians are called to reject evil without becoming hateful people.
We must oppose destructive behavior without forgetting that every human being still bears the image of God.
That requires both conviction and humility.
Ephesus had learned to reject what Christ rejected.
Their danger, as verse 4 has already shown, was making sure that hatred of evil did not become the defining characteristic of their hearts.

3. Who Were the Nicolaitans?

This is one of those places in Revelation where humility is important.
We simply do not know as much about the Nicolaitans as we might like.
They appear again in Revelation 2:15, where Christ tells the church at Pergamum that some among them hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Early Christian writers later attempted to identify the group and sometimes connected them with a figure named Nicolas. Some traditions associated them with Nicolas of Antioch, one of the seven mentioned in Acts 6:5.
But the historical evidence is uncertain, and Revelation itself does not make that identification.
We should therefore be careful not to present speculation as fact.
What we can say with confidence is that the Nicolaitans represented a teaching or practice Christ considered incompatible with faithful Christian discipleship.
The surrounding messages in Revelation 2 give us some clues about the broader problem.
When Christ addresses Pergamum, the Nicolaitans appear in a context involving compromise, idolatry, and sexual immorality.
That suggests their teaching may have encouraged Christians to accommodate practices associated with the surrounding pagan culture.
Exactly what they taught cannot be reconstructed with certainty.
But Christ's judgment of their works is unmistakable.
He rejects them.
That is enough for the pastoral purpose of the passage.
Revelation does not require us to solve every historical mystery before we can understand its warning.

4. The Temptation to Compromise

If the Nicolaitans did represent some form of accommodation to pagan society, we can understand why such teaching might have been attractive.
Living faithfully as a Christian in a city like Ephesus could be difficult.
Religion was woven into public life.
Social relationships, commerce, civic identity, festivals, and religious practices could overlap.
Refusing participation could have consequences.
Someone eventually would have been tempted to ask:
Do Christians really need to be so different?
Perhaps there is a way to follow Jesus and still participate fully in everything the surrounding culture expects.
Perhaps certain compromises are harmless.
Perhaps faith can remain private while public life continues unchanged.
That temptation is hardly confined to the first century.
Every generation of Christians must decide how to live faithfully within a culture that does not necessarily share Christian convictions.
Two opposite mistakes are possible.
One is withdrawal:

We separate ourselves from everyone who does not believe as we do.
The other is accommodation:
We become so similar to the surrounding culture that nothing distinctively Christian remains.
Jesus calls His followers to neither.
Christians are sent **into** the world without becoming indistinguishable **from** the world.
That tension requires wisdom.

5. Ephesus Got This Right

Whatever the Nicolaitans were teaching, Ephesus rejected it.
Jesus says:
"This thou hast."
That matters because the church's loss of first love had not made discernment irrelevant.
Christ does not say:
You have become insufficiently loving, so stop worrying about false teaching.
Quite the opposite.
He praises their opposition to the Nicolaitan works.
This confirms something we have already seen:
Jesus does not ask Ephesus to choose between love and truth.
Their problem was not that they cared too much about truth.
Their problem was that truth was no longer accompanied by the love that should characterize those who belong to Christ.
The solution was not less discernment.
It was restored love.
That distinction is vital.
Sometimes Christians respond to harsh or loveless expressions of doctrine by assuming that doctrine itself is the problem.
It is not.
Truth matters.
And sometimes Christians respond to moral compromise by assuming that greater harshness proves greater faithfulness.
It does not.
Christ calls His Church to something more difficult and more beautiful:
truth without compromise and love without surrender.

6. "Which I also hate"

These may be the strongest words in the verse.
Christ Himself says there are works He hates.
That should prevent us from reducing Jesus to a figure who merely approves whatever people choose to do.
The Jesus of Revelation is loving.

He is gracious.
He calls churches to repentance.
He offers restoration.
He promises life.
But He also judges evil.
The Christ who walks among the lampstands has moral authority over the churches.
He decides what is faithful.
He decides what is destructive.
He decides what belongs within the life of His people.
That means the Church cannot determine right and wrong merely by asking what is culturally acceptable.
Nor can it determine truth by majority vote.
The Church belongs to Christ.
Its moral compass therefore must remain oriented toward Him.
But once again, we must notice what Christ hates:
the works.
Christ's hatred of evil never gives Christians permission to cultivate hatred toward people.
The distinction can be difficult to maintain, but discipleship requires it.
We oppose what destroys people precisely because people matter to God.

7. Loving People Without Loving Everything People Do

Modern culture sometimes treats love and approval as though they were identical.
If you love someone, the assumption goes, you must affirm everything that person believes or does.
Christian love cannot accept that definition.
Parents understand this instinctively.
A loving parent does not affirm behavior that is destroying a child.
A physician does not demonstrate compassion by refusing to identify disease.
A pastor does not love a congregation by refusing to address destructive patterns.
Love sometimes says:
This is hurting you.
Love sometimes says:
This is wrong.
Love sometimes says:
You need to turn around.
That is exactly what Christ has just done with Ephesus.
He loves them.

Therefore He confronts them.
The same principle applies to the Nicolaitan works.
Christ rejects them because they are contrary to the life He desires for His people.
Biblical love is not indifferent.
Love seeks what is good.

8. Discernment Without Becoming Defined by Opposition

There is another pastoral warning hidden here.
Ephesus deserves praise for rejecting the Nicolaitan works.
But the church must not become defined primarily by what it hates.
That danger is very real.
Churches can build an identity around opposition.
We are against this.
We oppose that.
We reject those people.
We condemn that movement.
Some opposition may be entirely justified.
But if someone asks what characterizes a Christian community, the first answer should ultimately be more than a list of things it opposes.
Jesus said His disciples would be known by their **love**.
The Church must know what it rejects.
But even more importantly, it must know **Whom it follows**.
Ephesus knew what it hated.
Verse 4 suggests they needed to rediscover what they loved.
That may be the tension at the heart of this entire message.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a difficult balance every pastor and congregation must learn.
How do we stand firmly for truth without becoming harsh?
How do we love people without pretending that every choice is healthy?
How do we practice grace without turning grace into permission?
How do we practice discernment without becoming suspicious of everyone?
How do we oppose evil without allowing opposition to shape our identity?
There is no simple formula.
But Jesus Himself provides the pattern.
He loves Ephesus enough to praise them.
He loves Ephesus enough to confront them.
He loves Ephesus enough to warn them.
And He loves Ephesus enough to offer them a way back.

That is pastoral love.
It neither flatters nor condemns unnecessarily.
It seeks restoration.
This also connects directly with the question of a healthy church.
A healthy church cannot simply ask:
Are we loving?
It must also ask:
Are we faithful?
And it cannot simply ask:
Are we doctrinally correct?
It must also ask:
Does the way we hold that truth look like Jesus?
Ephesus shows us why both questions matter.
They had strong discernment.
They had moral conviction.
They had doctrinal vigilance.
Jesus praised those things.
But He still wanted their hearts.
Perhaps one of the marks of a truly healthy church is therefore the ability to say both:
"We will not compromise the truth."
and
"We will not stop loving people."
The world often tells us we must choose one.
Christ does not.

Something Worth Pondering

There are things Christians should oppose.
Revelation 2:6 makes that unmistakable.
But perhaps every time we say:
"This is what we stand against,"
we should also be able to answer:
"What are we standing for?"
We oppose falsehood because we love truth.
We oppose exploitation because we love people.
We oppose injustice because we love what is right.
We oppose sin because we believe God's purposes for human beings are better than the things that destroy us.
Christian opposition should therefore always grow from something deeper than anger.
It should grow from love.
Otherwise we risk becoming people who are correct about what is wrong while becoming wrong in the way we are correct.

Ephesus was right to reject the works of the Nicolaitans.
Jesus Himself says so.
But the church that knew exactly what Christ hated still needed to rediscover what Christ loved.
That is the challenge.
Reject what Christ rejects.
Love what Christ loves.
And never allow the first to destroy the second.

Ask Yourself This

When I confront something I believe is wrong, **is my response motivated by love for Christ, love for truth, and genuine concern for people—or simply by anger at those with whom I disagree?**
And if people knew Christianity only by watching me, would they know primarily **what I oppose—or Whom I love?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:7

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”
— Revelation 2:7, KJV

The message to Ephesus ends by widening the circle.
Christ began:
“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write.”
Now He says:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
The message was written to Ephesus.
But it was never intended only for Ephesus.
What Christ says to one church must be heard by **all the churches**.
And then the message becomes even more personal:
“He that hath an ear…”
The congregation must listen.
But ultimately each person must hear.
No one can listen to Christ for us.

1. “He that hath an ear, let him hear”

Jesus used similar language repeatedly during His earthly ministry.
The meaning is deeper than physical hearing.
Nearly everyone receiving John's Revelation possessed ears capable of hearing the words when they were read aloud.
The question was whether they would truly **listen**.
There is a difference between hearing words and receiving them.
We can hear a sermon without allowing it to confront us.
We can read Scripture while remaining untouched by it.
We can recognize that a biblical warning applies perfectly to someone else while never considering whether it applies to us.
We can even become experts in Scripture while becoming increasingly resistant to what Scripture asks of us.
Jesus therefore says:
Listen.
Not merely:
Hear what I said.
But:
Receive it. Take it seriously. Respond to it.
That is especially important after everything Christ has just told Ephesus.

Imagine members of the Ephesian congregation hearing this message read aloud.
Some may have thought:
Yes, our church works very hard.
Others:
Yes, we have resisted false teachers.
Others:
Yes, we have endured.
Then came:
"Thou hast left thy first love."
At that moment they faced a choice.
They could become defensive.
They could explain themselves.
They could point to everything they were doing correctly.
They could argue that other churches had greater problems.
Or they could listen.
That remains the choice every time Scripture confronts us.

2. Listening Requires Humility

There is a particular danger for mature Christians.
The more Scripture we know, the easier it becomes to assume that we already know what a passage says.
We recognize the story.
We know the verse.
We have heard the sermon.
We may even have taught the passage ourselves.
Familiarity can quietly replace attentiveness.
Instead of asking:
"Lord, what are You saying to me?"
we begin thinking:
I know this already.
But the Word of God is not merely information to be mastered.
It is truth before which we continually place ourselves.
The question is not simply whether we understand Revelation 2:1–7.
The question is whether Revelation 2:1–7 has been allowed to examine **us**.
Do we still love Christ?
Have we become spiritually mechanical?
Are we faithful but cold?
Do we defend truth without displaying love?
Do we need to remember, repent, and return?
Christ says:
Listen.

3. “What the Spirit saith”

There is something theologically beautiful here.
Throughout the message, Christ has been speaking.
Yet verse 7 says:
“What the Spirit saith.”
The words of Christ are the words the Spirit brings to the churches.
This is not a dead message preserved from an ancient congregation.
The Spirit continues to address the Church through the words Christ gave.
That means when Revelation is faithfully read within the Church, we are not merely studying what Jesus once said to someone else.
We are listening for what the Spirit is saying **through that word to us**.
The historical setting matters.
Ephesus was a real city.
This was a real congregation.
Its struggles were real.
We should understand those circumstances as carefully as we can.
But historical study is not the end of interpretation.
Eventually Scripture turns toward the reader.
Eventually Ephesus becomes a mirror.
Eventually we must ask:
What is the Spirit saying to the churches now?

4. “Unto the churches”

Notice again the plural.
Churches.
Every church is expected to hear every message.
Smyrna must listen to what Christ says to Ephesus.
Pergamum must listen.
Thyatira must listen.
Sardis must listen.
Philadelphia must listen.
Laodicea must listen.
And Ephesus must listen to what Christ says to all the others.
This prevents us from treating the seven churches merely as seven historical case studies.
Together they form a spiritual examination of the Church.
One congregation struggles with lost love.
Another faces persecution.
Another compromises.
Another tolerates destructive teaching.
Another possesses a reputation for life while spiritually dying.
Another remains faithful despite weakness.

Another becomes complacent and self-satisfied.
Different churches.
Different circumstances.
Different diagnoses.
The same Christ.
And every church must listen to all of it.
That makes Revelation 2–3 extraordinarily relevant to any discussion of what constitutes a healthy church.
Christ is effectively walking among His lampstands and telling His Church what He sees.
Some things He praises.
Some things He confronts.
Some things He warns.
Some things He promises.
And after every message He says, in effect:
Everybody listen.

5. "To him that overcometh"

Now we encounter one of Revelation's great themes:
Conquering.
The language will appear repeatedly in the messages to the churches.
But we must allow Revelation itself to define what conquering means.
Human beings usually imagine victory in terms of power.
The conqueror defeats an opponent.
The conqueror dominates.
The conqueror survives because someone else loses.
Revelation turns that idea upside down.
At the center of this book stands **the Lamb who was slain**.
Christ conquers not by becoming like the powers of evil but by remaining faithful to the Father even unto death.
His apparent defeat becomes victory.
The cross becomes the throne from which God's redemptive victory unfolds.
His followers conquer in the same paradoxical way.
They conquer by remaining faithful to Christ.
They conquer by refusing compromise.
They conquer by enduring.
They conquer by holding their testimony.
They conquer even when faithfulness costs them everything.
That means conquering in Revelation does not primarily mean defeating the people who oppose us.
It means refusing to allow opposition to defeat **our faithfulness to Christ**.

That distinction is crucial.
The Christian victory is not:
“I destroyed my enemy.”
It is:
“My enemy could not make me stop following Jesus.”
That is Revelation's kind of victory.

6. When Faith Must Endure

Here our title appears again in everything but name.
When Faith Must Endure.
What does enduring faith ultimately look like?
It conquers.
Not necessarily because circumstances improve.
Not because suffering disappears.
Not because Christians gain political or social power.
Not because every prayer is answered as we hoped.
Faith conquers because after everything that has happened, it still says:
Jesus is Lord.
That is the victory Revelation calls the churches toward.
Ephesus must conquer its cooling love.
Smyrna must conquer fear in the face of suffering.
Pergamum must conquer compromise.
Thyatira must conquer tolerated corruption.
Sardis must conquer spiritual deadness.
Philadelphia must continue holding fast.
Laodicea must conquer complacency.
The circumstances differ.
The call remains:
Remain faithful to Christ.

7. “Will I give to eat”

Notice who gives the reward.
Christ.
Victory does not place God in our debt.
The conqueror does not earn eternal life as though sufficient endurance purchases admission to paradise.
The promise remains gift.
Christ says:
“I will give.”
Grace stands at the beginning of the Christian life.
Grace sustains the Christian life.
And grace waits at the end.
The believer conquers because Christ has conquered first.

8. “Of the tree of life”

With these words, Revelation suddenly carries us back to the opening chapters of Genesis.
In Eden stood **the tree of life**.
After humanity's rebellion, access to that tree was lost.
Genesis 3 ends with humanity driven from the garden and the way to the tree of life guarded.
It is one of Scripture's great tragedies.
Humanity loses paradise.
Humanity loses unhindered fellowship with God.
Humanity loses access to the tree of life.
Death enters the human story.
But the Bible does not end in Genesis 3.
The tree returns.
Near the conclusion of Revelation, John will see the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.
And there, beside the river, stands:
the tree of life.
What disappeared from humanity's reach in Genesis appears again in Revelation.
That is not accidental.
The Bible begins with creation.
It ends with new creation.
It begins with a garden.
It ends with a garden-city.
It begins with humanity losing access to the tree of life.
It ends with redeemed humanity receiving access again.
The biblical story is moving toward restoration.

9. From Eden to the New Jerusalem

This gives us one of the great arcs of Scripture:
Creation.
Fall.
Redemption.
Restoration.
What humanity lost through sin, God restores through Christ.
But restoration is more than simply returning us to Genesis 2 as though nothing happened.
The biblical story moves forward.
The garden becomes a city.
Humanity is redeemed.
Creation is renewed.
God dwells with His people.

Death is gone.
Mourning is gone.
Crying is gone.
Pain is gone.
The curse is gone.
And the tree of life stands again.
Already in Revelation 2:7, before the seals have opened and before the trumpets have sounded, Christ tells His Church where this story is going.
That matters.
Because Christians can endure the difficult middle of the story when they know **how the story ends**.

10. “The paradise of God”

The word **paradise** evokes the garden of God—the place of life and fellowship with Him.
Christ's promise therefore reaches beyond mere survival.
He does not say:
If you endure, eventually the suffering will stop.
He promises something far greater.
Life with God.
That has always been the goal of redemption.
Christian hope is not merely escape from pain.
It is communion with God.
The greatest promise of Revelation is ultimately not golden streets, gates of pearl, or even the absence of suffering.
The greatest promise comes near the end:
God will dwell with His people.
Paradise is paradise because **God is there**.
The Ephesians had abandoned their first love.
How fitting, then, that Christ's final promise directs them toward eternal fellowship with the One they are being called to love again.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a phrase in this verse every congregation should probably hear regularly:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
Churches become unhealthy when they lose the ability to hear correction.
Individuals do too.
Sometimes we become so invested in defending what we have done that we cannot hear what Christ is asking us to become.
Ephesus could point to an impressive record.
Hard work.
Endurance.
Sound doctrine.

Discernment.
Resistance to evil.
Years of faithfulness.
All true.
But Christ was asking them to listen to something uncomfortable.
Your love has changed.
And the health of the church depended upon whether they could hear it.
That connects directly with pastoral leadership.
A faithful pastor cannot merely tell a congregation what it enjoys hearing.
Sometimes shepherding means helping the church hear what Christ is saying even when the message is uncomfortable.
But the purpose is never humiliation.
Look where Christ's correction ends.
Not with condemnation.
Not with rejection.
Not with despair.
It ends beside **the tree of life in the paradise of God**.
That tells us the purpose of Christ's correction.
He is calling His people toward life.
Every warning in these letters should therefore be heard against the backdrop of that promise.
Christ confronts because He loves.
Christ warns because He desires repentance.
Christ calls us back because He intends to bring His people home.

Something Worth Pondering

The Bible begins with humanity standing near a tree and losing paradise.
Revelation ends with redeemed humanity standing near that tree again.
Everything between those moments tells the story of what God has done to bring us home.
And at the center of that story stands another tree:
the cross.
Humanity loses access to the tree of life through sin.
Christ bears sin upon the cross.
And through His death and resurrection, the road toward life is opened again.
Genesis tells us what was lost.
The Gospels tell us what Christ did.
Revelation shows us what will finally be restored.
That means Christian endurance is never meaningless.
We are not simply holding on because Christians are supposed to be stubborn.

We endure because history is going somewhere.
We endure because Christ has conquered.
We endure because death does not have the final word.
We endure because paradise is not permanently lost.
We endure because the tree of life appears again.
And perhaps most beautifully:
We endure because Someone is waiting for us at the end of the journey.
The One walking among the lampstands is also the One who promises to bring His faithful people home.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ says, **"He that hath an ear, let him hear,"** am I genuinely willing to hear what He says—even when His Word challenges something about me or my church that I would rather defend?
And when faith becomes difficult, do I remember that endurance is not merely about surviving today, but about remaining faithful to Christ until the day when **everything sin has broken is finally made new?**

Smyrna — The Church Called to Endure

Revelation 2:8–11

**“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;
I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”**
— Revelation 2:8–11, KJV

Introduction

The message to Smyrna is one of the shortest of the seven letters, but its brevity should not be mistaken for insignificance.
There is no rebuke here.
There is no accusation of abandoned love. There is no warning about false teaching being tolerated within the congregation. There is no charge of spiritual deadness, compromise, or lukewarm faith.
Instead, Christ looks upon a suffering church and essentially says:
I know.
He knows their affliction.
He knows their poverty.
He knows the accusations being made against them.
He knows the suffering that has already come.
And perhaps most remarkably, He knows the suffering that is still coming.
Yet Jesus does not promise to prevent it.
That may be one of the most difficult truths in this passage.
We often pray for God to remove suffering—and there is nothing wrong with doing so. Jesus Himself prayed in Gethsemane that, if possible, the cup might pass from Him. But there are moments when God's answer is not deliverance **from** the trial.
Sometimes His promise is His presence **through** the trial.
Smyrna is about to learn that distinction.

Christ does not tell them:
You will not suffer.
He tells them:
"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer."
He does not promise:
None of you will die.
Instead He commands:
"Be thou faithful unto death."
That is faith stripped down to its most fundamental question:
Will I remain faithful to Christ even when following Him costs me everything?
Smyrna's answer must be yes.
And that makes this little church one of the clearest examples in Revelation of what it means **when faith must endure.**

The Movement of the Message

The message to Smyrna follows a remarkably simple progression:
Christ identifies Himself → Christ acknowledges their suffering → Christ prepares them for greater suffering → Christ commands faithfulness → Christ promises life.
There is movement here from **death to life**.
That movement begins with Christ Himself.
"The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive."
And it ends with His people:
"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."
Christ's own victory over death surrounds the entire message.
That is not accidental.
Jesus is about to ask these Christians to face something terrifying. Before He tells them what they must face, He reminds them **who He is**.

The First and the Last

Jesus introduces Himself as:
"the First and the Last."
These words speak of sovereignty.
Before Smyrna existed, Christ was.
Before the Roman Empire existed, Christ was.
Before their persecution began, Christ was.
And after every earthly power that threatened them has disappeared, **Christ will still be.**
That changes the perspective of suffering.
The people persecuting the Christians of Smyrna may appear powerful at the moment, but their power is temporary.

Christ is not.
Empires rise and fall.
Governments come and go.
Cultures change.
Human authorities live and die.
Christ remains.
The suffering Christian therefore measures the present not merely by what is happening now but by the One who stands at both the beginning and the end.

"Which was dead, and is alive"

Then Jesus says something extraordinary:
"which was dead, and is alive."
Christ does not speak to suffering from a safe distance.
He has suffered.
He has been rejected.
He has been falsely accused.
He has been beaten.
He has faced injustice.
He has been executed.
He has entered the grave.
When Jesus tells Smyrna not to fear what lies ahead, He is not asking them to walk somewhere He has never been.
He has already walked that road.
And more importantly, He knows where the road ends.
It ends not with the cross.
It ends not with the tomb.
It ends with resurrection.
That is why Jesus can speak about death differently from the way the world speaks about death.
The world says:
Death is the end.
Jesus says:
I have already been there.
And He came back.
Therefore, when He tells Smyrna to remain faithful even unto death, He does so as **the risen Lord who has already defeated it.**

1. "I Know"

Then come two words that may have meant everything to a frightened congregation:
"I know."
Jesus had said the same thing to Ephesus.
But here those words carry a different emotional weight.

To Ephesus, *I know* meant:
I see your faithfulness, but I also see what has gone wrong.
To Smyrna it means:
I see what you are suffering.
There are few things more painful than suffering while believing nobody understands.
Sometimes even faithful Christians ask:
Does God see this?
Does He know what I am going through?
Does He know how tired I am?
Does He know how frightened I am?
Does He know what this is costing me?
Smyrna receives its answer.
Yes.
Christ knows.
His knowledge does not necessarily mean immediate deliverance, but it does mean that suffering is never invisible to Him.

2. Poor — Yet Rich

Jesus says:
"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich."
What an extraordinary reversal.
By ordinary measurements, Smyrna was poor.
Christ says they were rich.
Later, when Jesus speaks to Laodicea, we will encounter almost the exact opposite.
Laodicea will essentially say:
I am rich.
Christ will tell them they are poor.
Smyrna says:
We have nothing.
Christ says:
You have everything that matters.
Laodicea says:
We have everything.
Christ says:
You do not realize how poor you actually are.
Revelation therefore forces us to reconsider the way we measure prosperity.
A church may possess property, money, programs, influence, reputation, technology, staff, and resources—and still be spiritually impoverished.
Another congregation may possess almost none of those things and yet be extraordinarily rich before God.

The question is not merely:
What does the church possess?
The deeper question is:
Does the church possess Christ?
Smyrna did.
And apparently, that was enough.

3. The Slander Against Them

Christ also knows the slander directed against the believers:
"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."
These are difficult words, and because passages like this have sometimes been horribly misused in Christian history, they require careful explanation.
Jesus is **not condemning the Jewish people**.
Jesus was Jewish.
John was Jewish.
The apostles were Jewish.
The earliest Christian movement emerged from Judaism.
The conflict reflected here belongs to the complicated first-century struggle surrounding the identity of the people of God and the growing separation between Jewish communities and followers of Jesus.
Whatever the precise local circumstances in Smyrna, some opponents were apparently slandering Christians and contributing to their suffering.
Christ's severe phrase **"synagogue of Satan"** identifies the spiritual character of that opposition. Those who were attacking Christ's people were, knowingly or unknowingly, participating in the work of the adversary.
This passage must never become an excuse for antisemitism.
Indeed, using these words to justify hatred or persecution would contradict the very Lord whose suffering love Revelation proclaims.
The target of Christ's condemnation is not an ethnicity.
It is **opposition to His people and His purposes.**

4. "Fear none of those things"

Then Jesus looks toward what is coming:
"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer."
Notice what He does not say.
He does not say:
There is nothing to be afraid of.
There clearly is.
Prison is coming.
Testing is coming.
Affliction is coming.

Death may be coming.
Christian courage is therefore not pretending frightening things are not frightening.
Courage is remaining faithful when they are.
This distinction matters enormously.
Faith is sometimes presented as though genuine Christians should never experience fear, doubt, grief, or anxiety.
But Scripture is far more realistic about human beings.
The command **"Fear none of those things"** does not necessarily mean the absence of the emotion of fear.
It means:
Do not allow fear to determine your allegiance.
You may tremble.
You may cry.
You may wonder how you will endure.
But when the question comes—
Will you still belong to Christ?
—the answer remains: **Yes.**

5. Tested for Ten Days

Jesus warns:
"the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days."
The expression **"ten days"** has produced considerable interpretation.
Some understand it literally as a brief period of persecution. Others understand it symbolically as a limited and divinely bounded period of suffering. Connections have also been suggested with Daniel 1, where Daniel and his companions undergo a ten-day test.
We should resist claiming more certainty than the text gives us.
But one theological point is clear:
Their suffering has a limit.
Whatever the ten days signify, they are **ten days—not forever.**
Evil does not receive unlimited authority.
The devil may act.
The believers may suffer.
But Satan does not determine the ultimate outcome.
Christ does.
There is profound comfort in that.
When suffering begins, it can feel endless.
Christ reminds Smyrna that suffering has boundaries known to God.
The trial has a beginning.
It has an end.
Christ stands beyond both.

6. “Be thou faithful unto death”

Then comes perhaps the defining sentence of the entire message:
“Be thou faithful unto death.”
There is no prosperity gospel here.
There is no promise that faithfulness guarantees comfort, wealth, health, popularity, or earthly success.
There is simply a call to remain faithful.
Even if faithfulness costs everything.
This is where our familiar expression—
“If God brings you to it, God will get you through it”
—must be understood carefully.
Sometimes God gets us through something by changing the circumstances.
Sometimes He opens the door.
Sometimes He provides healing.
Sometimes He removes the danger.
Sometimes He restores what has been lost.
And sometimes He gets His people through the trial by bringing them safely **through death and into life.**
The Christian promise has never ultimately been that we will escape death.
The promise is that **death will not keep us.**
That is why the One giving the command is the One **“which was dead, and is alive.”**
Jesus can say:
“Be thou faithful unto death”
because He knows what lies beyond death.

7. The Crown of Life

Then comes the promise:
“and I will give thee a crown of life.”
The image is not primarily that of a jeweled royal crown. The Greek word used here can refer to the victor's wreath awarded in athletic contests or as a mark of honor.
The world may regard these Christians as defeated.
They may lose possessions.
They may lose freedom.
Some may even lose their lives.
Yet Christ sees something entirely different.
He sees victors.
That is one of Revelation's great reversals.
The world may look at a martyr and say:
Defeated.

Christ says:
Conqueror.
The world may say:
They lost everything.
Christ says:
They are rich.
The world may say:
They died.
Christ says:
I will give them life.
Once again, Revelation teaches us that heaven's measurements are very different from ours.

8. Whoever Conquers

The message closes:
"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."
We encountered the language of conquering at Ephesus, and we will encounter it repeatedly.
Revelation gradually teaches us what Christian conquest looks like.
It is not domination.
It is not destroying enemies.
It is not acquiring political power.
It is not avoiding suffering.
The Lamb Himself defines victory.
Jesus conquered through faithful obedience—even through suffering and death.
His followers conquer in the same manner.
For Smyrna, conquering means:
Remaining faithful when suffering gives them every earthly reason to surrender.
Their enemies may inflict the first death.
But they cannot touch the second.
That gives us perhaps the simplest summary of Smyrna's message:
Those who belong to Christ may lose their earthly lives, but they cannot lose the life Christ has promised them.

9. Ephesus and Smyrna — Return and Remain

There is already a beautiful progression between our first two churches.
Ephesus had wandered.
Christ told Ephesus:
Return.
Smyrna is suffering.
Christ tells Smyrna:
Remain.

Ephesus needed repentance.
Smyrna needed endurance.
One church needed to recover the love it had left behind.
The other needed to hold tightly to the Christ it had never abandoned.
And both churches needed the same thing:
To hear what the Spirit was saying.
This gives us an important pastoral distinction.
Sometimes when God feels distant, **we have moved**.
We have become distracted. We have wandered. Prayer has disappeared.
Worship has become routine. Our first love has cooled.
Then Christ says:
Remember. Repent. Return.
But there are other times when God feels distant and we have **not** wandered.
We have remained faithful.
Life simply hurts.
The prayer seems unanswered.
The diagnosis comes.
The job disappears.
Someone we love dies.
The opposition continues.
The night becomes long.
Smyrna teaches us not automatically to interpret those moments as evidence that God has abandoned us.
Sometimes faith must simply **remain**.
Sometimes we feel far from God because we have wandered from Him. At other times suffering makes God feel distant even when we have remained faithful. In either case, our feelings do not determine His faithfulness.
That is the difference between Ephesus and Smyrna.
Ephesus needed to return.
Smyrna needed to remain.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something profoundly comforting about the fact that Jesus has no criticism for Smyrna.
Their suffering was not evidence that they were doing something wrong.
That needs to be said.
Christians sometimes assume that when life becomes difficult, someone must have failed spiritually.
Maybe I didn't pray enough.
Maybe my faith wasn't strong enough.
Maybe God is angry with me.

Maybe if I had believed more, this wouldn't have happened.
Smyrna destroys that simplistic theology.
Here is a faithful church.
Here is a church Christ commends.
Here is a church spiritually rich.
And here is a church that suffers.
Faithfulness does not make us immune to suffering.
Sometimes faithfulness itself brings suffering.
But Christ's words also remind us of something else.
The most important question in suffering is not always:
"How quickly can I get out of this?"
Sometimes the deeper question is:
"How can I remain faithful while I am in it?"
That is a difficult prayer.
Lord, change this.
But also:
Lord, if this does not change today, keep me faithful today.
And tomorrow we pray it again.
That is endurance.
Perhaps we can express the promise this way:
If God brings us to it, God will get us through it—but we must allow God to define what "through" means.
For the Christian, *through* ultimately means something far greater than surviving every earthly circumstance.
It means that nothing—not poverty, persecution, prison, suffering, disease, loss, and finally not even death itself—can defeat the life Christ has promised.
The Christian's confidence rests not in the belief that nothing terrible can happen.
It rests in the knowledge that **nothing terrible that happens can have the final word.**
Christ does.
And He is **the First and the Last.**

Something Worth Pondering

Imagine being one of the Christians in Smyrna hearing this message read aloud.
You know people are talking about you.
You know persecution is increasing.
Perhaps your livelihood has already suffered.
Perhaps someone you know has already been arrested.
And then John's Revelation arrives.
You might hope Jesus will say:

I am going to stop this.
Instead He says:
"I know."
Then:
"Fear none of those things."
Then:
"Be thou faithful."
And finally:
"I will give thee a crown of life."
At first, that may not sound like the answer we wanted.
But perhaps it is the answer we ultimately need.
Because Christianity does not rest upon the promise that nothing bad will happen to us.
It rests upon something infinitely stronger:
Whatever happens to us, we belong to Christ.
And the Christ to whom we belong has already entered the grave and walked back out.
That means the worst thing the world can ultimately do to the Christian is something **Jesus has already defeated.**
Smyrna therefore teaches us one of Revelation's greatest lessons:
Faith does not conquer because it avoids suffering.
Faith conquers because suffering cannot make it let go of Christ.
And perhaps even more importantly:
Christ never lets go of His people.

Ask Yourself This

When life becomes difficult, is my first assumption that God has abandoned me—or can I trust that Christ still sees me and knows exactly where I am?
If God does not immediately remove the trial I am facing, can I pray not only **"Lord, deliver me"** but also **"Lord, keep me faithful while I wait"?**
And if following Christ eventually costs me more than I ever imagined, do I truly believe the promise of the One **who was dead and came to life**:
Death does not get the final word?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:8

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;”
— Revelation 2:8, KJV

Before Jesus says anything about Smyrna's suffering, He tells them **who He is**.
That is where this message must begin.
Christ does not begin with their poverty.
He does not begin with their persecution.
He does not begin with the prison that awaits some of them.
He does not even begin with the possibility of death.
He begins with Himself.
That order matters.
Because when suffering comes, our circumstances can become so large that they occupy our entire field of vision. The problem becomes all we can see. Christ begins by redirecting Smyrna's attention:
Before you look at what is coming, look at Me.

1. “Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna”

As with Ephesus, the message is addressed:
“to the angel of the church.”
The Greek word *angelos* means **messenger**, and as we noted previously, interpreters have understood these “angels” in different ways. Some regard them as heavenly representatives of the churches; others understand them as human messengers or leaders associated with the congregations.
Revelation does not settle the question as clearly as we might like.
And once again, we do not need to pretend certainty where Scripture has left room for interpretation.
What is certain is that the message is intended for the church itself. By verse 11 the Spirit will say:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Smyrna must hear what Christ is saying.
And eventually, so must we.

2. Smyrna — A Church Under Pressure

Smyrna was an important and prosperous city of Roman Asia, located north of Ephesus along the Aegean coast.

It was a city deeply connected with Roman civic life and imperial loyalty. That environment could create serious difficulties for Christians whose ultimate confession was not that Caesar was lord, but that:
Jesus is Lord.
The precise circumstances behind every accusation and hardship mentioned in this letter cannot be reconstructed with certainty. But the text itself makes the central fact unmistakable:
Being a Christian in Smyrna could be costly.
These believers lived in a society where their allegiance to Christ could affect their social standing, economic security, personal freedom, and eventually even their lives.
Yet before Christ speaks about any of that, He gives them two descriptions of Himself.
Both are exactly what a suffering church needs to hear.

3. "The First and the Last"

Jesus identifies Himself as:
"the First and the Last."
We have already heard similar language in Revelation 1.
This is language of eternity and sovereignty.
Christ was there before Smyrna's troubles began.
Christ will remain after Smyrna's troubles have ended.
Before their persecutors came to power, **Christ was.**
After their persecutors have disappeared into history, **Christ will be.**
That gives suffering a boundary it does not appear to possess when we are standing in the middle of it.
Suffering often feels permanent.
When we hurt, tomorrow can look exactly like today.
When grief settles over us, it can become difficult to remember what life felt like before it.
When circumstances refuse to change, we may begin to wonder whether they ever will.
But Christ says:
I am the First and the Last.
In other words:
Your suffering is not the first thing.
And your suffering will not be the last thing.
I am.
That is an extraordinary foundation for endurance.

Rome Was Not the Last

Imagine how these words would have sounded in the Roman world.
Rome looked permanent.
Its armies were powerful.

Its political authority seemed overwhelming.
Its emperors claimed extraordinary honor.
From the perspective of a small Christian congregation in Smyrna, Rome must have seemed enormous and the Church incredibly small.
Yet Jesus does not introduce Himself as one power competing with another.
He says:
"I am the First and the Last."
Rome was not first.
And Rome would not be last.
History has proven the point.
The empire that appeared permanent disappeared.
Christ remains.
That is one of Revelation's recurring corrections to human perspective.
We tend to measure power by what is visible.
Revelation asks us to see reality from heaven's perspective.
The powers of this world may dominate a particular moment in history.
Christ holds history itself.

4. "Which was dead"

Then Jesus says something startling about Himself:
"which was dead."
The First and the Last—
died.
The Eternal One entered human mortality.
The Lord of life experienced death.
And that means Jesus does not speak to Smyrna's suffering from a place untouched by suffering.
This matters pastorally.
There are moments when someone attempts to comfort us but clearly does not understand what we are experiencing.
Their intentions may be good, but their words feel distant because they have never walked the road we are walking.
Christ is different.
When the believer says:
"Lord, I am suffering,"
Christ does not answer from ignorance.
When we say:
"Lord, I have been rejected,"
He knows rejection.
When we say:
"Lord, people have lied about me,"
He knows false accusation.

When we say:
“Lord, I am afraid,”
we remember Gethsemane.
When we say:
“Lord, I am facing death,”
Christ can say:
I have been there too.
Christianity does not give us a God who observes human suffering from a safe distance.
It gives us **Emmanuel—God with us.**
Even there.

5. “And is alive”

But the sentence does not stop with:
“which was dead.”
Thank God for that.
Jesus says:
“which was dead, and is alive.”
There is the gospel in a few words.
Death happened.
But death did not win.
The tomb was real.
But the tomb was temporary.
Good Friday happened.
But Easter followed.
And that is precisely the Christ Smyrna needs.
Jesus is about to tell them:
“Be thou faithful unto death.”
How can He possibly ask that of them?
Because the One asking them to face death is the One who has already **defeated death.**
He knows what is on the other side.

6. Christ Has Already Walked the Road

This gives us one of the most comforting truths in the passage.
Jesus is not pointing toward a road He refuses to walk Himself.
He has already traveled it.
Suffering?
He has been there.
Rejection?
He has been there.
False accusation?
He has been there.
Persecution?

He has been there.
Death?
He has been there.
The grave?
He has been there too.
And He came out the other side.
Therefore, when Jesus tells Smyrna:
"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer,"
those words carry the authority of resurrection.
Christ is not saying suffering will not hurt.
He is saying suffering **will not have the final word.**

7. The Theology Is in the Introduction

Something important is happening throughout these seven messages.
Jesus does not introduce Himself to every church in exactly the same way.
The description of Christ corresponds to what that particular church needs.
Ephesus needed to remember that Christ **walks among the lampstands** because their continued existence as His lampstand was at stake.
Smyrna is facing suffering and death.
So Jesus introduces Himself as:
"the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive."
It is as though Christ looks at each congregation and says:
Here is what you need to remember about Me in order to face what you are facing.
That is profoundly pastoral.
Sometimes we need to remember Christ the Shepherd.
Sometimes Christ the Healer.
Sometimes Christ the Teacher.
Sometimes Christ the Judge.
Sometimes Christ the Savior.
And when death casts its shadow across the road before us, we desperately need to remember:
Christ the Risen One.

8. The First and Last Word Belongs to Christ

There is another beautiful relationship between the two titles.
"The First and the Last."
"Which was dead, and is alive."
Together they say something extraordinary.
Christ stands beyond the limits that frighten us most.
He stands beyond history.
And He stands beyond death.

Nothing Smyrna is about to experience lies outside His authority.
Their enemies may determine whether they enter prison.
Their persecutors may even determine whether they live another day.
But there is one thing their enemies cannot determine:
How their story ends.
Christ has already claimed that position.
He is **the Last.**
The final word does not belong to Rome.
It does not belong to persecution.
It does not belong to suffering.
It does not belong to the grave.
The final word belongs to Jesus Christ.
And His word is:
Life.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when God seems very near.
Prayer flows easily.
Worship lifts our hearts.
Scripture speaks almost immediately.
We sense God's presence and have little difficulty trusting Him.
Then there are other seasons.
The diagnosis comes.
Someone dies.
A relationship breaks.
Employment disappears.
A prayer remains unanswered.
Something we thought God would prevent happens anyway.
And suddenly God feels very far away.
That does not necessarily mean **God moved.**
Nor does it necessarily mean **we moved.**
Sometimes suffering simply makes the distance feel greater than it really is.
That is where Smyrna differs so beautifully from Ephesus.
Ephesus had moved.
They had abandoned their first love.
Christ told them:
Remember. Repent. Return.
But Smyrna had not wandered.
They were faithful.
Their suffering was not evidence that God had abandoned them.
And it was not evidence that they had abandoned God.
They were simply walking through a very dark valley.

So Christ does not tell Smyrna:
Return.
He tells them:
Remain.
That distinction is worth remembering.
Sometimes we need repentance.
Sometimes we need endurance.
Wisdom is knowing which one Christ is asking of us.
And when we cannot understand what God is doing, Revelation 2:8 gives us somewhere to place our confidence:
Not in the circumstances.
In the Christ who stands beyond them.

Something Worth Pondering

We often say:
"If God brings you to it, God will get you through it."
There is truth in that expression.
But Smyrna teaches us to allow God to define **"through."**
Sometimes *through* means the storm stops.
Sometimes *through* means the door opens.
Sometimes *through* means healing comes.
Sometimes *through* means the circumstances change.
But sometimes *through* means God gives us enough grace to take one more faithful step.
And eventually, for every Christian, *through* means passing even through death itself into the life Christ has promised.
That is why Revelation 2:8 does not promise Smyrna an easier road.
It gives them something better.
It gives them the risen Christ.
The One speaking to them has already traveled farther into the darkness than any of them will ever travel.
And He returned.
So perhaps the deepest comfort of this verse can be expressed very simply:
There is nowhere faithfulness can take us where Christ has not already gone before us.
And because He is **the First and the Last**, wherever the road finally leads—
Christ will be there too.

Ask Yourself This

When suffering makes God seem distant, do I immediately assume that He has abandoned me, or can I trust that Christ remains present even when I cannot feel His presence?
When I cannot understand what God is doing, am I willing to anchor my faith not in what I can see happening around me, but in **who Christ has revealed Himself to be?**
And when I eventually face the one journey every human being must face, can I entrust myself to the One **"which was dead, and is alive,"** knowing that He has already walked that road and conquered what lies at its end?
The Christian does not face an unknown future alone.
The First and the Last is already there.

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:9

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”
— Revelation 2:9, KJV

Once again, Jesus begins with two extraordinarily comforting words:
“I know.”
But those words carry special weight in Smyrna.
Jesus does not say:
I have heard about your suffering.
He does not say:
Someone has told Me what is happening.
He says:
“I know.”
The One who was dead and came to life knows exactly what His people are enduring.
And notice what Christ knows.
He knows their **affliction**.
He knows their **poverty**.
He knows the **slander** directed against them.
In other words, Christ knows what is happening **to them**, what it is **costing them**, and what is being **said about them**.
Nothing about their suffering is hidden from Him.

1. “I know thy works, and tribulation”

The word translated **“tribulation”** carries the idea of pressure, distress, or affliction.
This is more than an inconvenient season.
These Christians are under pressure because they belong to Jesus Christ.
Smyrna was a prosperous city deeply integrated into Roman civic and religious life. For Christians who refused forms of worship incompatible with allegiance to Christ, faithfulness could carry social and economic consequences.
Exactly how every believer in Smyrna experienced that pressure cannot be reconstructed from the text. But Jesus' words make one thing clear:
Their faith was costing them something.
That is worth noticing because modern Christians can sometimes unconsciously measure God's favor by the ease of their circumstances.
If things are going well, we say:
“God is blessing me.”

And certainly, prosperity and peace can be blessings from God.
But what happens when things are not going well?
Was Smyrna not blessed?
Christ certainly does not speak as though they have been abandoned.
Quite the opposite.
This suffering church receives some of the warmest words spoken to any of the seven churches.
Suffering, therefore, cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence of God's displeasure.
Sometimes God's faithful people suffer **precisely because they are faithful.**

2. Christ Knows What Pressure Feels Like

There is another reason those words matter.
The One saying **"I know thy works, and tribulation"** has suffered Himself.
Jesus knows what it means to be misunderstood.
He knows what it means to be rejected.
He knows what it means to have people speak falsely about Him.
He knows what it means to stand before hostile authorities.
He knows pain.
He knows abandonment.
He knows death.
Therefore, when Christ says:
"I know,"
His knowledge is not detached.
The Christian faith gives us something remarkable:
A suffering person can pray to a Savior who has suffered.
That does not answer every question about why suffering occurs.
But it tells us something enormously important about where God is when we suffer.
He is not indifferent to it.

3. "And poverty"

Then Jesus says:
"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty."
This is striking because Smyrna itself was not a poor city.
Yet the Christians there apparently were.
Their poverty may have resulted, at least partly, from the social and economic consequences of their Christian commitment. Belonging to Christ could interfere with participation in parts of civic, commercial, and religious life. Persecution could also bring confiscation, exclusion, or loss.

We should be careful not to invent circumstances the text does not provide.
What we do know is enough:
They were materially poor.
And Christ knew it.
There is something deeply pastoral in that.
Jesus notices not merely the great theological battles of the Church.
He knows when His people are struggling to survive.
He knows the unpaid bill.
He knows the empty cupboard.
He knows the lost job.
He knows the uncertainty about tomorrow.
He knows what faithfulness sometimes costs in very practical terms.

4. “But thou art rich”

Then Jesus overturns the entire world's accounting system:
“but thou art rich.”
Poor—
yet rich.
By one measurement, Smyrna had very little.
By Christ's measurement, they possessed extraordinary wealth.
This is one of Revelation's characteristic reversals.
The world looks at Smyrna and sees:
Poverty.
Jesus looks at Smyrna and sees:
Riches.
The world sees weakness.
Christ sees faithfulness.
The world sees people without influence.
Christ sees conquerors.
And eventually the world may see death.
Christ will see people receiving **the crown of life.**
Revelation repeatedly asks us to decide whose evaluation of reality we are going to trust.

5. Heaven Keeps Different Books

This becomes especially powerful when Smyrna is compared with Laodicea.
Later Christ will tell Laodicea:
“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”
Yet Christ will expose their true spiritual poverty.
What a contrast.

Smyrna:
We are poor.
Christ says:
You are rich.
Laodicea:
We are rich.
Christ says:
You are poor.
That ought to make every church stop and think.
Because churches, like individuals, are easily impressed by visible measurements.
How large is the congregation?
How large is the budget?
How impressive is the building?
How many programs are offered?
How much influence does the church possess?
None of those things is inherently wrong.
Resources can accomplish enormous good when placed in God's hands.
But they are not the ultimate measurement of spiritual health.
A congregation can have almost nothing and be spiritually wealthy.
Another can possess almost everything and be spiritually bankrupt.
Heaven keeps different books than we do.

6. What Makes Smyrna Rich?

Jesus does not provide a financial statement explaining Smyrna's spiritual wealth.
But the surrounding message makes the answer apparent.
They have remained faithful.
They belong to Christ.
They have endured.
Their suffering has not separated them from Him.
And ultimately they possess something no earthly economy can provide:
Life in Christ.
That gives us a radically different definition of wealth.
If everything that can be taken from us determines whether we are rich, then eventually every one of us becomes poor.
Possessions can disappear.
Careers end.
Health changes.
Reputations can be damaged.
Relationships can be lost.
Even life itself eventually slips from our hands.

But if our greatest treasure is Christ, then the world can take everything it has the power to take and still fail to take **what matters most.** That is Smyrna's wealth.

7. “I know the blasphemy”

Their suffering was not merely economic.
Jesus continues:
“I know the blasphemy.”
Words can wound.
Sometimes we underestimate that because there is no visible injury.
But anyone who has been falsely accused understands how destructive slander can be.
A reputation built over decades can be damaged by a sentence.
A lie can travel farther than the truth correcting it.
And when accusations carry social or legal consequences, slander can become dangerous.
Again Christ says:
“I know.”
That means Christians do not always have to win every argument about themselves.
There are times when false accusations should certainly be answered.
There are times when truth must be defended.
But there are also moments when we simply cannot control what others choose to believe about us.
Smyrna receives an important assurance:
Christ knows the truth.
There may be enormous peace in that.
When everyone does not understand—
Christ does.
When motives are misrepresented—
Christ knows them.
When truth seems buried beneath accusation—
Christ still knows the truth.
For the believer, the judgment of Christ ultimately matters more than the verdict of the crowd.

8. “Them which say they are Jews, and are not”

Now we reach one of the difficult phrases in Revelation:
“them which say they are Jews, and are not.”
This requires careful handling.
The earliest Christian movement was deeply Jewish.
Jesus was Jewish.

His disciples were Jewish.
Paul was Jewish.
John himself emerged from the Jewish world.
The Hebrew Scriptures were the Scriptures of the earliest Church.
So this verse cannot responsibly be turned into a blanket condemnation of Jewish people.
The issue is a specific conflict in Smyrna.
There appears to have been hostility from some members of the local Jewish community toward the Christians there, and Christ condemns those participating in the slander.
When Jesus says that they claim to be Jews but are not, the statement is best understood within the theological struggle over what it means to belong faithfully to the people of God in light of Jesus the Messiah.
It is **not** a denial of anyone's ethnicity.
Nor does it provide Christians with permission to demean Judaism or Jewish people.
History gives us far too many examples of what happens when such passages are removed from their context and transformed into weapons.
That is precisely what we must refuse to do.

9. "The synagogue of Satan"

Jesus uses even stronger language:
"the synagogue of Satan."
Those words sound shocking to modern ears.
But again, we must identify the target correctly.
The Greek word *satanas* carries the idea of an **adversary**. Throughout Revelation, Satan is the great opponent of God's purposes and the accuser of God's people.
The connection with slander is therefore important.
People are speaking falsely against Christ's followers, and Jesus identifies that destructive opposition with the work of the adversary.
Christ is not declaring that synagogues in general belong to Satan.
He is describing the spiritual character of **this particular hostile opposition to His people.**
That distinction matters enormously.
The Church has no permission to take a passage describing Christians being persecuted and use it to justify persecuting someone else.
To do so would turn the passage completely upside down.

10. The Danger of Becoming What We Condemn

There is an important pastoral lesson hidden within this difficult language.

Smyrna was being slandered.
Christ condemns the slander.
Therefore Christians reading this passage should never use it as permission to slander others.
That includes people of other religions.
It includes people who disagree with us.
It even includes people who oppose us.
We may identify error.
We may defend truth.
We may oppose evil.
We may speak clearly about injustice.
But Christians should be extraordinarily careful about bearing false witness against another person.
We cannot condemn slander in Smyrna while practicing it ourselves.
Truth must remain truthful even when defending truth.

11. Christ Knows Who We Really Are

There is a deeper thread running through the verse.
Appearances and reality do not match.
Smyrna appears **poor**.
Christ says:
Rich.
Their opponents claim one identity.
Christ sees something different.
Human beings see one reality.
Christ sees another.
That is becoming one of Revelation's great themes:
Things are not always what they appear to be.
That is why the vision of Revelation is necessary.
It pulls back the curtain.
It allows the Church to see earthly circumstances from heaven's perspective.
And when heaven looks at Smyrna, it does not see a defeated little congregation struggling on the margins of an impressive Roman city.
It sees: **A rich church.**

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when faithful Christians may feel that they have lost almost everything.
Perhaps money becomes scarce.
Perhaps a career disappears.
Perhaps health changes.
Perhaps reputation suffers.
Perhaps people misunderstand.

Perhaps someone says something about us that simply is not true.
And sometimes we become so focused upon what has been lost that we forget to ask:
What remains?
For Smyrna, Christ remained.
And because Christ remained, they were still rich.
That does not trivialize poverty.
It does not make suffering imaginary.
Jesus does not tell Smyrna:
You are spiritually rich, so your earthly poverty doesn't matter.
He says:
"I know your poverty."
God does not ask suffering people to pretend suffering does not hurt.
He acknowledges it.
But He also reminds them:
Your circumstances do not determine your worth before Me.
There is another pastoral truth here.
Sometimes when we suffer, God feels distant.
But Smyrna had not abandoned Christ.
Unlike Ephesus, they did not need to **return**.
They needed to **remain**.
Their suffering was not proof that God had moved.
It was not proof that they had moved.
It was simply a season in which faith would have to endure.
And Christ wanted them to know:
I see you here.
I know what this costs.
I know what people are saying.
And I know who you really are.
Sometimes those words are enough to carry us another day.

Something Worth Pondering

Suppose Christ evaluated our wealth today.
Not our bank account.
Not our house.
Not our retirement savings.
Not our possessions.
Not the size of our church building or its annual budget.
Suppose He evaluated only the things that cannot be taken away.
How rich would we be?
That is an uncomfortable question in a culture that teaches us to measure success by accumulation.
Smyrna possessed very little that the world considered valuable.

Yet Jesus looked at them and said:
“Thou art rich.”
Perhaps real wealth is discovered by asking:
What do I possess that suffering cannot take from me?
If the answer is Christ, then we possess something even death cannot take.
And perhaps that is why Jesus first introduced Himself as:
“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”
The Christians of Smyrna were about to discover that many things could be taken from them.
But not everything.
Their possessions might be taken.
Their freedom might be taken.
Their reputation might be attacked.
Eventually, their earthly lives might even be taken.
But their enemies could never take **Christ**.
And if they still had Christ—
they were still rich.

Ask Yourself This

When I measure God's blessing in my life, do I measure primarily by what I possess—or by **Whom I belong to?**
If something important were taken from me tomorrow, would I still be able to recognize the riches I possess in Christ?
When people misunderstand me or speak falsely about me, can I find peace in knowing that Christ sees beyond accusation and knows the truth?
And perhaps the most searching question of all:
If Christ looked at everything in my life that cannot be taken away, would He call me rich?
Smyrna owned little.
But Smyrna possessed Christ.
And according to Jesus, that made them wealthy beyond measure.

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:10

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
— Revelation 2:10, KJV

There are verses of Scripture that comfort us by promising deliverance.
This is not one of them.
Revelation 2:10 comforts us in a much harder way.
Jesus does not tell the Christians in Smyrna that their suffering will be prevented. In fact, He tells them plainly that **more suffering is coming**.
Prison lies ahead.
Testing lies ahead.
Affliction lies ahead.
For some, perhaps even death lies ahead.
And into that frightening future Christ speaks:
“Fear none of those things.”
At first, that may seem like an impossible command.
But everything depends upon remembering **who is speaking**.
The One saying *“Fear none of those things”* is the One who has just identified Himself as:
“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”
Christ is not promising them a road without death.
He is reminding them that **He has already conquered whatever waits at the end of the road.**

1. “Fear none of those things”

Fear is one of the most powerful forces in human life.
Fear can make us run.
Fear can make us remain silent.
Fear can make us compromise convictions we once thought were immovable.
Fear can make us choose immediate safety over long-term faithfulness.
Jesus knows that.
And therefore His first command concerning Smyrna's coming suffering is:
“Fear none of those things.”
But we must understand what Christ means.
Surely Jesus is not condemning the involuntary human emotion of fear.

The Christians of Smyrna were human beings. The prospect of prison was frightening. The possibility of death was frightening.
Christian courage does not mean that the faithful never feel afraid.
Christian courage means fear does not get to decide whom we follow.
A believer may have trembling hands and still remain faithful.
A believer may cry and still remain faithful.
A believer may say, *"Lord, I don't know whether I can do this,"* and still take the next step.
Courage is not always the absence of fear.
Sometimes courage is simply **obedience while afraid.**

2. "Those things which thou shalt suffer"

Jesus knows what is coming.
That fact deserves attention.
Smyrna's suffering will not surprise Christ.
Before the prison doors close, **Jesus already knows about them.**
Before the accusations are made, He knows.
Before the testing begins, He knows.
Before His people discover what tomorrow holds, Christ is already there.
That does not answer the difficult question:
If Christ knows suffering is coming, why does He allow it?
Revelation does not offer a simple answer to that question.
Neither should we.
Scripture never requires us to pretend that the problem of suffering is easy.
But this verse does establish something important.
God's foreknowledge of suffering does not mean God's abandonment of the sufferer.
Smyrna is not suffering because Christ has forgotten them.
Quite the opposite.
He knows exactly what is coming.
And He is preparing them to endure it.

3. A Promise We Are Not Given

There is a temptation within Christianity to make promises that Scripture itself does not make.
We may tell someone:
Everything is going to be all right.
Usually we mean well.
But what do we mean by **all right**?
Do we mean the illness will disappear?
The marriage will be restored?
The job will return?
The financial crisis will end?

The person we love will recover?
The danger will pass?
Sometimes those things happen.
And when they do, we give thanks to God.
But Smyrna prevents us from turning those outcomes into universal promises.
Jesus does not tell them:
"Do not fear because I will prevent your suffering."
He tells them:
"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer."
That is very different.
Christian hope is not built upon the promise that everything in this life will turn out the way we want.
Christian hope rests upon the promise that **whatever happens in this life cannot overturn what Christ has accomplished for eternity.**
That is a much stronger hope.

4. "The devil shall cast some of you into prison"

Now Jesus identifies the spiritual dimension behind their persecution:
"the devil shall cast some of you into prison."
Human authorities will presumably perform the arrests.
Human beings will make accusations.
Human officials will lock the doors.
Yet Revelation pulls back the curtain and shows another dimension.
Behind the opposition stands **the adversary**.
This does not mean every hardship in life should be attributed directly to Satan.
Scripture does not encourage Christians to see a demon behind every inconvenience.
But Revelation does insist that there is a spiritual conflict underlying the Church's struggle to remain faithful.
The battle is larger than what can be seen.
And yet notice something equally important:
The devil is **not sovereign**.
Satan acts.
Satan opposes.
Satan accuses.
Satan seeks to destroy.
But Satan does not control the end of the story.
That belongs to Christ.

5. “That ye may be tried”

Their imprisonment will result in testing.
Testing reveals something.
It exposes what is genuine.
It demonstrates whether allegiance remains when allegiance becomes costly.
Faith that has never encountered resistance may appear strong simply because it has never been required to carry much weight.
Smyrna's faith is about to carry enormous weight.
But we should be careful here.
Christ is not suggesting that suffering earns salvation.
Nor is suffering itself spiritually virtuous.
Pain does not automatically make people holy.
Suffering can embitter as easily as it can deepen.
The question is:
What happens to faith while we suffer?
Will suffering drive Smyrna away from Christ?
Or will they cling more tightly to Him?
That is the test.

6. “Ten days”

Jesus tells them:
“ye shall have tribulation ten days.”
What exactly do the **ten days** mean?
Interpreters have offered several possibilities.
Some understand ten literal days of intense persecution or imprisonment.
Others see the number symbolically as representing a definite but limited period of testing.
Some have noticed a possible echo of Daniel 1:12–15, where Daniel and his companions are tested for ten days while attempting to remain faithful in a hostile pagan environment.
There have also been attempts to connect the ten days with ten specific historical periods of Roman persecution, but such schemes are much more speculative and should not be presented as though Revelation itself teaches them.
Our guardrail serves us well here:
Explain what we can know. Acknowledge what we cannot. Do not sensationalize the text.
And there is something we **can** say confidently.
Whether the ten days are literal or symbolic, the suffering is presented as **limited**.
Jesus does not say:
You will suffer forever.

There is a boundary.
Ten days.
The persecutors may feel powerful.
The devil may appear to be in control.
But even the suffering has limits beyond which it cannot ultimately go.
Christ knows its beginning.
Christ knows its duration.
Christ knows its end.

7. Suffering Has a Clock

There is a beautiful pastoral truth here.
When we are suffering, time behaves strangely.
Ten minutes can feel like an hour.
Ten days can feel like a lifetime.
And when we cannot see an ending, we may begin to believe there isn't one.
But Revelation reminds the suffering Church:
Affliction has a clock.
God does.
The suffering Christian may not know when the trial will end.
But Christ does.
There is something deeply reassuring about knowing that suffering is temporary even when we cannot see its boundary.
This does not minimize pain.
Ten days in prison would still be ten terrible days.
A season of grief is still grief.
A battle with illness is still a battle.
Loss still hurts.
But suffering does not possess eternity.
Christ does.

8. "Be thou faithful"

Then comes the heart of the verse:
"Be thou faithful."
Not:
Be successful.
Not:
Be impressive.
Not:
Defeat everyone who opposes you.
Not even:
Make sure you survive.
Simply:
Be faithful.

That may be one of the purest descriptions of Christian discipleship anywhere in Revelation.
God does not always ask us to understand what He is doing.
Sometimes He asks us simply to remain faithful while we do not understand.
There will be moments when we cannot change the circumstances.
We cannot open the prison door.
We cannot make another person change.
We cannot undo what has happened.
We cannot see tomorrow.
But there is still one decision available:
I can remain faithful today.
And tomorrow, by God's grace, I can make that decision again.
That is endurance.

9. “Unto death”

Then Jesus makes the command even more demanding:
“Be thou faithful unto death.”
The expression can carry the sense of faithfulness even to the point of death.
There is no guarantee here that every believer in Smyrna will survive the persecution.
That is difficult.
But we must not soften the verse simply because it makes us uncomfortable.
Jesus asks for an allegiance that even death cannot break.
And suddenly our entire definition of victory changes.
If Christians die because they refuse to abandon Christ, the world may declare:
They lost.
Revelation says:
They conquered.
The world measures victory by survival.
Christ measures victory by faithfulness.
That is an enormous difference.

10. When God Gets Us “Through It”

This brings us directly to the expression we discussed earlier:
“If God brings you to it, God will get you through it.”
Smyrna teaches us how carefully that should be understood.
Sometimes God gets us through the trial by removing it.
Sometimes He gets us through by changing it.
Sometimes He gets us through by giving us strength we did not know we possessed.

Sometimes He gets us through by placing people beside us who help carry the burden.
But there comes a point for every Christian when God getting us **through** something will not mean returning us to the life we had before.
Eventually God brings every believer through the final doorway.
Death.
And Christianity makes the astonishing claim that **even there, God gets us through.**
Because Jesus did not merely approach death.
He went through it.
"He was dead and came to life."
Therefore:
God's promise is not that we will never enter the valley. His promise is that the valley will never become our final home.

11. "I will give thee a crown of life"

And now the entire verse turns.
Prison.
Affliction.
Testing.
Death.
Then:
Life.
Jesus promises:
"I will give thee a crown of life."
The Greek word translated *crown* here is *stephanos*, commonly used for the wreath awarded to a victor.
That imagery would have been readily understandable in the Greco-Roman world.
The world may look at these suffering Christians and see losers.
Jesus sees people approaching the victory stand.
Notice also who gives the crown:
"I will give thee..."
The crown comes from Christ.
The Christian's ultimate reward is not bestowed by society.
The crowd does not vote on it.
Rome cannot veto it.
The persecutor cannot take it away.
Christ gives it.
And what He gives is:
Life.

12. Death Is Not the Opposite of Christian Victory

This is one of the great paradoxes of Revelation.
For Smyrna, death and victory are not necessarily opposites.
A believer may die and still conquer.
That makes no sense according to ordinary human measurements.
But it makes perfect sense when the center of Christianity is a crucified and risen Savior.
On Good Friday, Jesus looked defeated.
The authorities had arrested Him.
His followers scattered.
He was condemned.
He was crucified.
He died.
He was buried.
By every ordinary measurement:
Defeat.
Then came Sunday.
And God revealed what victory actually looked like.
The cross teaches the Church never to judge the final outcome **too early.**

13. Faithfulness Is Not the Same as Fearlessness

There is another truth worth emphasizing.
Jesus does not say:
"Feel no fear until death."
He says:
"Be thou faithful unto death."
Those are not the same thing.
We can be afraid and faithful.
We can be tired and faithful.
We can grieve and remain faithful.
We can have unanswered questions and remain faithful.
We can pray:
Lord, I wish this were different.
And remain faithful.
We can even cry:
Lord, I don't know how much more I can take.
And still reach for His hand.
Sometimes the strongest faith does not shout.
Sometimes it whispers: **"Lord, I am still here."**
And perhaps heaven calls that endurance.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times in pastoral ministry when words become difficult.
Standing beside someone who is suffering teaches us that quickly.
There are moments when we cannot honestly say:
“I know everything will turn out the way you want.”
We do not know that.
And Scripture does not authorize us to promise it.
But there is something stronger we can say:
“Christ knows where you are.”
“Christ knows what you are facing.”
“Christ will not abandon you in it.”
“And whatever happens, this suffering will not have the final word.”
Sometimes we pray:
“Lord, take this away.”
That is a faithful prayer.
Jesus prayed something very much like it in Gethsemane.
But Christian maturity eventually adds another prayer:
“Lord, if You do not take it away yet, give me the grace to remain faithful while I carry it.”
That may be one of the hardest prayers a Christian ever learns.
It may also be one of the most important.
Because faith that must endure eventually discovers:
God's presence is sometimes revealed not by the absence of the fire, but by discovering that He is with us in it.

Something Worth Pondering

We often ask God:
“How long?”
The Bible is not embarrassed by that question.
The Psalms ask it.
The prophets ask it.
Revelation itself will ask it.
Suffering people want to know when suffering will end.
Smyrna is given an intriguing answer:
“Ten days.”
Whatever precisely those ten days represent, Christ knows their number.
Perhaps that is enough.
We may not know how many days our particular trial has.
But God does.
There will be a morning when the trial that seemed endless has ended.
There will be a day when the grief we carried no longer crushes us.
And ultimately there will come a day when Christ wipes every tear from the eyes of His people.

Until then:
Be faithful.
Not because suffering is good.
Not because pain does not matter.
Not because Christians are supposed to pretend everything is fine.
But because **Christ is faithful.**
And the One who asks us to endure is the One who has already endured the cross, defeated the grave, and now holds out:
the crown of life.
Perhaps the whole verse can be reduced to three movements:
Do not fear.
Be faithful.
Life is coming.

Ask Yourself This

When I pray for God to deliver me from something difficult, am I also willing to pray:
"Lord, if this does not change today, keep me faithful today"?
When fear comes, do I assume that being afraid means my faith has failed—or can I understand that courage sometimes means obeying Christ **while my hands are still trembling?**
And if faithfulness to Christ were ever to cost me far more than I expected, do I truly believe the promise of the One **who was dead and came to life**:
The grave can take my earthly life, but it cannot take the life Christ has promised me?
That is Smyrna's great lesson:
The world may determine the cost of our faithfulness.
But Christ determines its reward.
And His final word is not **death**.
It is **life.**

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:11

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”
— Revelation 2:11, KJV

The message to Smyrna ends almost exactly as the message to Ephesus ended:
Listen.
Conquer.
Receive the promise.
But because this is Smyrna, those words carry a very different weight.
Ephesus was being called to overcome spiritual decline—to remember, repent, and return to the love it had abandoned.
Smyrna is being called to overcome **fear in the face of suffering and death**.
And Christ closes the message with an extraordinary promise:
“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”
The persecutors of Smyrna may have power over the first death.
They have absolutely no power over the second.
And suddenly we understand why Jesus began this message by identifying Himself as the One:
“which was dead, and is alive.”
Verse 8 and verse 11 belong together.
At the beginning:
Christ conquered death.
At the end:
Those who belong to Christ will share His victory.

1. “He that hath an ear, let him hear”

Again Jesus uses the familiar biblical expression:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
Obviously, nearly everyone hearing the message physically possessed ears.
Jesus is speaking about something deeper than hearing sound.
He is speaking about **spiritual attentiveness**.
There is a difference between hearing Scripture and allowing Scripture to speak to us.
We can hear a sermon without receiving it.
We can read the Bible without allowing it to examine us.
We can become so familiar with Christian language that the words pass through our minds without ever reaching our hearts.

That danger may actually increase with familiarity.
The person who has never heard the passage may lean forward.
The person who has heard it a hundred times may think:
I already know this.
And sometimes the assumption that we already know what God is going to say becomes the very thing that prevents us from hearing what He is saying.
So Christ says:
Listen.

2. "What the Spirit saith"

Notice the movement in these messages.
At the beginning Jesus says:
"These things saith..."
At the end:
"what the Spirit saith..."
Christ speaks.
The Spirit speaks.
The message John writes becomes the living Word addressed to the churches.
That means Revelation is not merely a historical record of something Christ said to seven congregations nearly two thousand years ago.
Certainly, we must first understand what these words meant to those churches.
Context matters.
History matters.
Language matters.
We should never bypass Smyrna and immediately make the passage about ourselves.
But neither are we permitted to leave the message in Smyrna.
The Spirit says:
"unto the churches."
Plural.
The message to Smyrna belongs to Ephesus.
It belongs to Pergamum.
It belongs to Thyatira.
It belongs to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.
And because Scripture has preserved it, **it belongs to the Church today.**

3. What Smyrna Says to Comfortable Churches

This creates an interesting question for Christians who are not presently experiencing anything resembling Smyrna's persecution.

What are we supposed to hear?
Perhaps one answer is:
Prepare your faith before it is tested.
It is difficult to develop deep roots in the middle of a storm.
The habits we develop during peaceful seasons often become the resources upon which we draw during difficult ones.
Prayer matters now.
Scripture matters now.
Worship matters now.
Christian fellowship matters now.
Learning to trust Christ in ordinary disappointments matters now.
Because none of us knows when life will suddenly demand more of our faith than it demanded yesterday.
Smyrna teaches persecuted Christians how to endure.
But it also teaches comfortable Christians **what kind of faith they should be developing before endurance becomes necessary.**

4. "He that overcometh"

Again we encounter one of Revelation's great words:
"conquers."
And once again, Revelation begins reshaping our understanding of victory.
The Greek verb often translated *conquer*, *overcome*, or *be victorious* is *nikaō*. It will appear repeatedly throughout the book.
But Revelation's definition of conquest is radically different from the world's.
The world conquers by overpowering its enemies.
The Lamb conquers by remaining faithful.
That distinction is essential to understanding Revelation.
If we miss it, we can turn this book into exactly the kind of story it is trying to overturn.
Jesus does not conquer by becoming a greater beast than the beasts.
He conquers as **the Lamb**.
He remains faithful to the Father.
He gives Himself.
He dies.
He rises.
And therefore His followers conquer in a similarly surprising manner.

5. What Does Conquering Look Like in Smyrna?

For the Christians in Smyrna, conquering may look remarkably unimpressive from the outside.

Some may be arrested.
Some may lose possessions.
Some may be imprisoned.
Some may be executed.
And yet Jesus says:
Conquer.
How?
By remaining faithful.
That means the prison door can close and the Christian can still conquer.
The possessions can disappear and the Christian can still conquer.
The reputation can be destroyed and the Christian can still conquer.
Even the executioner can carry out his sentence—
and the Christian can still conquer.
Why?
Because the enemy's ultimate objective is not merely to hurt the Christian.
It is to make the Christian **abandon Christ**.
If suffering cannot accomplish that, suffering has failed.
That gives us one of the clearest definitions of victory in the entire book:
The Christian victory is not that our enemies cannot hurt us.
It is that they cannot make us stop following Jesus.

6. When Faith Must Endure

Here we arrive directly at the heart of our title.
When Faith Must Endure does not mean faith never struggles.
It does not mean Christians never become tired.
It does not mean believers never ask questions.
It does not mean we never cry.
It certainly does not mean nothing terrible ever happens.
Smyrna teaches something far more substantial.
Faith endures when, after everything else has been stripped away, it still says:
“I belong to Christ.”
That may sometimes be said confidently.
At other times it may be whispered through tears.
But it is still faith.
Perhaps endurance sometimes sounds less like:
“I am strong.”
and more like:
“Lord, I am still holding on.”
And even then, our deeper confidence is not ultimately in how tightly we hold Christ.
It is in the One who holds us.

7. “Shall not be hurt”

Then comes the promise:
“shall not be hurt.”
At first, those words almost seem contradictory.
Haven't these people already been harmed?
They are afflicted.
They are impoverished.
They are slandered.
Some are going to prison.
Some may die.
How can Jesus possibly say they will not be harmed?
Because He immediately qualifies the promise:
“of the second death.”
Jesus is not promising immunity from earthly suffering.
He is promising protection from **ultimate destruction**.
That distinction is enormously important.
Christianity does not teach that those who belong to Christ cannot be wounded.
We can.
It does not teach that we cannot lose things.
We can.
It does not teach that Christians cannot die.
We do.
It teaches that none of those things can finally destroy the life God has given us in Christ.
The first death may touch the body.
The second death cannot claim the one who belongs to Christ.

8. What Is the “Second Death”?

Revelation will explain this phrase more fully later.
In Revelation 20, the **“second death”** is associated with final judgment and the lake of fire.
So Christ is drawing a distinction between physical death and ultimate judgment.
Everyone fears the first death because it is the death we can see.
Smyrna is being taught to look beyond it.
Their persecutors may possess the power to kill.
But their power ends there.
Jesus had taught something very similar during His earthly ministry: His followers were not to fear those whose power extends only to killing the body.
Revelation now places that teaching into the experience of a real suffering congregation.

Rome may control the prison.
Rome may control the courtroom.
Rome may control the execution.
Rome does not control eternity.
That belongs to God.

9. The First Death and the Second Death

There is a striking paradox here.
Those who desperately avoid the first death by abandoning Christ gain nothing ultimately.
Those who remain faithful even through the first death are protected from the second.
From an earthly perspective, that looks backward.
Revelation intentionally turns our perspective around.
The question is no longer simply:
"How do I stay alive?"
The deeper question becomes:
"What kind of life cannot be taken from me?"
Jesus has already answered.
The life He gives.
That is why verse 10 promised:
"a crown of life."
And verse 11 promises:
"shall not be hurt of the second death."
Life surrounds death.
Death appears to stand in the middle of the story.
Christ tells Smyrna:
It does not stand at the end.

10. The Worst Thing Is Not the Last Thing

This may be one of Smyrna's greatest pastoral gifts to the Church.
We often fear the worst thing that might happen.
What if the diagnosis is bad?
What if I lose the job?
What if the relationship cannot be restored?
What if the person I love dies?
What if I die?
Smyrna does not answer those fears by saying:
Those things cannot happen.
Some of them can.
Instead Smyrna says something stronger:
The worst thing that happens to you does not have to become the last thing that happens to you.
For the Christian, there is always something beyond the worst.

Resurrection.
Restoration.
Life.
God.
That is why Christian hope can survive circumstances that optimism cannot.
Optimism says:
"Things will probably get better."
Christian hope says:
"Even if they do not get better in the way I desire, Christ will still be faithful."
There is a tremendous difference.

11. Ephesus and Smyrna — Two Ways of Conquering

Our first two churches now give us two very different pictures of what overcoming looks like.
Ephesus must conquer by **returning**.
Smyrna must conquer by **remaining**.
Ephesus faces the danger of losing love.
Smyrna faces the danger of allowing suffering and fear to overcome faithfulness.
Ephesus hears:
Remember. Repent. Return.
Smyrna hears:
Do not fear. Be faithful.
Both are called to conquer.
But Christ addresses each church according to what it actually needs.
That is another mark of His pastoral care.
Christ does not prescribe the same medicine for every congregation.
Some churches need encouragement.
Some need correction.
Some need warning.
Some need reassurance.
Some need repentance.
Some simply need someone to say:
I know this is hard. Keep going.
Smyrna needed the latter.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments in pastoral ministry when there is nothing left to fix.
No clever sentence changes the diagnosis.
No explanation removes the grief.

No amount of advice reverses what has happened.
Those are the moments when ministry becomes less about providing answers and more about helping someone remember **what remains true**.
Christ remains true.
Resurrection remains true.
Eternal life remains true.
God's love remains true.
The promise remains true.
Sometimes the most faithful thing we can say to someone suffering is not:
"I know why this happened."
We often do not.
It may simply be:
"Christ is still here."
That is essentially what Smyrna receives.
Jesus never explains why every painful thing is happening.
Instead He gives them Himself.
The First and the Last.
The One who was dead and came to life.
And sometimes that is the only answer large enough for suffering.
Not an explanation.
A Savior.

Something Worth Pondering

There is something beautiful about the way this four-verse message begins and ends.
Verse 8:
"which was dead, and is alive."
Verse 11:
"shall not be hurt of the second death."
Christ's resurrection surrounds Smyrna's suffering.
Their affliction is inside that promise.
Their poverty is inside that promise.
Their slander is inside that promise.
Their prison is inside that promise.
Even their possible death is inside that promise.
Nothing they are about to experience lies outside the victory of Jesus Christ.
Perhaps that is what endurance finally rests upon.
Not our ability to predict tomorrow.
Not our ability to control circumstances.
Not even our ability to understand what God is doing.
It rests upon knowing **who stands at the end.**

The First and the Last.
The One who died.
The One who lives.
And therefore the Christian can say something that sounds impossible until Easter is taken seriously:
Death may come.
But death cannot win.

Ask Yourself This

When life becomes difficult, is my greatest concern simply escaping the difficulty—or remaining faithful to Christ while I walk through it?
Am I building a faith today that could endure if tomorrow required more of me than today does?
When I think about death, do I see only an ending—or can I trust the One **who was dead and came to life**?
And when everything around me seems to say that suffering has won, can I still hear Christ saying:
“Be thou faithful.”
“Conquer.”
“The second death cannot touch you.”
Smyrna's message began with Christ.
It ends with Christ's promise.
And between those two things stands all the suffering this little church must endure.
Perhaps that is the final lesson of Smyrna:
Our suffering may be part of our story.
It is never the end of our story.
For those who belong to the risen Christ, **life gets the final word.**
And that brings Christ’s four-verse message to Smyrna to its conclusion.
Ephesus taught us to return.
Smyrna teaches us to remain.

Pergamum — The Church Living Where Satan's Throne Is

Revelation 2:12–17

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;
I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."
— Revelation 2:12–17, KJV

Introduction

Pergamum presents us with a church living in a difficult place.
Jesus Himself describes their location with startling language:
"where Satan's seat is."
And then, as if that were not strong enough, He says again:
"where Satan dwelleth."
Whatever precisely those expressions mean—and we will need to examine the possibilities carefully when we reach verse 13—Christ clearly recognizes that Pergamum is an extraordinarily difficult environment in which to remain Christian.
Yet they have remained faithful under severe external pressure.
Jesus tells them:
"Thou holdest fast my name."
And:
"Hast not denied my faith."
One of their own, Antipas, has even been killed.
Pergamum therefore appears at first to be another Smyrna.

A suffering church.
A courageous church.
A church refusing to deny Christ.
But then comes a word we have already learned to pay very close attention to:
“But...”
Something is wrong inside Pergamum.
The church has resisted the pressure **outside** remarkably well.
Its problem is what it has begun tolerating **inside**.
And that gives Pergamum its distinctive place among the seven churches.
The enemy could not make them deny Christ through persecution, so compromise offered another path.

The Movement of the Message

Pergamum's message follows a revealing progression:
Christ possesses the sword → Christ knows where they live → Christ commends their courage → Christ exposes their compromise → Christ commands repentance → Christ promises hidden nourishment and a new identity.
The central tension is striking:
They held fast to Christ's name while allowing teachings contrary to Christ to gain a foothold among them.
That should make us uncomfortable.
Because it demonstrates that faithfulness is not always an all-or-nothing condition.
A Christian—or an entire congregation—may demonstrate extraordinary courage in one area while becoming dangerously compromised in another.
Christ sees both.

1. “Where Satan's seat is”

Pergamum was an important center of political, cultural, and religious life in Roman Asia. It contained prominent temples and religious institutions, and it had significant associations with imperial worship.
Several explanations have therefore been proposed for Christ's phrase:
“where Satan's seat is.”
Some associate it with Pergamum's monumental altar of Zeus.
Others point toward the city's importance as a center of emperor worship.
Others have suggested connections with the healing cult of Asclepius, whose imagery included the serpent.
Still others understand the expression more broadly as describing Pergamum's concentration of pagan religious and imperial power.
The text does not explicitly identify the “throne,” so we should resist declaring one theory unquestionably correct.

But we do not need to identify a particular monument to understand Christ's point.

Pergamum was a place where allegiance to Jesus Christ collided directly with powerful competing allegiances.

And Jesus knew exactly where His people lived.

2. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest"

There is something wonderfully pastoral about those words.

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest."

Jesus does not evaluate Pergamum as though environment makes no difference.

He knows the pressure surrounding them.

He knows what faithfulness costs **there**.

That does not excuse compromise.

Verse 14 will make that perfectly clear.

But Christ acknowledges difficulty before confronting failure.

There is wisdom in that.

We sometimes evaluate another person's faithfulness without knowing the environment in which that faithfulness is being attempted.

Christ never does.

He knows where we live.

He knows the workplace.

He knows the family.

He knows the culture.

He knows the pressures.

He knows the temptations.

He knows what it costs to say no.

And He knows what it costs to say:

Jesus is Lord.

3. "Thou holdest fast my name"

Despite their environment, Pergamum has done something remarkable.

They have held fast to Christ's name.

In the biblical world, a name represents more than a label. It speaks of identity, character, authority, and allegiance.

To hold fast to Christ's name therefore means more than continuing to call themselves Christians.

They have publicly maintained their allegiance to Jesus.

That matters particularly because Pergamum was a place filled with competing claims upon allegiance.

Christians could live peacefully enough within Roman society provided they were willing to accommodate certain expectations.

But Christianity eventually reaches a place where accommodation becomes impossible.
There are things Christians can respectfully participate in.
There are things about which Christians may disagree.
And then there are moments when discipleship simply requires:
No.
Pergamum had apparently said no when saying no was dangerous.

4. Antipas — "My faithful martyr"

Then Jesus names someone.
Antipas.
We know remarkably little about him from Scripture.
Later traditions attempt to tell us more, but the biblical text itself gives us very little historical information.
Yet what Jesus says about him is enough.
Antipas was:
"my faithful martyr."
There is something especially moving about those words.
Antipas may have been largely forgotten by history.
Christ remembered his name.
That alone preaches.
The world may never know the names of most faithful Christians.
They will never appear in history books.
They may never lead large congregations.
They may never write books.
They may never become famous.
But Christ knows their names.
And Antipas receives an extraordinary title.
The language echoes the description of Jesus Himself in Revelation 1:5 as **"the faithful witness."**
Antipas followed his Lord so faithfully that Christ describes him with language resembling His own.
He witnessed.
He remained faithful.
And he died.
From Pergamum's perspective, Antipas was killed.
From heaven's perspective:
Antipas conquered.
Smyrna has already taught us how to understand that.

5. The Church That Survived Persecution

At this point Pergamum appears remarkably strong.
They live where Satan's throne is.
They hold fast to Christ's name.

They refuse to deny Him.
One of their own has died for the faith.
Surely Christ will say:
Well done.
And He does.
But not only that.
Because then comes verse 14:
“But I have a few things against thee.”
Here we encounter one of the most sobering lessons in the seven churches.
Yesterday's courage does not excuse today's compromise.
The fact that Pergamum remained faithful during persecution does not give them permission to become careless afterward.
A church cannot say:
Look what we endured.
Look what we sacrificed.
Look how faithful we have been.
Christ acknowledges all of it.
And then He says:
There is still something we need to talk about.
Once again:
Christ loves His Church too much to flatter it.

6. Balaam and Balak

Jesus compares the problem in Pergamum with the Old Testament story of Balaam and Balak.
The story unfolds primarily in Numbers 22–25, with Numbers 31 later connecting Balaam with the events that led Israel into sin.
Balak, king of Moab, wanted Israel cursed.
Balaam discovered that Israel could not simply be cursed according to Balak's wishes.
Yet Israel was eventually drawn into idolatry and sexual immorality through relationships connected with the peoples around them.
Revelation uses Balaam as an image of **compromise from within**.
That is significant.
Pergamum's enemies had tried pressure.
The church endured.
But what persecution could not accomplish from outside, compromise threatened to accomplish from inside.
That is often the more subtle danger.

7. When the Enemy Changes Tactics

Smyrna and Pergamum together reveal two very different threats to faith.
Smyrna faces:

Persecution.
Pergamum faces:
Persecution and compromise.
Persecution says:
"Deny Christ or suffer."
Compromise whispers:
"You don't really have to deny Christ. Just adjust a little."
That second voice may be more dangerous precisely because it sounds reasonable.
You can still believe.
You can still attend church.
You can still call yourself Christian.
Just don't take it quite so seriously.
Surely God won't mind this.
Everybody else does it.
Times have changed.
And gradually a line once considered immovable becomes negotiable.
The danger of compromise is that **we can remain outwardly Christian while slowly surrendering what Christian faithfulness requires.**

8. Food Sacrificed to Idols and Sexual Immorality

Jesus identifies two areas connected with the Balaam-like teaching:
"eat things sacrificed unto idols"
and
"commit fornication."
The issue of food sacrificed to idols was complicated in the early Church. Paul himself distinguishes between eating ordinary marketplace food that may previously have been associated with sacrifice and knowingly participating in idolatrous worship.
Therefore the problem is not merely what happened to be on someone's dinner plate.
The issue is **participation in idolatry and the compromise of allegiance to Christ.**
Likewise, sexual immorality represents an area where Christian discipleship collided with accepted practices in the surrounding culture.
Pergamum was being tempted to redraw Christian boundaries according to the expectations of the society around it.
That temptation has never disappeared.
The details change.
The pressure remains.

9. The Nicolaitans Again

Then Jesus says:

"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."

We encountered the Nicolaitans in Ephesus.

There, the church **rejected** their works.

Here, some within Pergamum **hold to** their teaching.

That gives us a fascinating contrast.

Ephesus had strong discernment but weakening love.

Pergamum had courageous public allegiance but tolerated dangerous compromise.

Neither church was permitted to point toward its strengths as an excuse for its weakness.

That is an important lesson for church health.

A congregation may be excellent in doctrine and weak in love.

Another may be courageous in public witness and weak in moral discernment.

Another may excel in service while neglecting prayer.

Christ examines the **whole church**.

10. "Repent"

The remedy is direct:

"Repent."

Notice that Christ addresses the church, not merely the people holding the false teaching.

That means the congregation bears some responsibility for what it allows within its fellowship.

Pergamum cannot simply say:

Well, that's what those people believe.

Christ holds the church accountable for tolerating what threatens its faithfulness.

That does not mean churches must become places of suspicion where every disagreement becomes grounds for condemnation.

Christians have always disagreed about secondary matters.

But there are boundaries beyond which disagreement becomes distortion.

And there are behaviors that cannot simply be baptized with the language of tolerance.

Love does not require a church to abandon discernment.

We learned that at Ephesus.

Now Pergamum learns the other side:

Tolerance is not always love.

Sometimes love must say:

This is leading us away from Christ.

11. The Sword of His Mouth

Christ warns:

"Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The message began with Christ as the One possessing:

"the sharp sword with two edges."

Now we discover why.

This sword proceeds from Christ's mouth.

The imagery points toward the irresistible authority of His word and judgment.

Christ does not need Rome's weapons.

He does not need an army.

He speaks.

Truth itself becomes judgment against falsehood.

That is another reason churches should take Scripture seriously.

We do not stand over the Word as its judge.

The Word stands over us.

12. Hidden Manna

Then the tone changes from warning to promise.

To the one who conquers, Christ promises:

"of the hidden manna."

Manna immediately takes us back to Israel's wilderness journey.

God fed His people when they could not feed themselves.

Bread appeared where bread should not have existed.

God sustained His people through the wilderness.

That makes the promise beautifully appropriate for Pergamum.

They are being tempted to eat at tables associated with compromise.

Christ essentially says:

I have food for you.

Why settle for the table of idols when Christ Himself provides what sustains life?

The precise meaning of **"hidden"** manna has been interpreted in different ways, but the central symbolism is difficult to miss.

God provides what His faithful people truly need.

13. The White Stone

Then comes one of Revelation's intriguing mysteries:

"Will give him a white stone."

Numerous interpretations have been proposed.

White stones were used in various ancient contexts. Suggestions have included tokens of acquittal, admission tokens for feasts or games, symbols of victory, and other social or legal practices.

No single explanation has achieved certainty.
So once again:
We explain what we can know without pretending to know what John does not tell us.
Whatever its precise cultural background, the stone is clearly a **gift from Christ to the conqueror**.
And on it is written something intensely personal.

14. "A New Name"

Jesus says:
"in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."
Throughout Scripture, names often represent identity.
Abram becomes Abraham.
Jacob becomes Israel.
Simon becomes Peter.
A changed name can signify a changed identity, calling, or relationship with God.
Here Christ promises a name known intimately between Himself and the recipient.
There is something almost breathtakingly personal about that.
Pergamum lives in a world demanding that Christians define themselves according to its categories and allegiances.
Christ says, in effect:
I know who you really are.
The world may label you.
Society may condemn you.
Others may misunderstand you.
But the final word concerning your identity belongs to Christ.
And He gives the faithful a **new name**.

Pastoral Reflection

Pergamum forces us to ask a difficult question:
Where have we learned to live with something Christ is asking us to confront?
Compromise rarely announces itself:
"Today I intend to abandon my faith."
It usually begins much more quietly.
Just this once.
It's really not that serious.
Everyone does it.
Surely Christianity needs to adjust.
I still believe in Jesus.

And perhaps that last statement is exactly what makes compromise so dangerous.
Pergamum **did** believe in Jesus.
They held fast to His name.
They had refused to deny their faith.
Their problem was not outright rejection of Christ.
Their problem was trying to hold Christ in one hand while holding something incompatible with Christ in the other.
Eventually one must be released.
Christ says:
Let go of the compromise.
Repent.
This is not Christ attempting to destroy Pergamum.
It is Christ trying to save Pergamum from becoming something it never intended to become.

Something Worth Pondering

There are at least two ways the world can pressure Christians to abandon faithfulness.
One is through **threat**.
The other is through **acceptance**.
Threat says:
"Change or we will punish you."
Acceptance says:
"Change just a little and everything will become easier."
Smyrna teaches us how to face the first.
Pergamum teaches us how to recognize the second.
And perhaps the second is sometimes harder.
Open persecution makes the battle line obvious.
Compromise slowly moves the line until we can no longer remember where it originally stood.
That may be why Pergamum's message is so important for every generation of the Church.
Faith must endure not only when the world threatens us for being different.
Faith must also endure when the world invites us to become the same.
And Christ promises something better than anything compromise can provide:
His nourishment.
His approval.
His name.

Ask Yourself This

Where in my life am I most tempted to make following Christ a little easier by adjusting what faithfulness requires?
Have I ever confused **tolerance** with love when genuine love required me to acknowledge that something was spiritually harmful?
When culture and Christ ask for competing allegiances, whose approval matters most to me?
And if faithfulness makes me feel like an outsider, can I trust that the One who knows **where I live** also knows **who I am**?
Ephesus needed to **return**.
Smyrna needed to **remain**.
And now Pergamum must learn to **resist**.
Return. Remain. Resist.

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:12

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;”
— Revelation 2:12, KJV

The message to Pergamum begins with a weapon.
That immediately distinguishes it from Smyrna.
To the suffering Christians in Smyrna, Jesus introduced Himself as:
“the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”
They needed reassurance. Death threatened them, so Christ reminded them that He had already conquered death.
Pergamum needs something different.
This church has demonstrated remarkable courage in the face of persecution. They have held fast to Christ's name. They have refused to deny their faith even when Antipas was killed.
But something dangerous has been permitted to grow within the congregation.
So Christ introduces Himself as the One:
“which hath the sharp sword with two edges.”
Before Pergamum hears what Christ thinks about its compromise, it is reminded that **Christ's Word has the authority to expose it, judge it, and cut through every excuse used to defend it.**

1. “To the angel of the church in Pergamos”

Once again the message is addressed:
“to the angel of the church.”
As we have noted with Ephesus and Smyrna, the Greek word *angelos* means **messenger**, and interpreters differ over whether these figures are heavenly representatives of the congregations or human messengers associated with them.
The text does not require us to settle that question.
What is unmistakable is that Christ is speaking to **the church**.
And Pergamum must listen carefully.
Because this church is about to discover something that every congregation eventually needs to learn:
Faithfulness in one area does not make us immune from Christ's correction in another.
Pergamum has done some extraordinarily courageous things.
Christ will acknowledge them.
But first He shows them the sword.

2. Pergamum — A City of Power

Pergamum was one of the most important cities of Roman Asia.
Although Ephesus was the great commercial center of the region, Pergamum possessed considerable political, cultural, and religious significance. It had served as a royal capital before coming under Roman control and remained an important administrative center.
It was also filled with impressive religious structures.
Temples and sanctuaries honored various deities. The city was associated with the worship of Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius, and it played a significant role in the imperial cult.
For Christians living there, religion was not something confined neatly to private life.
Religion, civic identity, social participation, political loyalty, and economic life could overlap.
That meant following Christ sometimes required Christians to decide:
How far can I participate without compromising whom I worship?
That question lies beneath much of what follows.

3. "These things saith"

Again we encounter the solemn formula:
"These things saith..."
John is writing.
But Christ is speaking.
That distinction is essential throughout Revelation.
John does not examine the churches according to his personal preferences.
He does not say:
Here is what I think Ephesus should change.
Here is my opinion about Smyrna.
Here is what bothers me about Pergamum.
The evaluation belongs to Christ.
And that matters enormously for the Church.
The ultimate question is never merely:
What does our culture think about the Church?
Nor even:
What does the congregation think about itself?
The ultimate question is:
What does Christ say?
Pergamum may have been quite pleased with its record.
After all, they had survived persecution without denying Jesus.
But Christ sees something they may have learned to overlook.

4. “He which hath”

Notice the language carefully:

“he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.”

The sword belongs to Christ.

This is not merely an ornament or symbol of status.

It represents His authority.

Pergamum lived in a city where Roman political power was very real. Rome possessed the authority to enforce law and punish those regarded as offenders. The sword naturally carried associations with governmental power, judgment, and even execution.

The Christians of Pergamum therefore lived beneath the shadow of an earthly sword.

Antipas had already been killed.

Yet Revelation pulls back the curtain and asks:

Who actually possesses ultimate authority?

Not Rome.

Christ.

Rome may possess a sword.

But Jesus possesses **the sword that ultimately matters.**

5. The Sharp Two-Edged Sword

The image comes directly from John's earlier vision of Christ.

In Revelation 1:16, John saw:

“out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword.”

That detail becomes crucial.

Christ does not carry this sword in His hand.

It proceeds from His **mouth**.

The symbolism therefore directs us toward the power and authority of Christ's word.

He speaks truth.

He exposes falsehood.

He judges evil.

He separates what human beings would prefer to blend together.

This imagery also resonates with broader biblical language about God's Word.

Hebrews famously describes the Word of God as:

“living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.”

The point is not that Scripture and Revelation are necessarily using the image in precisely identical ways, but the theological connection is unmistakable:

God's Word penetrates beneath appearances.

And Pergamum desperately needs that kind of examination.

6. A Sword That Cuts Both Ways

There is a reason a two-edged sword is such an effective image.
It cuts in either direction.
Pergamum may have expected Christ's sword to be directed toward **their enemies**.
After all, they were living where Satan's throne was.
One of their own had been killed.
Surely judgment belonged to the people persecuting the Church.
But then comes the surprise.
In verse 16 Jesus will warn Pergamum itself:
"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."
The sword is not only directed outward.
It turns toward the Church.
That is sobering.
Christ certainly judges evil in the world.
But Revelation begins judgment by examining His own lampstands.
Before Christ tells us everything that is wrong with Babylon, beasts, kings, and empires, He speaks to His churches.
That order matters.
It is always easier to open Scripture and discover what is wrong with **someone else**.
Christ asks us first to allow Scripture to examine **us**.

7. When We Use the Sword on Everyone Else

There is a danger here for Christians who know Scripture well.
We can become skilled at using the Bible to diagnose everyone around us.
We know which verse applies to that person.
We know which passage our neighbor needs.
We know exactly which Scripture our denomination, another denomination, society, politicians, or culture ought to read.
And perhaps we are correct.
But there remains another question: **What is the Word saying to me?**
A sword that only points outward has ceased functioning the way Christ intends.
Before we use Scripture to expose someone else's compromise, we should be willing to stand beneath its examination ourselves.
Pergamum could easily point toward the pagan world surrounding it.
Jesus says, in effect:
Before we discuss them, we need to discuss you.
That is spiritually healthy.
And frequently uncomfortable.

8. The Sword and Compromise

Why is this particular image appropriate for Pergamum?
Because compromise **blurs lines**.
The compromised heart says:
It's not really that different.
Surely this is close enough.
Everybody else does it.
God understands.
We don't want to be unreasonable.
Sometimes those statements may even contain legitimate wisdom.
Christianity should not manufacture prohibitions simply for the sake of being different.
But compromise occurs when we blur a distinction **Christ has made clear** because keeping the distinction has become inconvenient.
And what does a sharp blade do?
It separates.
It establishes a boundary.
It distinguishes one thing from another.
Truth from falsehood.
Faithfulness from compromise.
Allegiance from accommodation.
The Church at Pergamum had allowed some boundaries to become indistinct.
Christ arrives with something sharp enough to make them clear again.

9. The Word That Cuts Is Also the Word That Heals

We should not interpret the sword merely as an image of destruction.
Christ's purpose in speaking to Pergamum is still **repentance and restoration**.
That matters.
A surgeon also uses a sharp instrument.
The blade cuts, but the purpose of the cutting is not destruction.
It is healing.
Sometimes something harmful must be removed so that something healthy can remain.
There are moments when God's Word does that to us.
A passage troubles us.
A sermon unsettles us.
A conviction refuses to disappear.
Something we once comfortably justified suddenly becomes difficult to defend.

Our first reaction may be resistance:
I don't like what this says.
Perhaps the better question is:
Why does this bother me?
Sometimes discomfort with Scripture is not evidence that Scripture has wounded us improperly.
Sometimes it has found exactly the place that needs healing.

10. Christ Does Not Need Our Permission to Examine His Church

Pergamum also reminds us of something we discovered at Ephesus.
The Church belongs to Christ.
He walks among the lampstands.
He knows where they live.
He knows what they endure.
He knows what they believe.
He knows what they tolerate.
Therefore, Christ does not need a congregation's permission to evaluate it.
That can be uncomfortable in an age when churches sometimes function almost like consumer organizations.
We ask:
Are people happy?
Are attendance numbers good?
Are programs successful?
Is giving strong?
Are people satisfied with the pastor?
Those may provide useful information.
But none answers the ultimate question:
Is Christ pleased?
A congregation can be pleased with itself while Christ calls it to repentance.
Pergamum demonstrates exactly that possibility.

11. Truth Is Not Determined by the Culture Around Us

Pergamum's environment made compromise understandable.
But it did not make compromise faithful.
That distinction is important.
Jesus begins verse 13 by saying:
"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest."
Christ understands their environment.
He knows the pressure.

He knows how difficult it is.
But understanding the pressure does not mean redefining truth to accommodate it.
There is a lesson here for every generation.
The Church must communicate the gospel within culture.
We must understand the people around us.
We must speak language they can understand.
We must distinguish biblical conviction from mere tradition.
But the Church cannot allow the surrounding culture to become the final authority over what Christianity is permitted to believe.
Christ retains that authority.
He has the sword.

12. The Sword Belongs to Christ — Not Us

There is another guardrail we should establish.
Because Christ possesses the sword, **the Church does not receive permission here to wield physical violence against those who disagree with it.**
That would completely misunderstand the image.
The sword comes from **Christ's mouth**.
His weapon here is His authoritative word and judgment.
Christians have sometimes forgotten this distinction in history, with tragic consequences.
The Church's calling is not to force conversion.
It is to bear witness.
To proclaim truth.
To love.
To serve.
To remain faithful.
And when judgment ultimately comes, judgment belongs to Christ.
The sword is His.
That should make the Church both courageous and humble.

13. A Word Before the Commendation

There is something else I find fascinating about verse 12.
Jesus has not yet mentioned Pergamum's courage.
That comes next.
He has not yet mentioned Antipas.
That comes next.
He has not yet mentioned Balaam or the Nicolaitans.
Those come later.
First:
The sword.

It is almost as though Christ wants the church to understand the standard before hearing the evaluation.
Their faithfulness will be measured by **His Word**.
Their compromise will be exposed by **His Word**.
Their repentance will be commanded by **His Word**.
And their restoration will begin when they submit again to **His Word**.
Everything starts there.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when Scripture comforts us.
Thank God for them.
There are nights when we desperately need:
"The Lord is my shepherd."
There are seasons when we need:
"I am with you always."
There are gravesides where we need:
"I am the resurrection and the life."
But if Scripture only ever comforts us, we may not actually be listening to all of Scripture.
Sometimes the Word confronts.
Sometimes it exposes.
Sometimes it tells us that something we have accepted needs to change.
Sometimes Christ says:
"I know where you live."
And then:
"Repent."
Both voices belong to the same Savior.
The Christ who comforted Smyrna is the Christ who confronts Pergamum.
And both are expressions of His love.
A physician who refuses to tell a patient something is wrong is not compassionate.
A pastor who never tells a congregation something needs correction may eventually cease being pastoral.
And a Christian who only accepts the portions of Scripture that affirm what he already believes has made himself the authority over the Word rather than placing himself beneath it.
Christ loves His Church enough to comfort it.
Christ also loves His Church enough to correct it.

Something Worth Pondering

Pergamum lived beneath two swords.
One belonged to Rome.
One belonged to Christ.

Rome's sword could threaten the body.
Christ's sword examined the soul.
Which one should they fear more?
That is a profound question.
The temptation would have been to compromise Christ's truth in order to avoid Rome's consequences.
But Jesus turns their perspective around.
The power that appears greatest is not necessarily the power that **is** greatest.
Rome looked powerful.
Christ possessed ultimate authority.
And perhaps the Church still needs that reminder whenever faithfulness becomes costly.
We should certainly care what people think.
We should listen respectfully.
We should examine ourselves when criticized.
We should never use "faithfulness" as an excuse for arrogance or cruelty.
But eventually every Christian encounters moments when the question becomes:
Whose word has final authority over my life?
Culture's?
My own?
The crowd's?
Or Christ's?
Pergamum's answer must be:
Christ's.
Because the sword belongs to Him.

Ask Yourself This

When I read Scripture, am I primarily looking for confirmation of what I already believe—or am I genuinely willing to let Christ correct me?
Do I use God's Word more readily to identify compromise in other people than to examine compromise within myself?
Are there places where I have gradually blurred a boundary Christ is asking me to make clear again?
And if Christ's Word cuts deeply enough to expose something uncomfortable, will I resist the blade—
or trust the One holding it?
Because the hand that holds the sword is the same hand that was pierced for us.
Christ does not cut merely to condemn.

Sometimes He cuts in order to heal.
And Pergamum is about to discover that **the Church that refuses to surrender to the sword of the world must still be willing to submit to the sword of the Word.**

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:13

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.”
— Revelation 2:13, KJV

Jesus begins again with words we have already heard:
“I know.”
But this time He adds something:
“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.”
That is an extraordinarily pastoral statement.
Christ does not merely know **what** Pergamum is doing.
He knows **where** they are trying to do it.
He knows their environment.
He knows the pressures surrounding them.
He knows the temptations built into their culture.
He knows what it costs them to remain faithful.
And before He confronts the compromise that exists within this congregation, He acknowledges something that deserves praise:
Living faithfully in Pergamum is hard.
Christ knows that.

1. “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest”

There is something deeply reassuring about those words.
Sometimes Christians hear biblical commands and wonder whether God understands how difficult obedience can be in the circumstances in which they actually live.
Lord, You don't understand my workplace.
You don't understand my family.
You don't understand the pressure.
You don't understand what people expect of me.
You don't understand what saying no will cost.
Pergamum gives us Christ's answer:
“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.”
There is no environment in which Christ loses sight of His people.
He knows the culture in which we live.
He knows the generation into which we were born.
He knows our families.
He knows our workplaces.

He knows the expectations surrounding us.
He knows exactly how difficult faithfulness may become.
That does not lower His standard.
Verse 14 will make that clear.
But it means His evaluation is never detached from reality.
Christ understands the difficulty without redefining faithfulness because of the difficulty.
That is an important distinction.

2. “Where Satan's seat is”

Then comes one of the most provocative expressions in the seven messages:
“where Satan's seat is.”
What exactly did Jesus mean?
Several possibilities have been suggested.
Pergamum contained a monumental altar associated with Zeus, dramatically situated on the city's acropolis. Some interpreters have connected this structure with Satan's throne.
Others point toward Pergamum's strong association with **emperor worship**. The city was an important center of the imperial cult, where religious devotion and political loyalty could become intertwined. For Christians who confessed Jesus as Lord, imperial religious expectations could create an unavoidable conflict of allegiance.
Still others have suggested the cult of **Asclepius**, the god associated with healing, whose imagery included a serpent—a particularly suggestive symbol given Revelation's later identification of Satan with the ancient serpent.
Each proposal has something to commend it.
But Revelation itself never says:
“By Satan's throne, I mean this particular building.”
So neither should we.
Our approach remains the same:
Explain what we can know. Acknowledge what we cannot. Do not sensationalize the text.
What we can say confidently is that Pergamum represented an environment in which religious, political, and cultural forces stood in profound opposition to Christian allegiance.
Whatever specific landmark John may have had in mind, Jesus describes Pergamum as a place where **the power of the adversary was particularly evident.**

3. Satan Has a Throne — But He Is Not King

There is an important theological distinction here.
Jesus calls it:

“Satan's seat.”
But Revelation never suggests Satan is equal to God.
Christian theology is not a story of two equally powerful gods—one good and one evil—fighting to see who will eventually win.
Satan is not God's equal.
He is not eternal in the way God is eternal.
He does not possess unlimited power.
He does not know everything.
He is not everywhere.
And Revelation's outcome is never genuinely in doubt.
Satan may have a **throne** in the imagery of this verse.
But he does not possess **the throne**.
That belongs to God.
Later Revelation will take us into the heavenly throne room, and there will be no uncertainty about who governs creation.
So when Jesus says Pergamum lives where Satan's throne is, He is acknowledging the intensity of evil without surrendering one inch of divine sovereignty.
Satan may exercise influence.
Christ remains Lord.

4. Christians Living in Difficult Places

Notice that Jesus does not tell Pergamum:
“Leave.”
That deserves attention.
They are living in an extraordinarily hostile spiritual environment, yet Christ's immediate concern is not relocation.
It is faithfulness.
Sometimes Christians imagine that holiness is primarily achieved by escaping difficult environments.
Certainly there are situations from which wisdom requires us to remove ourselves.
But Christian faithfulness has never depended upon finding a place where temptation, unbelief, or evil do not exist.
If that were required, we would have nowhere to go.
Jesus Himself prayed concerning His disciples not simply that they be removed from the world but that they be kept faithful within it.
Pergamum demonstrates that Christians can live even **“where Satan's seat is”** and still belong completely to Christ.
The question is not merely:
Where do you live?
The deeper question is:
Whom do you belong to where you live?

5. “And thou holdest fast my name”

Then comes Christ's commendation:

“And thou holdest fast my name.”

The contrast matters. Christ knows where they dwell, and He knows they have held fast there.

Despite the environment—

they held fast.

Despite the pressure—

they held fast.

Despite the consequences—

they held fast.

Despite watching one of their own die—

they held fast.

The image is almost physical.

They have grabbed hold of Christ's name and refused to release it.

That is endurance.

And once again our title appears almost naturally from the text.

When faith must endure, sometimes faith looks simply like refusing to let go.

6. Holding Fast to the Name

In Scripture, a name frequently represents more than identification.

It carries ideas of character, identity, authority, and belonging.

To hold fast to Christ's name therefore means more than continuing to use the word **Christian**.

They remain identified with Jesus.

That would matter enormously in Pergamum.

The surrounding culture offered many religious identities and demanded various forms of civic allegiance.

Yet Pergamum's Christians continued to say:

We belong to Jesus Christ.

There comes a point where Christianity cannot simply become one allegiance among many.

Jesus does not ask for a place somewhere on the list.

He asks for the place from which every other allegiance is evaluated.

Family matters.

Country matters.

Community matters.

Work matters.

Relationships matter.

But none can become Lord.

That name belongs to **Jesus**.

7. “Hast not denied my faith”

The statement becomes even stronger:

“hast not denied my faith.”

Apparently there had been circumstances in which denial would have made life easier.

Perhaps denial would have prevented trouble.

Perhaps a small compromise would have satisfied the authorities.

Perhaps a few carefully chosen words would have removed suspicion.

We cannot reconstruct the precise event.

But Jesus knows what happened.

Pergamum had been given an opportunity to distance itself from Christ.

And it refused.

There is something beautifully simple about that.

They did not necessarily defeat their opponents.

They did not transform Pergamum overnight.

They did not overthrow Roman authority.

They simply refused to say:

“I do not belong to Jesus.”

And Christ calls that faithfulness.

8. “Even in those days wherein Antipas”

Then Jesus does something deeply personal.

He names a man.

Antipas.

Among all the people living in the Roman Empire—

among emperors, governors, generals, philosophers, wealthy patrons, and famous citizens—

Jesus remembers:

Antipas.

We know almost nothing about him from the biblical text.

Later Christian tradition supplied stories about Antipas and his death, but those traditions come later and cannot simply be treated as historical facts established by Revelation.

John gives us only what we need to know.

Antipas belonged to Christ.

Antipas witnessed faithfully.

Antipas was killed.

And **Jesus knew his name.**

That may be enough.

9. Heaven Remembers Different Names

History remembers famous people.

Heaven remembers faithful people.

There are countless Christians whose names never entered a history book.
They taught children.
They cared for the sick.
They prayed quietly.
They served congregations nobody outside the community ever heard about.
They gave when nobody noticed.
They remained faithful through marriages, illnesses, grief, disappointment, and ordinary life.
They died without fame.
The world moved on.
But Christ knows their names.
Antipas reminds us:
Obscurity on earth does not mean anonymity in heaven.
What an encouragement that is to ordinary Christians.
Most of us will never be famous.
Thank God, perhaps.
But we can be faithful.
And apparently Christ considers that far more important.

10. The Witness of Antipas

Jesus calls Antipas:
"My faithful martyr."
The Greek word is *martys*.
It means **witness**.
From this word the English word **martyr** eventually developed because Christians who bore witness to Christ sometimes sealed that testimony with their lives.
The KJV's "martyr" is especially fitting here. Antipas bore witness to Christ and was slain among them.
Antipas was Christ's witness.
His life testified to Jesus.
And eventually his death did too.
There is a profound progression here.
Every Christian is called to witness.
Not every Christian will become a martyr.
But every Christian should possess a faith that does not depend upon the guarantee that faithfulness will always be safe.
Antipas apparently did.

11. "My Faithful Martyr"

Then Jesus calls him:
"My faithful martyr."

This is one of the most moving phrases in the passage.
Because similar language has already been used of Christ Himself.
In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is:
“the faithful witness.”
The title Christ gives Antipas echoes that witness.
faithful witness.
Do not move past that too quickly.
The disciple has begun to resemble his Master.
Jesus remained faithful unto death.
Antipas remained faithful unto death.
Jesus bore witness before hostile authorities.
Antipas bore witness in a hostile city.
Jesus died.
Antipas died.
And because Jesus rose, Antipas' death cannot be the end of Antipas' story.
This is discipleship at its deepest:
The faithful follower begins to look like the faithful Lord.

12. “Who was slain among you”

Then come the terrible words:
“who was slain among you.”
Pergamum's persecution was not theoretical.
Someone had died.
Someone they knew.
Perhaps someone they worshiped beside.
Someone whose voice they had heard.
Someone whose absence was now noticeable whenever the congregation gathered.
We should not romanticize martyrdom.
Death leaves grief behind.
Courage does not make bereavement painless.
Antipas may have conquered, but the congregation still had to live with the empty place he left behind.
And perhaps that made Pergamum's continued faithfulness even more remarkable.
They knew what following Jesus might cost because they had watched it cost Antipas everything.
And still:
“thou holdest fast my name.”

13. Faith After Watching Someone Else Suffer

Sometimes our faith is tested not primarily by what happens to us but by what happens to someone else.

We watch a faithful person become sick.
We watch someone pray and still lose the person they love.
We watch injustice happen to someone who did not deserve it.
And somewhere inside us arises the question:
If this happened to them, what does faithfulness guarantee me?
Pergamum knew the answer.
Faithfulness did not guarantee physical safety.
Antipas proved that.
But Antipas also demonstrated something else:
There are things worth remaining faithful to even when faithfulness costs everything.
That is a very different kind of Christianity from one built primarily upon what God will give us if we follow Him.
Antipas followed Christ because **Christ was worthy of being followed.**
Even unto death.

14. “Where Satan dwelleth”

Jesus ends the verse almost where He began:
“where Satan dwelleth.”
At the beginning:
“where Satan's seat is.”
At the end:
“where Satan dwelleth.”
Pergamum is surrounded linguistically by the reality of spiritual opposition.
Yet look at what stands right in the middle:
Christ's name.
Faith.
Witness.
Faithfulness.
Antipas.
The verse almost becomes a picture of the Church itself.
Satan may surround.
But Christ has people **inside that territory**.
Darkness may be present.
But so is witness.
And perhaps that is why Christians are sometimes called to remain in difficult places.
A lamp is most noticeable where it is dark.

15. External Courage and Internal Compromise

There is, however, an uncomfortable tension we must carry into the next verse.
Pergamum has demonstrated remarkable courage against external pressure.
Yet Christ is about to rebuke them for internal compromise.
That means courage in one battle does not guarantee faithfulness in another.
They resisted persecution.
But some among them were yielding to accommodation.
This is spiritually important.
We may point toward some great act of faithfulness in our past and assume it proves our present condition.
Look what I endured.
Look what I sacrificed.
Look what I did for God.
Christ says:
I know.
He genuinely honors it.
But then He continues examining us.
Yesterday's faithfulness is something to thank God for.
It is not permission to compromise today.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a phrase in this verse that may be especially important for people going through difficult circumstances:
“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest.”
Christ knows where you are.
Not merely geographically.
He knows the place in life where you are standing.
He knows the pressure at work.
He knows the tension at home.
He knows the financial uncertainty.
He knows the grief nobody else quite understands.
He knows the temptation you repeatedly have to resist.
He knows what obedience costs you that other people never see.
And Christ does not evaluate your faithfulness from a distance.
He knows where you live.
But Pergamum also reminds us that difficult circumstances cannot become permanent excuses for compromise.
Christ understands why obedience is difficult.

He still calls us to obey.
Grace says:
“I know how hard this is.”
Faithfulness answers:
“Then help me remain true here.”
Perhaps that is a prayer worth learning:
Lord, You know where I live. Help me live faithfully here.
Not in some imaginary life where every temptation disappears.
Not in some future where circumstances become easier.
Here.

Something Worth Pondering

Antipas receives only a few words in Revelation.
Yet what words they are.
“My faithful martyr.”
“My faithful martyr.”
Imagine reaching the end of life and hearing Christ describe you that way.
Not:
My famous one.
Not:
My successful one.
Not:
My wealthy one.
Not:
My influential one.
Not:
My impressive one.
My faithful one.
Perhaps we spend too much of life trying to become things Christ never asked us to become.
The world asks:
Were you successful?
Christ asks:
Were you faithful?
The world asks:
Did people know your name?
Revelation says:
Christ knows your name.
The world asks:
What did you accomplish?
Christ may ask:
Did you hold fast to My name?

And perhaps, at the end of everything, there could be no greater testimony than for Christ to say:
You were My faithful one.

Ask Yourself This

Do I truly believe that Christ knows **where I am living**—the pressures, temptations, difficulties, and costs of faithfulness that may be invisible to everyone else?
When allegiance to Christ makes life harder, am I willing to **hold fast to His name**, or do I begin looking for ways to make my Christianity less costly?
Am I relying upon yesterday's faithfulness while overlooking areas of compromise today?
And if history eventually forgets my name, would it be enough to know that **Christ remembers it?**
Antipas may have been almost forgotten by the world.
But nearly two thousand years later, Christians still read the words Jesus spoke about him:
"My faithful martyr."

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:14

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”
— Revelation 2:14, KJV

There is that word again:
“But.”
Pergamum has just received extraordinary commendation.
They live **“where Satan's seat is.”**
They have held fast to Christ's name.
They refused to deny their faith.
Even when Antipas was killed, they remained faithful.
If any congregation had reason to point toward its record and say, *Surely that proves we are doing well,* Pergamum did.
Then Christ says:
“But I have a few things against thee.”
Once again we encounter an uncomfortable truth:
Christ's commendation of our faithfulness in one area does not prevent Him from confronting our unfaithfulness in another.
Pergamum had resisted the enemy when he came through the front door.
They were having considerably more trouble recognizing him when he slipped in through the side.

1. “I have a few things against thee”

Jesus does not erase what He has just praised.
That is important.
He does not say:
Because there is compromise among you, everything you did before was meaningless.
Their courage was real.
Their endurance was real.
Their loyalty during persecution was real.
Antipas' witness was real.
Christ honors all of it.
But neither does He allow those accomplishments to become a defense against correction.
We saw the same pattern at Ephesus.
Christ sees the **whole church**.
He does not allow failure to erase faithfulness.

And He does not allow faithfulness to excuse failure.
That is a remarkably balanced form of judgment.
Human beings often struggle to do this.
We tend to place people into categories.
Good.
Bad.
Faithful.
Unfaithful.
Christ's evaluation is more discerning.
This is good. Continue it.
This is wrong. Change it.
That is how a loving Lord shepherds His Church.

2. “Thou hast there them”

Notice carefully what Jesus says:
“thou hast there them...”
Not everyone in Pergamum holds this teaching.
The entire congregation has not abandoned the gospel.
There are **some**.
Yet Christ addresses the church as a whole.
That tells us something significant about corporate responsibility.
The problem is not simply:
Some people believe something wrong.
The problem is:
The congregation has permitted the teaching to remain among them without adequately confronting it.
Pergamum's failure is therefore partly a failure of discernment and discipline.
This does not mean every theological disagreement requires confrontation.
Christians have disagreed about secondary matters since the earliest days of the Church.
There must be room for differences of interpretation, conscience, practice, and tradition.
But there are also teachings and behaviors that strike at the heart of Christian faithfulness.
A healthy church must know the difference.

3. The Danger of Tolerance Without Discernment

The word **tolerance** carries a generally positive meaning in modern society.
And rightly so in many contexts.

Christians should be patient with people.
We should respect human dignity.
We should listen.
We should avoid arrogance.
We should allow room for disagreement.
We certainly should never attempt to force Christian belief upon others.
But there is a difference between **tolerating people** and **tolerating everything people teach or do within the Church**.
Love welcomes people.
Love is patient with people.
Love walks beside struggling people.
But love does not require pretending that everything is spiritually healthy.
Sometimes the loving thing is to say:
This road is taking us somewhere Christ does not want us to go.
Pergamum had apparently become reluctant to say that.
And Christ would not allow their reluctance to continue.

4. "The doctrine of Balaam"

Jesus reaches back into Israel's history:
"the doctrine of Balaam."
The story of Balaam appears primarily in Numbers 22–24, with the consequences unfolding in Numbers 25 and further explanation appearing in Numbers 31.
Balak, king of Moab, feared Israel and summoned Balaam to curse them.
But something remarkable happened.
Balaam could not simply pronounce the curse Balak wanted.
God repeatedly turned the intended curse into blessing.
On the surface, Israel appeared safe.
The enemy could not destroy God's people through direct spiritual attack.
But then something changed.
Numbers 25 records Israel becoming involved with the women of Moab, participating in sacrificial meals, and bowing down to their gods.
Later, Numbers 31:16 associates Balaam with counsel that contributed to Israel's unfaithfulness.
Revelation summarizes that episode by saying Balaam taught Balak:
"to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel."
And suddenly the relevance to Pergamum becomes obvious.

5. What Could Not Be Cursed Could Be Compromised

This may be the heart of the Balaam comparison.
Balak could not simply destroy Israel through Balaam's curse.

But Israel could be enticed into compromising its own covenant faithfulness.
Pergamum had experienced something remarkably similar.
External pressure had failed.
They had been threatened.
They had been persecuted.
Antipas had been killed.
And still:
“thou holdest fast my name.”
The enemy could not force Pergamum to surrender Christ.
So another temptation appeared:
Compromise.
That gives us an important spiritual principle:
What persecution cannot destroy from the outside, compromise may weaken from the inside.
The first attack is obvious.
The second rarely is.

6. Persecution Says “No” — Compromise Says “Almost”

Persecution says:
“Deny Christ.”
That is easy to recognize.
Compromise says:
“You don't have to deny Him.”
Just adjust.
Just make room.
Just don't be so rigid.
Surely this little thing doesn't matter.
You can still believe in Jesus.
And that is much harder to recognize.
Because compromise rarely asks us to abandon everything at once.
It asks us to surrender something small enough that we can still tell ourselves:
“I'm faithful.”
Then perhaps another line moves.
Then another.
Eventually we may find ourselves somewhere we never intended to go.
Compromise seldom begins with rejecting Christ. It begins by making obedience to Christ negotiable.

7. “A stumblingblock”

Jesus says Balaam taught Balak:

“to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel.”
A stumbling block is something placed in the path that causes another person to fall.
That imagery is important.
False teaching is not merely an intellectual error.
Ideas lead somewhere.
What we believe shapes what we permit.
What we permit shapes how we live.
That is why doctrine matters.
Christian teaching is not simply a collection of theological facts to be memorized.
Doctrine shapes discipleship.
Bad theology eventually produces bad spiritual consequences.
Pergamum's problem therefore was not merely that someone had an unusual opinion.
The teaching was leading Christians into practices incompatible with their allegiance to Christ.
That is why Jesus takes it seriously.

8. “Things sacrificed unto idols”

The first issue is:
“to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”
This requires some care because the New Testament treatment of food offered to idols is more nuanced than simply:
Never eat such food under any circumstances.
Paul addresses the issue extensively in 1 Corinthians 8–10.
Meat that had previously been associated with pagan sacrifice could eventually appear in ordinary markets, and Paul makes clear that food itself does not possess some magical spiritual contamination.
But participating knowingly in an idolatrous religious meal was another matter.
Paul draws the line at **participation in idolatry**.
That distinction helps us understand Pergamum.
The issue was not merely food.
The issue was **allegiance**.
At what point does participation in the surrounding culture become participation in something incompatible with worship of Christ?
That was not always an easy line for first-century Christians to navigate.
And perhaps that is precisely why false teachers could make compromise sound reasonable.

9. The Social Cost of Saying No

We should also appreciate how difficult this could have been.

Religious meals and festivals could be woven into social, civic, family, and economic relationships.
Refusing participation might not simply mean:
I won't attend that religious service.
It could affect friendships.
Business relationships.
Professional associations.
Community standing.
Family expectations.
In other words, compromise could make life considerably easier.
And that is often where compromise becomes most attractive.
We rarely compromise simply because we have suddenly decided evil is wonderful.
More often we compromise because **faithfulness has become inconvenient.**
That makes Pergamum painfully contemporary.

10. "And to commit fornication"

Jesus also identifies:
"fornication."
The Old Testament account itself connects Israel's idolatrous compromise with sexual wrongdoing.
The two are frequently associated in Scripture because pagan worship in the ancient world could sometimes involve sexual practices or because sexual relationships became part of Israel's broader accommodation to surrounding peoples and their gods.
At the same time, Scripture also frequently uses sexual unfaithfulness as an image for **spiritual unfaithfulness toward God**.
In the case of Pergamum, there is no need to force a choice between physical and spiritual meanings. The text presents compromise as something affecting both **worship and conduct**.
That is important.
Christian faithfulness concerns both what we believe and how we live.
The Church cannot proclaim:
Jesus is Lord
while continually arranging life as though His lordship has no claim upon our behavior.

11. Sexual Ethics and Pastoral Care

This is an area where the Church must speak with both truth and humility.
Sexual sin is not the only sin.
It is not the unforgivable sin.

And Christians have sometimes spoken about sexual failures with a severity they do not apply to greed, pride, gossip, cruelty, dishonesty, or self-righteousness.
That inconsistency has harmed people.
But the answer to mishandling biblical sexual ethics is not to pretend Scripture has none.
Christ calls His people to holiness in every dimension of life—including sexuality.
The Church therefore needs both:
conviction without cruelty
and
grace without pretending sin does not matter.
Jesus Himself provides that pattern.
He identifies the problem clearly.
Then He calls people to repent.
Repentance is possible because grace remains available.

12. Balaam's Old Strategy in a New City

What happened to Israel centuries earlier was now happening in another form at Pergamum.
Different city.
Different culture.
Different century.
Same spiritual temptation.
Blend in enough that faithfulness no longer costs quite so much.
Israel was called to belong to God.
Pergamum was called to belong to Christ.
Both faced cultures offering attractive alternatives.
And both discovered that the greatest threat to God's people is not always an enemy standing outside the camp.
Sometimes the greatest danger is the voice inside saying:
“Surely this won't hurt anything.”

13. A Church Can Survive Persecution and Still Lose to Compromise

This may be the most sobering lesson in the verse.
Pergamum had survived something extraordinary.
They had remained faithful even after Antipas was killed.
That required courage.
Yet the same church capable of such courage was vulnerable to compromise.
How can that be?
Because yesterday's victory does not eliminate today's temptation.

Spiritual maturity is never something we place on a shelf and say:
Finished.
We continue walking.
We continue listening.
We continue examining ourselves.
We continue repenting.
We continue depending upon grace.
There is no point in Christian life where we become too experienced to wander.
And there is no congregation with such a glorious history that it no longer needs Christ's correction.

14. Ephesus and Pergamum — Opposite Dangers

Now an interesting contrast emerges between Ephesus and Pergamum.
Ephesus was exceptionally vigilant about false teaching.
They tested false apostles.
They rejected the works of the Nicolaitans.
But their love had grown cold.
Pergamum, meanwhile, had demonstrated remarkable loyalty to Christ under persecution.
But they were allowing corrupt teaching to remain among them.
One church may have guarded the boundary so aggressively that something happened to its heart.
The other may have become insufficiently attentive to the boundary.
Christ approves neither extreme.
The goal is not:
Truth without love.
Nor is it:
Love without truth.
The Church is called to:
Truth held in love.
That balance is difficult.
Which is precisely why we need Christ continually walking among the lampstands.

Pastoral Reflection

Compromise rarely feels like compromise when we first make it.
Usually it feels reasonable.
Practical.
Compassionate.
Necessary.
Temporary.

We tell ourselves:
This doesn't really change what I believe.
And perhaps initially it does not.
But eventually we must ask:
Where is this leading me?
That is the question of the stumbling block.
The first step may seem harmless.
But where does the path end?
There is also a pastoral lesson here for the Church.
People who are struggling need grace.
People wrestling with sin need patience.
People asking difficult questions need room to ask them.
Churches should not become places where imperfect people are afraid to enter.
If perfection were required at the door, none of us could come inside.
But grace and truth belong together.
A church should be a place where sinners are welcomed **and transformed**, not merely reassured that transformation is unnecessary.
Christ does not say to Pergamum:
"Remove all imperfect people."
If He did, the church would be empty.
He says:
Do not allow teaching that turns unfaithfulness into something acceptable.
There is an enormous difference.

Something Worth Pondering

Balaam could not curse Israel.
But compromise could wound Israel.
Pergamum's persecutors could not make the church deny Christ.
But compromise threatened to accomplish quietly what persecution had failed to accomplish openly.
That should make us think.
We naturally prepare ourselves for obvious attacks upon faith.
We imagine moments when someone might demand:
"Will you deny Jesus?"
And we hope we would answer:
"No."
But perhaps most of us will never face such a dramatic moment.
Our tests may come much more quietly.
Will you bend this conviction just a little?
Will you overlook this because confronting it would be uncomfortable?

Will you allow culture to define what Christ is permitted to ask of you?
Will you keep moving the line until obedience no longer costs anything?
Those questions may reveal our allegiance just as surely as persecution does.
Perhaps the enemy's most dangerous question is not:
"Will you abandon Christ?"
Perhaps it is:
"How much of Christ can you surrender while still calling yourself Christian?"
Pergamum teaches us never to begin that negotiation.

Ask Yourself This

Are there areas of my life where I have gradually made peace with something I once recognized as incompatible with following Christ?
Have I ever used words such as **tolerance**, **love**, **freedom**, or **grace** to avoid confronting something Christ is actually asking me to change?
When faithfulness becomes socially, professionally, relationally, or personally inconvenient, do I begin moving the boundary?
And is there something in my life today about which Christ may be saying:
"You have held fast in so many difficult places—but we still need to talk about this"?
That may be the hardest sentence for a mature Christian to hear.
But it is also grace.
Because Christ could simply leave Pergamum to its compromise.
Instead, **He speaks.**
And whenever Christ still speaks to His Church and calls it back—**there is still a way home.**

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:15

“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.”
— Revelation 2:15, KJV

Verse 15 is only a single sentence.
But it carries considerable weight.
Jesus has just compared some within Pergamum to the followers of **Balaam**, whose influence led Israel toward idolatry and sexual immorality.
Christ has just named the doctrine of Balaam. He now names the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes and says of it, “which thing I hate.”
“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.”
We have heard that name before.
At Ephesus.
But there is an important difference.
Ephesus **hated the works** of the Nicolaitans.
Pergamum had people within the congregation who **held to their teaching**.
Two churches.
The same dangerous influence.
Two very different responses.
And once again Christ demonstrates that there is no single formula for diagnosing the health of every congregation.

1. “So hast thou also them”

The word **“some”** matters.
Jesus is not accusing the entire congregation of embracing this teaching.
Pergamum has faithful Christians.
Verse 13 made that unmistakable.
They have held fast to Christ's name.
They refused to deny their faith.
They remained faithful even when Antipas was killed.
But within that same congregation there are **some** who have embraced teaching Christ rejects.
This gives us a realistic picture of the Church.
A congregation is rarely spiritually uniform.
Within the same church there may be mature believers and new believers.

People of strong conviction and people still struggling to understand what they believe.
People walking closely with Christ and people beginning to drift.
People who recognize compromise immediately and people who have gradually become comfortable with it.
Christ sees all of them.
The problem in Pergamum is not that imperfect people are present.
Every church has those.
The problem is that dangerous teaching has been allowed to establish itself within the congregation.

2. “That hold”

There is an interesting repetition between verses 13 and 15.
In verse 13 Jesus says:
“thou holdest fast my name.”
Then in verse 15:
“them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.”
People in Pergamum are **holding onto something**.
The question is:
What are they holding?
Some hold fast to **Christ's name**.
Others hold to **the teaching of the Nicolaitans**.
That contrast gets very close to the heart of the message.
Everyone builds life around something.
Everyone gives something authority.
Everyone eventually decides which voice gets the final word.
Pergamum contains competing allegiances within the same congregation.
One group is holding Christ.
Another is holding a teaching that allows compromise with the surrounding culture.
And Christ will not pretend those two positions are compatible.

3. The Nicolaitans — What Do We Actually Know?

We should apply the same guardrail here that we used in Revelation 2:6.
We know less about the Nicolaitans than we sometimes wish we did.
The New Testament mentions them only here in Revelation 2.
At Ephesus:
“thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.”
At Pergamum:
“So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.”
Later Christian writers attempted to connect the group with **Nicolas of Antioch**, one of the seven named in Acts 6:5.

But those traditions are later, and they are not consistent enough for us to state confidently that the Nicolas of Acts founded the movement condemned in Revelation.
So, we should not.
This is precisely the kind of place where Revelation can invite speculation.
And precisely the kind of place where we should resist it.
The Bible does not require us to know everything about the Nicolaitans in order to understand Christ's warning.

4. What Can We Know?

Although their precise identity remains uncertain, the immediate context gives us important clues.
Verse 14 speaks of the **teaching of Balaam**, which encouraged compromise involving idolatrous food and sexual immorality.
Verse 15 then says:
"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."
The close relationship between the two verses strongly suggests that the Nicolaitan teaching involved some form of similar accommodation to the surrounding pagan culture.
Perhaps they taught that Christians could participate more freely in pagan social and religious life than other believers thought appropriate.
Perhaps they developed theological arguments that made such participation appear harmless.
We cannot reconstruct their complete theology.
But Christ's evaluation is unmistakable.
Whatever they were teaching:
It was leading Christians away from faithful allegiance to Him.
And that is enough for the warning to stand.

5. False Teaching Rarely Introduces Itself as False Teaching

This is worth remembering.
Nobody normally enters a church and announces:
"Good morning. I am here to teach false doctrine."
False teaching usually sounds much more attractive.
It may sound sophisticated.
Compassionate.
Progressive.
Traditional.
Spiritual.
Practical.

Liberating.
Even biblical.
That is why discernment is necessary.
The question cannot simply be:
Does this teaching sound good?
Nor:
Is the person teaching it sincere?
Sincerity does not guarantee truth.
The deeper question is:
Does this teaching remain faithful to Christ and the gospel entrusted to His Church?
That requires more than instinct.
It requires Scripture.
Prayer.
Humility.
Wisdom.
And sometimes the courage to say:
No.

6. The Nicolaitan Temptation

Imagine what a teaching of accommodation might have offered Christians in Pergamum.
Following Christ had become costly.
One believer had already been killed.
Participation in ordinary social and economic life could intersect with pagan religious customs.
Then perhaps someone says:
You are making Christianity harder than it needs to be.
Those idols aren't really gods anyway.
Surely participating doesn't mean you actually worship them.
God knows your heart.
Why create unnecessary problems?
That argument could sound reasonable.
It might even contain pieces of truth.
Paul himself taught that an idol is nothing and that food itself does not determine our relationship with God.
But Paul also drew a firm boundary at **participation in idolatry**.
And that is where false teaching often becomes dangerous.
It takes a piece of truth and stretches it until the truth becomes permission for something the gospel never intended.
Grace can be distorted into permission.
Freedom can be distorted into self-indulgence.
Love can be distorted into moral indifference.

Tolerance can be distorted into surrender.
A Christian virtue can become the vocabulary through which compromise justifies itself.

7. Ephesus and Pergamum

Now the contrast with Ephesus becomes especially revealing.
Jesus told Ephesus:
"thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."
Ephesus recognized the danger.
Pergamum tolerated people who **held to the teaching**.
But Ephesus had another problem.
They had abandoned their first love.
So here are two churches standing on opposite sides of a dangerous imbalance.
Ephesus guarded truth but was losing love.
Pergamum demonstrated courageous loyalty but was tolerating corrupt teaching.
Christ does not tell Ephesus:
You need more love, so stop caring about truth.
Nor does He tell Pergamum:
You need more truth, so stop caring about people.
He calls both churches toward wholeness.
This may be one of the great lessons emerging from Revelation 2–3:
Christ does not ask His Church to choose between truth and love.
The Church must have both.
Truth without love can become harsh.
Love without truth can become directionless.
But truth expressed in love becomes a faithful witness to Christ.

8. Discernment Is Not Suspicion

There is another danger we should avoid.
A passage like this can make Christians suspicious of every unfamiliar idea.
That is not spiritual discernment.
Discernment does not mean assuming everyone who disagrees with us is a Nicolaitan.
Christians can faithfully disagree over many matters.
Baptism.
Church government.
Worship styles.
Spiritual gifts.
Eschatology.
Predestination and free will.

And quite a few other subjects that have kept theologians gainfully employed for centuries.
The existence of legitimate disagreement should make us humble.
But humility does not mean that **nothing can be wrong**.
Pergamum demonstrates that some teachings genuinely do lead people away from Christ.
The task is to distinguish carefully between:
differences we should graciously discuss
and
distortions we must faithfully resist.
That requires maturity.

9. When Acceptance Becomes Endorsement

Pergamum also raises a difficult pastoral question:
When does welcoming people become tolerating what harms them?
Jesus welcomed sinners.
So should the Church.
If people had to correct their lives completely before entering a church, the sanctuary would be empty—including the pulpit.
The gospel invitation is:
Come.
Come wounded.
Come confused.
Come struggling.
Come carrying questions.
Come carrying failures.
Come needing grace.
But Jesus' invitation is never:
Come and remain exactly as you are forever.
Grace welcomes us where we are.
Then grace begins transforming us.
A healthy church therefore says both:
You are welcome here.
and:
Christ loves you too much to leave you unchanged.
Pergamum had apparently begun losing the second half.

10.Holding People and Holding Teaching Apart

There is another distinction worth making.
Jesus condemns **the teaching** of the Nicolaitans.
At Ephesus He condemned their **works**.

That reminds the Church to distinguish between rejecting destructive teaching and treating people as though they themselves are beyond redemption.
People caught in error are still people Christ desires to redeem.
The purpose of correction is restoration.
The goal is not:
Destroy the person.
The goal is:
Expose the falsehood so the person can return to truth.
That is why verse 16 will begin with:
"Repent."
Even this severe message contains an invitation home.

11. The Responsibility of Church Leadership

There is a particular pastoral weight here.
Those entrusted with teaching bear responsibility for what is taught within the congregation.
That does not mean pastors must police every conversation.
Nor can pastors control everything every member believes.
But church leadership cannot knowingly allow teaching that fundamentally contradicts Christian discipleship to become normalized simply because confrontation would be uncomfortable.
Sometimes pastoral love comforts.
Sometimes pastoral love encourages.
Sometimes pastoral love sits quietly beside someone who is hurting.
And sometimes pastoral love must say:
"Brother, sister, this path is not leading where you think it is."
That may be one of the hardest responsibilities in ministry.
Because correction can be misunderstood as judgment.
But refusing to warn someone of genuine spiritual danger is not necessarily kindness.
Love does not merely ask whether correction will be comfortable.
Love asks whether silence will be harmful.

12. A Church With a Reputation for Courage

There is another irony here.
Pergamum could probably point proudly to Antipas.
Our church produced a martyr.
We stood firm under persecution.
We didn't deny Christ.
And all of that was true.
But Christ was not interested in maintaining Pergamum's self-image.
He was interested in its present faithfulness.
Churches can do the same thing.

They can live on yesterday's reputation.
Our church has been here for 150 years.
Great pastors served here.
Missionaries came from this congregation.
We survived difficult times.
Those are wonderful stories.
Tell them.
Celebrate them.
Thank God for them.
But never confuse **a history of faithfulness** with **a guarantee of present faithfulness**.
Every generation must decide what it will hold.

Pastoral Reflection

Verse 15 asks us to examine what we are **holding onto**.
That may be more revealing than we realize.
We hold traditions.
Opinions.
Habits.
Political assumptions.
Cultural values.
Personal preferences.
Theological convictions.
Some deserve to be held firmly.
Others may need to be examined.
And occasionally something we have held for years must be released because Christ shows us that it does not belong beside Him.
The question is not whether we hold convictions.
We should.
The question is:
Which convictions are holding us close to Christ, and which ones have quietly taken Christ's place as the thing we refuse to release?
Pergamum had Christians holding Christ's name and others holding Nicolaitan teaching.
Eventually Christ forces the question:
Which will define this church?
Every congregation eventually answers that question.
So does every Christian.

Something Worth Pondering

There is a subtle progression from verse 13 to verse 15.
"Thou holdest fast my name."
Then:
"them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes."

Everyone is holding something.
And perhaps spiritual formation is partly the lifelong process of learning **what to hold tightly and what to release.**
Hold Christ tightly.
Hold truth tightly.
Hold grace tightly.
Hold love tightly.
Hold hope tightly.
But release anything that requires loosening your grip on Christ.
That may be the simplest way to understand compromise.
Compromise begins when we try to hold something that requires us to loosen our hold on Jesus.
And there are things in life that cannot ultimately be carried together.
Sooner or later, one must be released.

Ask Yourself This

What am I holding most tightly in my life?
Are there beliefs, habits, relationships, cultural assumptions, or personal preferences that I defend more passionately than I defend my relationship with Christ?
Have I ever mistaken Christian love for the belief that nothing should ever be challenged?
When someone corrects me from Scripture, is my first instinct to listen—or to defend?
And perhaps the most important question Pergamum places before us:
Am I trying to hold Christ in one hand while holding something in the other that Christ is asking me to release?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:16

“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”
— Revelation 2:16, KJV

There is no ambiguity in the first word:
“Repent.”
Christ has praised Pergamum.
He knows where they live.
He knows the pressure they face.
He knows they have held fast to His name.
He knows they refused to deny their faith.
He remembers Antipas, His faithful witness, who was killed among them.
But none of that changes what Christ now requires.
“Repent.”
Pergamum's courage deserves commendation.
Its compromise requires repentance.
And perhaps one of the hardest lessons for mature Christians and established churches to learn is that **past faithfulness never places us beyond the need for present repentance.**

1. “Repent”

We encountered this word at Ephesus.
There Christ said:
“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”
Now Pergamum hears the same command:
“Repent.”
But the churches need repentance for different reasons.
Ephesus had abandoned its first love.
Pergamum had tolerated corrupt teaching and compromise.
That reminds us that repentance is not merely something unbelievers do when they first come to Christ.
Repentance belongs to the continuing life of discipleship.
Christians repent.
Pastors repent.
Church leaders repent.
Congregations repent.
Churches repent.

Indeed, one sign of spiritual health may be the ability to recognize when repentance is necessary.
A church that believes it has nothing left to repent of may have stopped listening carefully to the One walking among the lampstands.

2. Repentance Is More Than Regret

Biblical repentance is not simply feeling bad.
It is possible to regret consequences without changing direction.
We can feel embarrassed.
Ashamed.
Guilty.
Sorry that someone was hurt.
Sorry that something was discovered.
Sorry that circumstances became uncomfortable.
But repentance goes deeper.
The Greek word *metanoeō* carries the idea of changing one's mind or turning around—a reorientation that produces a changed direction.
Repentance says:
"I have been walking this way. Christ has shown me that this way is wrong. Therefore, by His grace, I will turn."
Emotion may accompany repentance.
Sometimes tears do.
Sometimes profound sorrow does.
But the essential movement is:
Turn around.
That is what Christ asks Pergamum to do.

3. Who Needs to Repent?

There is an interesting detail in the verse.
Jesus says to the church:
"Repent."
Then He warns:
"I will...wage war against them."
The pronouns shift.
The whole congregation is called to repentance because the congregation has tolerated the problem.
But Christ's threatened judgment is particularly directed toward **those embracing the false teaching**.
That distinction matters.
Pergamum's faithful members may not personally be practicing the compromise.
Yet the church still bears responsibility for what it has permitted to take root within its fellowship.
In other words:

“I'm not doing it myself” is not always the end of Christian responsibility.
There are moments when silence becomes a form of permission.
There are times when a church must lovingly say:
This teaching is not compatible with following Christ.
Not because the Church enjoys confrontation.
Not because Christians should become spiritual police.
But because shepherding sometimes requires protecting the flock from something that can harm it.

4. The Difficulty of Confrontation

Anyone who has served in pastoral ministry knows how difficult this becomes.
It is much easier to preach about sin **in general** than to address a problem that has actually taken root within a congregation.
General sin rarely becomes angry with the pastor.
Specific sin occasionally does.
It is easier to say:
“Christians should not compromise.”
It is much harder when someone asks:
“Are you saying what I'm doing is compromise?”
Suddenly theology becomes pastoral reality.
That is where courage is required.
And perhaps Pergamum's great irony is that this church possessed tremendous courage toward **external opposition** but needed courage toward an **internal problem**.
They could face persecution.
They had difficulty facing one another.
That is not difficult to understand.
Sometimes confronting people we love is harder than confronting people who oppose us.

5. “Or else”

Then come two small words carrying enormous weight:
“Or else...”
Christ gives Pergamum a choice.
Repentance is genuinely offered.
Judgment is not inevitable if they respond.
That means the warning itself is an expression of grace.
Christ could simply judge.
Instead, He warns.
He exposes the problem before acting against it.
He gives the congregation opportunity to change direction.
We encountered this at Ephesus:

Warning before judgment is mercy.
Whenever Christ says:
"Or else..."
there is still another possibility.
Repentance.
Restoration.
Renewal.
The door has not closed.

6. "I will come unto thee quickly"

Jesus continues:
"I will come unto thee quickly."
We should be careful not to assume that every reference in Revelation to Christ "coming" necessarily means the final Second Coming.
The immediate context suggests a more direct visitation of judgment against the situation in Pergamum.
Christ is warning that if the church refuses to address its compromise, **He Himself will act.**
That is sobering.
Pergamum might have thought its greatest danger was the hostile city around it.
Jesus says there is something more serious:
The Lord of the Church opposing what His own Church has allowed.
We often ask whether the world is hostile toward Christianity.
Pergamum forces another question:
Is Christ pleased with the Christianity we are asking Him to defend?
That is considerably more uncomfortable.

7. The One Who Comes

Remember how this message began.
Verse 12:
"These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges."
Now verse 16:
"I will come unto thee quickly."
The One coming is the One holding the sword.
That creates deliberate tension.
Christ has already identified the instrument of judgment before announcing that He may come.
Pergamum therefore knows exactly who is approaching.
Not merely:
Jesus the Comforter.
Not merely:
Jesus the Shepherd.
Not merely:

Jesus the Savior.
But also:
Jesus the Lord and Judge of His Church.
We should not divide those portraits as though one were loving and the other harsh.
They are the same Christ.
The Shepherd carries a staff partly because sheep require protection and correction.
Love without holiness is not the love Revelation presents.

8. "I Will Wage War Against Them"

Those are startling words:
"fight against them."
Christ—the One whose name Pergamum has courageously defended—warns that He may become the opponent of those within the church who persist in corrupt teaching.
That should make us hesitate before treating false teaching casually.
The greatest danger facing the compromised Christian is not merely:
"Other Christians may disagree with me."
The deeper question is:
"Am I placing myself in opposition to Christ?"
Pergamum's teachers may have considered themselves sophisticated Christians.
Perhaps they believed they had discovered a more flexible way to navigate pagan society.
Perhaps they believed stricter Christians were unnecessarily rigid.
But Jesus does not evaluate their teaching according to how practical or culturally acceptable it seems.
He evaluates it according to **truth**.
And if they refuse repentance, Christ says:
I will oppose it Myself.

9. This Is Not a Call for Christian Violence

We need an important guardrail here.
Jesus' language of warfare does **not** authorize Christians to use physical violence against false teachers, unbelievers, other religions, or people whose moral choices they reject.
The text itself tells us what Christ's weapon is:
"the sword of my mouth."
The sword belongs to **Christ**.
It proceeds from **His mouth**.
The Church is called to proclaim truth, exercise appropriate spiritual discernment and discipline, and bear faithful witness.
Ultimate judgment belongs to Jesus.

Whenever Christians have taken texts such as this and turned them into permission for coercion or violence, they have confused **Christ's authority with their own**.
The Church does not wield Christ's sword.
The Church submits to it.

10. “The Sword of My Mouth”

Here we return to the image that opened the message.
The sword comes from Christ's mouth because His weapon is His authoritative word.
He speaks.
Falsehood is exposed.
He speaks.
Excuses collapse.
He speaks.
Compromise is revealed for what it is.
There is something powerful here.
Pergamum does not ultimately need a better marketing strategy.
It does not need to conduct a public opinion survey to determine whether Nicolaitan teaching is acceptable.
It needs to hear **Christ speak**.
Because the final authority for Christian faithfulness is not:
What seems reasonable to us.
Not:
What everybody else accepts.
Not even:
What most Christians happen to be doing.
The final authority is Christ.

11. The Word That Judges Us

There is an uncomfortable tendency in Christian life to use Scripture primarily as a weapon directed toward others.
We discussed this in verse 12.
We find verses about what **they** are doing wrong.
We identify what **their** church gets wrong.
We diagnose what **society** needs to repent of.
We can become remarkably skilled at swinging the sword toward everyone except ourselves.
But Pergamum is a church.
And the sword is pointed **inside**.
Before Revelation turns fully toward beasts, Babylon, empires, evil powers, and final judgment, Christ examines His lampstands.
That order should never be forgotten.

The Word of God is not first a sword we wield against the world. It is a sword beneath which the Church itself must stand.

12. Correction Before Judgment

There is also tremendous grace hidden within this severe verse.
Christ speaks **before** He acts.
He warns **before** He comes.
He commands repentance **before** judgment.
Why?
Because His desire is restoration.
The command:
"Repent"
means:
"There is still time to turn around."
That changes how we should understand biblical confrontation.
Conviction is not evidence that Christ has abandoned us.
Sometimes conviction is evidence that Christ is still calling us.
When Scripture unsettles us—
when conscience becomes uncomfortable—
when a trusted Christian confronts us—
when a sermon reaches somewhere we hoped it would not—
our instinct may be:
I wish this would leave me alone.
Perhaps grace is precisely why it will not.

13. When God Refuses to Leave Us Comfortable

There is a form of divine mercy that comforts.
And there is another form that makes us uncomfortable.
Ephesus heard:
Remember. Repent. Return.
Pergamum hears:
Repent.
Neither message is intended to humiliate the congregation.
Both are intended to restore it.
Sometimes God's grace says:
"Come to Me, all who are weary."
Sometimes God's grace says:
"You cannot continue down this road."
We need both.
A Christianity that only condemns becomes crushing.
A Christianity that never confronts becomes meaningless.

Jesus manages perfectly what we frequently struggle to hold together:
Grace and truth.

14. The Healthy Church and Repentance

This connects beautifully with the idea of a healthy church.
We often imagine a healthy church as one that has arrived.
Good doctrine.
Strong preaching.
Healthy attendance.
Active ministry.
Generous giving.
Loving fellowship.
But Revelation adds another mark we might overlook:
A healthy church knows how to repent.
Not because it is worse than other churches.
Because it knows it still belongs to Christ.
The healthiest congregation may not be the one that never gets anything wrong.
There is no such congregation.
The healthiest may be the one that, when Christ reveals something wrong, says:
"Lord, show us how to change."
That requires humility.
And humility may be one of the strongest signs that Christ is truly Lord of a church.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a great difference between saying:
"I was wrong."
and:
"I need to change."
The first acknowledges the past.
The second places the future in Christ's hands.
Repentance does both.
For pastors and church leaders, this verse also carries particular weight.
There are times when confrontation becomes part of shepherding.
Not every disagreement deserves a battle.
Not every preference deserves a sermon.
Not every mistake deserves discipline.
Wisdom must distinguish between weakness requiring patience and compromise requiring correction.
But when something genuinely threatens the spiritual health of people entrusted to our care, silence may no longer be loving.
That is where pastoral courage becomes necessary.

And those who confront must always remember:
The sword belongs to Christ.
Our job is not to win.
Our job is not to humiliate.
Our job is not to demonstrate that we were right.
Our responsibility is to speak truthfully enough that repentance remains possible.
Because restoration is the goal.

Something Worth Pondering

Pergamum was brave enough to face persecution.
But Christ now asks whether it is humble enough to repent.
Those are two very different kinds of courage.
It takes courage to stand before an enemy and say:
“I will not deny Christ.”
But sometimes it takes just as much courage to stand before Christ and say:
“I was wrong.”
The first kind of courage refuses to surrender truth.
The second refuses to surrender pride.
And perhaps mature faith requires both.
Courage before the world.
Humility before Christ.
Pergamum had already demonstrated the first.
Now Jesus calls them to demonstrate the second.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ's Word confronts something in my life, is my first response **repentance** or **defense**?
Do I sometimes rely upon years of Christian service or previous faithfulness as though they excuse something Christ is asking me to change today?
Am I more comfortable identifying the compromises of the world than allowing Scripture to identify compromise within me?
And when I realize I have been wrong, can I possess enough humility simply to say:
“Lord, I was wrong. Help me turn around”?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:17

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”
— Revelation 2:17, KJV

Pergamum's message ends very differently from the way it began.
It began with a **sword**.
It ends with **manna, a white stone, and a new name**.
It began with Christ exposing compromise.
It ends with Christ promising communion, acceptance, and identity to those who remain faithful.
That movement matters.
Christ's purpose in confronting Pergamum is not destruction.
It is restoration.
He wants His people to hear.
He wants them to repent.
He wants them to conquer.
And He wants to give them something infinitely better than anything compromise has promised them.
Once again, the warning of Revelation opens into hope.

1. “He that hath an ear, let him hear”

We have heard these words before.
Ephesus heard them.
Smyrna heard them.
Now Pergamum hears them.
And we will continue hearing them as Christ addresses the remaining churches.
Jesus is asking for more than physical hearing.
He is asking for **spiritual attentiveness that produces response**.
Pergamum has heard many voices.
The voice of Roman authority.
The voice of pagan religion.
The voice of social expectation.
The voice of false teaching.
The voice of compromise.
And now:
the voice of Christ.
The issue is not whether all those voices can be heard.

They can.
The issue is:
Which voice will the Church obey?

2. Hearing Is Not the Same as Listening

There is a difference between hearing Scripture and allowing Scripture to speak.
A person can hear sermons for decades.
Read the Bible repeatedly.
Attend Sunday school.
Participate in Bible studies.
Know Christian vocabulary.
And gradually become so familiar with the words that they no longer penetrate.
We can even begin anticipating what the text will say before allowing it to say anything new to us.
That may be one of the quieter dangers of mature Christian life.
Familiarity can sometimes create the illusion that we have mastered Scripture.
But Scripture was never given so that we might master it.
It continually places us beneath the mastery of Christ.
Pergamum had heard enough.
Now it needed to **listen**.

3. "What the Spirit saith"

Again notice the relationship between Christ and the Spirit.
The message began:
"These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges."
Christ speaks.
Yet verse 17 says:
"what the Spirit saith unto the churches."
The risen Christ addresses His Church through the Spirit.
These are not merely John's personal observations about seven congregations in Asia Minor.
The Spirit takes Christ's words and presses them upon the churches.
And notice the tense:
"saith."
The words first belonged to real first-century congregations facing real first-century circumstances.
We must respect that historical setting.
But the Spirit has not finished speaking through them.
That is why Pergamum's problem can still confront us.
The names change.
The culture changes.

The temptations change form.
But the question remains:
Will the Church remain faithful to Christ when compromise would make life easier?

4. "Unto the churches"

Again, plural:
"the churches."
Christ speaks to Pergamum, but the Spirit speaks to **the churches**.
Ephesus needed to hear Smyrna.
Smyrna needed to hear Pergamum.
Pergamum needed to hear Ephesus.
And every church needs to hear all seven.
That prevents us from reading these messages merely as descriptions of other congregations.
We cannot say:
We're not Ephesus.
We're certainly not Pergamum.
Wait until we get to Laodicea—that sounds like those people down the road.
The Spirit says:
Listen.
Every church should ask every time:
Is there something here Christ is saying to us?

5. "To him that overcometh"

Then comes the familiar promise: **"To him that overcometh..."**
We have already begun learning what Revelation means by conquering.
It does not mean dominating other people.
It does not mean defeating every earthly opponent.
It does not mean Christians always succeed according to the world's measurements.
Smyrna taught us that someone may even die and still conquer.
Antipas confirms it.
Revelation's great model of victory is Jesus Christ—the Lamb who was slain.
Therefore Christian conquest is **Lamb-shaped victory**.
It is faithfulness.
It is endurance.
It is refusing to surrender allegiance to Christ.
For Pergamum specifically, conquering means something more:
Refusing compromise.
The Christian in Pergamum conquers by saying:
I will not trade faithfulness for acceptance.

6. What Pergamum Is Being Asked to Overcome

Every church faces a somewhat different battle.
Ephesus must overcome the cooling of love.
Smyrna must overcome fear in the face of suffering.
Pergamum must overcome **compromise**.
That gives us our developing progression:
Return.
Remain.
Resist.
Ephesus:
Return to your first love.
Smyrna:
Remain faithful through suffering.
Pergamum:
Resist the temptation to accommodate what Christ has forbidden.
Different churches.
Different illnesses.
Different prescriptions.
Same Physician.

7. "I Will Give"

Notice who supplies the reward:
"I will give."
Then again:
"I will give."
The conqueror receives.
Christ gives.
That protects us from misunderstanding endurance as though eternal life were a wage earned by heroic Christians.
Revelation's conquerors do not stand before Christ saying:
"Look what I earned."
They receive what Christ gives.
Grace stands at the beginning of Christian life.
Grace sustains Christian life.
Grace waits at the end.
Even the crown promised to Smyrna is something Christ says: **"I will give thee."**
Faithfulness does not place Christ in our debt.
Faithfulness simply refuses to abandon the One from whom every gift already comes.

8. “Of the hidden manna”

The first promise is:
“of the hidden manna.”
For anyone familiar with the Old Testament, manna immediately recalls Israel's wilderness journey.
After Israel left Egypt, the people found themselves in a place where ordinary resources could not sustain them.
And God provided bread from heaven.
Every morning, there was enough.
The people asked:
“What is it?”
And manna became God's provision for His wilderness people.
That makes this promise especially beautiful in Pergamum.

9. Two Tables

Remember the problem in verse 14.
Some were being drawn toward:
“things sacrificed unto idols.”
Now Jesus promises:
“hidden manna.”
The contrast is almost impossible to miss.
Pergamum faces two tables.
One represents accommodation to the surrounding idolatrous culture.
The other represents God's provision.
Compromise says:
Eat here. Life will become easier.
Christ says:
I will feed you.
That transforms the question.
The issue is no longer merely:
What must I give up to remain faithful?
It becomes:
Do I trust Christ to provide something better than what compromise offers?
That is the deeper battle.

10. Compromise Always Promises Something

Nobody compromises for nothing.
There is always some promised reward.
Acceptance.
Pleasure.
Security.
Advancement.

Belonging.
Comfort.
Avoidance of conflict.
Perhaps economic opportunity.
Perhaps simply the relief of no longer feeling different.
Compromise says:
If you loosen your allegiance just a little, I can give you this.
Jesus answers:
I have something better.
That does not mean faithfulness always produces immediate earthly prosperity.
Smyrna has already destroyed that interpretation.
The church Christ called **rich** was materially poor and suffering.
The promise is deeper.
Christ Himself will sustain those who refuse to feed their souls at the table of compromise.

11. Why Is the Manna "Hidden"?

The word **"hidden"** has generated several interpretations.
Jewish traditions existed concerning the manna associated with the ark and its restoration in the age to come. Others understand the hidden manna more generally as God's heavenly provision reserved for His faithful people.
There may also be a broader connection with Christ Himself as the true bread from heaven.
We should again avoid claiming more precision than the text provides.
But the central promise is clear enough:
God possesses nourishment the world cannot see and compromise cannot provide.
That is particularly appropriate for Pergamum.
The visible table may look attractive.
The faithful believer trusts the **hidden provision of God**.

12. "And will give him a white stone"

Then comes one of those wonderful Revelation phrases that makes us wish John had included another paragraph.
"Will give him a white stone."
Here John does what he did with the Nicolaitanes.
He apparently assumes the image will communicate something.
Two thousand years later:
"John...about that stone..."
A number of explanations have been proposed.
White stones could appear in different ancient contexts. They have been associated with favorable legal verdicts, tokens connected with

admission to events or banquets, symbols of victory, and other forms of recognition or identification.
Because several ancient practices involved stones or tokens, it is difficult to establish with certainty which specific custom—if any—stands behind Revelation's image.
So our rule applies again:
Explain what we can know. Acknowledge what we cannot. Do not sensationalize the text.
What Revelation itself tells us is more important than identifying a particular archaeological parallel.
The stone is:
white,
given by Christ,
given to the conqueror,
and
marked with a new name.
Whatever else the image means, it represents something precious given personally by Christ to the faithful believer.

13. White in Revelation

The color itself deserves attention.
White repeatedly appears throughout Revelation in contexts associated with victory, purity, righteousness, and heavenly recognition.
The faithful will be given white robes.
Heavenly figures appear clothed in white.
Christ later appears upon a white horse.
We should not force every appearance of the color into exactly the same symbolic meaning, but the pattern is unmistakably positive.
The white stone belongs to the imagery of **Christ's approval and the believer's victory**.
The world may reject Pergamum's faithful Christians.
Christ receives them.
The world may exclude them from certain tables.
Christ gives them His own token.
The world may label them.
Christ gives them **a new name**.

14. “A New Name”

And perhaps this is the most beautiful part of the promise:
“in the stone a new name written.”
Names matter throughout Scripture.
Abram becomes Abraham.
Sarai becomes Sarah.
Jacob becomes Israel.

Simon becomes Peter.
A new name can signify a transformed identity, a new calling, or a new relationship established by God.
Revelation will return to the imagery of divine names written upon God's people.
Here the promise is intensely personal.
Christ gives the conqueror a new name.
That speaks to **identity**.
And identity is exactly what Pergamum's Christians were struggling to preserve.
The surrounding culture continually asked:
Who are you?
Are you a loyal participant in Pergamum's religious life?
Will you join the civic celebrations?
Will you accommodate the expectations around you?
Will you define yourself the way society expects?
Christ answers:
I will tell you who you are.

15. The World Gives Labels — Christ Gives a Name

There is an enormous difference between a label and a name.
The world labels people constantly.
Successful.
Failure.
Important.
Unimportant.
Conservative.
Progressive.
Rich.
Poor.
Educated.
Uneducated.
Insider.
Outsider.
Accepted.
Rejected.
Sometimes those labels become so powerful that we begin constructing our identities around them.
Revelation says there is an identity deeper than every label society can place upon us.
The identity Christ gives.

Pergamum is being asked not to compromise who they are in order to gain acceptance from the surrounding culture.
Why?
Because the world does not possess final authority to name them.
Christ does.

16. “Which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it”

Then the promise becomes almost startlingly intimate.
The new name is one:
“which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”
Whatever the precise symbolism, the language suggests something profoundly personal between Christ and the believer.
Christianity is certainly communal.
We belong to the Church.
We worship together.
We bear one another's burdens.
We are members of one body.
But there is also something irreducibly personal about our relationship with Christ.
Christ knows the congregation.
But Christ also knows **Antipas**.
Christ loves the Church.
But Christ also knows **you**.
The One who walks among seven lampstands knows individual names.
And now He promises an identity known intimately between Himself and the one who conquers.

17. The Person Christ Knows

There is something pastorally beautiful here.
Other people never completely know us.
Even those who love us deeply know only part of our story.
They do not know every prayer.
Every fear.
Every temptation resisted.
Every private grief.
Every moment we nearly gave up.
Every time we quietly chose faithfulness when nobody was watching.
Christ does.
Remember His repeated words:
“I know.”
I know your works.
I know your toil.

I know your endurance.
I know your affliction.
I know your poverty.
I know where you live.
And now, at the end of Pergamum's message:
I know your name.
Perhaps that is part of the beauty of the promise.
The One who knows us completely is the One who ultimately tells us who we are.

18. From Balaam's Table to Christ's Table

Look at the entire message now.
Some in Pergamum were tempted toward food connected with idolatrous compromise.
Christ offers:
hidden manna.
The culture offers belonging.
Christ offers:
a white stone.
The culture offers an identity shaped by accommodation.
Christ offers:
a new name.
Suddenly the entire temptation is exposed.
Pergamum is being tempted to settle for lesser things.
Christ's answer is not merely:
“Don't.”
His answer is:
“I have something better.”
That is how grace confronts temptation.

19. The Theology of “Something Better”

Much of Christian discipleship can be misunderstood if we reduce it to:
Don't do this.
Don't go there.
Don't participate in that.
There are certainly things Christians must refuse.
Pergamum makes that clear.
But behind every faithful **no** stands a greater **yes**.
No to idolatry because:
Yes to Christ.
No to compromise because:
Yes to faithfulness.
No to the world's table because:
Yes to hidden manna.

No to an identity the culture gives because:
Yes to the name Christ gives.
Christian holiness is not primarily the art of having less life.
It is refusing lesser things because we have discovered **something better in Christ**.

Pastoral Reflection

There will be times when following Christ costs us something.
Sometimes we may wonder whether faithfulness is worth the price.
Pergamum knew that feeling.
They had already buried Antipas.
They lived where Christ said Satan's throne stood.
They knew the cost of being different.
And compromise offered relief.
Jesus does not pretend the cost is imaginary.
Instead, He asks them to trust Him.
I will feed you.
I will receive you.
I will name you.
There are seasons when faith must endure without immediately seeing what faithfulness will produce.
That is where trust becomes real.
We obey not because we can calculate that obedience will make life easier.
We obey because we trust the One asking us to obey.
And sometimes the prayer becomes very simple:
Lord, if faithfulness costs me something I can see, help me trust You for what I cannot yet see.
That is hidden manna faith.

Something Worth Pondering

Pergamum was surrounded by competing invitations.
One table was visible.
Christ's manna was hidden.
One identity was socially available.
Christ's new name was still promised.
One path offered immediate accommodation.
Christ offered future victory.
That is often how temptation works.
Compromise usually offers something now.
Faith often asks us to trust Christ for something we cannot yet see.
And that is why faith must endure.
We do not endure because we always understand.
We endure because we know **Whom we have trusted**.

There may also be a beautiful pattern emerging from the three churches we have studied.
Ephesus was told:
Return to the One you love.
Smyrna was told:
Remain with the One who conquered death.
Pergamum is told:
Resist anything that asks you to trade Him for something less.
Return. Remain. Resist.
And behind all three commands stands the same truth:
Christ is worth it.

Ask Yourself This

Which voices most strongly compete with Christ's voice in my life?
What does compromise promise me—acceptance, comfort, security, pleasure, approval, or simply an easier life?
Am I willing to refuse a visible table because I trust Christ for **hidden manna**?
Have I allowed the labels other people place upon me to become more important than the identity Christ gives me?
And if faithfulness sometimes leaves me misunderstood, excluded, or alone, can I trust the One who says:
"I know where you live."
"I know your faithfulness."
"And I know your name."

The Message to Thyatira

Revelation 2:18–29

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;
I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.
Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.
And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.
And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 2:18–29, KJV

Introduction

Of all the seven churches addressed in Revelation, Thyatira may seem at first to be one of the least remarkable. It was not the political center that Pergamum was. It did not possess the commercial importance of Ephesus or the wealth and reputation of some of the other cities. Yet the smallest and seemingly least significant city among the seven receives the longest message from Christ.

That fact itself is worth noticing.

Christ does not measure the importance of a church by the importance of its city.

Nor does he measure a congregation by its size, reputation, influence, property, or visibility. The risen Christ walks among all his lampstands, and the congregation that seems insignificant in the eyes of the world is no less visible to him.

And what Christ sees in Thyatira is complicated.

This is not a loveless church. Quite the opposite.

Jesus says:

"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience."

Those are extraordinary words of commendation.

Ephesus had maintained doctrine and endurance but had abandoned its first love. Thyatira has love. Smyrna had endured suffering faithfully. Thyatira has endurance. Pergamum had held fast to Christ's name despite enormous cultural pressure. Thyatira possesses faith and service.

Even more remarkably, Jesus tells them:

"Thy works; and the last to be more than the first."

This congregation is growing in Christian practice.

They are doing more, loving more, serving more, and apparently persevering more faithfully than they had in the beginning.

And yet Christ says:

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee."

Those words change everything.

The problem at Thyatira is not the absence of Christian virtue.

The problem is that Christian virtue has been allowed to coexist with serious spiritual compromise.

Someone within the church—identified by Christ symbolically or perhaps literally as **"Jezebel"**—claims prophetic authority and is influencing Christ's servants toward practices incompatible with allegiance to him.

The church has not necessarily embraced her teaching as its official doctrine.

Something subtler has happened.

They tolerate it.

That single word lies near the center of Christ's indictment.

The church knows enough to recognize what is happening. Yet rather than confronting it, the congregation has permitted it to continue.

This makes Thyatira's message especially relevant to Christians who sincerely desire to be loving.

Love is central to Christian discipleship. Jesus commands it. The apostles repeatedly teach it. Without love, even impressive religious activity becomes empty.

But biblical love is never indifference toward what destroys another person.

There comes a point at which tolerance ceases to be patience and becomes participation.
Thyatira appears to have crossed that line.

The Setting of Thyatira

Thyatira was located southeast of Pergamum along an important road connecting several cities of Asia Minor. Although it lacked the grandeur and political prominence of some neighboring cities, it was known for commerce and skilled trades.
The city appears to have supported numerous trade guilds associated with occupations such as textile production, dyeing, metalworking, leatherworking, pottery, and other crafts.
Readers of Acts may recognize Thyatira for another reason.
Lydia, whom Paul encountered at Philippi, is described as **"a dealer in purple cloth"** from Thyatira.
That seemingly small detail gives us a glimpse into the commercial character of the city.
Trade guilds matter to our understanding of the message because participation in them could involve far more than professional networking. Social, economic, and religious life were often intertwined.
Guild gatherings could include meals connected with pagan worship, food associated with sacrifices, and behavior Christians would find morally unacceptable.
For a Christian tradesperson, therefore, the question was not merely:
"Will I attend a pagan religious ceremony?"
The question could become:
"Can I continue earning a living if I refuse to participate?"
That changes the pastoral situation considerably.
A Christian artisan might depend upon guild relationships for customers, contracts, business contacts, or employment. Refusing to participate could carry an economic price.
Now the temptation becomes easier to understand.
Imagine someone appearing within the church claiming prophetic authority and teaching believers that participation in these activities really was not spiritually dangerous.
Perhaps Christians could participate outwardly while remaining inwardly loyal to Christ.
Perhaps the pagan gods meant nothing anyway.
Perhaps eating at the guild feast was merely business.
Perhaps the moral practices surrounding these gatherings did not need to be taken quite so seriously.
Perhaps Christians could accommodate the culture without surrendering their faith.

We cannot know precisely how the teaching was argued, because Revelation does not tell us.
But we know Christ's judgment upon it.
Whatever justification was being offered, Jesus regarded the teaching as spiritual corruption.

The Movement of the Passage

The message to Thyatira develops in a deliberate progression, and each movement builds upon what came before it.
Christ first **reveals himself** as **"the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass"** (v. 18). Before anything is said about the church, we are reminded who stands in authority over it. His fiery eyes see what others cannot see, and his burnished feet convey strength, stability, and judgment. The church at Thyatira will be examined not according to its own opinion of itself, but according to the searching vision of Christ.
He then **commends the church** for what is genuinely good among them (v. 19). Their love, faith, service, and endurance are real. Even more remarkably, their **"the last to be more than the first."** Unlike Ephesus, which had abandoned its first love, Thyatira appears to be growing in visible expressions of Christian faithfulness. Christ does not allow their serious failure to erase the good that he sees among them.
But commendation is followed by confrontation.
Christ brings a serious **rebuke against tolerated false teaching** (vv. 20–23). He says, "thou sufferest that woman Jezebe**l."** Here "sufferest" means the church permits her to teach and lead His servants astray.
Yet even within this severe warning we encounter the patience of Christ. He says, **"I gave her space to repent"** (v. 21). Judgment does not come because Christ has refused mercy. Judgment comes after mercy has been offered and repentance has been refused. Those who have followed her are likewise given the opportunity to repent.
Verse 23 then brings the warning to its theological center. Christ declares that **"all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts."** The fiery eyes of verse 18 now take on their full significance. Nothing is hidden from him—not false teaching disguised as spiritual insight, not compromise disguised as freedom, and not faithfulness that may go unnoticed by everyone else.
Then the focus changes dramatically.
Christ turns from those who have compromised to **"the rest in Thyatira"** who have refused this teaching (vv. 24–25). They have lived under the same pressures and heard the same arguments, yet they have remained faithful. Christ does not place another elaborate requirement upon them. His instruction is wonderfully uncomplicated:

“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
That command captures one of the central themes running throughout Revelation.
Faithfulness does not always require doing something new.
Sometimes faithfulness means refusing to surrender what Christ has already given us.
Finally, the message moves from endurance to **promise** (vv. 26–28).
Those who conquer and continue Christ's works **“unto the end”** will share in his authority over the nations. Drawing upon the language of Psalm 2, Christ assures believers who may presently appear powerless that the final authority belongs not to the powers surrounding them but to him.
And then comes the final promise:
“And I will give him the morning star.”
By the end of Revelation, Jesus will identify himself as **“the bright and morning star.”** The promise therefore reaches beyond victory, authority, or reward.
The faithful receive **Christ himself**.
The movement of the passage has carried us from the searching eyes of Christ to the promise of possessing Christ; from exposure and judgment to endurance and hope.
And once again Revelation teaches us what it means to conquer.
Endurance does not merely mean surviving difficulty. It means remaining faithful to Christ until the end.

1. “That Woman Jezebel”

The name **Jezebel** immediately carries the reader back into Israel's history.
The Jezebel of the Old Testament was the Phoenician wife of King Ahab. She became associated with the promotion of Baal worship in Israel and with opposition to the prophets of the Lord. Her name consequently became almost synonymous with religious corruption and idolatrous compromise.
It is therefore possible that the woman in Thyatira was not literally named Jezebel.
Christ may be giving her a prophetic designation.
In effect:
She is doing within my church what Jezebel once did within Israel.
That is a serious accusation.
But we should also exercise restraint here.
The passage has sometimes been used carelessly to turn “Jezebel” into a label applied to women who are strong, outspoken, influential, or difficult. That goes far beyond the text and can become deeply abusive.

The problem is not that this woman possesses influence.
The problem is not simply that she is a woman.
The problem is what she **teaches** and where that teaching is **leading Christ's servants**.
She claims:
“I speak for God.”
Christ responds, in effect:
“No, you do not.”
That distinction is crucial.
The church must never confuse someone's claim to spiritual authority with genuine spiritual authority.
Prophetic claims must be tested by faithfulness to God.

2. Christ's Patience Before Judgment

One of the most easily overlooked statements in this severe passage occurs in verse 21:
“I gave her space to repent.”
That is extraordinary.
Before judgment comes mercy.
Before condemnation comes opportunity.
Before Christ acts against her, Christ gives her time.
Even the person corrupting his servants is offered repentance.
That tells us something important about the judgment scenes we will encounter throughout Revelation. Divine judgment is not the uncontrolled anger of a God eager to destroy.
God repeatedly calls people to turn back.
The tragedy of verse 21 is not that repentance was unavailable.
It is that:
“she repented not.”
Grace has been offered.
Grace has been resisted.
Judgment follows persistent refusal.

3. The One Who Searches Minds and Hearts

The language becomes severe in verses 22–23, and we should not soften it simply because it makes modern readers uncomfortable.
Christ warns of distress and judgment.
Then he explains why:
“And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.”
Notice that the judgment at Thyatira has an audience larger than Thyatira.
“All the churches shall know.”

The seven messages are therefore not isolated letters intended only for seven ancient congregations.
Each church is meant to listen to what Christ says to the others.
Ephesus must hear about Smyrna.
Smyrna must hear about Pergamum.
Pergamum must hear about Thyatira.
And Thyatira must hear what the Spirit says to them all.
Christ's statement that he searches **"reins and hearts"** reaches beneath outward religious appearance.
Human beings see activity.
Christ sees motivation.
Human beings see reputation.
Christ sees character.
Human beings hear professions of faith.
Christ sees whether those professions correspond to the allegiance of the heart.
This is precisely why the opening description of Christ matters:
His eyes are like a flame of fire.
Nothing is hidden from that gaze.

4. "But unto you I say, and unto the rest"

Then the tone changes.
Christ turns toward another group within the congregation:
"But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine…"
These believers have resisted.
They have lived within the same city.
They have experienced the same economic pressures.
They have heard the same persuasive teaching.
They have faced the same temptation to compromise.
But they have not followed it.
And Christ knows them too.
This is pastorally important because Christ does not condemn the entire congregation indiscriminately.
He distinguishes.
He knows who teaches falsely.
He knows who follows.
He knows who repents.
And he knows who remains faithful.
Then comes one of the most beautiful statements in the message:
"I will put upon you none other burden."
Christ does not give the faithful believers in Thyatira a complicated new program.

He does not demand that they solve every problem in their city.
He does not require them to unravel every mystery of evil.
He gives them one command:
"But that which ye have already hold fast till I come."
There is our theme again.
Endurance.
Faithfulness in Revelation is repeatedly expressed not through spectacular achievement but through steadfast allegiance.
Keep what you have.
Do not surrender Christ.
Do not exchange truth for convenience.
Do not allow cultural pressure to redefine faithfulness.
Do not become weary because others compromise.
Hold fast.
And how long?
"Till I come."
That gives Christian endurance its horizon.
We do not endure merely because endurance builds character.
We endure because history is moving toward Someone.
Christ is coming.

5. The Promise to Those Who Conquer

As in the other messages, Christ concludes with a promise:
"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end…"
Notice again what conquering means.
Revelation will eventually present dragons, beasts, armies, judgments, Babylon, and cosmic conflict. If we allow those later images to define "conquering" for us, we might imagine military power or political domination.
But Christ defines the conqueror before those visions ever appear.
The conqueror is the one who **continues faithfully to the end**.
Christian victory is faithful endurance.
Christ then promises authority over the nations, using language drawn from Psalm 2. The persecuted and pressured followers of Jesus may appear powerless now, but they belong to the One to whom the Father has given ultimate authority.
The kingdoms that seem permanent are temporary.
The powers that appear invincible will pass away.
The faithful people of God will share in the victory of Christ.
And then comes a mysterious and beautiful promise:
"And I will give him the morning star."
Later in Revelation, Jesus himself will say:

“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”
That helps us understand the promise.
The greatest reward Christ gives the faithful is ultimately not authority, safety, prosperity, or even escape from suffering.
Christ gives them himself.
The morning star appears while darkness still covers the sky.
It announces that night is almost over.
Dawn is coming.
For Christians living under pressure in Thyatira, that image would have carried profound hope.
The darkness does not last forever.
Compromise does not win.
Idolatry does not win.
Empire does not win.
Suffering does not win.
Even death does not win.
Morning is coming.

Pastoral Reflection

Thyatira presents the church with one of the most difficult balances in Christian life:
How do we remain loving without becoming undiscerning?
The church was praised for love.
That praise should not be forgotten simply because rebuke follows it.
Jesus genuinely values their love, faith, service, and endurance.
But love cannot become an excuse for permitting spiritual destruction.
There are times when Christians imagine that there are only two choices: either we condemn people harshly or we accept everything without question.
Jesus offers neither alternative.
He loves.
He warns.
He gives time to repent.
He judges persistent rebellion.
He protects those being led astray.
And he encourages those who remain faithful.
That is a far richer understanding of love.
The message also forces us to consider the compromises we make because faithfulness becomes inconvenient.
The Christians of Thyatira may have faced genuine economic consequences for refusing to participate fully in guild life.
That matters.

It is easy to condemn compromise when obedience costs us nothing.
The harder question comes when faithfulness threatens our livelihood, friendships, reputation, advancement, comfort, or security.
Then we discover what we truly believe.
Thyatira reminds us that Christ sees those moments.
He sees the employee who quietly refuses to participate in something dishonest.
He sees the businessperson who accepts a financial loss rather than violate conscience.
He sees the believer who refuses to surrender conviction merely to remain socially acceptable.
He sees the Christian who feels increasingly alone because everyone else seems to have decided that compromise is easier.
And to such people Christ says:
"I know."
Then:
"Hold fast."

Something Worth Pondering

There is an enormous difference between **loving someone who is wrong** and **pretending that what is wrong does not matter**.
Thyatira had apparently begun confusing the two.
Christ does not.
Neither should we.
But perhaps the most encouraging words in this passage are not addressed to Jezebel or even to those who followed her.
They are addressed to **"the rest."**
There are always people whose faithfulness may never attract attention.
They do not have platforms.
They do not make headlines.
They may never become important in the eyes of the world.
They simply continue believing.
Continue serving.
Continue loving.
Continue enduring.
And continue refusing to surrender Christ.
Jesus sees them.
And he does not demand something spectacular from them.
"But that which ye have already hold fast till I come."
Perhaps that is one of the clearest definitions of enduring faith we have encountered yet.

Ask Yourself This

Where am I most tempted to call something “tolerance” when it may actually be compromise—and what would it mean for me, in that place, simply to hold fast to Christ until he comes?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:18

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;”
— Revelation 2:18, KJV

Before Christ commends Thyatira for anything it is doing, and before he confronts anything it is tolerating, he directs the church's attention to himself.
That pattern has appeared throughout the messages to the seven churches. Each message begins with a description of Christ appropriate to the spiritual condition of the congregation receiving it.
To Ephesus, he is the One who holds the seven stars and walks among the lampstands.
To Smyrna, suffering beneath persecution and facing death, he is “the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”
To Pergamum, where truth and compromise were colliding, he is the One who possesses “the sharp sword with two edges.”
And now, to Thyatira, where outward Christian growth exists alongside tolerated corruption, Christ appears as the One whose eyes penetrate appearances and whose authority cannot be compromised.”

1. “These things saith the Son of God”

This title immediately deserves our attention.
Jesus identifies himself as:
“the Son of God.”
This is the only message among the seven churches in which Jesus explicitly uses that title for himself.
That makes its appearance here significant.
Earlier, in John's vision of the risen Christ, John described seeing **“one like the Son of Man”** (Revelation 1:13). Here Christ identifies himself unmistakably as **the Son of God**.
The church at Thyatira is therefore not receiving pastoral advice from another teacher.
It is not hearing one theological opinion among several competing opinions.
It is hearing the judgment of the **Son of God**.
That becomes particularly important because verse 20 will introduce a woman who **“calleth herself a prophetess.”**
She claims spiritual authority.
Christ possesses it.

She claims to speak on behalf of God.
The Son of God is now speaking for himself.
That contrast should not be missed.
There may have been considerable debate within the congregation about her teaching. Some apparently accepted it. Others rejected it. Perhaps some believed the church should simply tolerate differing viewpoints.
But Christ does not enter the debate as another participant.
He enters as **Lord of the church**.
That means the ultimate question is not:
"What does Jezebel say?"
Nor is it:
"What does the culture of Thyatira permit?"
Nor even:
"What does the congregation prefer?"
The question is:
"What does the Son of God say?"
That remains the church's ultimate question in every generation.

2. "Eyes like unto a flame of fire"

Christ next describes himself as the One:
"who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire."
John has already seen these eyes.
In Revelation 1:14, the glorified Christ appeared with **"his eyes were as a flame of fire."**
Now the image returns, but this time we begin to understand why it matters.
Fire illuminates.
Fire exposes.
Fire tests.
Fire consumes.
The image communicates the penetrating vision of Christ.
Nothing within the church is hidden from him.
Human beings can observe behavior, listen to words, evaluate reputations, and form opinions. But our knowledge always remains incomplete.
Christ sees deeper.
That becomes explicit in verse 23 when he says:
"I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts."
The fiery eyes of verse 18 therefore anticipate the searching judgment of verse 23.
Christ does not merely see **what** people are doing.
He sees **why** they are doing it.
He sees the motive behind the ministry.

He sees the pride behind the service.
He sees the resentment hidden beneath polite words.
He sees the compromise disguised as tolerance.
He sees the selfishness disguised as freedom.
He sees the fear disguised as prudence.
But those same eyes also see something else.
They see **faithfulness**.
That matters tremendously.
The eyes of Christ are not merely searching for something to condemn.
They also see the quiet believer who remains faithful when nobody notices.
They see the person who serves without recognition.
They see the Christian who refuses compromise even when faithfulness costs something.
They see the one who is struggling yet still holding fast.
The same eyes that expose Jezebel's corruption will see the faithfulness of **"the rest in Thyatira."**
Nothing sinful can hide from Christ.
But neither can anything faithful.

3. The Danger of Selective Vision

There is another dimension to this image that deserves consideration.
Human beings are extraordinarily good at seeing certain sins while remaining strangely blind to others.
Sometimes the sins we notice most readily are the ones we ourselves are least tempted to commit.
That makes judgment easy.
We can become outraged by the failures of people outside our circle while finding remarkably sophisticated explanations for the failures of people within it.
The church can condemn one form of sexual immorality while quietly overlooking another.
It can condemn dishonesty in public life while tolerating dishonesty in business.
It can condemn addiction while excusing greed.
It can condemn obvious immorality while allowing gossip, bitterness, arrogance, prejudice, or cruelty to become almost respectable.
Christ's eyes do not work that way.
The church loses its moral authority when it condemns in outsiders what it excuses in insiders.
And perhaps the more personal warning is even more important:
It is always easier to be outraged by someone else's sin than to allow Christ's searching eyes to examine our own.

The eyes like fire do not selectively examine the people we disapprove of.
They search **all of us**.
That is why this image should produce humility before it produces judgment of anyone else.
Before we ask what Christ sees in someone else, Revelation invites us to ask:
What does Christ see in me?

4. “His feet are like fine brass”

The second image is:
“His feet are like fine brass.”
Again, the description reaches back to John’s vision in Revelation 1:15, where Christ’s feet were **“like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.”**
The exact metal represented by the Greek expression is difficult to identify with certainty, and we should resist becoming overly confident about its precise composition.
The theological image, however, is much clearer.
These are feet associated with **strength, permanence, purity, and judgment**.
Christ stands firmly.
He cannot be moved by cultural pressure.
He cannot be manipulated by religious influence.
He cannot be intimidated by economic power.
He cannot be persuaded to redefine righteousness because obedience has become inconvenient.
The church at Thyatira may be wavering.
Christ is not.
The culture surrounding them may be changing.
Christ is not.
The congregation may be debating what should be tolerated.
Christ already knows.
There may also be a deliberate connection between these feet and Christ's coming judgment upon evil. Throughout Scripture, placing enemies beneath one's feet is an image of victory and authority.
That makes the combination of the two images particularly powerful.
Christ has **eyes that see everything** and **feet that stand immovably upon truth**.
He sees rightly.
And therefore he judges rightly.

5. Before Christ Examines the Church

There is something deeply pastoral about the order of this verse.

Christ does not begin by listing Thyatira's failures.
He begins by revealing himself.
That is important because Christian self-examination becomes distorted when it begins merely with ourselves.
If we look only inward, we may become either proud or discouraged.
We may minimize our failures.
Or we may become overwhelmed by them.
Revelation gives us another starting point.
Look first at Christ.
See who he is.
Then allow his light to reveal who we are.
The Son of God stands before Thyatira with eyes like fire and feet like burnished bronze.
The image is intimidating—and it should be.
But remember who this Christ is.
This is the same Jesus who died and rose again.
This is the Lamb who gave himself for his people.
This is the Lord who gives even Jezebel **time to repent**.
His searching gaze is not separated from his grace.
Christ exposes sin because sin destroys those he loves.
He calls people to repentance because he desires restoration.
And he confronts compromise because he refuses to abandon his church to it.

6. The Son of God Still Walks Among the Churches

There is a temptation for every generation of Christians to imagine that the church belongs to us.
We speak of **our church**.
Our denomination.
Our traditions.
Our programs.
Our ministries.
Our preferences.
There is nothing necessarily wrong with that language, but Revelation repeatedly reminds us of something deeper.
The church belongs to Christ.
He walks among the lampstands.
He holds the messengers.
He knows the congregations.
He commends.
He corrects.
He warns.

He calls to repentance.
And he promises life to those who overcome.
The authority of the church therefore never originates in the church itself.
It originates in the One who says: **"These things saith the Son of God."**
That should humble every pastor, teacher, deacon, elder, congregation, and denomination.
None of us owns the church.
We serve the One who does.
And before we ask Christ to examine the world around us, perhaps we should first stand with Thyatira and allow those fiery eyes to examine **us**.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something both unsettling and comforting about knowing that Christ sees us completely.
It is unsettling because we spend much of our lives managing what other people see.
Others see our actions, but not always our motives.
They hear our words, but they do not always know what lies behind them.
They may know our reputation without knowing our struggles. They may see our service without seeing our pride, our generosity without seeing our desire for recognition, or our outward faithfulness without seeing the compromises we have quietly begun to make.
But Christ sees beneath all of it.
His **"eyes like unto a flame of fire"** penetrate every carefully constructed appearance.
Yet that same truth can also be wonderfully comforting.
Because other people may fail to see our faithfulness.
They may never know the sacrifice involved in doing what is right. They may never understand what it cost us to remain faithful. They may overlook the quiet act of service, the private prayer, the temptation resisted, the forgiveness offered, or the obedience that nobody applauded.
Christ sees those things too.
The eyes of fire are not merely searching for something to condemn.
They are the eyes of the One who says in the very next verse:
"I know thy works."
That changes how we understand Christ's examination of his church.
He sees everything that needs correction.
But he also sees everything worth commending.
And perhaps that is why we can safely allow Christ to search us. His judgment is not distorted by prejudice, favoritism, reputation, influence, or appearances.

He does not excuse the deacon because he is important.
He does not condemn the outsider because that person's sin happens to be easier for the congregation to recognize.
He does not overlook the wealthy member because the church needs the contribution.
He does not ignore the quiet believer because nobody else notices.
Christ sees truthfully.
That should produce humility in the church.
Before we point toward someone else's failure and say, *"Look at what they are doing,"* the fiery eyes of Christ invite us to stand before him and ask: **"Lord, what do you see in me?"**
And because the One examining us is also the One who gave himself for us, that question does not have to be asked in terror.
It can be asked in trust.
The Son of God who exposes what is wrong is also the Savior who calls us to repentance, forgiveness, restoration, and deeper faithfulness.
His feet remain like burnished bronze because truth does not move.
His eyes remain like fire because love refuses to look away.

Something Worth Pondering

We often ask God to help us see what is wrong with the world.
Perhaps one of the more dangerous prayers is:
"Lord, show me what is wrong with me."
That prayer places us before the eyes like a flame of fire.
And those eyes may reveal things we would rather not see.
They may reveal that what we called prudence was actually fear.
That what we called righteous anger was partly resentment.
That what we called discernment was sometimes judgmentalism.
That what we called tolerance was actually avoidance.
That what we condemned loudly in others we excused quietly in ourselves.
But the purpose of Christ's searching gaze is not merely exposure.
It is transformation.
The physician identifies the disease because healing matters.
The shepherd searches for the wound because the sheep matters.
And Christ searches the heart because **we matter to him**.
Perhaps, then, the fiery eyes of Revelation 2:18 should not cause us merely to ask whether Christ sees us.
Of course he does.
The more important question is whether we are willing to let **ourselves see what he sees.**

Ask Yourself This

If I truly believed that the Son of God sees beyond my reputation, my explanations, and the things I choose to notice in others, what might his searching eyes reveal in me—and what would I need to place before him in repentance?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:19

“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”
— Revelation 2:19, KJV

There are only a few words in Revelation that may be simultaneously as comforting and as unsettling as these:
“I know.”
We encountered their weight in verse 18. The Son of God has eyes like a flame of fire. Nothing within his church escapes his notice.
But verse 19 reminds us that the searching eyes of Christ are not merely looking for failure.
They also see faithfulness.
Before Jesus speaks one word about Jezebel, compromise, immorality, idolatry, or judgment, he pauses to acknowledge what is genuinely good within the church at Thyatira.
And there is much that is good.

1. “I know thy works”

This expression appears repeatedly throughout the messages to the seven churches.
Christ knows his churches.
Not merely statistically.
Not merely institutionally.
Personally.
He knows what they do, why they do it, what they endure, where they struggle, where they have compromised, and where they have remained faithful.
There is an important connection here with the previous verse.
The One who says **“I know thy works”** is the One whose **“eyes are like a flame of fire.”**
His knowledge is therefore not superficial.
Human beings evaluate churches by what they can observe.
Attendance.
Giving.
Programs.
Buildings.
Baptisms.
Budgets.
Reputation.
Community involvement.

Those things can certainly tell us something about a congregation.
But they cannot tell us everything.
Christ sees beneath them.
A congregation may appear successful while spiritually deteriorating.
Another may appear small and insignificant while demonstrating extraordinary faithfulness.
Christ is not impressed by appearances, nor is he discouraged by them.
He knows the truth.
And what he sees in Thyatira begins with four remarkable qualities:
love, faith, service, and endurance.

2. "Charity"

The first quality Christ names is **love**.
That immediately invites comparison with Ephesus.
The Ephesian church possessed discernment. It rejected false apostles. It had endured hardship. It hated the practices of the Nicolaitans.
Yet Christ said:
"Thou hast left thy first love."
Thyatira has almost the opposite problem.
Its love is real.
Its discernment is failing.
That contrast between Ephesus and Thyatira is instructive.
Ephesus demonstrates that **truth without love becomes spiritually dangerous**.
Thyatira demonstrates that **love without discernment can also become spiritually dangerous**.
The church needs both.
Christian love is not merely emotional warmth or unconditional approval. Biblical love seeks the genuine good of another person.
Sometimes love comforts.
Sometimes love encourages.
Sometimes love forgives.
Sometimes love serves.
And sometimes love must say:
"This is harming you, and I cannot pretend otherwise."
That will become especially important when Christ confronts Thyatira in verse 20.
Their failure is not that they love too much.
Their failure is that they have apparently confused love with **tolerance of something destructive**.
Christ never asks them to become less loving.
He calls them to become more discerning in how they love.

3. “Faith”

Christ next commends their **faith**.
The Greek word *pistis* can carry the sense of faith, faithfulness, trust, or reliability depending upon context. Here those ideas naturally overlap.
These believers trust Christ.
And that trust has produced faithfulness.
Christian faith in Revelation is never merely intellectual agreement with certain doctrines.
It is allegiance.
It is continuing to trust Christ when doing so becomes costly.
That matters in Thyatira.
If participation in the city's trade guilds involved religious and moral compromises, believers may have faced genuine pressure to choose between economic opportunity and Christian conviction.
Faith therefore becomes something very practical.
It is one thing to say:
“I trust Christ.”
It is another to say it when obedience might cost a customer, a contract, a friendship, a promotion, or a place within the community.
Faith becomes visible when trust survives cost.
Christ sees that faith among the believers in Thyatira.

4. “Service”

The third quality is **service**.
The Greek word here is *diakonia*, the word from which we eventually receive terms such as **deacon** and **ministry**.
It describes service rendered for the benefit of others.
This is love becoming active.
That relationship between the words may be important.
Christ does not simply say that Thyatira possesses love.
He says they possess:
love … and service.
Their love produces action.
They do something for one another.
They care.
They help.
They minister.
They serve.
This is not theoretical Christianity.
Their faith has hands.
There is a lesson here for every congregation.
A church may say that it loves its community, loves its members, loves the poor, loves the lonely, loves the hurting, and loves its neighbors.

But eventually love must become **service**.
Love that never moves beyond words has not yet reached its fullest Christian expression.
Thyatira's love has moved.
Christ sees it.
And he commends it.

5. "Endurance"

Then comes a word that has already become central to our journey through Revelation:
endurance.
The Greek word *hypomonē* carries the idea of steadfastness, perseverance, remaining under pressure without surrendering.
This is not passive resignation.
It is active faithfulness.
Endurance says:
"This is difficult, but I will not abandon Christ."
And once again we find ourselves at the heart of Revelation.
The book is not primarily teaching Christians how to decode a timetable.
It is teaching Christians how to remain faithful when faith becomes difficult.
Thyatira is doing that in significant ways.
Despite the serious problem Christ is about to address, he does not erase their endurance.
He sees it.
That matters pastorally.
Sometimes we imagine that discovering one serious failure means everything else about a person or congregation must have been false.
Jesus does not evaluate Thyatira that way.
The failure is real.
But so is the faithfulness.
Christ is capable of holding both truths simultaneously.
We should learn to do the same.

6. Love, Faith, Service, and Endurance

There may be a deliberate relationship among these four qualities.
Love produces service.
Faith produces endurance.
Love looks outward toward others and becomes service.
Faith looks toward Christ and becomes endurance.
Together they describe a remarkably healthy Christian life.
We love.
Therefore we serve.
We trust.

Therefore we endure.
And that makes the next statement even more remarkable.

7. “Thy works; and the last to be more than the first”

This is perhaps the most extraordinary part of Christ's commendation.
Thyatira is not merely maintaining its Christian life.
It is growing.
Their later works are greater than their earlier works.
That gives us another striking contrast with Ephesus.
Ephesus is told to remember where it has fallen and **“do the first works.”**
Thyatira is told:
“Thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”
One church has moved backward.
The other has moved forward.
At least in this respect.
This gives us an important picture of Christian maturity.
Following Christ is not intended to become merely a nostalgic memory of what our faith once was.
We sometimes speak fondly about earlier seasons of faith:
When I first believed.
When I first entered ministry.
When I first discovered Scripture.
When prayer seemed easier.
When church felt exciting.
Those memories can be precious.
But Christ does not call us merely to remember what faith used to be.
He calls us to **grow**.
The question is not only:
“Was I faithful once?”
It is:
“Am I becoming more faithful now?”
Are we more patient than we were?
More generous?
More compassionate?
More willing to forgive?
More discerning?
More prayerful?
More willing to serve?
More able to trust Christ when life becomes difficult?
That is spiritual growth.
And Christ sees it in Thyatira.

8. A Growing Church Can Still Have a Serious Problem

Here lies one of the most sobering lessons of verse 19.
A church can be growing spiritually in some areas while becoming dangerously compromised in another.
Thyatira proves it.
Their love is increasing.
Their service is increasing.
Their works are increasing.
Their endurance is real.
And yet verse 20 will begin:
"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee…"
Growth in one area does not excuse disobedience in another.
We sometimes reason differently.
We may think:
Look at everything we're doing right.
Attendance is good.
People are being helped.
Ministry is expanding.
The church is generous.
People genuinely care about one another.
Surely that outweighs this one uncomfortable issue.
Christ does not use that scale.
He praises everything worthy of praise.
Then he confronts everything requiring confrontation.
The good does not erase the wrong, and the wrong does not erase the good.
That is an extraordinarily balanced way of seeing people.
And perhaps it is another lesson from those eyes like fire.
Christ sees the whole truth.

9. Christ's Commendation Before His Correction

There is also something profoundly pastoral about the order Jesus uses.
He knows what he is about to say in verse 20.
The rebuke will be severe.
Yet he does not begin there.
He begins:
"I know thy works."
Then he names them.
Love.
Faith.

Service.
Endurance.
And then:
“Thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”
Only after acknowledging their faithfulness does he confront their failure.
There is wisdom here for anyone entrusted with correcting another person.
Correction should never require pretending that everything about someone is wrong.
Parents need to remember that.
Pastors need to remember that.
Spouses need to remember that.
Supervisors need to remember that.
Churches need to remember that.
Sometimes the person who needs correction also desperately needs to know:
“I see the good in you too.”
Jesus does not flatter Thyatira.
He tells them the truth.
And the truth includes both commendation and correction.
That is what makes his judgment trustworthy.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when faithful people wonder whether anything they are doing matters.
Perhaps nobody notices the quiet service.
Nobody recognizes the sacrifice.
Nobody knows what it took simply to remain faithful.
Nobody sees the prayer offered in private, the temptation resisted, the forgiveness extended, the difficult kindness given, or the decision to do what was right when doing otherwise would have been easier.
Revelation 2:19 offers a simple answer:
Christ knows.
Those may be two of the most comforting words a weary Christian can hear.
“I know.”
Not:
“I heard about it.”
Not:
“Someone reported it.”
Not:
“I noticed some of it.”

Christ knows.
He knows the love that nobody thanked you for.
He knows the faith that survived questions.
He knows the service that received no recognition.
He knows the endurance required simply to keep going.
And he also knows whether we are growing.
That gives us a healthier way to think about Christian maturity.
The goal is not perfection tomorrow morning.
The goal is movement toward Christ.
Our latest works should increasingly reflect the One we follow.
Perhaps we love a little more deeply than we once did.
Perhaps we forgive a little more readily.
Perhaps we listen more patiently.
Perhaps we serve without needing as much recognition.
Perhaps our faith has survived enough storms that we no longer panic quite as quickly when another one appears.
Perhaps endurance itself has taught us something.
Those changes may seem small to us.
But the eyes like fire see them.
Christ notices growth.

Something Worth Pondering

We often measure spiritual maturity by how much someone knows.
Christ's commendation of Thyatira suggests another measurement.
Love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
Not one of those requires a theological degree.
Not one requires a title.
Not one requires a platform.
Not one requires recognition.
They simply require a life increasingly surrendered to Christ.
And perhaps there is something especially beautiful in the final sentence:
“Thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”
The Christian life does not have to be a story about slowly losing what we once possessed.
It can be a story of becoming.
More loving.
More faithful.
More willing to serve.
More capable of enduring.
We will stumble.

We will discover places requiring repentance.
Christ may expose things in us that need to change.
Thyatira certainly will.
But those failures do not mean growth is impossible.
The same Christ who says:
“I have somewhat against thee”
can also say:
“I see how far you have come.”
Perhaps mature faith is not faith that never needs correction.
Perhaps it is faith that keeps allowing Christ to correct it—and keeps growing.

Ask Yourself This

If Christ compared my faith today with my faith several years ago, where would he see greater love, deeper faith, more willing service, and stronger endurance—and where is he still calling me to grow?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:20

“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”
— Revelation 2:20, KJV

Verse 19 ended with one of the strongest commendations given to any of the seven churches.
Love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
Growing works.
Then comes one small word that changes the direction of the entire message:
“But…”
Christ has seen everything good in Thyatira.
Now he addresses what cannot remain.
And importantly, he does not withdraw his earlier praise.
Their love is still real.
Their faith is still real.
Their service is still real.
Their endurance is still real.
But none of those virtues gives the church permission to ignore something that is spiritually destroying people within the congregation.
The good does not erase the wrong.
And now Christ names the wrong:
“Thou sufferest…”

1. “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee”

These words should sound familiar by now.
Christ used similar language with Ephesus:
“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee…”
The pattern teaches us something important about Christ's relationship with his church.
Commendation does not eliminate accountability.
Jesus loves his church too much to flatter it.
He acknowledges what is faithful, but he also confronts what is destructive.

That distinction matters because churches can easily begin evaluating themselves by comparison.
Look at everything we are doing.
Look at how many people we help.
Look at our ministries.
Look at our generosity.
Look at our worship.
Look at our growth.
All of those things may genuinely be good.
Jesus acknowledged Thyatira's good works.
But obedience is not a balance sheet on which enough good works eventually cancel an area of deliberate compromise.
Christ does not say:
"Your love and service outweigh this problem, so we will overlook it."
He says:
"I have somewhat against thee."
There are some things love requires us to confront.

2. "Thou sufferest"

This may be the most important word in the verse.
Notice what Christ does **not** say.
He does not say the entire congregation teaches Jezebel's doctrine.
He does not say everyone participates in her practices.
In fact, verses 24–25 will specifically identify believers who have rejected her teaching.
The accusation against the church is:
"Thou sufferest…"
Something destructive has been allowed to remain.
That is different from patience.
It is different from mercy.
It is different from allowing people time to grow.
It is different from welcoming sinners into the church.
Every church is filled with imperfect people because there is no other kind of person available.
The church cannot require moral perfection before welcoming someone into fellowship. If it did, the building would be empty.
The issue in Thyatira is not the presence of sinners.
The issue is the **acceptance of teaching that makes sin acceptable**.
That distinction is crucial.
There is a difference between saying:
"You have sinned, but there is grace, forgiveness, and a way home."
and saying:

“There is nothing here from which you need to turn.”
The first is the gospel.
The second can make repentance impossible because it removes the need for repentance.
Christ's problem with Thyatira is therefore not that sinful people are present.
His church has always contained sinful people being transformed by grace.
The problem is that someone is teaching Christ's servants to accommodate what Christ calls them to leave behind—and the church is permitting that teaching to continue.

3. “That Woman Jezebel”

Christ identifies the source of the teaching as:
“that woman Jezebel.”
Whether this woman's actual name was Jezebel is uncertain.
It seems quite possible that Christ is giving her a symbolic name drawn from one of the darkest periods of Israel's history.
The Old Testament Jezebel was the Phoenician wife of King Ahab. She promoted Baal worship within Israel, supported pagan prophets, opposed the prophets of the Lord, and became a powerful symbol of idolatrous corruption.
Calling someone in Thyatira **“Jezebel”** therefore communicates far more than identifying an individual.
It interprets what she is doing.
In effect, Christ is saying:
The same kind of compromise that once corrupted Israel is now attempting to corrupt my church.
But this requires an important caution.
“Jezebel” has sometimes become a careless religious insult applied to women considered assertive, influential, sexually attractive, outspoken, or difficult.
That is not what the passage authorizes.
There is no biblical justification for turning “Jezebel” into a convenient label for a woman someone dislikes.
Her gender is not the issue.
Her personality is not the issue.
Her influence itself is not the issue.
Her teaching is the issue.
And Christ tells us exactly why.

4. “Which calleth herself a prophetess”

This phrase is particularly revealing:
“which calleth herself a prophetess.”

The problem is not merely immoral behavior.
It is claimed **spiritual authority**.
She apparently presents her teaching as something carrying divine approval.
That makes the situation considerably more dangerous.
A temptation may entice someone to sin.
False teaching can convince someone that the sin is actually faithfulness.
That is much harder to correct.
Once a person believes:
“God approves of this,”
repentance becomes exceedingly difficult because repentance now appears unnecessary—or even wrong.
This is why the church must test spiritual claims.
The words:
“God told me…”
do not end Christian discernment.
They begin it.
Someone's confidence does not establish divine authority.
Charisma does not establish divine authority.
Popularity does not establish divine authority.
A religious title does not establish divine authority.
Even apparent spiritual gifts do not place someone beyond examination.
Every claim made in God's name must ultimately be tested against God's revealed character and truth.
There is a striking contrast between verses 18 and 20.
She **“calleth herself a prophetess.”**
Jesus says:
“These things saith the Son of God.”
She claims authority.
Christ possesses authority.
And when the two conflict, the church must decide whose voice it will follow.

5. “To teach and to seduce my servants”

Christ describes the people being influenced by Jezebel with a deeply personal expression:
“my servants.”
They belong to him.
That helps explain the severity of the response.
Christ is not protecting an institution's reputation.
He is protecting people.
His people.
False teaching matters because people matter.

Bad theology is not merely an academic problem when it leads people away from faithfulness to Christ.
Ideas have consequences.
Teaching shapes behavior.
What we believe eventually influences how we live.
That is exactly what is happening here.
Jezebel's teaching is **beguiling** Christ's servants.
The idea is one of misleading or leading astray.
That makes Christ's rebuke of the congregation more understandable.
By tolerating the teacher, they are allowing Christ's people to be harmed.
There comes a point at which refusing to confront destructive teaching is no longer kindness toward the teacher.
It becomes neglect of those being harmed by the teaching.

6. Sexual Immorality and Food Sacrificed to Idols

The two practices Christ identifies are familiar from the message to Pergamum:
sexual immorality
and
eating food sacrificed to idols.
The pairing may reflect the social and religious pressures surrounding trade-guild life in Thyatira.
Guild meals could be connected with pagan religious observances. For Christian artisans and merchants, participation could therefore blur the line between ordinary commercial life and idolatrous worship.
The pressure may have been substantial.
Refuse participation, and perhaps you lose business relationships.
Refuse the feast, and perhaps you insult colleagues.
Refuse the expected social practices, and perhaps you become known as difficult, antisocial, or disloyal.
Under those circumstances, Jezebel's teaching may have offered a very attractive solution.
Perhaps Christians could participate without really believing in the pagan gods.
Perhaps outward participation did not matter if inward faith remained Christian.
Perhaps sexual practices common within the surrounding culture could be separated from one's spiritual life.
Perhaps accommodation was simply the price of living successfully within society.
We should be careful not to claim details John does not give us.
But whatever arguments were being made, Christ rejects the conclusion.

There are forms of accommodation that cease to be cultural participation and become spiritual compromise.

7. The Economic Cost of Faithfulness

This is where we should be careful not to make the Christians of Thyatira into foolish caricatures.
Compromise is easy to condemn when we do not understand what obedience might cost.
For some believers in Thyatira, this may have involved livelihood.
Imagine being told: **Remain faithful to Christ, but doing so may cost your business.**
Now the issue becomes considerably harder.
We face versions of the same question.
What happens when honesty costs the sale?
What happens when integrity costs the promotion?
What happens when refusing something unethical makes us unpopular with management?
What happens when Christian conviction costs a friendship?
What happens when obedience means being excluded from the room where relationships and opportunities are being created?
It is easy to affirm convictions that cost us nothing.
Faith becomes visible when conviction has a price.
That does not mean Christians should deliberately seek conflict with society.
Nor does it mean every cultural difference represents compromise.
Wisdom is required.
But there eventually comes a line beyond which accommodation requires us to become something other than faithful.
Thyatira had begun crossing that line.

8. Selective Morality

There is another danger hidden within the word **"tolerate."**
Churches can become remarkably selective about what they tolerate.
One sin may provoke immediate condemnation.
Another may be quietly ignored.
And sometimes the difference has little to do with Scripture and much to do with **who is committing it**.
A church may speak loudly about sexual behavior outside its walls while quietly overlooking adultery within its leadership.
It may condemn drunkenness while ignoring greed.
It may condemn dishonesty in politicians while excusing dishonesty in business.

It may condemn sexual immorality in people it does not understand while protecting an influential member whose behavior is equally destructive.
It may condemn hatred in society while permitting bitterness and gossip to flourish inside the congregation.
That is not holiness.
It is selective morality.
The church loses its moral authority when it condemns in outsiders what it excuses in insiders.
Christ's eyes like a flame of fire do not operate selectively.
He does not inspect only the sins a congregation has decided are particularly offensive.
He searches **minds and hearts**.
All of them.
This is why verse 20 must first be heard as a word addressed **to the church**, not as ammunition the church uses against the world.
Jesus is not rebuking the culture of Thyatira.
He is speaking to **his people**.
That changes the direction in which we should point the passage.
Before asking:
"What sins is the world tolerating?"
the church must ask:
"What are we tolerating?"
And before I ask what the church is tolerating, perhaps I should ask:
"What am I tolerating in myself?"

9. Tolerance Is Not Always Love

Modern Christians must approach this subject carefully because the word **tolerance** carries meanings today that differ from the ancient context.
Respecting another person's freedom and dignity is not the same as approving everything that person believes or does.
Christians can live peacefully with people with whom they profoundly disagree.
Indeed, Christian love requires that we treat every person with dignity.
But love and moral agreement are not identical.
Sometimes love says:
"I disagree with you, but I will still treat you with dignity and kindness."
Sometimes love says:
"I forgive you."
Sometimes love says:
"I will walk with you while you struggle."
And sometimes love must say:

“I cannot tell you that something destructive is harmless.”
Jesus himself demonstrates that balance in this passage.
He confronts Jezebel.
Yet verse 21 will immediately tell us:
“I gave her space to repent.”
Truth and grace are not enemies.
Christ can confront sin while extending mercy.
His church must learn to do the same.

10. The Difference Between Struggling and Teaching

There is another distinction that churches must preserve.
A believer struggling with sin is not the same as a teacher encouraging people to embrace it.
Someone may come to church carrying addiction, broken relationships, sexual failure, anger, greed, doubt, pride, or any number of struggles.
That person needs grace.
So do the rest of us.
The church should be the place where broken people can say:
“I am struggling.”
without fearing that confession will result in immediate rejection.
But Jezebel is doing something different.
She is **teaching**.
She is persuading.
She is giving spiritual justification to behavior Christ identifies as unfaithful.
That is why leadership and teaching carry special responsibility.
A struggling sinner needs help.
A teacher who teaches people that they need not repent of sin can lead many others into the same destruction.
Christ distinguishes between the two.
So should we.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a difficult question behind Revelation 2:20:
When does patience become permission?
Churches should be patient with imperfect people.
If we are not, none of us has much hope.
We need room to grow.
Room to struggle.
Room to ask questions.
Room to fail.
Room to repent.

Room to begin again.
That is grace.
But grace is not pretending that whatever we choose must therefore be good.
Grace tells the truth precisely because restoration matters.
Perhaps one of the hardest responsibilities in Christian community is learning when to say:
“I love you too much to pretend this does not matter.”
That sentence must never be spoken arrogantly.
It must never become permission for cruelty.
And it must never be selectively applied only to sins we personally dislike.
The person speaking it must first be willing to stand beneath the same searching eyes of Christ.
Because the question is never merely:
“What are they doing wrong?”
It is also:
“Lord, what are you asking me to confront in myself?”
Thyatira teaches us that love without truth can become permission.
But truth without love can become cruelty.
Christ offers neither.
He gives us **truth shaped by love and love governed by truth**.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the most dangerous sentence a church can say is not:
“We disagree about this.”
Perhaps it is:
“We know this is wrong, but we would rather not deal with it.”
That seems much closer to Thyatira's problem.
“Thou sufferest…”
Not because they necessarily approved.
Perhaps because confrontation was uncomfortable.
Perhaps because Jezebel was influential.
Perhaps because people liked her.
Perhaps because challenging her might divide the congregation.
Perhaps because her teaching made life in Thyatira economically easier.
Perhaps because everyone simply hoped the problem would disappear.
We do not know.
But we know what happened.
What they refused to confront continued to grow.
There is a lesson there for churches, families, organizations, and individual lives.

Problems rarely become healthier simply because we refuse to name them.
And spiritually destructive compromise rarely remains small merely because confronting it is inconvenient.
Sometimes endurance means bearing suffering patiently.
But sometimes endurance requires having the courage to say:
“This cannot continue.”
And because Christ's eyes search every heart, that courage must always begin with ourselves.

Ask Yourself This

Is there something I have learned to tolerate—not because I truly believe it is right, but because confronting it in myself, my relationships, or my church would be uncomfortable—and what would faithful, loving truth require of me?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:21

“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.”
— Revelation 2:21, KJV

There is something almost startling about this verse.
After everything Christ has just said about Jezebel—her false claim to prophetic authority, her deceptive teaching, her influence upon Christ's servants, her encouragement of sexual immorality and participation in idolatry—we might expect immediate judgment.
Instead, Jesus says:
“I gave her space.”
Those four words reveal something essential about the character of Christ.
Before judgment came opportunity.
Before punishment came patience.
Before consequences came a call to turn around.
Christ did not immediately destroy the one who was misleading his servants.
He gave her the opportunity to repent.
The tragedy of verse 21 is therefore not that mercy was unavailable.
The tragedy is that mercy was **refused**.

1. “I gave her space”

We are not told how much time Christ gave Jezebel.
Nor are we told exactly how that opportunity for repentance came.
Perhaps she had been confronted by believers within the congregation.
Perhaps prophetic warnings had been given.
Perhaps Christ had worked through circumstances we know nothing about.
Perhaps the very message John is recording represents the culmination of that warning.
Revelation does not tell us.
And because it does not tell us, we should resist pretending that we know.
What matters is the theological statement:
Christ gave her time.
Judgment was not impulsive.
There was patience.
There was opportunity.
There was space in which another decision could have been made.

That is consistent with the larger biblical witness about God's patience.
Again and again Scripture portrays God as calling people to turn back before judgment falls.
Warnings themselves are expressions of mercy.
If God simply desired destruction, warning would be unnecessary.
The warning exists because another possibility remains:
Repentance.

2. What Repentance Means

The word **repent** is sometimes reduced to feeling sorry.
But biblical repentance means considerably more than regret.
The Greek word *metanoeō* carries the idea of changing one's mind, turning around, reconsidering one's direction.
True repentance certainly may involve sorrow.
But sorrow alone is not repentance.
A person can regret consequences without rejecting the behavior that produced them.
Repentance says:
"The direction I am traveling is wrong, and I must turn."
That distinction is especially important in Thyatira.
Jezebel does not merely need to feel badly about what has happened.
She must stop teaching what she has been teaching.
She must turn away from the behavior Christ identifies as immoral.
She must abandon the spiritual authority she has claimed for teaching that contradicts Christ.
Repentance therefore involves both **recognition and change**.
We recognize that Christ is right.
Then we turn toward him.

3. Grace Does Not Eliminate the Need for Repentance

There is a temptation to imagine grace and repentance as opposites.
If God is gracious, why insist upon repentance?
But verse 21 shows that the two belong together.
Christ's grace is precisely what gives Jezebel **time to repent**.
Grace does not say:
"Nothing is wrong."
Grace says:
"Something is wrong, but you can still turn around."
That is much better news.
If grace merely redefined everything we did as acceptable, there would be no transformation.
No healing.

No restoration.
No new direction.
The gospel is not merely that Christ accepts us where we are.
It is that Christ loves us enough **not to leave us there**.
The invitation to repent is therefore not the opposite of grace.
It is one of grace's greatest expressions.

4. “And she repented not”

Then comes the tragedy:
“and she repented not.”
There is deliberate resistance here.
Christ gives time.
She refuses.
Christ offers the possibility of turning.
She continues.
The door of repentance is open.
She will not walk through it.
This is important when we reach the severe judgment language of verses 22–23.
Those verses should never be read as though Christ suddenly becomes angry and lashes out without warning.
Verse 21 stands between the sin and the judgment.
“I gave her space to repent.”
The judgment that follows comes after persistent refusal.
That does not make the language of judgment comfortable.
It is not intended to be comfortable.
But it does place the judgment within the context of rejected mercy.

5. God Does Not Force Repentance

There is also something profound here concerning human response to grace.
Christ gives Jezebel time.
But he does not force her to repent.
Love can call.
Grace can invite.
Truth can confront.
The Spirit can convict.
But repentance involves a response.
That means human beings possess the terrible capacity to resist grace.
We can rationalize.
We can delay.
We can blame others.
We can redefine our behavior.
We can become angry with the person who confronts us.

We can surround ourselves with people who reassure us that nothing needs to change.
We can even create theological arguments explaining why repentance is unnecessary.
And eventually we can become so committed to our chosen direction that turning around feels impossible.
That appears to be Jezebel's tragedy.
She has not merely fallen.
She refuses to turn.
There is an enormous difference between the two.

6. Struggling Is Not the Same as Refusing

This distinction deserves special pastoral attention.
There is a difference between someone who struggles repeatedly with sin and someone who refuses repentance.
A believer may sincerely say:
"Lord, I know this is wrong. I hate that I keep returning to it. Help me."
That person may stumble again.
And again.
And perhaps again.
But struggling is not necessarily refusing.
The direction of the heart still matters.
The struggling Christian keeps turning back toward Christ even after falling.
Jezebel's problem is different.
Christ says:
"She repented not."
There is no turning.
No acknowledgment.
No willingness to change direction.
That distinction matters enormously in pastoral ministry.
We should be very careful not to crush struggling believers by treating every repeated failure as deliberate rebellion.
Sometimes spiritual growth is painfully slow.
Sometimes people fight the same battle for years.
Sometimes repentance means getting up for the hundredth time and turning toward Christ again.
Grace has room for that struggle.
The dangerous moment comes when we stop saying:
"Lord, help me change."
and begin saying:
"Lord, I have decided I do not need to change."

7. The Danger of “Later”

There is another warning hidden in the phrase:

“I gave her space.”

Time is mercy.

But time is not unlimited.

That is uncomfortable, but Revelation refuses to hide uncomfortable truths.

We often assume that because consequences have not arrived, God must not care.

Nothing happened yesterday.

Nothing happened today.

Therefore perhaps nothing ever will.

But delayed judgment is not necessarily divine approval.

Sometimes delay is **mercy**.

The absence of immediate consequences may actually be the space God has provided for repentance.

That changes how we interpret God's patience.

Instead of asking:

“Why hasn't God done something?”

perhaps sometimes the better question is:

“What opportunity is God giving me while he waits?”

The most dangerous response to grace may be:

“Later.”

Later I will deal with it.

Later I will apologize.

Later I will forgive.

Later I will stop.

Later I will make things right.

Later I will return to God.

But repeated “later” can eventually become refusal.

Jezebel had time.

She used that time not to turn around, but to continue.

8. Repentance and the Church

There is also an important lesson here for how churches handle failure.

If Christ gives time to repent, his church should understand the value of restoration.

Church discipline, when necessary, should never primarily be about humiliation or punishment.

Its purpose should be repentance and restoration.

The goal is not:

“How do we get rid of this person?”

The better question is:

“How do we call this person back?”
There may eventually be circumstances in which someone must be removed from leadership or fellowship because persistent behavior is harming others.
Thyatira will demonstrate that boundaries sometimes become necessary.
But the goal should remain restoration whenever restoration remains possible.
Christ's sequence matters:
Confrontation.
Opportunity.
Repentance.
Restoration if repentance occurs.
Judgment when repentance is persistently refused.
The church should be very cautious about reversing that order.

9. Repentance Is Not Humiliation

Unfortunately, Christians sometimes hear the word **repentance** and imagine public shame.
That is not its purpose.
Repentance is not God rubbing our faces in our failures.
Repentance is God pointing toward the road home.
Think of the prodigal son.
The turning point in the story comes when the son recognizes where his choices have taken him and turns toward his father.
The father does not meet him with humiliation.
He meets him with restoration.
The painful part was admitting:
“I need to go home.”
That is repentance.
And Christ offers Jezebel precisely that opportunity.
She could have turned.
She could have stopped teaching.
She could have acknowledged that she was wrong.
She could have returned.
The tragedy is:
She refused.

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts God gives us is **time to change**.
We rarely think of time that way.
We think of another day as ordinary.
Another morning.
Another week.
Another year.

But sometimes another day is mercy.
Another opportunity to apologize.
Another opportunity to forgive.
Another opportunity to abandon something destructive.
Another opportunity to repair what we damaged.
Another opportunity to tell the truth.
Another opportunity to return to Christ.
And perhaps we should be careful about interpreting God's patience as indifference.
There may be areas of our lives where we know something needs attention.
We have known for some time.
Christ has not struck us down.
Life has continued.
Nothing dramatic has happened.
That does not necessarily mean:
"It must be fine."
Perhaps it means:
"I gave you time."
That possibility changes the way we look at grace.
Grace is not merely forgiveness after repentance.
Grace may also be the time **before repentance** in which God patiently waits for us to turn.
And there is another pastoral comfort here.
If you are aware that something in your life needs to change and you genuinely desire to turn toward Christ, you are not standing where Jezebel stands in this verse.
The person saying:
"Lord, help me repent"
has already begun turning.
The dangerous heart is the one that says:
"I refuse."

Something Worth Pondering

There are two ways to respond when Christ reveals something in us that needs to change.
We can ask:
"How quickly can I turn?"
Or we can ask:
"How long can I get away with this?"
Those questions reveal very different hearts.
One sees God's patience as an opportunity for transformation.
The other sees God's patience as permission to delay.

Jezebel had time.
That was grace.
But grace rejected eventually became judgment.
Perhaps one of the most sobering thoughts in Revelation is that God's patience should never be confused with God's approval.
And perhaps one of the most hopeful thoughts is that if Christ is still calling us to repent, **the invitation home is still being offered.**
The question is not whether we have ever wandered.
We all have.
The question is what we do when Christ says:
"Turn around."

Ask Yourself This

Is there something Christ has been giving me time to address—something I keep postponing, rationalizing, or avoiding—and what would it look like for me to use that time as grace and turn toward him now?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:22

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”
— Revelation 2:22, KJV

Verse 21 told us something essential before we reached this warning:
“I gave her space to repent.”
She refused.
Only then does Christ announce the consequence.
That sequence must remain firmly in view as we approach verse 22.
Otherwise, we could easily picture Christ's judgment as sudden, arbitrary, or vindictive.
It is none of those things.
Warning has been given.
Time has been provided.
Repentance has been offered.
Repentance has been refused.
Now Christ says:
“Behold.”
Judgment is no longer merely possible.
It is approaching.
Yet even here—within one of the sternest warnings in the messages to the seven churches—mercy has not completely disappeared.
Even at the end of the verse, Christ leaves room for a response.
“Except they repent of their deeds.”
That may be the most important phrase in the verse.

1. “Behold”

The KJV begins the verse with **“Behold.”**
The underlying expression carries the sense of calling attention to what is about to happen: *Look. See. Pay attention.*
Christ is announcing his action.
The congregation that has tolerated Jezebel must now understand that Christ will not tolerate indefinitely what they have refused to address.
There is an important distinction here.
God's patience should never be mistaken for God's passivity.
Verse 21 demonstrated patience.
Verse 22 demonstrates action.
The two are not contradictory.
In fact, they belong together.
Christ waits because he desires repentance.

Christ acts because destructive rebellion cannot be permitted forever.
A God who never judged evil would eventually become a God who permanently tolerated evil.
And that would not be loving toward those evil destroys.

2. “I will cast her into a bed”

This is intentionally striking language.
Jezebel has been associated with sexual immorality, and Christ says:
“I will cast her into a bed.”
There appears to be deliberate irony in the image.
The bed associated with her immorality becomes a bed associated with judgment.
What had represented pleasure becomes associated with suffering.
What had been presented as freedom becomes a place of consequence.
Some interpreters understand the bed specifically as a **sickbed**, an image of illness or affliction. That is certainly possible and fits ancient ways of speaking about being confined to bed through sickness.
But the larger point does not depend upon identifying a particular medical condition.
The symbolism is clear enough.
The place of rebellion becomes the place where the consequences of rebellion are experienced.
There is a broader spiritual principle here.
Sin often promises one thing and eventually delivers another.
It promises freedom and produces bondage.
It promises pleasure and leaves emptiness.
It promises control and eventually controls us.
It promises that consequences can be avoided.
Eventually they cannot.
This does not mean every illness, hardship, or suffering in a person's life should be interpreted as divine punishment for a particular sin.
Scripture itself will not permit such a simplistic conclusion. The book of Job should cure us of that assumption, and Jesus explicitly rejected easy equations between suffering and personal guilt.
So we should not take Revelation 2:22 and begin looking at sick people wondering:
“What did they do?”
That would badly misuse the passage.
Christ is describing a specific judgment in a specific prophetic message.
He possesses knowledge we do not possess.
Remember verse 18.
His eyes are like a flame of fire.
We do not have those eyes.

3. The Irony of the Bed

Still, the image of the bed deserves reflection.
The place associated with Jezebel's teaching becomes the symbol of her judgment.
There is a kind of moral correspondence between the behavior and its consequence.
We encounter this pattern elsewhere in Scripture.
People sometimes experience the consequences inherent in the very thing they chose.
Greed can destroy the relationships money was supposed to improve.
Dishonesty can destroy the reputation a lie was intended to protect.
Adultery can destroy the intimacy it sought outside the marriage.
Bitterness can imprison the person who believes resentment is punishing someone else.
Pride can isolate the person desperate to appear important.
Sin often contains within itself the seeds of its own consequences.
That does not explain every judgment of God.
But it helps us understand the imagery here.
Jezebel has taught that certain behavior can be embraced without spiritual consequence.
Christ says otherwise.
The bed itself becomes the warning.

4. “Them that commit adultery with her”

Christ's attention then moves beyond Jezebel:
“and them that commit adultery with her…”
This phrase can be understood literally, spiritually, or perhaps with elements of both.
Literal sexual immorality has already been mentioned in verse 20, so we should not automatically spiritualize the language away.
At the same time, Scripture repeatedly uses **adultery** as an image for spiritual unfaithfulness to God, particularly when idolatry is involved.
Israel's covenant relationship with God is sometimes portrayed in marital terms, making idolatry a form of spiritual adultery.
In Thyatira, the two may be deliberately intertwined.
Sexual compromise and idolatrous compromise belong to the same larger problem:
divided allegiance.
The central issue is ultimately faithfulness to Christ.
Jezebel teaches believers that they can belong to Christ while participating in practices incompatible with that allegiance.
Christ says there is a point at which accommodation becomes unfaithfulness.

You cannot endlessly divide your loyalty and pretend nothing has changed.

5. Responsibility Extends Beyond the Teacher

There is another important distinction in the verse.
Jezebel bears responsibility for teaching.
But those who follow her teaching also possess responsibility.
False teachers are accountable for misleading others.
Followers are not therefore relieved of all moral agency.
That balance is important.
We should have compassion for people who have been deceived.
Manipulation can be powerful.
Spiritual authority can be abused.
People can genuinely be led astray.
Christ himself describes his servants as being **beguiled** in verse 20.
But deception does not permanently eliminate responsibility.
At some point truth confronts us.
Then we must decide what we will do with it.
The message from Christ has now exposed Jezebel's teaching.
Those who followed her can no longer simply say:
"But she told us it was acceptable."
The Son of God has spoken.
Now they must choose.

6. "Great tribulation"

Christ says that those participating with Jezebel will be thrown into:
"great tribulation."
The language is severe.
We should allow it to remain severe.
Revelation does not present rebellion against God as trivial.
But neither should we use this language to indulge in frightening speculation about precisely what happened to particular individuals in Thyatira.
John does not tell us.
The point is theological rather than sensational.
Persistent rebellion has consequences.
That truth runs throughout Scripture.
Grace does not make our choices meaningless.
Forgiveness does not make obedience irrelevant.
And God's patience does not guarantee that consequences will never come.
There is also something pastorally important here.
Sometimes we imagine God's judgment only as something imposed externally.

But much human distress comes because sin itself wounds.
Relationships fracture.
Trust disappears.
Consciences become hardened.
Communities divide.
People are used.
Families suffer.
Those consequences are real even before we begin discussing divine judgment.
Christ takes seriously what destroys human beings because Christ takes human beings seriously.

7. "Except They Repent"

And then, after all that severity, we encounter these words:
"except they repent."
There it is again.
Grace.
Jezebel had been given time to repent and refused.
But those who have followed her are still being called back.
The judgment announced is not presented merely as an inevitable fate.
There remains a door.
Repentance.
That tells us something remarkable about Christ.
He warns people because he desires them to respond to the warning.
If destruction alone were the goal, there would be no reason to say:
"Except."
That little word contains hope.
Unless they repent.
Unless they turn around.
Unless they leave the path they are traveling.
Unless they return.
The warning itself therefore becomes an act of mercy.

8. Repentance Can Interrupt the Direction We Are Traveling

Verse 22 gives us an important picture of repentance.
Repentance does not mean pretending consequences never existed.
Sometimes damage remains.
Sometimes relationships require rebuilding.
Sometimes trust takes time to restore.
Sometimes earthly consequences cannot simply be undone.
But repentance changes our **direction**.
We were moving away from Christ.

We turn toward him.
We were defending ourselves.
We surrender.
We were rationalizing.
We acknowledge the truth.
We were saying:
“I will not change.”
We begin saying:
“Lord, change me.”
That turning matters.
Christ treats it as meaningful.
The people following Jezebel have already gone considerably down the wrong road.
Yet Jesus still says:
“except they repent.”
Apparently they are not too far away to turn around.
That is worth remembering.

9. Judgment and Mercy Meet in the Same Sentence

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of verse 22 is that judgment and mercy appear together.
Christ says:
“I will cast…”
and then:
“except they repent.”
We often separate those aspects of God.
We prefer either a God of judgment or a God of mercy.
Revelation refuses the choice.
The Christ whose eyes are like fire is also the Christ who gives time to repent.
The Christ who announces consequences is also the Christ who provides a way back.
His judgment tells us that evil matters.
His mercy tells us that sinners matter.
Remove judgment, and evil becomes insignificant.
Remove mercy, and restoration becomes impossible.
Christ offers both truth and grace.

10. The Church Must Be Careful With Judgment

This verse also reminds us why Christians should approach the subject of divine judgment with humility.

Christ can say:
“I will cast her into a bed.”
We cannot.
Christ knows the heart.
We do not.
Christ knows whether repentance has truly been refused.
We do not.
Christ knows the complete story.
We rarely do.
Therefore passages about divine judgment should make Christians more humble, not more eager to pronounce judgment upon particular people.
We can identify what Scripture teaches.
We can call one another toward faithfulness.
We can establish necessary boundaries.
We can protect people from harmful teaching.
But ultimate judgment belongs to Christ.
The church should never confuse the responsibility to discern with the authority to know another person's heart.
The fiery eyes belong to **Jesus**.
Not to us.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when love requires consequences.
Parents learn this.
Pastors learn it.
Churches learn it.
Anyone responsible for others eventually learns it.
If every destructive action is continually excused in the name of compassion, eventually compassion becomes permission for destruction.
But consequences should never become revenge.
Christ's example in Thyatira is instructive.
He warns.
He gives time.
He calls to repentance.
He distinguishes between the teacher and those being led astray.
And even when judgment is announced, he still says:
“except they repent.”
That should shape Christian correction.
The goal should never be:
“I want you to suffer because you were wrong.”
The goal should be:
“I want you to turn around before this destroys you and others.”
That is a very different spirit.

It also changes the way we hear God's correction in our own lives.
When Christ confronts us, perhaps our first instinct should not be:
“God is against me.”
Perhaps sometimes the warning itself means:
“God has not given up on me.”
If Christ were finished calling these people back, there would be no **“unless.”**

Something Worth Pondering

There is a small word near the end of this severe verse that may contain more grace than we initially notice:
“Except.”
Judgment is announced.
Unless.
Consequences are coming.
Unless.
The road ahead leads toward distress.
Unless.
There is still another direction available.
Repent.
Sometimes we imagine that we must first repair ourselves before returning to God.
Revelation reverses the order.
Turn first.
Come back.
Let Christ begin the work of restoration.
The people following Jezebel had already compromised.
They had already listened.
They had already participated.
Yet Christ still addressed them as people capable of turning around.
Their past had not yet become their destiny.
That may be one of the quietest expressions of hope in the entire message to Thyatira:
As long as Christ is still saying “except thou repent,” he is still showing the way home.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ allows me to experience the consequences of a wrong direction, do I see them only as punishment—or can I also hear within them his invitation to turn around while the way home is still open?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:23

“And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”
— Revelation 2:23, KJV

There is no responsible way to approach this verse by pretending its language is not severe.
“I will kill her children with death.”
Those words disturb us.
They should.
But our discomfort should lead us toward careful interpretation rather than either softening the text or rushing to the harshest possible conclusion.
The first question is obvious:
Who are “her children”?
And the answer affects how we understand everything that follows.

1. “Her Children”

The expression should not automatically be understood as referring to Jezebel's biological children.
Nothing in the passage tells us that she had literal children, much less that Christ intends to punish innocent children for their mother's behavior.
The context points much more naturally toward **spiritual offspring**—those who have so thoroughly embraced her teaching that they have become identified with it.
This kind of family imagery is not unusual in biblical and ancient language.
A teacher could speak of disciples in familial terms.
People who embody a particular character or teaching could be described as children of that way of life.
John himself uses similar imagery elsewhere when addressing believers as his “little children.”
So there appears to be a progression within the warning.
Jezebel is the teacher.
Some **“commit adultery with her”** and are given opportunity to repent.
Her **“children”** appear to represent those whose identification with her teaching has become deeper and more settled.
They are not innocent bystanders being punished for someone else's behavior.

They are participants in what she has produced.
That distinction is essential.

2. “I will kill her children with death”

Even with that clarification, the language remains severe.
Christ says:
“I will kill her children with death.”
We should not weaken that into something harmless simply because the words make us uncomfortable.
At the same time, we should not speculate beyond what Revelation tells us.
We do not know the historical circumstances by which this judgment occurred—or whether John intends us to understand the language entirely in terms of immediate physical death.
The Greek wording emphatically uses the language of death, so the seriousness of the judgment should remain.
The point is unmistakable:
Persistent rebellion against Christ is not spiritually harmless.
This teaching has reached a point where Christ himself intervenes.
And again, verse 21 prevents us from interpreting this as impulsive rage.
Christ gave time to repent.
Verse 22 offered repentance even to those participating in Jezebel's works.
Judgment comes after warning and persistent refusal.
Revelation presents grace as abundant.
It never presents grace as permission to rebel indefinitely without consequence.

3. Why Such Severe Judgment?

The severity becomes more understandable when we remember what is at stake.
Jezebel is not merely expressing an unpopular opinion.
She is claiming prophetic authority while leading **Christ's servants** into practices he identifies as unfaithful.
People are being harmed.
Allegiance to Christ is being corrupted.
And the congregation has tolerated it.
We sometimes have difficulty with biblical judgment because we instinctively view judgment only from the perspective of the person being judged.
But there is another perspective:
What about the people being harmed?
If God never confronts evil, then eventually the victims of evil are told that their suffering does not matter.

If God eternally tolerates injustice, exploitation, deception, abuse, and corruption, then evil ultimately receives the final word.
Biblical judgment says otherwise.
God's judgment is frightening because evil is serious.
But God's judgment is also hopeful because:
evil will not be permitted to reign forever.
That theme will become enormously important as Revelation unfolds.

4. "And all the churches shall know"

Notice the audience suddenly becomes larger.
Christ does not say merely:
"Thyatira will know."
He says:
"all the churches shall know."
What happens in Thyatira becomes a lesson for the entire Christian community.
And that probably includes the other six congregations receiving Revelation.
Ephesus needs to hear this.
Smyrna needs to hear this.
Pergamum needs to hear this.
Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea need to hear it.
And because Revelation has been preserved as Scripture, the church in every generation hears it.
Christ's dealings with one congregation teach every congregation something about the Lord of the church.
The churches belong to him.
Their teaching matters to him.
Their conduct matters to him.
Their treatment of people matters to him.
Their faithfulness matters to him.
And their hidden compromises are not hidden from him.

5. "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts"

Here we arrive at what may be the theological center of the entire message to Thyatira.
Christ says:
"I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts."
Now the eyes like a flame of fire in verse 18 become fully understandable.
Those eyes were not decorative imagery.
They told us something about Christ.

He sees beneath appearances.
The KJV's "re**ins and hearts"** reflects the Greek expression literally.
Here "reins" means **kidneys, which the ancient image associates with a person's inner life.**
That sounds peculiar to modern ears, but ancient people commonly associated the internal organs with the deepest dimensions of human thought, emotion, desire, and motivation.
The "heart" represented more than emotion.
The inward parts represented the hidden self.
So Christ is essentially saying:
"I search the deepest places within a human being."
Not merely behavior.
Motivation.
Not merely words.
Intentions.
Not merely reputation.
Character.
Not merely what others believe about us.
What is actually true about us.

6. The God Who Searches the Heart

There is an important Old Testament background here.
The Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly describe **the Lord** as the One who searches human hearts and tests the inward person.
Jeremiah, for example, speaks of the Lord searching the heart and testing the inward being in order to give to each person according to their ways.
That makes Jesus' statement in Revelation especially significant.
The function attributed to God in the Old Testament is here claimed by Christ.
Jesus does not merely say that God searches hearts.
He says:
"I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts."
This is another powerful statement about the identity and authority of Christ.
Verse 18 called him:
"the Son of God."
Verse 23 places him in the divine role of searching the human heart and rendering judgment accordingly.
The Christ speaking to Thyatira is not merely a religious teacher offering moral advice.
He possesses divine knowledge and divine authority.

7. We See Behavior; Christ Sees Motive

This should make every one of us somewhat uncomfortable.

Human beings are remarkably skilled at managing appearances.
We know how to look faithful.
We know how to say the expected things.
We know how to explain our behavior.
We know how to construct narratives in which our motives appear considerably better than they sometimes are.
Christ sees through all of it.
He can distinguish generosity from the desire to be admired.
He can distinguish discernment from judgmentalism.
He can distinguish righteous anger from personal resentment.
He can distinguish patience from cowardice.
He can distinguish tolerance from avoidance.
He can distinguish humility from insecurity.
He can distinguish service offered in love from service performed for recognition.
And he can distinguish genuine repentance from regret over getting caught.
Christ sees what we do, and he sees why we do it.
That is the meaning of the fiery eyes.

8. But the Searching Eyes Are Also Good News

We should not hear this only as a threat.
Remember verse 19.
The same Jesus said:
"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience."
If Christ sees every hidden compromise, he also sees every hidden act of faithfulness.
He sees the prayer nobody hears.
He sees the kindness nobody notices.
He sees the temptation resisted without anyone knowing there was a struggle.
He sees the person who forgives quietly.
He sees the believer who remains faithful when faithfulness costs something.
He sees the pastor who serves faithfully without recognition.
He sees the exhausted caregiver.
He sees the person who gives without telling anyone.
He sees the Christian who is barely holding on but **is still holding on**.
Nothing sinful can hide from Christ.
But neither can anything faithful.
That is why the fiery eyes are both frightening and comforting.
They see truthfully.

9. Selective Moral Vision Becomes Impossible

Verse 23 also returns us to the problem we discussed earlier.
Human beings often see sin selectively.
We notice the failures that offend us personally.
We overlook the failures we understand.
We condemn sins associated with people outside our group while finding explanations for similar failures among people inside it.
Christ does not.
He searches **every** mind and **every** heart.
The deacon does not receive an exemption because he is influential.
The pastor does not receive an exemption because he preaches well.
The wealthy donor does not receive an exemption because the church needs the contribution.
The longtime member does not receive an exemption because the family helped build the church.
And the outsider is not judged more harshly merely because that person's failures are unfamiliar to us.
The eyes of Christ recognize no convenient double standard.
That should profoundly affect the moral witness of the church.
Before pointing toward someone else and saying:
"Christ sees what you are doing,"
we should remember:
Christ sees what I am doing too.
And more than that:
He sees why.

10. "I will give unto every one of you"

Then Christ makes the judgment personal:
"I will give unto every one of you…"
Not merely to the congregation collectively.
Each.
There is individual responsibility within the community.
This is particularly important in Thyatira because not everyone has followed Jezebel.
Verse 24 will address:
"the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine."
Christ distinguishes among them.
He does not condemn an entire congregation indiscriminately because some within it have compromised.
He knows who taught.
He knows who followed.
He knows who resisted.
He knows who tolerated.

He knows who repented.
He knows who remained faithful.
The fiery eyes see individuals within the crowd.
That is both sobering and reassuring.
We cannot hide behind the faithfulness of the group.
But neither are we automatically condemned by the failures of others.
Christ knows the difference.

11. “According to your works”

This phrase can make Christians nervous because it sounds as though salvation is being earned by works.
But that is not the point.
Throughout the New Testament, salvation is God's gift of grace.
Yet the New Testament also consistently teaches that our actions reveal something about the reality and direction of our lives.
That should sound familiar after our journey through James.
Works do not purchase grace.
But works **reveal allegiance**.
Jesus is evaluating the fruit of people's lives.
Jezebel's teaching has produced one kind of fruit.
The faithful believers in Thyatira are producing another:
love, faith, service, and endurance.
Christ sees both.
And he judges truthfully.
Grace therefore does not make our lives meaningless.
Quite the opposite.
Because we belong to Christ, how we live matters.

12. Christ Knows the Difference

There is something deeply pastoral in the precision of Christ's judgment.
We often make sweeping judgments.
Christ does not.
We say:
“That church is corrupt.”
Christ sees the faithful believer sitting quietly in the third pew.
We say:
“Those people are all the same.”
Christ sees every heart individually.
We see categories.
Christ sees persons.
We see reputation.
Christ sees reality.
We see a moment.
Christ sees the entire journey.

That means his judgment is never based upon incomplete evidence.
There are no missing facts.
No misunderstood motives.
No false testimony.
No favoritism.
No prejudice.
No political pressure.
No social influence.
No manipulation.
No one can deceive the Judge because the Judge already knows the heart.
The One who judges perfectly is the One who sees perfectly.

Pastoral Reflection

Being completely known is one of humanity's deepest fears.
We spend enormous energy deciding what other people are allowed to see.
We show our strengths.
We conceal our insecurities.
We explain our failures.
We protect our reputations.
We keep some rooms within ourselves locked.
Then Christ says: **"I search minds and hearts."**
There is no locked room.
Initially that may sound terrifying.
But consider the alternative.
Would we rather be judged by someone who only knows part of the story?
Christ knows the whole story.
He knows where we failed.
But he also knows how hard we fought.
He knows the moment we compromised.
But he also knows the moment we turned around.
He knows what others accused us of.
But he knows whether the accusation was true.
He knows the good deed.
And he knows whether anyone ever thanked us for it.
To be completely known by Christ means there is nowhere to hide.
But it also means there is **nothing we ever need to explain to him because he misunderstood us.**
He already knows.
That makes his judgment searching.
But it also makes his judgment safe.
Christ sees truthfully.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps we spend too much time asking:
“What do people think of me?”
Reputation matters to us because human beings live in community.
But reputation is not the same as character.
Reputation is what people believe we are.
Character is what remains when nobody is watching.
And Christ sees both.
One day every carefully managed appearance disappears before the simple declaration:
“I search minds and hearts.”
That need not lead us into fearful introspection.
It can lead us into freedom.
We no longer have to pretend before Christ.
There is little point.
He already knows.
We can pray:
“Lord, here is the resentment.”
“Here is the fear.”
“Here is the pride.”
“Here is the temptation.”
“Here is the doubt.”
“Here is the compromise.”
“Here is the part of myself I do not want anyone else to see.”
And the astonishing truth of the gospel is that the One who already sees those things is also the One who calls us to repentance, forgives, restores, and makes us new.
The fiery eyes do not merely expose.
They belong to the Savior.

Ask Yourself This

If Christ already sees the deepest motives of my mind and heart, what am I still trying to hide, excuse, or manage—and what freedom might come from simply bringing it honestly before the One who already knows?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:24

“But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.”
— Revelation 2:24, KJV

After the severity of the preceding verses, the tone changes dramatically.
Christ has spoken about Jezebel.
He has spoken about those who follow her.
He has warned of judgment.
He has declared that he searches minds and hearts.
Now he turns toward another group:
“the rest in Thyatira.”
They have been there throughout the entire message.
They heard the commendation.
They heard the rebuke.
They heard the warning.
Perhaps some of them wondered whether Christ's condemnation included them.
Now he speaks directly to them.
And his words demonstrate something we encountered in verse 23:
Christ knows the difference.

1. “But unto you I say, and unto the rest”

This phrase is extraordinarily important.
The church at Thyatira has a serious problem.
But not everyone within the church has embraced it.
Some believers have resisted Jezebel's teaching.
They have apparently remained faithful despite pressure from within the congregation and probably from the surrounding culture as well.
Christ sees them.
That should caution us against sweeping judgments about churches, denominations, communities, and groups of people.
We often speak collectively:
“That church…”
“Those Christians…”
“That denomination…”
“That generation…”
“Those people…”
Christ is more precise.
He sees individuals.

There may be serious compromise within a congregation while faithful believers remain within it.
There may be institutional failure while individuals continue serving Christ sincerely.
There may be false teaching from influential voices while quiet Christians refuse to follow it.
Christ knows who is who.
The eyes like a flame of fire do not merely expose guilt.
They also recognize innocence where others might assume guilt.

2. Faithful in a Compromised Environment

We should consider how difficult the position of these believers may have been.
They were not simply resisting pressures outside the church.
They were resisting teaching **inside** it.
That can be much harder.
When pressure comes from the surrounding culture, Christians expect disagreement.
But when compromise is taught by someone claiming spiritual authority within the church, resistance becomes more complicated.
Perhaps these believers were told they were rigid.
Perhaps they were accused of being judgmental.
Perhaps they were told they did not understand Christian freedom.
Perhaps they were made to feel spiritually immature because they would not accept Jezebel's teaching.
Perhaps they were simply tired of the controversy.
We do not know.
But we know this:
They did not hold her teaching.
And Christ noticed.
There is a quiet heroism in that.
They apparently did not overthrow Jezebel.
They did not solve every problem in the congregation.
They did not eliminate every source of compromise.
They simply refused to surrender their own allegiance to Christ.
Sometimes that is what faithfulness looks like.

3. “As many as have not this doctrine”

Notice the contrast with the previous verses.
Jezebel teaches.
Some follow.
But these believers **“have not this doctrine.”**
They have listened and rejected it.
That tells us something important about Christian discernment.

Not every teaching offered within a church must be accepted simply because it comes from someone claiming spiritual authority.
Jezebel **“calleth herself a prophetess.”**
That claim does not make her teaching true.
Christ's people have a responsibility to discern.
We are not called to believe something merely because a pastor says it.
Or a teacher.
Or a denomination.
Or an author.
Or a television preacher.
Or a popular Christian personality.
Or even because someone confidently says:
“God told me.”
Every teacher remains beneath the authority of Christ.
Christian discernment therefore asks:
Does this teaching lead toward greater faithfulness to Jesus, or does it provide justification for moving away from him?
The faithful believers at Thyatira have apparently asked that question.
And they have refused the teaching.

4. “The depths of Satan”

Then comes one of the more intriguing expressions in the seven messages: **“the depths of Satan.”**
What exactly does this mean?
We should immediately acknowledge that we cannot reconstruct Jezebel's complete theology from this phrase.
Several possibilities have been proposed.
Perhaps Jezebel and her followers claimed to possess special spiritual knowledge, available only to those who had reached the so-called “depths.”
Perhaps they taught that mature Christians could participate in pagan practices without being spiritually harmed.
Perhaps they believed that one could explore or experience evil without being overcome by it.
Perhaps the phrase is Christ's ironic description of teaching that its followers themselves called **“depths.”**
We cannot know with certainty.
And therefore we should resist building an elaborate theology upon a phrase Revelation leaves unexplained.
But Christ's evaluation is unmistakable.
Whatever was being advertised as spiritual depth was actually leading people **away from faithfulness to him**.
What looked deep was spiritually destructive.

5. The Attraction of “Deeper” Teaching

There is a perennial temptation within Christianity to become fascinated with teachings presented as hidden, advanced, secret, or available only to the spiritually enlightened.

Ordinary Christianity begins to seem too simple.

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

Trust Christ.

Serve others.

Forgive.

Pray.

Practice mercy.

Pursue holiness.

Endure faithfully.

Those things can begin to sound almost disappointingly ordinary.

Then someone arrives offering:

“deeper truth.”

Secret knowledge.

Hidden meanings.

Special revelations.

Codes nobody else has discovered.

Prophetic insights available only to a select group.

Suddenly ordinary believers are made to feel that they possess an inferior form of Christianity.

Revelation itself has probably suffered from this temptation as much as any biblical book.

People have repeatedly approached it as though its purpose were to provide secret information for those clever enough to decode it.

But Revelation continually brings us back to something far simpler:

Remain faithful to Jesus.

Perhaps spiritual depth is not primarily discovering something nobody else knows.

Perhaps spiritual depth is becoming increasingly faithful to what Christ has already made clear.

6. Knowledge That Produces Pride

There is another danger associated with supposed spiritual depth.

Knowledge can become a source of pride.

A person begins thinking:

“I understand things ordinary Christians do not.”

That can create spiritual elitism.

Instead of knowledge producing humility, it produces superiority.

Instead of drawing believers toward Christ, it draws attention toward the person claiming special insight.
That is always dangerous.
True Christian maturity should make us increasingly aware of our dependence upon grace.
The closer we come to Christ, the less reason we have to boast about ourselves.
Paul expressed the principle well:
"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."
That does not mean knowledge is unimportant.
Christian faith is not anti-intellectual.
But knowledge separated from love and obedience can become spiritually destructive.
The question is not merely:
"How deep is this teaching?"
The better question is:
"Where does it lead?"
Does it produce love?
Faith?
Service?
Endurance?
Humility?
Holiness?
Greater allegiance to Christ?
Or does it produce pride, compromise, division, and fascination with the teacher?
Jesus judges teaching by its relationship to truth and by the fruit it produces.

7. Not Everything Mysterious Is Profound

There is an important distinction between **mystery** and **confusion**.
Christian faith contains genuine mysteries.
The nature of God.
The incarnation.
Providence and human freedom.
The relationship between eternity and time.
The final purposes of God.
There are realities larger than our ability to comprehend completely.
But something is not automatically profound merely because it is complicated.
And something is not spiritually deep merely because few people understand it.
Sometimes the deepest Christian truths are remarkably simple.

God loves.
Christ saves.
Grace forgives.
Truth matters.
Love serves.
Faith endures.
We can spend a lifetime discovering the depth contained within those simple truths.

8. Revelation and the Temptation of Secret Knowledge

This warning is particularly appropriate while studying Revelation.
Few biblical books attract more claims of secret knowledge.
Every generation seems to produce someone who has finally discovered the hidden key.
A political leader becomes a prophetic figure.
A technological development becomes the mark of the beast.
A war becomes the final battle.
A date becomes the predicted end.
Numbers are calculated.
Names are decoded.
Headlines are placed beside verses.
And the person explaining it all may sound extraordinarily knowledgeable.
But Revelation itself repeatedly emphasizes something much less sensational:
Faithfulness.
The saints endure.
The witnesses testify.
The martyrs remain faithful.
The churches hold fast.
The Lamb conquers.
Christ returns.
God makes all things new.
That is the great movement of the book.
The deepest message of Revelation may therefore be considerably simpler than many supposed secret interpretations:
Follow the Lamb and do not let go.
That is exactly what Christ is about to tell Thyatira.

9. “I will put upon you none other burden”

Then comes one of the gentlest statements in the entire message:
“I will put upon you none other burden.”

These believers are already carrying enough.
They live within a culture where faithfulness may be costly.
They belong to a congregation experiencing internal conflict.
They are resisting an influential teacher.
They may be facing economic and social pressure.
Christ does not respond by giving them a complicated new spiritual program.
He says:
“I will put upon you none other burden.”
There is compassion in those words.
Jesus knows what they are carrying.
He does not unnecessarily add to it.
This reminds us of something important about discipleship.
Christ calls us to obedience.
Sometimes obedience is costly.
But Jesus is not interested in making Christian life unnecessarily complicated.
Human religion often adds burdens.
More rules.
More expectations.
More measurements.
More requirements.
More reasons to feel inadequate.
Christ looks at these weary, faithful believers and says:
“No additional burden.”
That sounds remarkably like the Jesus who said:
“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

10. A Possible Echo of Acts 15

Some interpreters hear an echo here of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.
When Gentile believers were being brought into the church, the apostles resisted placing unnecessary burdens upon them.
The council's letter spoke of laying upon Gentile believers **“no further burden”** beyond certain necessary things, including abstaining from food sacrificed to idols and from sexual immorality.
Those are precisely the two practices mentioned in Revelation 2:20.
The verbal and thematic resemblance is intriguing.
We should probably avoid insisting that John is deliberately quoting Acts 15.
But the parallel is certainly worth noticing.
In both cases the principle is similar:
Christian freedom does not mean moral chaos.

Yet neither should the church burden believers with unnecessary religious requirements.
There are boundaries necessary for faithfulness.
Beyond those, do not make discipleship heavier than Christ makes it.

11. Sometimes Faithfulness Means Simply Refusing to Move

Perhaps the most beautiful thing about these believers is what Christ does **not** ask them to do.
He does not tell them to become famous.
He does not tell them to accomplish something spectacular.
He does not tell them to discover deeper mysteries.
He does not tell them to win the culture.
He does not even tell them to fix everything wrong with Thyatira.
Verse 25 will give them a remarkably simple instruction:
“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
Sometimes endurance is not dramatic.
Sometimes faithfulness means simply refusing to let go.
The culture moves.
You remain with Christ.
Popular teaching changes.
You remain with Christ.
People around you compromise.
You remain with Christ.
You become tired.
You remain with Christ.
You do not understand everything happening around you.
You remain with Christ.
That may not look impressive.
But Revelation calls it **conquering**.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when faithful Christians become exhausted because they believe they must fix everything around them.
Fix the church.
Fix the denomination.
Fix the culture.
Fix everyone else's theology.
Fix every moral problem.
Fix every controversy.
But perhaps Christ sometimes says something much simpler:
“I will put upon you none other burden.”
You are not the Savior.

Jesus is.
You are not responsible for changing every heart.
You cannot.
You are not responsible for knowing every answer.
You won't.
You are not responsible for solving every problem within the church.
You may not be able to.
But you are responsible for your own faithfulness to Christ.
There can be enormous freedom in recognizing that distinction.
The believers in Thyatira could not control Jezebel.
They could not control those who followed her.
But they could decide:
“I will not follow.”
And Christ saw them.
Sometimes the most faithful thing a Christian can do is quietly say:
“Whatever others decide, I am staying with Jesus.”

Something Worth Pondering

We often imagine spiritual maturity as accumulating more.
More knowledge.
More experiences.
More insight.
More activity.
More responsibility.
But perhaps sometimes maturity is learning what we can finally put down.
The need to impress.
The need to understand everything.
The need to correct everyone.
The need to carry responsibilities Christ never gave us.
The need to chase every supposed “deep” teaching.
The believers at Thyatira are surrounded by spiritual complexity.
Christ gives them simplicity.
You rejected the false teaching.
I am not giving you another burden.
And next:
Hold fast.
Perhaps the Christian life is deeper than we imagine precisely because its center is so simple.
Know Christ.
Trust Christ.
Love others.
Serve faithfully.

Repent when necessary.
Endure when life becomes difficult.
And when everything around you seems to be shifting:
Hold fast to Jesus.

Ask Yourself This

Am I carrying spiritual burdens Christ never asked me to carry—or chasing "deeper" things that distract me from the simple calling to know Christ, remain faithful to him, and hold fast to what he has already given me?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:25

“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
— Revelation 2:25, KJV

There are moments when the Christian life seems enormously complicated.
Questions arise.
Cultures change.
Churches struggle.
Teachers disagree.
New ideas appear.
Old assumptions are challenged.
Faithful people sometimes find themselves wondering what they are supposed to do next.
Christ's answer to the believers at Thyatira is remarkably simple:
“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
He does not give them a new strategy.
He does not reveal another mystery.
He does not ask them to defeat Jezebel themselves.
He does not require them to master the so-called depths.
He gives them one responsibility:
Hold fast.
And he gives them one horizon:
Until I come.
Between those two phrases lies much of the Christian life.

1. The Burden Christ Gives

Read this command alongside the promise immediately before it.
Christ has promised to put no other burden on them.
Verse 24 gives us His words.
“I will put upon you none other burden.”
Then:
“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
There is pastoral tenderness in that instruction.
These believers are already living under pressure.
They have resisted false teaching.
They have refused compromise.
They may be experiencing economic and social consequences for their convictions.
They are members of a congregation experiencing serious internal conflict.

Christ does not add another complicated set of requirements.
He simplifies their calling.
Only hold fast.
Sometimes religion makes faithfulness more complicated than Jesus does.
We create programs.
Systems.
Measurements.
Expectations.
Rules.
Strategies.
And some of those things may be useful.
But none of them is the center.
Christ brings these believers back to the center.
Do not let go of what I have already given you.

2. "Hold Fast"

The expression carries the idea of retaining something firmly, keeping possession of it, refusing to release it.
The believers already possess something worth keeping.
They do not need Jezebel's supposedly deeper teaching.
They do not need some new spiritual secret.
They need to keep what they already have.
What do they have?
Verse 19 gives us a good answer:
Love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
And above all, they have **Christ**.
They know the gospel.
They belong to the Son of God.
They have learned what faithfulness looks like.
Now Jesus says:
Keep it.
That sounds almost too simple.
But holding fast becomes difficult when everything around us is pulling in another direction.

3. Holding Fast Is Not Standing Still

There is an important distinction here.
Holding fast does not mean refusing all change.
Christians sometimes confuse faithfulness with nostalgia.

We may imagine that holding fast means preserving every tradition, custom, method, worship style, institutional structure, or cultural habit we inherited.
But Christ does not say:
"Never change anything."
Remember verse 19.
Christ says of their **works, "the last to be more than the first."**
They are growing.
Growth requires change.
Christian maturity means becoming more loving, more faithful, more willing to serve, and more capable of endurance.
So what remains unchanged?
Our allegiance to Christ.
Methods may change.
Cultures certainly change.
Church structures change.
Music changes.
Technology changes.
Language changes.
Ministries change.
Human traditions change.
But the One to whom the church belongs does not.
Holding fast therefore does not mean gripping the past.
It means gripping **Christ** while moving faithfully into the future.

4. Faithfulness Sometimes Means Refusing to Move

And yet there are moments when faithfulness does require us to stand still.
Not because we are stubborn.
Not because we fear change.
But because we have reached a point beyond which movement would require abandoning something Christ has made clear.
The surrounding culture may say:
Move.
Popular opinion may say:
Move.
Economic pressure may say:
Move.
Influential voices within the church may say:
Move.
Fear may say:
Move.

Convenience may say:
Move.
And sometimes Christ says:
“Hold fast.”
There is a difference between stubbornness and steadfastness.
Stubbornness refuses to move because **I must be right**.
Steadfastness refuses to move because **Christ is Lord**.
That distinction requires humility.
We must continually ask whether we are actually holding fast to Christ or merely holding fast to our own preferences.

5. You Cannot Hold Fast to Everything

There is another implication in Christ's command.
To hold fast to one thing, we may need to release another.
We cannot cling equally to Christ and to every competing loyalty.
The believers in Thyatira may have discovered this painfully.
Perhaps they could not hold tightly to both Christ and complete acceptance within the trade guild.
Perhaps they could not hold Christ and every economic opportunity.
Perhaps they could not hold Christ and Jezebel's teaching.
Perhaps they could not hold Christ and the approval of everyone around them.
Eventually allegiance requires choices.
That remains true.
We may want Christ **and** complete control.
Christ **and** universal approval.
Christ **and** comfortable compromise.
Christ **and** resentment.
Christ **and** pride.
Christ **and** whatever else we are unwilling to surrender.
But sometimes Jesus' command to **hold fast** forces another question:
What do I need to let go of so that I can keep holding on to him?

6. Endurance Is Active

The command to hold fast might sound passive.
It is not.
Anyone who has ever held onto something while another force tried to pull it away understands that holding fast requires effort.
Endurance is active faithfulness under pressure.
It means continuing to trust when doubt presses against us.
Continuing to love when love is difficult.
Continuing to serve when nobody notices.
Continuing to forgive when resentment would be easier.
Continuing to pray when God seems quiet.

Continuing to obey when obedience costs something.
Continuing to hope when circumstances offer little encouragement.
Continuing to follow Christ when the surrounding world offers easier alternatives.
That is not passivity.
That is perseverance.

7. Sometimes Victory Looks Like Not Letting Go

We naturally think of victory as advancement.
Winning.
Achieving.
Overcoming obstacles.
Accomplishing something visible.
Revelation will eventually redefine victory.
The Lamb conquers through apparent defeat.
The martyrs conquer by remaining faithful.
The saints conquer through endurance.
The churches conquer by refusing allegiance to powers opposed to Christ.
That means there are seasons when victory looks remarkably unimpressive from the outside.
You are still praying.
Still believing.
Still serving.
Still loving.
Still showing up.
Still trusting.
Still holding on.
And perhaps you think:
“I haven't accomplished very much.”
Christ may see something entirely different.
He may see:
“You did not let go.”
And in Revelation, that is victory.

8. “That which ye have”

Jesus does not say:
“Hold fast to what you wish you had.”
He says:
“Hold that fast which thou hast.”
There is something wonderfully grounding about that.
Christ does not ask these believers to become someone else.

They already possess what they need for faithfulness.
They have love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
They have the truth they received.
They have one another.
They have Christ.
Sometimes Christians become discouraged because we compare our faith with someone else's.
Someone knows more Scripture.
Someone prays more eloquently.
Someone seems more spiritually confident.
Someone has a more dramatic testimony.
Someone has greater gifts.
Someone appears to accomplish more.
Christ does not tell Thyatira to become another church.
He says:
"Hold that fast which thou hast."
Faithfulness begins with what Christ has already entrusted to us.

9. "Till I come"

Then Christ gives endurance its horizon:
"till I come."
He does not say:
"Hold fast forever with no end in sight."
There is a destination.
There is an arrival.
There is a Person coming.
That changes endurance.
Christian endurance is not endless survival.
It is waiting.
We endure because history is moving somewhere.
We hold fast because Christ has promised to return.
Revelation's hope is therefore not merely:
"Things will eventually improve."
Its hope is:
"Jesus is coming."
The Christian future is ultimately personal.
Our hope is not merely a better circumstance.
Our hope is Christ.

10. The Word "Till"

Perhaps the most hopeful word in the verse is:

“Till.”
Until means suffering has a boundary.
Until means waiting has an ending.
Until means darkness does not last forever.
“Till” gives their endurance a horizon.
Until means there is something on the other side.
Hold fast until I come.
There will be days when faith feels easy.
Hold fast.
There will be days when faith feels costly.
Hold fast.
There will be seasons when God seems very near.
Hold fast.
There may be seasons when God seems silent.
Hold fast.
There will be moments of clarity.
Hold fast.
There will be moments when nothing makes sense.
Hold fast.
Not forever.
Until.

11. Endurance Is Relational

There is something else we should notice.
Christ does not simply say:
“Hold fast until everything gets better.”
He says:
“till I come.”
The object of Christian hope is not merely improved circumstances.
It is reunion with Christ.
That means endurance is relational.
We hold fast because we trust **someone**.
This is not merely determination.
It is faith.
A person can endure through sheer stubbornness.
Christian endurance is different.
It says:
“I do not know how this will unfold, but I know who holds the future.”
Revelation repeatedly draws our eyes away from circumstances and toward Christ.
The circumstances may be frightening.
The empire may appear powerful.

The beasts will appear terrifying.
Babylon will appear magnificent.
The saints may appear defeated.
But appearances do not determine the end of the story.
The Lamb does.

12. When Faith Must Endure

This verse brings us directly to the heart of our journey through Revelation.

When faith must endure, hold fast.

Not because suffering is pleasant.
Not because questions are unimportant.
Not because Christians should ignore injustice.
Not because change is always wrong.
Not because fear is imaginary.
Hold fast because **Christ is coming**.
The Christian life is lived between two realities:
Christ has come.
Christ will come again.
Between those two events lies the life of faith.
And sometimes that life requires endurance.
We do not always conquer by changing the circumstances.
Sometimes we conquer by refusing to allow the circumstances to change our allegiance.
That may be one of Revelation's most important lessons.

13. Holding Fast in Ordinary Life

Most Christians will never face the dramatic circumstances depicted later in Revelation.
But nearly every Christian will eventually encounter a moment when faith must endure.
A diagnosis.
A funeral.
A broken relationship.
A disappointment.
A prayer that seems unanswered.
A child who wanders.
A financial crisis.
A church conflict.
A season of doubt.
A betrayal.
A loneliness nobody else understands.
A morning when getting out of bed requires more faith than anyone realizes.

Those moments rarely feel heroic.
But perhaps heaven sees them differently.
The person who whispers:
“Lord, I still trust you.”
may be practicing the very endurance Revelation celebrates.
Holding fast often happens quietly.
There may be no applause.
No dramatic testimony.
No visible victory.
Just a tired believer refusing to let go of Christ.
And Jesus says:
“I know.”

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when we want Christ to explain everything.
Why did this happen?
Why hasn't this prayer been answered?
Why did that door close?
Why did someone we trusted disappoint us?
Why does obedience sometimes seem to make life harder rather than easier?
Sometimes answers come.
Sometimes they do not.
And in those moments Christ may give us something other than an explanation.
He gives us himself.
“Hold fast till I come.”
That does not dismiss our questions.
It gives our questions somewhere to rest.
We do not have to understand everything in order to remain faithful.
We do not have to know tomorrow in order to trust Christ today.
Sometimes the prayer of endurance is not complicated.
“Lord, I don't understand, but I'm still here.”
Perhaps that is one of the purest prayers faith can offer.
And Christ sees it.
The One whose eyes are like a flame of fire knows exactly how difficult holding on has become.
He does not say:
“Why aren't you stronger?”
He says:
“Hold fast.”
Sometimes that is enough.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps we have misunderstood what it means to conquer.
We imagine conquering means defeating the problem.
Fixing the situation.
Winning the argument.
Changing the culture.
Removing the obstacle.
Escaping the suffering.
But what if sometimes the victory Christ asks of us is much simpler?
Do not let go.
The storm may continue.
Hold fast.
The question may remain unanswered.
Hold fast.
The situation may not change today.
Hold fast.
You may feel weaker than you once did.
Hold fast.
Because Christian endurance is not ultimately measured by how tightly we can hold Christ.
It rests upon the deeper truth that **Christ is also holding us**.
The believers at Thyatira are commanded to hold fast.
But the command comes from the Son of God who walks among his churches, sees their faithfulness, knows their suffering, and promises to return.
Our grip may sometimes feel weak.
His is not.
And perhaps that is why tired believers can keep going.
We hold fast because the One to whom we cling has never let go of us.

Ask Yourself This

When faith becomes difficult and I cannot change the circumstances or understand what God is doing, can I trust Christ enough simply to hold fast—and what might I need to release so that I can keep holding on to him until he comes?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:26

“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:”
— Revelation 2:26, KJV

Verse 25 gave the faithful believers at Thyatira their immediate calling:
“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
Verse 26 tells them where that endurance leads.
“To him that overcometh…”
There is that word again.
Conquers.
Overcomes.
Prevails.
But by now we should begin recognizing that Revelation is quietly redefining what those words mean.
The believers at Thyatira do not appear powerful.
They live within a culture that pressures them.
Some may face economic consequences because of their faith.
False teaching has entered their congregation.
They are told not to compromise.
They are told simply to hold fast.
And Jesus looks at these apparently ordinary, pressured believers and calls what they are doing:
conquering.
That changes everything.

1. “To him that overcometh”

Each of the seven messages contains a promise **“To him that overcometh”** or **“To him that overcometh.”**
The expression comes from the Greek verb *nikaō*, meaning to conquer, overcome, prevail, or gain victory.
It is the word from which the Greek name **Nikē—Nike, “victory”**—comes.
To first-century ears, conquest would naturally suggest power.
Armies conquered.
Emperors conquered.
Nations conquered.
Rome conquered.
The empire surrounding these churches knew exactly what worldly conquest looked like.
Military victories were celebrated.

Generals were honored.
Emperors proclaimed their power.
Defeated nations became subjects.
Rome appeared to be the conqueror.
Then Revelation does something extraordinary.
It takes the language of conquest and places it in the hands of people who appear to have almost no earthly power.
Christians.
Some poor.
Some persecuted.
Some excluded.
Some economically pressured.
Some imprisoned.
Some eventually killed.
And Jesus calls **them** conquerors.
Why?
Because Revelation measures victory differently.

2. Revelation Redefines Victory

The world's definition of victory usually involves defeating someone else.
Christ's definition begins with remaining faithful to him.
The believers in Thyatira conquer by refusing Jezebel's teaching.
Smyrna conquers by remaining faithful even unto death.
Pergamum conquers by refusing compromise.
Ephesus conquers by returning to its first love.
Later in Revelation, believers conquer not through military strength but through allegiance to the Lamb.
That means Revelation's conquerors may sometimes look defeated by ordinary human standards.
They may lose opportunities.
They may lose status.
They may lose possessions.
Some may even lose their lives.
And yet Christ says:
They conquered.
That is one of Revelation's great reversals.
The world may pronounce a believer defeated at precisely the moment heaven declares that believer victorious.

3. The Lamb Shows Us What Conquering Means

We cannot understand Christian conquest without looking at Christ himself.
Revelation will introduce Jesus repeatedly as the conquering Lamb.
And there is an apparent contradiction in that image.
A lion conquers.
A warrior conquers.
An army conquers.
But a **lamb?**
Especially a Lamb who has been slain?
Yet that is exactly the point.
Christ conquers not by imitating the violent powers of the world but through sacrificial faithfulness, obedience, death, resurrection, and the triumph of God.
The cross looked like defeat.
Rome knew what crucifixion meant.
It was public humiliation.
The empire's message was unmistakable:
Rome wins. You lose.
Then came Easter.
And God overturned the verdict.
The cross therefore becomes the ultimate demonstration that appearances can lie.
What looks like defeat may become God's victory.
What looks weak may reveal divine strength.
What appears finished may only be beginning.
The followers of the Lamb conquer in the same pattern.
Not by becoming beasts themselves.
Not by mastering the world's methods of domination.
But by remaining faithful to the Lamb.

4. Conquering Is Endurance

Verse 26 itself tells us what conquering means:
“and keepeth my works unto the end.”
That phrase interprets the word **conquers**.
The conqueror is the one who continues.
The one who remains.
The one who endures.
The one who refuses to abandon Christ.
This connects directly with verse 25:
“Hold fast till I come.”

Holding fast is conquering.
Endurance is victory.
Faithfulness is triumph.
That is profoundly important for the message of Revelation.
Christians sometimes approach this book expecting to discover how God will eventually crush his enemies.
But Revelation spends enormous energy teaching Christians how **not to become unfaithful while waiting for Christ to set things right**.
The central question is not:
“Can you identify every symbol?”
It is:
“Will you remain faithful to the Lamb?”

5. “Keepeth my works”

There is an interesting contrast here with Jezebel.
Verse 22 spoke of:
“their deeds.”
Verse 26 speaks of:
“my works.”
Two ways of living stand before the church.
The deeds of those who follow Jezebel.
Christ's works.
The believers must choose which pattern will shape their lives.
This reminds us that Christian faithfulness is not merely avoiding certain sins.
It is actively living according to the way of Christ.
Love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
Those were already visible in verse 19.
Christ is not merely saying:
“Don't follow Jezebel.”
He is saying:
“Continue following me.”
Christian holiness is therefore not simply a life defined by what we refuse.
It is a life defined by **whom we follow**.
We do not merely turn away from something.
We turn toward Christ.

6. “Unto the end”

Then comes another endurance phrase:
“unto the end.”

Not temporarily.
Not when convenient.
Not until the pressure becomes uncomfortable.
Not until a better opportunity appears.
To the end.
That does not mean flawless performance.
We have already seen the importance of repentance.
Christians stumble.
Christians fail.
Christians sometimes wander.
Faithfulness does not mean never falling.
It means continuing to return to Christ.
The direction of the life remains toward him.
There is a great difference between:
"I fell."
and:
"I quit."
Revelation repeatedly calls believers not to quit.
Get up.
Repent.
Return.
Hold fast.
Continue.
Endure.
Follow the Lamb.
To the end.

7. The Long Obedience

There is something deeply unspectacular about Christian endurance.
We often admire dramatic moments of faith.
And rightly so.
But most Christian faithfulness is accumulated through thousands of ordinary decisions.
Pray again.
Forgive again.
Serve again.
Trust again.
Resist temptation again.
Tell the truth again.
Show compassion again.
Return to worship again.
Open Scripture again.
Choose integrity again.

Get up after failure again.
Hold fast again.
One day becomes another.
One year becomes another.
And eventually a life has been lived.
That is endurance.
There may be no dramatic moment when someone says:
“Today I conquered.”
But Christ sees the whole journey and says:
“You continued to the end.”
Perhaps that is one of the greatest things that could ever be said of a Christian life.

8. “Will I give power over the nations”

Then the verse takes an unexpected turn.
To these apparently powerless believers Christ promises:
“Will I give power over the nations.”
That would have sounded astonishing in the Roman world.
The nations possessed authority over them.
Rome possessed authority.
Local officials possessed authority.
Economic institutions possessed authority.
Guilds may have possessed practical authority over whether believers could successfully practice their trades.
Christians seemed to possess very little.
Jesus says:
That is not the final arrangement.
The people who appear powerless now will share in Christ's reign.
The world they cannot control does not belong ultimately to Caesar.
It belongs to Christ.
And those who remain faithful to Christ will participate in his kingdom.

9. Authority Must Be Understood Through Christ

But we must be extremely careful here.
“Power over the nations” has sometimes been interpreted as justification for Christians seeking political domination.
That is particularly dangerous because Revelation itself warns repeatedly about the corrupting nature of worldly power.
We cannot follow the Lamb by becoming the beast.
Christian authority must always be understood through the character of the One who gives it.
Who gives this authority?

Jesus.
And how did Jesus exercise authority?
He washed feet.
He welcomed children.
He touched lepers.
He ate with sinners.
He confronted hypocrisy.
He defended the vulnerable.
He forgave enemies.
He laid down his life.
He told his disciples that rulers of the nations **"lord it over"** others and then said:
"It will not be so among you."
Therefore any Christian interpretation of authority that produces domination, cruelty, pride, coercion, or the desire to control others has already departed from the pattern of Christ.
The Lamb's authority looks different from Caesar's authority.

10. We Must Not Become What We Oppose

This will become increasingly important as Revelation unfolds.
The book will introduce terrifying images of political, economic, and religious power.
Beasts.
Babylon.
Kings.
Merchants.
Armies.
Systems that demand allegiance.
Christians are called to resist those powers.
But there is always a danger in resistance:
We can begin resembling what we oppose.
We can become so determined to defeat evil that we adopt evil's methods.
We can become so determined to gain influence that power becomes more important than faithfulness.
We can become so determined to win that we forget how the Lamb conquered.
Revelation will not permit that.
The saints conquer by remaining faithful.
They follow the Lamb.
Their victory must therefore look like **his** victory.

11. The Promise Is Not "Take Authority"

Notice something else.

Christ does not tell the believers:
“Go seize authority over the nations.”
He says:
“I will give…”
That distinction is enormous.
The authority is a **gift from Christ**, not something the church is commanded to seize for itself.
The faithful believers at Thyatira are not told to overthrow local government.
They are not instructed to capture cultural institutions.
They are not told to establish Christian control over the city.
They are told:
Hold fast.
Continue my works.
Endure to the end.
And Christ will take care of the kingdom.
That removes a tremendous temptation from the church.
Our calling is not to manufacture the kingdom through human power.
Our calling is to remain faithful to the King.

12. Psalm 2 Begins to Appear

Verse 26 cannot be separated from verses 27–28.
The promise of authority over the nations introduces language from **Psalm 2**, one of the great royal and messianic psalms.
Psalm 2 portrays the nations raging against the Lord and his anointed.
God ultimately establishes his chosen king and gives the nations as his inheritance.
Revelation applies that royal imagery to Christ.
But astonishingly, Christ now shares his victory with those who conquer.
The believers who share Christ's suffering will also share his reign.
The ones who appear insignificant in Thyatira are being told:
Your present circumstances do not reveal your ultimate identity.
You belong to the King.

13. The Kingdom Reverses Appearances

This promise would have been especially powerful to Christians who felt marginalized.
The world may have looked at them and seen:
Unimportant people.
Troublemakers.
Religious outsiders.
Economic inconveniences.
People unwilling to participate fully in civic life.
Christ looked at them and saw:

future participants in his kingdom.
That is Revelation again.
Earth sees one thing.
Heaven sees another.
Earth sees weakness.
Heaven sees endurance.
Earth sees defeat.
Heaven sees conquest.
Earth sees people without authority.
Christ sees people who will share his reign.
We must learn to see with heaven's eyes.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us want to know whether our lives matter.
We may never possess significant authority.
We may never become famous.
We may never lead large organizations.
We may never have a platform.
History may never record our names.
But Revelation asks a different question.
Were you faithful?
Did you love?
Did you believe?
Did you serve?
Did you endure?
Did you continue Christ's works?
Did you hold fast?
Did you finish?
Those things may seem small in a world fascinated by influence.
Christ does not think they are small.
The believer who quietly remains faithful to the end participates in the victory of Christ.
That means no faithful Christian life is insignificant.
Not the quiet grandmother praying for her family.
Not the worker refusing dishonesty.
Not the caregiver serving someone who cannot repay them.
Not the pastor faithfully serving a small congregation nobody has heard of.
Not the believer struggling with doubt who nevertheless whispers:
“Lord, I still believe.”
Not the Christian approaching the end of life still holding the hand of Christ.
The world may never call those people conquerors.

Jesus does.
And his verdict is the one that lasts.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps one of Christianity's greatest temptations is wanting to **look victorious before Christ declares the victory.**
We want influence now.
Recognition now.
Power now.
Vindication now.
We want the world to acknowledge that we were right.
But Revelation teaches another way.
Follow the Lamb.
Do his works.
Hold fast.
Endure.
Let Christ determine when victory is revealed.
The saints do not conquer by forcing the world to recognize their importance.
They conquer by remaining faithful when the world considers them unimportant.
And perhaps that is why Christ can safely entrust them with authority.
They have learned that authority is not something to grasp.
It is something received from him.
The person most prepared to share Christ's reign may be the person who has stopped needing to rule anyone.

Ask Yourself This

Am I more concerned with appearing successful, influential, or victorious now—or with continuing the works of Christ faithfully to the end, trusting him to decide what true victory looks like?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:27

“And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.”
— Revelation 2:27, KJV

Verse 26 promised that the one who conquers and continues Christ's works to the end will receive:
“power over the nations.”
Verse 27 explains that promise using one of the most important royal passages in the Old Testament:
Psalm 2.
The imagery is forceful.
An iron scepter.
Nations ruled.
Clay vessels shattered.
At first glance, it sounds like the language of domination.
And if we detach this verse from Christ, from Psalm 2, and from Revelation's larger picture of the Lamb, it would be easy to make it sound like permission for Christians eventually to exercise the same kind of coercive power that Revelation condemns in the kingdoms of the world.
But that would turn the passage upside down.
The authority promised here belongs first to **Christ**.
Only then is it shared with those who have learned to conquer by following him.

1. Psalm 2 Behind the Verse

The language comes almost directly from Psalm 2.
Psalm 2 begins with a question:
“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?”
The kings of the earth gather against the Lord and against his anointed.
They imagine themselves powerful.
They believe they can resist God's rule.
But God declares that he has established his king.
The nations ultimately belong to him.
Then comes the imagery echoed in Revelation:
“Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”
Psalm 2 is therefore about the ultimate triumph of God's anointed king over rebellious powers.

For early Christians, this psalm became profoundly important because they understood Jesus as that promised Anointed One—the Messiah.
Revelation now takes that ancient royal promise and applies it to Christ.
The nations may appear powerful.
Rome may appear permanent.
Emperors may claim ultimate authority.
But Psalm 2 says:
They do not possess the final word.
God does.
And Revelation declares that God's King is Jesus Christ.

2. “He shall rule them”

The KJV reads as follows.
“And he shall rule them.”
The Greek verb here is *poimainō*.
That word is significant because its basic imagery is not merely ruling.
It means **to shepherd**.
It is related to the word for shepherd and is used elsewhere in the New Testament for tending or caring for a flock.
So the imagery contains something richer than simple political domination.
Christ exercises royal authority, certainly.
But the King is also a **Shepherd**.
That combination matters.
Revelation itself will use this shepherding language again.
The Lamb will shepherd God's people and guide them to springs of the water of life.
That creates a remarkable biblical image:
The Lamb is also the Shepherd.
And the Shepherd is also the King.
His authority is real.
His judgment is real.
But his authority cannot be separated from his character.

3. The Rod of Iron

Then comes the phrase:
“with a rod of iron.”
A scepter is a symbol of royal authority.
An iron scepter represents authority that cannot be broken.
Wood can snap.
Clay can shatter.
Iron endures.
The image therefore communicates the irresistible authority of God's Messiah.

Human kingdoms rise and fall.
Political systems appear permanent and disappear.
Empires dominate the world and eventually become chapters in history books.
But Christ's kingdom remains.
For believers living beneath Roman power, that message would have been extraordinary.
Rome looked like iron.
Rome possessed armies.
Rome controlled commerce.
Rome appointed governors.
Rome executed criminals.
Rome crucified people.
Rome appeared unbreakable.
Revelation says:
Rome is not the iron scepter.
Christ possesses the final authority.

4. “As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers”

The contrast is deliberate.
Iron meets pottery.
There is no serious contest.
A clay vessel may be useful and beautiful, but against iron it is fragile.
The image therefore exposes the temporary nature of human power.
The nations may appear invincible.
But before the sovereignty of God, their rebellion is as fragile as pottery.
This does not mean nations themselves—or the people within them—are worthless.
The issue in Psalm 2 is rebellion against God's reign.
The image concerns the collapse of powers that set themselves against God.
Revelation will repeatedly make this distinction.
The nations can rebel.
Kings can oppose God.
Empires can become instruments of oppression.
Economic systems can become corrupt.
Religious institutions can serve political power.
But none of them is permanent.
Every human system that claims ultimate authority eventually discovers:
It is made of clay.

5. The Illusion of Permanent Empires

History makes this imagery almost painfully obvious.
Every empire eventually believes itself exceptional.
Assyria did.
Babylon did.
Persia did.
Greece did.
Rome did.
Each possessed military power.
Each influenced enormous regions.
Each shaped the lives of millions.
Each appeared, for a time, nearly permanent.
None was.
That does not mean every nation or government is inherently evil.
Scripture recognizes legitimate functions of civil authority.
But Revelation warns against the moment when political power begins claiming what belongs only to God:
ultimate allegiance.
No government is eternal.
No political party is eternal.
No economic system is eternal.
No human ideology is eternal.
No empire is eternal.
Christ is.
That is the perspective Revelation gives persecuted and pressured believers.

6. A Word the Church Needs in Every Age

This becomes particularly important whenever Christians become too closely identified with political power.
Revelation does not teach Christians to place ultimate hope in gaining control of earthly institutions.
It teaches Christians to place ultimate hope in **Christ**.
Governments matter.
Justice matters.
Citizenship matters.
Christians can participate responsibly in public life.
But none of those things can bear the weight of our ultimate hope.
Whenever Christians begin speaking as though the survival of the faith depends upon a particular nation, leader, party, or political arrangement, Revelation quietly reminds us:
The kingdom already has a King.
And he does not need an election to remain King.

7. Shattering What Opposes God's Kingdom

The image of shattered pottery also tells us something about God's final victory over evil.
God does not merely manage evil forever.
He ends it.
That is important.
Imagine the alternative.
Suppose the new creation still contained oppression.
Suppose injustice continued eternally.
Suppose exploitation remained.
Suppose violence survived.
Suppose death remained.
Suppose evil simply received a permanent corner of God's renewed creation.
That would not be redemption.
For God's kingdom to be fully established, everything that eternally opposes God's good purposes must finally be removed.
The shattering imagery therefore points toward something Revelation will eventually proclaim clearly:
evil does not survive forever.
That is frightening if we are clinging to evil.
But it is extraordinarily hopeful for those who have suffered because of it.

8. The Authority Is Still Given, Not Seized

Verse 26 remains essential.
Christ says:
"Will I give power…"
The faithful do not seize the iron scepter.
They receive authority from Christ.
That means this verse cannot responsibly be used to justify Christians coercing others in the present.
The believers at Thyatira are not instructed:
"Take control of the city."
They are told:
"Hold fast."
They conquer by endurance.
They receive authority from Christ.
That order must not be reversed.
Whenever Christians attempt to seize through worldly power what Christ promises to give in his kingdom, we risk exchanging the way of the Lamb for the way of the beast.

9. The Shepherd Must Interpret the Scepter

This is perhaps the most important interpretive safeguard in the verse.
The one holding the iron scepter is the same Jesus who:
washed feet,
welcomed children,
touched lepers,
forgave sinners,
confronted hypocrisy,
wept at a grave,
gave his life for his enemies,
and prayed for those crucifying him.
We cannot separate the scepter from the Shepherd.
Nor can we separate the Shepherd from the Lamb.
Christ's authority is never petty.
Never insecure.
Never self-serving.
Never corrupt.
Never cruel for cruelty's sake.
He does not exercise power to prove that he possesses it.
His authority serves God's righteous purposes.
Therefore when Revelation promises believers participation in Christ's reign, it is not promising them an opportunity finally to dominate the people who once dominated them.
That would merely reverse the roles while preserving the same corrupt system.
The kingdom of God is something altogether different.

10. "We Cannot Follow the Lamb by Becoming the Beast"

The principle we identified in verse 26 becomes even more important here.
We cannot follow the Lamb by becoming the beast.
Revelation will eventually show us beasts that exercise enormous authority.
They intimidate.
They deceive.
They demand allegiance.
They use economic pressure.
They employ violence.
They present themselves as ultimate.
The church's response cannot simply be:
"We want that power instead."

That would miss Revelation entirely.
The Lamb conquers differently.
And those who follow the Lamb must conquer differently.
We do not overcome domination by becoming better dominators.
We overcome by remaining faithful to Christ until every false power is finally judged by him.

11. Authority as Stewardship

There is also a lesson here for whatever authority Christians possess now.
Parents have authority.
Pastors have authority.
Teachers have authority.
Supervisors have authority.
Government officials have authority.
Church leaders have authority.
The question is not merely whether we possess authority.
The question is:
How do we use it?
Do we use authority to protect ourselves or to serve others?
Do we use it to silence disagreement or to seek truth?
Do we use it to control people or to help them flourish?
Do we use it to preserve our position or to protect those entrusted to us?
Christ's authority is shepherding authority.
Therefore Christian authority should increasingly resemble the Shepherd.

12. Power Reveals Character

There is an old human temptation to imagine:
"If I had more power, I could finally accomplish good."
Sometimes that may be true.
But power does something else.
It reveals character.
A person without authority may appear humble partly because there is little opportunity to dominate anyone.
Give that person authority, and something hidden may become visible.
That is one reason Revelation places **endurance before authority**.
The faithful believers at Thyatira first learn to follow Christ without power.
They learn love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
They learn to resist compromise.
They learn to hold fast.

Only then does Christ speak of sharing his authority.
Perhaps the people safest to entrust with power are those who have already learned they do not need it to remain faithful.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us will never hold an iron scepter.
But nearly all of us will eventually possess some form of influence over another person.
A child.
An employee.
A congregation.
A student.
A family member.
A committee.
A friend seeking advice.
And every form of influence presents a question:
Will I use this for myself or for the good of the person entrusted to me?
Jesus never separates authority from responsibility.
That should make us cautious whenever we desire more influence.
Perhaps instead of praying:
"Lord, give me greater authority,"
we should sometimes pray:
"Lord, make me trustworthy with the authority I already have."
The believers in Thyatira are promised participation in Christ's reign not because they have demonstrated their ability to dominate others.
They have demonstrated their willingness to **serve and endure**.
That is kingdom preparation.
Love.
Faith.
Service.
Endurance.
Hold fast.
Then Christ says:
"I will give…"
The kingdom belongs to people who have learned that power is not something to grasp.
It is something to receive from Christ and exercise according to his character.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the greatest difference between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Christ is not simply **who possesses power**.
It is what power becomes in their hands.

The beast uses power to control.
The Lamb uses power to redeem.
The beast demands sacrifice from others.
The Lamb sacrifices himself.
The beast demands allegiance through fear.
The Lamb draws people through truth and love.
The beast kills to preserve its power.
The Lamb gives his life and receives it again.
That means Christian victory cannot simply be the moment when **our side finally gets the scepter**.
If we pick up the scepter and begin behaving like the beast, nothing truly changed.
The kingdom of God does something deeper.
It transforms the people who will share the reign of Christ until their understanding of authority has been shaped by the One who washed feet.
Perhaps that is why endurance comes before authority.
Before Christ entrusts his people with the kingdom, he teaches them to follow the Lamb.

Ask Yourself This

When I am given authority or influence over others, does the way I use it resemble the powers of this world—or the Shepherd who serves, the Lamb who gives himself, and the King whose authority is always righteous?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:28

“And I will give him the morning star.”
— Revelation 2:28, KJV

Verse 27 gave us powerful imagery.
Nations.
Authority.
An iron scepter.
Shattered pottery.
Verse 27 closes by reminding us where Christ’s authority comes from.
“even as I received of my Father.”
Then, almost unexpectedly, the imagery changes.
No iron.
No shattered vessels.
No nations.
Instead:
“And I will give him the morning star.”
It is one of the most beautiful promises in the messages to the seven churches.
And we do not have to guess forever what the morning star ultimately represents.
Near the very end of Revelation, Jesus will say:
“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”
The promise therefore reaches beyond authority, victory, vindication, or reward.
The ultimate gift Christ gives those who remain faithful is:
himself.

1. “As I received of my Father”

The first part of verse 28 completes the thought begun in verse 26.
Christ promises authority to those who conquer:
“even as I received of my Father.”
The authority believers receive is therefore not independent authority.
It is shared authority.
Derived authority.
Authority that exists within relationship to Christ.
And Christ describes his own authority in relationship to the Father.
That pattern is important.
The Father gives to the Son.
The Son shares with those who belong to him.

Nothing here suggests autonomous power.
Everything flows from relationship.
The conquerors do not become independent rulers competing with Christ.
They participate in **his reign**.

2. The Pattern of Christ

There is another important connection.
Christ himself followed the pattern he now asks his followers to follow.
Obedience.
Suffering.
Endurance.
Victory.
Glory.
Jesus did not avoid suffering on the way to exaltation.
He passed through the cross.
Paul describes the same pattern in Philippians 2.
Christ humbled himself.
He became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
Therefore God highly exalted him.
That pattern matters for Revelation.
The followers of Jesus should not expect a path fundamentally different from their Lord's.
Faithfulness may involve suffering.
Obedience may involve cost.
Endurance may involve waiting.
But suffering does not have the final word.
The cross did not have the final word for Jesus.
Neither will suffering have the final word for those who belong to him.

3. "And I Will Give"

Again we encounter the language of gift:
"And I will give…"
This has appeared repeatedly in the promises to those who conquer.
Christ gives.
He gives access to the tree of life.
He gives the crown of life.
He gives hidden manna.
He gives a white stone.
He gives authority.
And now:
He gives the morning star.
The Christian future is not something believers seize.
It is something Christ gives.

That keeps grace at the center even of Revelation's promises of reward.
The conqueror does not stand before Christ saying:
“Look what I earned.”
The conqueror receives.
The life of faith begins in grace.
It continues in grace.
And it reaches its fulfillment in grace.

4. “The Morning Star”

The morning star was the bright celestial object visible near dawn.
We know it today as the planet Venus when it appears in the morning sky.
For ancient observers, its appearance carried an obvious meaning.
Night is almost over.
The darkness may still cover the landscape.
The sun may not yet have risen.
But the morning star announces that dawn is approaching.
That makes the image particularly appropriate for Revelation.
The churches are living in the night.
Smyrna suffers.
Pergamum has seen martyrdom.
Thyatira faces compromise.
Other churches will face spiritual decline, pressure, complacency, and persecution.
Later Revelation will depict beasts, Babylon, violence, deception, suffering, and death.
At times darkness will seem overwhelming.
Then Christ says:
“I will give him the morning star.”
Night is not permanent.
Dawn is coming.

5. The Morning Star Does Not Mean the Night Is Already Gone

There is something subtle and beautiful about this image.
The morning star appears **while it is still dark**.
It does not wait for daylight.
It announces daylight before daylight arrives.
That is Christian hope.
Hope does not require pretending the darkness is absent.
Revelation never does that.
The book is brutally honest about suffering.
People die.

Empires oppress.
Churches compromise.
Evil appears powerful.
Faithful people struggle.
Christian hope does not say:
“It isn't really dark.”
Christian hope says:
“The darkness will not last.”
That is very different.
Faith can look directly at suffering without surrendering to despair because it sees something beyond the suffering.
The morning star is already visible.
Dawn is coming.

6. Christ Is the Morning Star

Then Revelation gives us the key to the symbol.
Near the conclusion of the book, Jesus says:
“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”
That means the promise of Revelation 2:28 is ultimately personal.
Jesus does not merely promise:
“I will give you hope.”
He gives **himself**.
He does not merely promise:
“I will give you a better future.”
He is the center of that future.
He does not merely promise:
“I will give you victory.”
Our victory is participation in his victory.
He does not merely promise:
“I will give you life.”
He is life.
This is one of the great movements of Christian theology.
We often come to God asking for things.
Peace.
Strength.
Healing.
Guidance.
Protection.
Provision.
Answers.
And those requests are legitimate.

But eventually we discover that the greatest gift God can give us is not something separate from himself.
The greatest gift is God himself.

7. From the Scepter to the Star

The movement between verses 27 and 28 is remarkable.
Christ promises the conqueror:
authority over the nations.
Then: **the morning star.**
If we focus only on the authority, we might misunderstand the promise.
We might imagine Christian victory primarily in terms of power.
Then Jesus gives the greater promise.
Himself.
That puts authority in perspective.
What is greater?
Ruling nations?
Or possessing Christ?
Revelation's answer is clear.
The deepest reward of faithfulness is not finally authority.
It is communion with the One to whom all authority belongs.
Perhaps that is another reason those who conquer can safely receive authority.
They have discovered that **Christ is worth more than power**.

8. The End of Night

The morning-star imagery also points toward the great conclusion of Revelation.
Eventually John will see a new heaven and a new earth.
Death will be no more.
Mourning will be no more.
Crying will be no more.
Pain will be no more.
The curse will be no more.
God will dwell with his people.
And significantly, the New Jerusalem will not need sun or moon because the glory of God illuminates it and the Lamb is its lamp.
The morning star therefore anticipates the destination toward which the entire book is moving.
The night is temporary.
The light is permanent.
Revelation begins among struggling churches.
It ends in the presence of God.
Between those two realities comes the call:
Hold fast.

9. Hope Before Circumstances Change

There is an important pastoral truth here.
The morning star appears before sunrise.
Likewise, Christian hope can appear before circumstances improve.
We often think:
“I will have hope when this gets better.”
When the diagnosis changes.
When the relationship heals.
When the financial situation improves.
When the prayer is answered.
When the grief becomes easier.
When the conflict ends.
When I finally understand why this happened.
But Christian hope is not dependent upon those things happening first.
Hope looks into the darkness and sees Christ.
That does not remove grief.
It does not eliminate questions.
It does not make pain imaginary.
It simply says:
This is not the end of the story.
The morning star is visible.

10. The Gift Is Presence

There are moments when what we most desperately want from God is an explanation.
Why?
Why did this happen?
Why didn't you prevent it?
Why hasn't this changed?
Why did you allow this loss?
Why does faithfulness sometimes hurt?
Revelation does not answer every “why.”
Instead, it repeatedly gives us a **Who**.
The Lamb.
The Shepherd.
The Son of God.
The King.
The Morning Star.
Perhaps there are questions that will never be completely answered this side of eternity.
But Christianity's final hope is not that we will possess a perfect explanation for every painful event.
Our final hope is:

We will possess Christ.
Or perhaps more accurately:
Christ will possess us completely, and we will dwell forever in his presence.

11. When Faith Must Endure

This image speaks directly to the heart of our journey.
When faith must endure, look for the morning star.
Endurance becomes possible when we remember that night has an ending.
The darkness tells us:
"This is all there is."
The morning star says:
"Dawn is coming."
Fear says:
"Nothing will change."
The morning star says:
"Christ is coming."
Grief says:
"What was lost is gone forever."
The morning star points toward resurrection.
Evil says:
"I have won."
The morning star announces the coming kingdom.
Death says:
"I have the final word."
Jesus says:
"I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."
That is Christian hope.
Not optimism.
Not denial.
Not wishful thinking.
Christ.

A Faith That Can Survive the Night

Anyone can see the sun at noon.
Faith learns to recognize the morning star before dawn.
There will be seasons in the Christian life when God's purposes seem obvious.
There will be others when almost nothing makes sense.
Those are the moments when faith must endure.
Perhaps we cannot see the sunrise yet.
Perhaps we cannot imagine how the situation will be redeemed.

Perhaps we cannot understand what God is doing.
But we can still look toward Christ.
The presence of the Morning Star does not mean the night was never real.
It means the night **cannot win**.
That distinction may be one of the most important lessons Revelation gives suffering Christians.

Pastoral Reflection

There are nights in life that feel very long.
Grief can feel that way.
Illness can feel that way.
Waiting can feel that way.
Unanswered prayer can feel that way.
Watching someone we love struggle can feel that way.
There are moments when we do not need someone to tell us:
"Everything is fine."
Because everything is not fine.
Revelation never insults suffering people with shallow optimism.
Instead, Christ says something far stronger:
"I will give him the morning star."
He does not deny the night.
He promises that the night has an ending.
And more importantly, he promises himself.
Perhaps sometimes our prayer does not need to be:
"Lord, explain the darkness."
Perhaps it can simply be:
"Lord, help me see you in it."
Because if Christ is present, the darkness is already living on borrowed time.
The Morning Star has appeared.
Dawn will follow.

Something Worth Pondering

We spend much of life asking Christ for gifts.
And perhaps, with the patience of a loving Savior, he gives many of them.
But eventually the Christian journey brings us to a deeper discovery.
What if the greatest answer to our prayers is not:
"Here is what you asked for."
What if it is:
"Here I am."
The believers at Thyatira may lose economic opportunities.
They may lose social acceptance.

They may endure conflict within their own church.
They may never see all their circumstances corrected during their earthly lives.
But Christ promises them something no empire, guild, false teacher, or circumstance can take away:
himself.
And perhaps that is the deepest meaning of Christian endurance.
We do not hold fast merely because heaven will contain wonderful things.
We hold fast because at the end of the road stands **Someone**.
The Son of God.
The Lamb.
The Shepherd.
The King.
The Bright Morning Star.
And when the Morning Star finally gives way to the full light of God's new creation, faith will no longer need to endure.
Faith will have become sight.

Ask Yourself This

When I ask Christ to change the darkness around me, am I also learning to recognize that his presence with me is already the Morning Star—the promise that the darkness will not last and that, ultimately, Christ himself is the greatest gift I could ever receive?

A Closer Look — Revelation 2:29

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 2:29, KJV

The message to Thyatira ends with words we have encountered before:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear…”
At first glance, we might be tempted to move past them quickly.
We have heard this already.
Ephesus heard it.
Smyrna heard it.
Pergamum heard it.
Now Thyatira hears it.
But repetition gives these words greater weight, not less.
Jesus keeps saying:
Listen.
Apparently having ears does not guarantee hearing.
And hearing words does not guarantee receiving them.
The question at the end of every message is not merely:
“Did you hear what Christ said?”
It is:
“Will you allow what Christ said to change you?”

1. “He that hath an ear”

The invitation begins broadly:
“He that hath an ear…”
The message has been addressed to the church in Thyatira.
But its application does not stop with Thyatira.
Anyone with ears is invited to hear.
That includes the other six churches.
It includes the wider first-century Christian community.
And because Revelation has become part of the church's Scripture, it includes every generation that reads these words.
Including us.
We are not merely studying correspondence addressed to ancient Christians.
We are being invited to stand among them and listen.
Their circumstances differ from ours.
Their culture differs.
Their political world differs.
Their economic structures differ.

Their temptations may take different forms.
But the fundamental question remains:
Will the church remain faithful to Christ?

2. “That hath an ear”

Nearly everyone physically hearing the message possesses ears.
So Jesus is obviously asking for something deeper than auditory ability.
This expression echoes a pattern found repeatedly in Jesus' earthly ministry.
After teaching, particularly in parables, Jesus would say:
“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”
The point is spiritual receptivity.
There is hearing.
And then there is **hearing**.
We can hear Scripture read without allowing it to confront us.
We can study theology without allowing truth to transform us.
We can analyze a passage brilliantly while keeping it safely outside ourselves.
We can even preach a sermon intended for everyone else.
The danger is particularly real when reading passages about sin and judgment.
Our first instinct is often:
“I know someone who needs to hear this.”
Perhaps.
But Jesus says:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
Before I decide who else needs the message, I should ask whether **I** have heard it.

3. Listening Is More Than Hearing

Biblically, listening frequently implies response.
A child can hear a parent's instruction without obeying it.
An employee can hear a supervisor's direction without following it.
A congregation can hear Scripture every Sunday without being transformed by it.
True listening involves receiving what has been said and allowing it to shape our actions.
That makes verse 29 the appropriate conclusion to everything Christ has said to Thyatira.
Christ has revealed himself.
He has commended.
He has confronted.
He has warned.
He has offered repentance.

He has promised.
Now the church must decide what it will do.
Christ has spoken.
Will they listen?

4. "What the Spirit saith"

There is something theologically significant here.
At the beginning of the message, Jesus said:
"These things saith the Son of God."
At the end:
"what the Spirit saith…"
The words of Christ are the words communicated by the Spirit to the churches.
We should not separate the work of Christ from the work of the Holy Spirit.
The Spirit does not lead the church away from Christ.
The Spirit directs the church toward Christ.
That becomes particularly important in Thyatira because Jezebel claims prophetic authority.
She claims to speak spiritually.
But not everything presented as spiritual comes from the Spirit.
That creates an important contrast:
Jezebel **"calleth herself a prophetess."**
The Son of God speaks.
The Spirit speaks.
The church must discern the difference.

5. Not Every Spiritual Claim Is the Voice of the Spirit

Christians sometimes use spiritual language very casually.
"God told me…"
"The Spirit led me…"
"I received a word…"
Such claims should never automatically be treated with contempt.
God does lead his people.
The Spirit does work.
But Thyatira reminds us that claims of spiritual authority require discernment.
The question is not merely:
"Did someone say this came from God?"
The question is:
"Does this accord with the character, truth, and purposes of Christ?"

The Holy Spirit will not lead the church away from the Son of God.
The Spirit who speaks to the churches is the Spirit of Christ.
That provides an important guardrail.
Any supposed spiritual insight that requires us to abandon faithfulness to Jesus has already failed the test.

6. "Saith"

Notice the tense:
"what the Spirit saith…"
Not merely:
"what the Spirit said."
The message was addressed to a historical church in first-century Asia Minor.
But through Scripture, the Spirit continues to address the church.
That does not mean we ignore historical context.
Quite the opposite.
We first ask what these words meant to Thyatira.
Only then can we responsibly ask what they mean for us.
But once we understand the message, we discover that its questions remain remarkably alive.
Do churches still struggle with compromise?
Yes.
Do teachers still claim spiritual authority?
Yes.
Do Christians still face economic pressure to compromise convictions?
Yes.
Do congregations still confuse tolerance with love?
Yes.
Do churches still selectively condemn some sins while overlooking others?
Yes.
Do believers still need repentance?
Yes.
Do faithful Christians still become weary?
Yes.
Do we still need to hold fast?
Absolutely.
The Spirit is still saying something through Thyatira.

7. "Unto the churches"

Perhaps the most important word in the final phrase is plural:
"churches."
Jesus has been speaking to Thyatira.
But the Spirit speaks through this message:

“unto the churches.”
Ephesus must listen to Thyatira.
Smyrna must listen.
Pergamum must listen.
Sardis must listen.
Philadelphia must listen.
Laodicea must listen.
Each church receives its own message.
But every church is expected to hear all seven.
That prevents us from reading Revelation selectively.
Ephesus cannot say:
“The warning about compromise belongs to Thyatira.”
Thyatira cannot say:
“The warning about losing first love belongs to Ephesus.”
Pergamum cannot say:
“The warning about lukewarmness belongs to Laodicea.”
The Spirit says these things:
“unto the churches.”
Every congregation should therefore hear every message.

8. The Danger of Reading Someone Else's Mail

There is a temptation when reading the seven messages to identify other churches with them.
We may think:
“I know a Laodicean church.”
Or:
“That denomination sounds like Thyatira.”
Or:
“Those Christians remind me of Pergamum.”
Perhaps sometimes those comparisons contain insight.
But they can also become a clever way of avoiding the text.
Instead of allowing Christ's words to examine us, we use them to diagnose someone else.
That contradicts the purpose of verse 29.
The first question should not be:
“Which church needs to hear this?”
The first question is:
“What is the Spirit saying to me through this?”
Only after hearing personally are we prepared to speak pastorally.

9. What Has the Spirit Said Through Thyatira?

Perhaps verse 29 invites us to look back over the entire message.

What have we heard?
We have heard that Christ is the **Son of God**.
We have seen his **eyes like a flame of fire**.
We have seen his **feet like burnished bronze**.
We have heard him commend:
love, faith, service, and endurance.
We have learned that Christian lives can continue growing:
“Thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”
We have heard the danger of tolerating teaching that leads Christ's servants away from faithfulness.
We have learned that claimed spiritual authority must be tested.
We have heard Christ say:
“I gave her space to repent.”
We have discovered that divine patience is not divine approval.
We have heard the warning that persistent refusal eventually has consequences.
We have learned that Christ:
“searcheth the reins and hearts.”
We have discovered that he distinguishes the faithful from the unfaithful within the same congregation.
We have heard him tell weary believers:
“I will put upon you none other burden.”
Then:
“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.”
We have learned that conquering means continuing Christ's works to the end.
We have learned that Christian authority must resemble the Shepherd rather than the beast.
And finally we have received the promise of:
“the morning star.”
Now Christ asks:
Were you listening?

10. Hearing the Whole Message

There is another reason this final command matters.
We naturally prefer some parts of Christ's message over others.
We like:
“I know your love.”
We may be less enthusiastic about:
“I have somewhat against thee.”
We like:
“I gave her space to repent.”
We struggle with the judgment that follows.

We like:
“I will put upon you none other burden.”
We may hesitate at:
“Hold fast till I come.”
We love:
“I will give him the morning star.”
But the Spirit asks us to hear **all of it**.
Grace and truth.
Commendation and correction.
Mercy and judgment.
Comfort and responsibility.
Promise and endurance.
Christian maturity means allowing Christ to speak the words we need rather than merely the words we prefer.

11. Listening Requires Humility

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to hearing Christ is not ignorance.
It is certainty.
If I already know everything Christ intends to say, I have little reason to listen.
If I approach Scripture only to confirm what I already believe, the Bible becomes a mirror reflecting my assumptions rather than a voice capable of correcting them.
True listening requires humility.
It says:
“Lord, perhaps there is something here I have missed.”
“Perhaps I have been wrong.”
“Perhaps something I have defended needs reconsideration.”
“Perhaps something I have tolerated needs confronting.”
“Perhaps something I have condemned in others exists within me.”
“Perhaps something I have nearly released needs to be held fast.”
That is what it means to have ears to hear.

12. Listening Before Speaking

There is also a lesson here for anyone who teaches Scripture.
Pastors.
Teachers.
Authors.
Anyone who opens the Bible intending to explain it to someone else.
Before we ask:
“What should I say?”
perhaps we should ask:
“What is Christ saying to me?”
The teacher remains a disciple.

The preacher remains a hearer.
The author remains beneath the text.
None of us graduates from listening.
That is especially important with Revelation.
This book can easily become something we analyze from a distance.
Symbols.
Timelines.
Interpretive systems.
Historical theories.
Prophetic possibilities.
But Revelation continually refuses to remain merely academic.
Eventually it turns toward the reader and says:
Listen.

Pastoral Reflection

There are moments when God does not need to give us more information.
We already know enough.
The question is whether we will respond to what we have heard.
Perhaps we already know forgiveness is needed.
Perhaps we already know the apology should be made.
Perhaps we already know the compromise needs to end.
Perhaps we already know the habit is destructive.
Perhaps we already know someone needs our compassion.
Perhaps we already know we have been carrying a burden Christ never gave us.
Perhaps we already know we simply need to hold fast.
At some point another sermon will not replace obedience.
Another book will not replace obedience.
Another Bible study will not replace obedience.
Even another verse-by-verse commentary will not replace obedience.
Eventually hearing must become living.
That is why Christ does not end the message by saying:
“Let anyone who has an ear understand.”
He says:
“Listen.”

Something Worth Pondering

There is a subtle danger in becoming familiar with Scripture.
We can become so accustomed to hearing holy words that they stop surprising us.
We recognize the verse.
We know the story.
We remember the sermon.

We can explain the theology.
And familiarity can quietly convince us that because we **know** the text, we have therefore **heard** it.
But perhaps Scripture is not finished with us simply because we have finished reading the sentence.
The real question may be:
Has the sentence finished changing us?
Thyatira heard the voice of Christ.
Now we have heard it too.
The Son of God still searches minds and hearts.
He still sees love, faith, service, and endurance.
He still calls compromise what it is.
He still gives time to repent.
He still tells weary believers not to carry burdens he has not given them.
He still calls his people to hold fast.
He still promises victory to those who endure.
And he is still the Morning Star announcing that the night will not last forever.
So perhaps the final words to Thyatira are not merely the conclusion of an ancient letter.
Perhaps they are Christ turning toward us and asking:
"Now that you have heard me, what will you do?"

Ask Yourself This

As I listen to what the Spirit said to Thyatira, which word of Christ do I most need to hear personally—not for someone else, not for another church, but for me—and what would it look like to respond rather than merely agree?

Sardis — The Church That Had a Reputation for Life

Revelation 3:1–6

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.
Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.
Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:1–6, KJV

Introduction

Some churches are threatened from the outside.
Others are weakened from within.
Sardis faced a different danger.
It had become something other than what people thought it was.
Jesus begins His message with one of the most unsettling statements spoken to any of the seven churches:
“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”
That is what makes Sardis so disturbing.
The church had a name.
It had a reputation.
From the outside, people apparently looked at this congregation and saw life. Something about Sardis caused others to believe that this was a healthy, active, living church.
But Christ saw something different.
The reputation remained.
The life did not.

There is no accusation here concerning the Nicolaitans. There is no Balaam. There is no Jezebel. There is no description of persecution like that faced by Smyrna.
The great danger confronting Sardis was not primarily something attacking the church.
It was something happening **to the church itself**.
It was dying.
And apparently, much of the church did not realize it.
That may be one of the most frightening forms spiritual decline can take.
If we know something is wrong, we may seek help. If we recognize that we are wandering, we may turn around. If we realize that our faith has grown weak, we may cry out to God.
But what happens when everything still looks normal?
The services continue.
The songs are still sung.
The prayers are still prayed.
The sermons are still preached.
The programs continue.
People still gather.
The church still has its name.
And everyone assumes that because the activity continues, the life must still be there.
Jesus does not make that assumption.
He looks beneath activity.
He looks beneath reputation.
He looks beneath appearances.
And what He sees in Sardis is alarming.
"Thou art dead."
Yet those words are not the end of the message.
Almost immediately Christ says:
"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain."
Something remains.
That may be the most important word in the entire message.
Remains.
For all that has been lost, something has survived.
For all that has grown weak, something still possesses life.
For all that Christ condemns in Sardis, He has not abandoned the church.
He is speaking to it precisely because there is still something worth awakening.
That gives the message to Sardis an unexpected hope.
Jesus does not simply announce death.
He calls the dead and dying toward life.
Wake up.

Strengthen what remains.
Remember what you received.
Remember what you heard.
Obey it.
Repent.
These are not instructions for building a more impressive church.
They are instructions for recovering a living faith.
And within Sardis there are already signs that such faith is possible.
Jesus speaks of "a few names" who have not soiled their clothes. Even within a congregation whose spiritual condition has deteriorated, there remain people who have continued faithfully with Christ.
They may be few.
But Christ knows them.
That becomes an important theme throughout these messages to the churches.
Christ sees what others miss.
At Ephesus, He saw love growing cold beneath impressive faithfulness.
At Smyrna, He saw spiritual riches beneath material poverty and suffering.
At Pergamum, He saw faithfulness existing where compromise was also taking root.
At Thyatira, He saw growing love and service while also seeing corruption being tolerated within the church.
And now at Sardis, He sees death beneath a reputation for life.
The churches cannot hide behind appearances because the One walking among the lampstands sees them as they truly are.
Neither can we.
That is what makes Sardis more than the story of an ancient congregation in Asia Minor.
Sardis asks a deeply personal question.
What if the person everyone thinks I am spiritually is no longer the person I actually am?
We can acquire a reputation for faithfulness.
We can become known as someone who loves Scripture.
Someone who serves.
Someone who prays.
Someone who teaches.
Someone who gives.
Someone who has followed Christ for many years.
And all of those things may be true.
But yesterday's faithfulness cannot substitute for today's relationship with Christ.
A reputation is built from what people have seen.

Christ sees what is.
And yet Sardis is not a message intended to leave us frightened that our faith might secretly be dying.
It is a message calling us to examine what remains and strengthen it.
Perhaps prayer has become difficult.
Pray again.
Perhaps Scripture has become familiar rather than transforming.
Listen again.
Perhaps worship has become routine.
Worship again.
Perhaps service has become obligation.
Remember whom you are serving.
Perhaps faith has become something you remember more vividly than something you presently experience.
Wake up.
There is still something there.
And Christ knows exactly where it is.
The message to Sardis therefore begins with one of Revelation's harshest diagnoses.
“Thou art dead.”
But it does not end there.
Christ still speaks.
Christ still calls.
Christ still offers repentance.
Christ still recognizes the faithful.
Christ still promises white garments.
Christ still promises to confess their names before His Father and before His angels.
Sardis may have possessed a name among people.
But ultimately there is only one recognition that matters.
To hear Christ speak **our name** before the Father.
That is where this message is taking us.

The Movement of the Passage

The message to Sardis moves from **reputation to reality, from reality to awakening, and from awakening to promise**.
Christ begins by identifying Himself as the One who has “the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.”
The church may have a reputation among people, but its life does not come from its reputation. Its life comes from God.
Then comes the diagnosis:
“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

What others believe about Sardis and what Christ knows about Sardis are two very different things.
Then comes the command:
Wake up.
Strengthen what remains.
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
Christ does not merely expose the condition of the church. He tells the church what to do about it.
Then comes the warning.
If Sardis refuses to watch, Christ will come "as a thief." The church that has become spiritually sleepy will discover that Christ's coming cannot be scheduled around its complacency.
Then the message turns toward the faithful remnant.
There are still a few who have not soiled their clothes.
Christ knows them.
They will walk with Him in white.
Finally comes the promise to those who conquer.
They will be clothed in white.
Their names will not be erased from the book of life.
And Christ will confess their names before His Father and before His angels.
The movement is therefore remarkably clear:
Reputation.
Reality.
Awakening.
Repentance.
Faithfulness.
Recognition.
Sardis begins with a church possessing a name before people.
It ends with Christ confessing the names of His faithful people before the Father.
That contrast is difficult to miss.
The question is no longer:
What do people think of Sardis?
The question becomes:
What does Christ know of Sardis?

1. A Church With a Reputation

There is nothing inherently wrong with having a good reputation.
A church should be known for faithfulness.

A Christian should live in such a way that others can see something of Christ in that life.
The problem begins when reputation and reality separate.
Sardis apparently had accumulated enough history, activity, or influence that others regarded it as alive.
Perhaps it had once been alive.
Perhaps its reputation had been honestly earned.
That possibility makes the warning even more sobering.
A reputation can outlive the reality that created it.
A congregation can continue being known for what it once was.
A ministry can continue being respected because of what God once accomplished through it.
An individual can continue being regarded as spiritually mature because of years of faithful service.
And meanwhile something can change beneath the surface.
That is one of the dangers of spiritual history.
Yesterday's faithfulness can become today's reputation.
And today's reputation can hide today's decline.
The longer we follow Christ, the more spiritual history we accumulate.
We remember conversions.
We remember answered prayers.
We remember ministries.
We remember sacrifices.
We remember seasons of extraordinary closeness to God.
Those memories matter.
But memories of faithfulness are not substitutes for faithfulness.
Sardis teaches us that the question Christ asks is not merely:
What were you?
It is:
What are you now?

2. “And art dead”

Few words spoken to the churches are more severe.
“Thou art dead.”
Christ does not say Sardis is struggling.
He does not say Sardis is tired.
He does not say Sardis needs improvement.
He describes the church as dead.
Yet the remainder of the passage prevents us from reading that statement as though absolutely nothing spiritual remains.
Something does remain.
There are faithful people within the congregation.
There are things that can still be strengthened.

The language therefore describes the overwhelming spiritual condition of the church while leaving room for the remnant Christ immediately identifies.
And that makes the diagnosis even more important.
A church can contain activity without possessing vitality.
Those two things are not the same.
Activity can be scheduled.
Vitality cannot.
Programs can be organized.
Spiritual life cannot be manufactured.
A calendar can be filled.
A sanctuary can be filled.
A budget can be funded.
A ministry can be busy.
And none of those things, by themselves, prove that a church is spiritually alive.
Life comes from Christ.
This is why appearances are such unreliable measurements of spiritual health.
We tend to count what can be counted.
Christ sees what cannot.
We see attendance.
Christ sees faithfulness.
We see activity.
Christ sees obedience.
We see reputation.
Christ sees reality.
And His evaluation of Sardis should remind every church that success and spiritual life are not necessarily the same thing.

3. Wake Up and Strengthen What Remains

Then comes grace disguised as a command.
“Be watchful.”
Christ would not tell Sardis to awaken if awakening were impossible.
He would not tell them to strengthen what remains if nothing remained.
The diagnosis is severe.
The invitation is hopeful.
Something is still alive.
Something still responds to Christ.
Something can still be strengthened.
And Christ knows where it is.
There are times in the Christian life when we may be tempted to concentrate entirely upon what has been lost.

We remember what faith once felt like.
We remember what prayer once meant.
We remember how eagerly we once opened Scripture.
We remember how naturally worship once flowed.
And comparing the present with the past can become discouraging.
Christ directs Sardis differently.
He does tell them to remember.
But He also directs their attention toward what remains.
Strengthen it.
Perhaps that is sometimes the beginning of renewal.
Not attempting to recreate every spiritual experience of the past.
Not pretending that nothing has changed.
Not mourning endlessly over what has disappeared.
But finding what remains and placing it again before Christ.
A prayer.
A desire.
A conviction.
A small act of obedience.
A longing to return.
An ember may not look like a fire.
But an ember is not dead.
And Christ knows the difference.

4. Remember, Obey, and Repent

Sardis does not need a new gospel.
It needs to return to the one it already received.
“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.”
There is something beautifully simple about Christ's remedy.
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
The church does not need novelty.
It needs remembrance.
Remember what you received.
Remember what you heard.
Remember the gospel that first called you to Christ.
Remember the grace by which you were saved.
Remember the truth that once shaped your life.
But remembrance alone is not enough.
“Hold fast.”
Christian memory must eventually become Christian obedience.
We can remember what Scripture teaches without living it.

We can remember sermons that once moved us.
We can remember commitments we once made.
We can remember what we know is right.
But Christ calls Sardis beyond memory.
What was received must again be lived.
And where the church has departed from that life, Christ gives the necessary word:
Repent.
Repentance is not humiliation for its own sake.
It is the doorway home.
Christ exposes Sardis not because He delights in condemning dying churches.
He exposes Sardis because Sardis can still hear Him.
The voice calling the church to repentance is itself evidence that Christ has not abandoned it.

5. The Few Who Remained Faithful

Then comes one of the quietest and most beautiful sentences in the message:
“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.”
A few.
Not many.
A few.
But Christ knows them.
Imagine being one of those believers.
The congregation around you is declining spiritually.
Perhaps others no longer notice.
Perhaps everyone continues behaving as though nothing has changed.
Perhaps the church's reputation remains intact.
And you are simply trying to remain faithful.
Christ sees you.
That is important because faithfulness is not always dramatic.
Sometimes faithfulness looks like continuing to pray when others have stopped caring.
Sometimes it looks like continuing to love when cynicism would be easier.
Sometimes it looks like continuing to serve when recognition never comes.
Sometimes it means refusing to surrender simply because those around you have grown indifferent.
The faithful few in Sardis remind us that spiritual decline around us does not require spiritual decline within us.

We cannot always determine what others will do.
We can determine whether we will remain faithful to Christ.
And no faithful disciple is ever invisible to Him.
The world may never know the name.
The congregation may never recognize the sacrifice.
History may never record the life.
Christ knows.
And in Sardis, that becomes especially significant because this entire message revolves around names and reputation.
Sardis has a name.
Christ knows **their names**.

6. White Garments and the Book of Life

The message ends with promise.
Those who conquer will be clothed in white.
Throughout Revelation, white garments become associated with those who belong to Christ, who have remained faithful, and who participate in His victory.
But another promise immediately attracts our attention:
“I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.”
Those words have sometimes generated more fear than comfort.
They have been drawn into debates about whether salvation can be lost, whether names can be removed from the book of life, and precisely how the imagery should fit within different theological systems.
Those questions deserve careful consideration when we examine verse 5 more closely.
But before turning Christ's promise into a theological problem, we should first allow it to function as a promise.
Jesus is speaking encouragement to those who conquer.
The emphasis is not:
Live in constant terror that I may erase your name.
The emphasis is:
I know your name.
And the next sentence makes that beautifully clear:
“I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”
That language recalls Jesus' teaching about acknowledging those who acknowledge Him.
The church at Sardis may have possessed an impressive name among people.
The faithful possess something infinitely greater.
Christ knows their names.
And He promises to speak those names in heaven.
There is something deeply personal about that.

Christian faith can sometimes become so occupied with enormous theological truths that we forget how personal salvation is.
Christ does not merely redeem populations.
He knows people.
He knows His sheep.
He knows those who endure.
He knows the believer who remained faithful when no one noticed.
He knows the one who strengthened the small thing that remained.
He knows the one who awakened.
He knows the one who repented.
He knows the name.
And He promises to confess it before the Father.
Sardis began with reputation.
It ends with recognition.
Not recognition from the world.
Recognition from Christ.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something uncomfortable about Sardis because it asks us to distinguish between our spiritual reputation and our spiritual reality.
Most of us have some kind of reputation.
People know us in certain ways.
Faithful church member.
Teacher.
Pastor.
Leader.
Volunteer.
Student of Scripture.
Someone who prays.
Someone who serves.
Someone who has followed Christ for decades.
There is nothing wrong with those descriptions.
But none of them can keep us spiritually alive.
There comes a point when every Christian must stand quietly before Christ without titles, accomplishments, ministries, history, or reputation and ask:
Lord, what do You see now?
Not twenty years ago.
Not when I first believed.
Not when I entered ministry.
Not during the greatest season of spiritual growth in my life.
Now.
That question does not have to frighten us.

Because the Christ who sees what is dying also sees what remains.
That may be the greatest pastoral hope in Sardis.
Perhaps some things really have changed.
Age changes us.
Loss changes us.
Disappointment changes us.
Success can change us.
Failure can change us.
Years of serving others can leave us tired.
Even years of church life can make things once extraordinary begin to feel ordinary.
But Christ does not demand that we somehow become the person we were decades ago.
He says:
Strengthen what remains.
There is extraordinary grace in those words.
What remains?
Perhaps you still whisper a prayer even when prayer feels difficult.
Strengthen it.
Perhaps Scripture still occasionally catches your heart.
Listen.
Perhaps there remains a desire to serve even though you cannot serve as you once did.
Offer what you can.
Perhaps there remains within you a longing to know Christ more deeply.
Follow that longing.
Perhaps the fire does not burn as visibly as it once did.
Look for the ember.
Christ already sees it.
And perhaps this is one of the reasons Sardis belongs in a book about enduring faith.
Endurance is not always dramatic.
Sometimes enduring faith means refusing to let the last ember die.
Sometimes it means waking up.
Sometimes it means remembering.
Sometimes it means repenting.
Sometimes it means doing the next faithful thing.
And sometimes the beginning of revival is simply hearing Christ say:
There is still something here. Strengthen it.

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis had something many churches desire.
A good name.

People thought it was alive.
But reputation turned out to be a poor measurement of spiritual reality.
There is a lesson here for churches, but there is also one for every Christian.
Eventually we accumulate a spiritual history.
People know what we have done.
They remember how we served.
They know what we believe.
They may even look to us as examples of faithfulness.
But Christ never asks us to live on yesterday's faith.
He calls us to walk with Him today.
And perhaps the most hopeful words in this entire passage are not the promises of white garments or even the book of life.
Perhaps they are these:
"Strengthen the things which remain."
Because those words mean that Christ sees possibility where we may see only decline.
He sees an ember where we may see ashes.
He sees something worth strengthening where we may see only what has been lost.
And the One who tells us to wake up is the same Christ who stands among the lampstands.
He has not walked away.
He is still speaking.
He is still calling.
He still knows our names.

Ask Yourself This

If I set aside everything people know about my faith—my reputation, my years of service, my church involvement, my knowledge of Scripture, and everything I have done in the past—**what would Christ say about the condition of my relationship with Him today?**

And if He were to point toward something within me and say, **"This remains—strengthen it,"** what would that something be?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:1

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;
I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”
— Revelation 3:1, KJV

The message to Sardis begins with one of the sharpest contrasts among the seven churches.
Before Christ describes the condition of the congregation, He once again identifies Himself.
He is the One who has “the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.”
Then He looks at Sardis and says:
“I know thy works.”
By now those words are familiar.
But what follows is not.
“Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”
There is no lengthy commendation.
There is no praise for endurance as there was at Ephesus.
There is no recognition of suffering as there was at Smyrna.
There is no acknowledgment that they have held fast to His name as at Pergamum.
There is no celebration of growing love, faith, service, and endurance as at Thyatira.
Christ goes directly to the problem.
The church possesses something that looks like life.
It has a name.
It has a reputation.
But Christ sees beneath both.
And what He sees is death.
That makes the way Jesus introduces Himself especially important.
Sardis has the reputation of life.
Christ possesses the Spirit who gives life.
The contrast is already present before the diagnosis is spoken.

1. “Unto the angel of the church in Sardis”

The familiar wording continues.
Each message is addressed “to the angel” of a particular church.
As we noted when examining Ephesus, the Greek word *angelos* means “messenger.” Interpreters have understood these angels in different ways.

Some see heavenly representatives of the churches. Others have suggested human messengers or leaders.
Revelation does not settle the question for us.
And perhaps it does not need to.
The important point remains the same:
Christ has something to say to His Church.
Although this message is addressed specifically to Sardis, its conclusion will again broaden the audience:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Churches.
Plural.
Ephesus needs to hear Sardis.
Smyrna needs to hear Sardis.
Pergamum and Thyatira need to hear Sardis.
Philadelphia and Laodicea need to hear Sardis.
And so do we.
That becomes particularly important with this message because the danger facing Sardis is not confined to one ancient congregation.
Every church can begin living on its reputation.
Every Christian can begin living on yesterday's faithfulness.
And every generation of the Church needs to hear Christ say:
“I know.”

2. Sardis

Sardis had once been one of the great cities of the ancient world.
It was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and was associated with enormous wealth. The Lydian king Croesus became so famous for his riches that his name endured as a symbol of extraordinary wealth.
The geography of Sardis also contributed to its sense of security.
Its ancient acropolis stood high above the surrounding plain, protected by steep slopes that made the position appear extraordinarily difficult to attack.
And yet Sardis possessed a history that makes Christ's later command especially striking.
The city had been captured despite believing itself secure.
Ancient accounts describe occasions when attackers discovered ways to scale portions of the heights that defenders had considered effectively inaccessible. The city's confidence in its natural defenses contributed to inadequate vigilance.
Sardis had learned the hard way that believing oneself secure is not the same as being secure.

That history gives remarkable resonance to what Christ is about to say in verse 2:

“Be watchful.”

And again in verse 3:

“If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

We should be careful not to claim more than the text itself tells us. Revelation does not explicitly say, “Jesus is referring to these historical captures of Sardis.”

But the imagery would have been difficult for people familiar with the city's history to hear without recognizing the irony.

A city famous for failing to remain watchful now contained a church being told by Christ:

Wake up.

History had become a warning.

3. “The seven spirits of God”

Christ describes Himself as the One who “hath the seven Spirits of God.” We encountered this expression near the beginning of Revelation:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne.”

The language should not lead us to imagine seven separate Holy Spirits. Seven functions symbolically throughout Revelation as a number associated with fullness and completeness.

Many interpreters therefore understand “the seven spirits of God” as symbolic language for the fullness of God's Spirit.

That interpretation fits beautifully within the message to Sardis.

Christ is speaking to a church He describes as dead.

And He introduces Himself in connection with the fullness of the Spirit of God.

The church may lack life.

Christ does not.

The church may have become spiritually exhausted.

Christ has not.

The church may possess only a reputation for vitality.

Christ possesses the source from which genuine spiritual life comes.

This is important because Sardis cannot solve its problem merely by becoming busier.

A dying church does not necessarily need more activity.

It needs life.

More meetings will not create it.

More programs will not create it.

A larger budget will not create it.

A better reputation will not create it.
Spiritual life comes from God.
The One diagnosing the death of Sardis is also the One who possesses everything necessary for Sardis to live.
The diagnosis and the hope therefore stand beside one another.
Sardis is dying.
Christ possesses life.

4. “And the seven stars”

Christ also has “the seven stars.”
Revelation 1:20 has already identified these as “the angels of the seven churches.”
The image reminds Sardis that the church remains under Christ's authority.
This is particularly important because Sardis apparently had developed a reputation independent of Christ's evaluation.
Other people believed the church was alive.
Christ said otherwise.
That raises an important question:
Who gets to decide whether a church is spiritually healthy?
The congregation?
Its leaders?
Its community?
Its denomination?
Its reputation?
Revelation's answer is consistent.
Christ does.
He holds the stars.
He walks among the lampstands.
He knows the churches.
That means a congregation cannot ultimately define its own spiritual condition.
Neither can public opinion.
A church may be celebrated and unhealthy.
Another may be small, struggling, and faithful.
Smyrna appeared poor but Christ called it rich.
Sardis appeared alive but Christ called it dead.
The difference lies in who is doing the evaluating.
Human beings see appearances.
Christ knows the reality beneath them.

5. “I know thy works”

Again we hear the words:
“I know.”

These words have become a refrain throughout the messages to the churches.
But their emotional weight changes depending upon the condition of the congregation hearing them.
To Smyrna:
“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty.”
Those words comfort.
To Thyatira:
“I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance.”
Those words affirm.
But in Sardis:
“I know thy works.”
Those words expose.
People know Sardis's reputation.
Christ knows Sardis's works.
And apparently the two do not agree.
This is one of the recurring themes of the seven messages.
Christ sees what statistics cannot measure.
He sees what reputation cannot reveal.
He sees what religious activity can sometimes conceal.
That should not make faithful Christians afraid of Christ's knowledge.
It should make us grateful for it.
The One who sees our failures also sees our faithfulness.
The One who sees what needs repentance also sees what remains.
The One who knows where spiritual life has weakened also knows exactly where renewal must begin.
Nothing about Sardis is hidden from Him.
Including the things that can still be saved.

6. “Thou hast a name that thou livest”

The word translated “name” carries the idea of reputation.
Sardis was known for something.
People apparently regarded this as a living church.
Perhaps the reputation had once been deserved.
That possibility makes Christ's words even more sobering.
Reputations often survive the circumstances that created them.
A church can continue being known for what it was.
Perhaps it experienced remarkable growth decades earlier.
Perhaps it once possessed an extraordinary ministry.
Perhaps generations of faithful believers established its reputation.
Perhaps missionaries were sent from it.
Perhaps people came to Christ there.

Perhaps the community once looked toward that congregation as a center of Christian witness.
All of those things would be worth remembering.
But none of them could keep the church alive today.
There is a subtle danger in possessing a faithful history.
Eventually we can begin borrowing spiritual credibility from yesterday.
We say:
Look what God did here.
Look how this church once grew.
Look how many people once worshiped here.
Look at the ministries we once supported.
Look at the pastors who once preached here.
Look at what we once accomplished.
Those memories may be precious.
But eventually Christ asks:
What is happening now?
The Christian life cannot be lived entirely in the past tense.
Neither can the life of a church.
Yesterday's faithfulness deserves gratitude.
Today's faithfulness still requires obedience.

7. “And art dead”

Then comes the verdict.
“And art dead.”
Few statements in these seven messages are more severe.
Christ does not say:
You are becoming weak.
He does not say:
You are struggling.
He does not say:
You have lost your effectiveness.
He says:
“Thou art dead.”
Yet we must read this statement together with what follows.
In verse 2 Christ will say:
“Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.”
And in verse 4 He will acknowledge a few in Sardis who have remained faithful.
So “dead” does not mean that absolutely nothing spiritually alive remains anywhere within the congregation.
It describes the prevailing condition of the church.
And that distinction gives the passage its hope.
Something remains.

There are still embers beneath the ashes.
Christ sees them.
The church may be largely dead.
But Christ has not pronounced it beyond recovery.
If He had, there would be no reason to say:
Wake up.
There would be no reason to say:
Strengthen what remains.
There would be no reason to say:
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
The severity of Christ's diagnosis should therefore never be separated from the grace of Christ's continued speaking.
He tells Sardis the truth because the truth can still be heard.
Sometimes grace sounds like:
“Come to me.”
Sometimes grace sounds like:
“Do not be afraid.”
Sometimes grace sounds like:
“Your sins are forgiven.”
And sometimes grace sounds like:
“Thou art dead.”
Because if we do not know our true condition, we will never recognize our need for life.
Christ does not expose Sardis in order to humiliate it.
He exposes Sardis in order to awaken it.
And the One calling a dying church to awaken is the One who has already introduced Himself as possessing the fullness of the Spirit of God.
The church has a name.
Christ has life.
That is the difference upon which everything that follows depends.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a particular danger that comes with having followed Christ for many years.
We accumulate a spiritual history.
We remember when we first believed.
We remember seasons when prayer seemed almost effortless.
We remember moments when Scripture spoke with extraordinary clarity.
We remember ministries in which God used us.
We remember people we helped.

We remember difficult seasons through which God carried us.
And other people remember some of those things too.
Over time, a reputation forms.
Faithful.
Committed.
Dependable.
A person who knows Scripture.
A person who loves the Church.
A person who has served Christ for years.
Those are wonderful things to have said about us.
But Sardis reminds us that no reputation can substitute for a present relationship with Christ.
The question is not simply:
Was I faithful?
The question is:
Am I walking faithfully with Christ now?
That does not mean every season of Christian life will feel the same.
Faith matures.
Circumstances change.
Our bodies change.
Our responsibilities change.
The ways we serve may change dramatically over a lifetime.
Spiritual vitality should not be confused with constant emotional intensity.
There are seasons when faith feels like fire.
There are others when faith looks more like quietly putting one foot in front of another.
Both can be faithful.
The problem at Sardis was deeper.
The reputation remained after much of the reality had disappeared.
And Christ loved this church enough to tell it so.
Perhaps one of the greatest gifts Christ can give us is the truth about ourselves.
Not the person others think we are.
Not the person we remember being.
Not even the person we wish we were.
The person standing before Him now.
Because only when we see where we truly are can we hear what Christ will say next:
Wake up.

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis had a name for being alive.

That means people were looking at the church and seeing something impressive.
Christ looked at the same church and saw something entirely different.
That should make us cautious about the measurements we use for spiritual health.
Busy does not necessarily mean alive.
Large does not necessarily mean alive.
Successful does not necessarily mean alive.
Respected does not necessarily mean alive.
Traditional does not necessarily mean alive.
Contemporary does not necessarily mean alive.
The question is not whether a church looks alive according to the expectations of its culture.
The question is whether the life of Christ is actually present among its people.
And the same is true personally.
We can spend years building a reputation.
Christ needs only a moment to see the heart.
But that truth is not merely frightening.
It is freeing.
We do not have to maintain an image before Christ.
He already knows.
We do not have to pretend the fire is blazing when only an ember remains.
He already sees the ember.
And as the next verse will show us, Christ is remarkably interested in embers.
He does not say: **Pretend the fire is still burning.**
He says: **Strengthen what remains.**

Ask Yourself This

If the reputation I have accumulated through years of following Christ were suddenly stripped away—if no one knew what I had done, where I had served, what I had taught, or how faithful I had once been—**what would Christ see in my relationship with Him today?**
And if His evaluation differed from my own, would I be willing to trust His diagnosis more than my reputation?
Because ultimately the question Sardis places before us is not:
Do people think I am spiritually alive?
It is:
Does Christ find life in me now?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:2

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”
— Revelation 3:2, KJV

Verse 1 ended with words that sounded final:
“Thou art dead.”
Verse 2 proves they were not.
“Be watchful.”
There is something almost startling about that command.
We do not normally tell the dead to wake up.
Yet Christ does.
That immediately tells us something about the nature of His diagnosis.
Sardis is spiritually dying, but it is not beyond the reach of Christ. There remains something within this congregation that can respond to His voice.
And Christ intends to call it back to life.
The command is urgent.
Wake up.
Strengthen what remains.
Something has been lost.
Something is dying.
But something remains.
And as long as something remains, Christ calls His people not to surrender to decline but to strengthen what is still alive.

1. “Be watchful”

The command can carry the sense of becoming watchful or staying awake.
That language would have possessed particular force in Sardis.
As we noted in verse 1, the city's history included humiliating occasions when its apparently secure position failed to protect it because vigilance failed. The heights of Sardis seemed nearly impossible to penetrate, yet enemies found ways to enter when defenders were insufficiently watchful.
The city's past therefore gives Christ's command a remarkable resonance:
Wake up.
The danger facing the church is not an army climbing the cliffs.
It is spiritual complacency.
Sardis has become comfortable with its reputation.
Other people think the church is alive.

Perhaps the church thinks so too.
But Christ knows otherwise.
And the first step toward renewal is therefore not activity.
It is awareness.
Wake up to your condition.
Wake up to what has happened.
Wake up to the distance between reputation and reality.
Wake up to what is dying.
Spiritual decline becomes particularly dangerous when we stop noticing it.
Prayer becomes less important.
We barely notice.
Scripture becomes less central.
We barely notice.
Worship becomes routine.
We barely notice.
Compassion weakens.
We barely notice.
Obedience becomes selective.
We barely notice.
Eventually we can become accustomed to a condition that once would have troubled us deeply.
That is spiritual sleep.
And Christ says:
Wake up.

2. "Strengthen the things which remain"

Then comes one of the most hopeful commands in the message to Sardis.
"Strengthen the things which remain."
Christ does not tell them merely to mourn what has been lost.
He directs them toward what remains.
That distinction matters.
There are times when Christians become so preoccupied with what used to be that they fail to recognize what God can still do with what remains.
Churches can do this.
"We used to have so many children."
"We used to fill the sanctuary."
"We used to have this ministry."
"We used to send missionaries."
"We used to have such wonderful programs."
Individuals can do it too.
"I used to teach."
"I used to preach."

“I used to serve.”
“I used to pray differently.”
“I used to understand Scripture more clearly.”
“I used to feel closer to God.”
There may be legitimate grief in those statements.
Things change.
Some things genuinely are lost.
But Christ does not tell Sardis:
Recreate everything you once had.
He says:
Strengthen what remains.
That is a very different command.
Look carefully.
What is still alive?
Where is faith still present?
Where is love still present?
Where is obedience still present?
Where is there still a desire for God?
Where is there still an ember?
Strengthen that.
Renewal does not always begin with something spectacular.
Sometimes it begins with taking seriously the small thing that has not yet died.

3. “That are ready to die”

The situation remains urgent.
What remains is not strong.
It too is “ready to die.”
Christ is not minimizing the condition of Sardis.
This is not:
Everything will probably work itself out.
It is:
Act now.
The church is standing at a critical point.
Some things have already died.
Other things are dying.
Without intervention, what remains may follow.
That gives Christ's command a pastoral urgency.
There are moments when spiritual decline requires immediate attention.
Not next year.
Not when circumstances improve.
Not when we feel more motivated.
Now.

If prayer is disappearing from our lives, strengthen it now.
If resentment is replacing love, address it now.
If worship has become merely habitual, examine it now.
If obedience is weakening, respond now.
If our relationship with Christ has become mostly a memory, seek Him now.
We often imagine spiritual collapse as something sudden.
Sometimes it is.
More often it happens gradually.
A little less prayer.
A little less attention.
A little more compromise.
A little more indifference.
Until one day we discover that something once central to our lives has nearly disappeared.
Christ sees that process before Sardis reaches the end of it.
And He intervenes.

4. Christ Notices What Remains

There is another important truth hidden inside this command.
Christ knows exactly what remains.
The congregation may not.
Perhaps its members see only decline.
Perhaps the faithful few feel overwhelmed by everything that has gone wrong.
Perhaps they wonder whether anything can be recovered.
Christ does not wonder.
He sees precisely where life remains.
That follows naturally from the words of verse 1:
"I know."
His knowledge is not limited to what is wrong.
He also knows what is worth strengthening.
That is tremendously important pastorally.
Christ does not merely inspect His people looking for failure.
He sees possibilities for restoration.
He knows the prayer that still rises from a tired heart.
He knows the faith that continues despite disappointment.
He knows the believer who still shows up.
He knows the person who still wants to obey even after failing.
He knows the small desire for Him that has somehow survived years of difficulty.
We may look at those things and think:
That is not much.

Christ says:
Strengthen it.
Never underestimate what Christ can do with something that remains.

5. “For I have not found thy works perfect”

Christ now explains why the church must awaken.
“I have not found thy works perfect.”
The word translated “perfect” here carries the sense of being complete or fulfilled.
The problem is not necessarily that Sardis has no works.
Verse 1 already said:
“I know thy works.”
The problem is that those works are incomplete before God.
Something is missing.
The church may still be active.
It may still be doing religious things.
But activity has not reached the fullness Christ seeks.
That fits the larger diagnosis perfectly.
Sardis has the appearance of life without its fullness.
Works remain.
But they are incomplete.
Perhaps this helps us understand why religious activity alone cannot prove spiritual health.
We can begin something for Christ and fail to carry it through faithfully.
We can perform outward acts of service while inward devotion deteriorates.
We can preserve the form of discipleship while losing much of its substance.
Christ is not merely counting works.
He is evaluating them.
And His evaluation reaches deeper than ours.

6. “Before God”

This phrase takes us directly to the issue at the heart of Sardis.
Whose evaluation matters?
The church has one reputation before people.
It has another condition “before God.”
That contrast could hardly be sharper.
Before people:
Alive.
Before God:
Works incomplete and a church near death.
The Christian life is ultimately lived **coram Deo**—before God.
We live in His sight.

That does not mean the opinions of others never matter. Scripture repeatedly teaches that Christian conduct should bear faithful witness before the world.
But human approval can never become the final measurement of discipleship.
People see only part of us.
God sees the whole.
People see what we do.
God knows why.
People remember our history.
God knows our present condition.
People may applaud.
God may call us to repent.
People may overlook us.
God may call us faithful.
Sardis has been living beneath the weight of the wrong evaluation.
Its reputation says:
Alive.
Christ says:
Wake up.
And only one of those voices can lead the church back to life.

7. The Grace of an Unfinished Story

Perhaps the greatest truth in this verse is that the story of Sardis is not finished.
Christ could have walked away.
He could have allowed the church's reputation to continue while its remaining life slowly disappeared.
Instead, He speaks.
Wake up. Strengthen.
Those are words of intervention.
The church has not been abandoned to its condition.
That means Christ's correction is itself an act of grace.
We often think of grace primarily as comfort.
And certainly grace comforts.
But grace also confronts.
Grace wakes us when we would rather sleep.
Grace points toward what is dying.
Grace refuses to let reputation hide reality.
Grace tells us the truth while there is still time to respond.
Sardis is being corrected because Christ has not finished with Sardis.
Something remains.
And Christ considers what remains worth saving.

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons in life when we become painfully aware of what no longer remains.
Strength changes.
Opportunities change.
Relationships change.
Ministries change.
Churches change.
The things we once did easily may become difficult or even impossible.
And sometimes we look backward and measure the present against everything that used to be.
Christ's words to Sardis offer another way of looking.
What remains?
That question is not denial.
Christ certainly does not deny what has been lost.
He calls Sardis dead.
But He also refuses to allow what has been lost to become the entire story.
Something remains.
Perhaps that is a useful question during any season of spiritual weariness.
What remains?
Do I still believe?
Strengthen it.
Do I still pray, even imperfectly?
Keep praying.
Does Scripture still speak, even if differently than it once did?
Keep listening.
Do I still desire to follow Christ?
Follow Him.
Can I still love someone?
Love them.
Can I still serve somewhere?
Serve there.
Can I still encourage another person?
Encourage them.
The Christian life is not always about recovering everything we once possessed.
Sometimes faithfulness means offering Christ what remains.
And here is the remarkable thing:
Christ considers what remains worth strengthening.
Perhaps we should too.

Something Worth Pondering

When Christ looked at Sardis, He saw death.
But He also saw an ember.
The church's reputation could not save it.
Its history could not save it.
Its activity could not save it.
But something remained that could still respond to Christ.
That may be one of the quietest expressions of hope in Revelation.
We tend to look for great beginnings.
Christ sometimes begins with remnants.
A little faith.
A little strength.
A little obedience.
A little desire.
Something that has not completely died.
And He says:
Strengthen that.
Perhaps renewal does not always begin when God gives us something new.
Perhaps sometimes it begins when He shows us that what we thought was nearly gone is not gone yet.

Ask Yourself This

What remains in my life that Christ may be asking me to strengthen?
Is there a prayer life that has grown weak but has not disappeared?
A calling I have neglected but never completely forgotten?
A love for Scripture that has grown quiet but still stirs?
A desire to serve that remains even though the way I serve must change?
And instead of spending all my energy grieving what used to be, **what might happen if I placed what remains into Christ's hands and began strengthening it today?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:3

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”
— Revelation 3:3, KJV

Christ has told Sardis to wake up.
He has told the church to strengthen what remains.
Now He tells them how.
“Remember.”
“Hold fast.”
“Repent.”
There is nothing complicated about the prescription.
Sardis does not need to discover some new spiritual secret.
It does not need a new gospel.
It does not need a new Christ.
It needs to return to what it has already received and heard.
That makes verse 3 particularly important for a church living on its reputation.
Sardis has a past.
Christ does not tell them to ignore it.
He tells them to remember the right part of it.
Do not merely remember how alive the church once appeared.
Remember what you received.
Remember what you heard.
And then live accordingly.

1. “Remember therefore”

Memory becomes part of the road toward renewal.
We have encountered this before.
Christ told Ephesus:
“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.”
Now Sardis is also told to remember.
But the emphasis is somewhat different.
Ephesus must remember what has been lost.
Sardis must remember what has been received.
In both cases, however, memory serves repentance.
Christian memory is not simply nostalgia.
Nostalgia says:
Those were wonderful days.

Christian remembrance asks:
What did God give me then that I need to live faithfully now?
That distinction matters.
A church can remember the past without learning anything from it.
It can celebrate anniversaries.
Display photographs.
Tell stories about former pastors.
Remember crowded sanctuaries.
Recall successful ministries.
Speak fondly about what God once did.
And none of those things necessarily produce renewal.
Sardis does not need sentimental memory.
It needs spiritual memory.
Remember what you received.
Remember what you heard.
Remember the truth that formed you.
Remember the gospel that gave you life.
Memory becomes useful when yesterday's truth produces today's obedience.

2. “How thou hast received and heard”

Christ directs Sardis back toward the message it originally received.
The wording naturally points toward the gospel and apostolic teaching that had been handed on to the church.
Before Sardis had a reputation, it had a message.
Before it became known as a living church, someone proclaimed Christ there.
Someone taught these believers.
They heard the good news.
They received it.
And a church was born.
That order matters.
The church did not create the gospel.
It received it.
Christian faith is something handed down.
One generation receives the testimony of those who came before and is then entrusted with faithfully carrying that testimony forward.
That means renewal does not necessarily require innovation.
Sometimes renewal requires recovery.
Return to Christ.
Return to Scripture.
Return to prayer.
Return to worship.

Return to obedience.
Return to the gospel that first gave the church life.
There is always a temptation to believe that spiritual decline requires something dramatic and new.
Christ tells Sardis:
Remember what you already have.
The problem is not that God failed to give them what they needed.
The problem is that they stopped living according to what they had received.

3. “Hold fast”

Remembering is not enough.
“Hold fast.”
The wording is brief.
The demand is enormous.
There is a difference between knowing Christian truth and living Christian truth.
We can know Scripture.
We can explain doctrine.
We can remember sermons.
We can quote passages.
We can understand what Christ commands.
And still fail to obey.
Sardis apparently possessed enough Christian history to have a reputation.
The problem was not necessarily ignorance.
It was that what had been received and heard was no longer producing complete works before God.
Christ therefore moves directly from memory to obedience.
Remember what you heard.
Then do it.
That pattern runs throughout Scripture.
God's Word is not given merely to inform us.
It calls us to respond.
Truth that never reaches life remains incomplete.
The church that remembers the gospel but no longer lives according to it has turned revelation into history.
Christ calls Sardis to make what it remembers present again through obedience.

4. “And repent”

Then comes the word we have heard repeatedly in these messages:
Repent.

Repentance is necessary because Sardis's condition did not simply happen to it.
Something within the church must change.
Repentance means turning.
It means recognizing that the present direction cannot continue and deliberately returning toward God.
That is why repentance is actually a hopeful word.
Christ does not say:
Regret what happened.
He says:
Repent.
Regret looks backward.
Repentance turns around.
Regret may leave us standing exactly where we were.
Repentance begins moving in another direction.
This is particularly important when dealing with spiritual decline.
We can spend enormous amounts of time lamenting what has changed.
We can regret that prayer has become difficult.
Regret that worship has become routine.
Regret that Scripture no longer receives our attention.
Regret that our love has cooled.
Regret that our service has diminished.
But regret alone changes nothing.
At some point Christ says:
Turn around.
Pray.
Listen.
Obey.
Forgive.
Return.
Repentance is not merely feeling badly about where we are.
It is responding to Christ's invitation to go somewhere else.

5. Remember, Obey, Repent

The three commands belong together.
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
Remove any one of them and something important is lost.
Memory without obedience becomes nostalgia.
Obedience without remembrance can become mere religious duty.
Repentance without returning to the truth we received can become nothing more than temporary remorse.

Together they form a path toward renewal.
Remember what Christ has given.
Live according to what Christ has said.
Turn away from whatever has led you elsewhere.
There is no complicated recovery program.
Christ brings Sardis back to the fundamentals of discipleship.
And perhaps that itself is worth noticing.
When spiritual life grows weak, we sometimes imagine that recovery must be equally complicated.
Christ's instructions are remarkably simple.
Wake up.
Strengthen what remains.
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
Simple does not mean easy.
But it does mean the way forward is clear.

6. “If therefore thou shalt not watch”

Now the tone changes.
Christ has offered the path toward renewal.
But Sardis can refuse it.
“If therefore thou shalt not watch...”
Grace does not eliminate responsibility.
Christ calls.
The church must respond.
The possibility that Sardis may remain asleep tells us something about spiritual complacency.
We can become so accustomed to our condition that even a warning fails to move us.
We can hear sermons about repentance without repenting.
We can recognize that prayer has weakened without praying.
We can acknowledge that something needs to change without changing it.
We can agree with Christ and still remain asleep.
That may be one of the strangest features of spiritual decline.
Eventually we can become aware of the problem without becoming sufficiently concerned to address it.
Christ therefore attaches a warning to His command.
Wake up.
Because remaining asleep has consequences.

7. “I will come on thee as a thief”

The image of a thief appears elsewhere in the New Testament to describe unexpected coming.
A thief does not make an appointment.
He does not send advance notice.
He comes when the household is unprepared.
But for Sardis, the imagery carries an additional historical resonance.
The ancient city had learned more than once the danger of inadequate watchfulness.
Its elevated position created confidence.
Its defenses appeared formidable.
And yet attackers had managed to enter when vigilance failed.
The city that believed itself secure discovered that security without watchfulness could become vulnerability.
Again, Revelation does not explicitly tell us that Christ is referring to a particular military episode in Sardis's history.
We should therefore avoid claiming certainty where the text does not give it.
But for people living in Sardis, the warning would have carried unmistakable force.
Stay awake.
Your city knows what happens when watchmen assume no one can come.
Now Christ applies that lesson spiritually.
A church with a reputation for life has become complacent.
And complacency is dangerous precisely because it makes urgency disappear.
Everything seems fine.
Until suddenly it is not.

8. “Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”

The warning ends with uncertainty.
“Thou shalt not know what hour.”
The emphasis is not upon calculating when Christ will come.
It is upon remaining ready.
That distinction is especially important in Revelation.
This book has often attracted attempts to calculate times, construct prophetic schedules, identify dates, and fit current events into elaborate systems.
But the pastoral force of Jesus' words here moves in the opposite direction.

The church is not told:
Figure out the hour.
It is told:
Wake up.
The proper response to uncertainty is not speculation.
It is faithfulness.
If Sardis is awake, the unknown hour is not the problem.
If Sardis is asleep, knowing the hour would not solve the deeper problem.
Christ's concern is the condition of the church.
The warning therefore brings us back to the central issue:
Be awake now.
Be faithful now.
Obey now.
Repent now.
Do not postpone present discipleship while trying to understand future timing.
The faithful church does not need to know the hour in order to be ready.
It simply needs to be awake when Christ comes.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something wonderfully practical about Christ's instructions to Sardis.
When our spiritual lives become weak, we often wonder where to begin.
Christ gives us three places.
Remember.
Obey.
Repent.
Remember what you received.
Perhaps that means remembering when grace first became more than a theological word.
Remember when you realized that Christ's love included you.
Remember when Scripture first began speaking into your life.
Remember prayers God answered.
Remember difficult places through which He carried you.
Remember the truth that shaped you.
Then ask:
Am I still living according to what I remember?
That is where obedience enters.
There may be something we already know Christ is asking us to do.
Perhaps we do not need another sermon.
Perhaps we do not need another book.
Perhaps we do not need another explanation.

Perhaps we already know.
Forgive.
Pray.
Serve.
Stop.
Begin.
Return.
Trust.
And where we have deliberately or gradually moved away from Christ, repent.
Turn around.
There is tremendous hope in that command because repentance means the road back remains open.
Christ would not tell Sardis to return if there were nowhere to return to.
He would not call them to wake if morning were impossible.
He would not tell them to strengthen what remains if everything had already been lost.
The warning is serious.
But the warning exists because Christ is still speaking.
And whenever Christ is still speaking, we should listen.

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis had a problem with time.
Its reputation belonged largely to the past.
Its spiritual condition existed in the present.
And Christ warned of an unknown hour in the future.
Past.
Present.
Future.
Christ addresses all three.
Remember what you received in the past.
Obey and repent in the present.
Stay awake for what may come in the future.
That may be one of the wisest ways Christians can think about time.
Remember the past without living in it.
Obey Christ in the present without postponing faithfulness.
Trust the future to God without trying to calculate what He has not revealed.
The past can teach us.
The future can motivate us.
But faithfulness can only be practiced **now**.

Ask Yourself This

What truth have I already received and heard from Christ that I know I should be living more faithfully today?
Is there something I keep remembering but have stopped obeying?
Something I regret but have not actually repented of?
Something Christ has been calling me to strengthen while I continue telling myself that I will deal with it later?
And if I truly do not know how much time lies ahead, **what obedience am I postponing that Christ may simply be asking me to begin today?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:4

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”
— Revelation 3:4, KJV

After the severity of the first three verses, verse 4 almost feels like light entering the room.
Sardis has been described as dead.
Its works are incomplete.
Christ has commanded the church to wake up, strengthen what remains, remember what it received, obey, and repent.
He has warned that if the church refuses to awaken, He will come unexpectedly.
Then:
“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.”
A few.
The number is apparently not impressive.
But Christ notices them.
That may be one of the most important truths in this verse.
The spiritual condition of the larger congregation does not cause Christ to overlook those who have remained faithful within it.
He knows exactly who they are.
The church may possess a reputation.
Christ knows the people.
And these faithful few receive one of the most personal promises among the seven churches:
“They shall walk with me.”

1. The Faithful Few

Christ has spoken a hard word to Sardis. Now He singles out the faithful.
“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.”
Everything Christ has said about Sardis remains true.
The church has a reputation for being alive.
But it is dead.
Its works are incomplete.
Much of what remains is itself close to death.
Yet.
The diagnosis of the church does not describe every individual within it.
There are exceptions.
There are people who have remained faithful.

That should caution us against making sweeping judgments about congregations—or about the people within them.
A church may be struggling spiritually while containing deeply faithful disciples.
A denomination may experience serious problems while containing people who love Christ sincerely.
A congregation may pass through seasons of decline while some of its members continue praying, serving, worshiping, and remaining faithful.
Christ sees distinctions that we may overlook.
He does not look at Sardis and say:
They are all alike.
He knows otherwise.
That turn in Christ's address makes room for the faithful few to be seen.

2. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis"

The KJV says "a few names." Christ knows the people behind those **names**.
That is particularly appropriate in Sardis.
Verse 1 said:
"Thou hast a name that thou livest."
Now Christ speaks of a few **names** within the church.
And in verse 5 He will promise:
"I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."
The repetition creates a beautiful contrast.
Sardis has a name.
The faithful have names.
The church's name represents its reputation before others.
The names of the faithful represent people known personally by Christ.
The world tends to notice institutions.
Christ notices individuals.
We see congregations.
Christ sees people.
We see movements.
Christ sees disciples.
We see crowds.
Christ sees names.
And apparently Christ does not require a large number before faithfulness matters to Him.
There are only a few.
He knows them anyway.

3. Faithful in an Unfaithful Environment

These believers deserve our attention precisely because of where they remained faithful.
They are in Sardis.
They have not escaped the spiritual decline surrounding them.
They live within it.
That makes their faithfulness significant.
It is one thing to remain spiritually alert when everyone around us encourages faithfulness.
It can be considerably harder when complacency becomes normal.
Spiritual attitudes are contagious.
Enthusiasm can spread.
So can indifference.
Prayerfulness can influence a congregation.
So can prayerlessness.
Faithfulness can encourage faithfulness.
Complacency can make complacency seem acceptable.
The few in Sardis are therefore examples of endurance.
They did not allow the spiritual condition around them to determine the spiritual condition within them.
That is an important lesson.
We cannot always control the faithfulness of the people around us.
We cannot always determine the direction of an institution.
We cannot force another person to care.
We cannot manufacture spiritual renewal in someone else's heart.
But we can remain faithful ourselves.
Sometimes endurance means standing with a multitude.
Sometimes endurance means standing among a few.

4. “Which have not defiled their garments”

Christ now introduces the image of clothing.
The language of clean and defiled garments appears throughout Scripture and will become increasingly important as Revelation unfolds.
Here the image communicates moral and spiritual faithfulness.
The few in Sardis have not allowed themselves to become stained by the condition surrounding them.
We should be careful not to turn the image into a claim that these believers are morally perfect.
That is not the point.
Their worthiness is not a declaration that they have achieved sinless perfection.
Rather, they have remained faithful to Christ.

They have not surrendered to the spiritual death consuming much of the congregation.
The image of clothing is especially effective because clothing is visible.
A garment can reveal where someone has been.
Walk through mud and the garment shows it.
Work among smoke and the garment carries the smell.
Brush against something dirty and the evidence may remain.
Christ uses that familiar reality spiritually.
The faithful few have lived within Sardis without allowing Sardis's spiritual condition to become their own.
They are surrounded by decline.
They have not surrendered to it.

5. “They shall walk with me”

Then comes the promise.
“They shall walk with me.”
There are more spectacular images in Revelation.
Thrones.
Crowns.
A sea like crystal.
Angels beyond counting.
A city descending from heaven.
A river of life.
A tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.
But perhaps few promises are more beautiful than this:
They will walk with me.
At the heart of Christian hope is not merely a place.
It is a Person.
The final hope of the believer is not simply that suffering ends.
Not simply that death ends.
Not simply that evil is defeated.
Not simply that heaven is beautiful.
The great promise is communion with Christ.
To be with Him.
To walk with Him.
The Bible begins with humanity experiencing fellowship with God and then losing that fellowship through sin.
The biblical story moves toward restoration.
Revelation will eventually declare:
“See, the home of God is among mortals.”
God with His people.
His people with God.
And here, in miniature, Sardis receives that same promise:

You will walk with Me.
The church with a reputation for life is dying.
But those who remain faithful are promised life in the presence of Christ.

6. “In white”

They will walk with Christ “in white.”
White garments become an important symbol throughout Revelation.
Later John will see believers clothed in white robes before the throne.
The imagery carries ideas of purity, victory, faithfulness, and belonging to the redeemed people of God.
But notice the contrast within this particular verse.
They have not soiled their garments.
They will walk in white.
Present faithfulness and future promise are connected.
They have refused to allow their allegiance to Christ to be stained.
Christ promises them garments appropriate for walking in His presence.
This does not mean that salvation is a reward earned by moral cleanliness.
Revelation itself will later make clear that the redeemed stand before God because of what the Lamb has accomplished.
The white garments ultimately testify not to human self-sufficiency but to God's saving work.
Still, Revelation never separates grace from faithfulness.
Those redeemed by the Lamb are called to live as people belonging to the Lamb.
The few in Sardis have done so.

7. “For they are worthy”

These words can make us uncomfortable.
“For they are worthy.”
How can sinful human beings be described as worthy?
We must read the statement within the language of Revelation itself.
The book has already established who is worthy in the ultimate sense.
Christ.
And Revelation will soon make that declaration dramatically clear:
“Worthy is the Lamb.”
The faithful in Sardis do not compete with the worthiness of Christ.
Their worthiness describes the appropriateness of the promised reward in light of their faithful allegiance to Him.
They have remained faithful.
Christ recognizes that faithfulness.
That matters because sometimes Christian teaching about grace is expressed in ways that unintentionally suggest that human faithfulness does not matter.

Revelation will not allow us to say that.
Grace does not make faithfulness irrelevant.
Grace makes faithfulness possible.
Christ sees obedience.
Christ sees endurance.
Christ sees sacrifice.
Christ sees the person who refuses compromise.
Christ sees the believer who remains spiritually awake when others sleep.
And He calls that faithfulness worthy of recognition.
Not because we have saved ourselves.
But because a life transformed by grace matters to the One who gave the grace.

8. Christ Knows the Few

Perhaps this is the pastoral center of verse 4.
Christ knows the few.
Imagine being one of them.
Perhaps you are watching the church you love decline.
Perhaps you remember what it once was.
Perhaps you see people becoming indifferent.
Perhaps you pray for renewal and wonder whether anything is happening.
Perhaps you sometimes feel very alone.
Christ says: **I know.**
The majority does not determine whether your faithfulness matters.
Numbers do not determine whether your prayers matter.
Recognition does not determine whether your service matters.
Christ does.
And He knows your name.
This is one of Revelation's recurring reversals.
The world may overlook people whom heaven knows very well.
Some of the most faithful Christians who have ever lived may never have had their names printed in books.
They never stood behind pulpits.
They never led large ministries.
They never became known outside their communities.
Some may hardly have been known within them.
But Christ knew.
Perhaps the history of the Church in heaven will look remarkably different from the history of the Church written on earth.
We remember the famous.
Christ remembers the faithful.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when following Christ can feel lonely.
Not necessarily because we are physically alone.
Sometimes we are surrounded by people.
We may even be surrounded by religious people.
And still feel that we are among only a few who recognize that something important is being lost.
That can produce frustration.
It can produce anger.
It can produce pride.
And it can eventually produce despair.
The faithful few in Sardis offer another possibility.
Remain faithful.
Not self-righteous.
Not bitter.
Not constantly comparing ourselves with everyone else.
Faithful.
We are not responsible for being the majority.
We are responsible for following Christ.
Sometimes that will place us among many.
Sometimes among few.
But the number does not change the calling.
And perhaps there is comfort here for those who have spent years quietly serving Christ without much recognition.
The Sunday school teacher whose class was never large.
The person who prayed faithfully for a congregation for decades.
The caregiver whose service was mostly invisible.
The believer who continued giving when no one noticed.
The person who quietly refused compromise when compromise would have been easier.
Christ knows the few.
Christ knows the names.
And ultimately the promise is not that everyone else will finally recognize how faithful we were.
The promise is better:
"They shall walk with me."
Perhaps that is enough.
Perhaps it has always been enough.

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis had a name.
Christ knew the names.
There is a tremendous difference.

A reputation belongs to the public.
A name belongs to a person.
The reputation of Sardis said:
Alive.
Christ looked beyond the reputation and found a few people who truly were.
And He knew exactly who they were.
That means faithfulness never disappears into the crowd.
It cannot be hidden by the failure of an institution.
It cannot be erased by the indifference of others.
It cannot become insignificant because only a few remain.
Christ sees.
Christ knows.
And Christ remembers.
Perhaps we spend too much time wondering whether anyone notices what we do for Christ.
Someone does.
And He is the only One whose recognition finally matters.

Ask Yourself This

If remaining faithful to Christ placed me among only "a few," would His presence be enough to keep me there?
Can I remain faithful without becoming bitter toward those who are not?
Can I serve without needing recognition?
Can I obey when no one applauds?
Can I continue walking with Christ when others around me become indifferent?
And when all the other rewards of faithfulness are stripped away, **is the promise "they shall walk with me" enough for me?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:5

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”
— Revelation 3:5, KJV

Verse 5 continues the promise begun in verse 4.
A few people in Sardis have remained faithful.
They have not soiled their garments.
Christ has promised that they will walk with Him, dressed in white.
Now the promise expands beyond those few and is offered to everyone who conquers.
“He that overcometh...”
Once again we encounter one of the great themes running through the messages to the seven churches.
Conquering does not mean escaping every difficulty.
It does not mean overpowering one's enemies.
It does not mean achieving worldly success.
In Revelation, conquering is closely connected with faithful endurance.
The conqueror is the one who remains faithful to Christ.
And to those who endure, Christ gives three extraordinary promises:
They will be clothed in white.
Their names will not be erased from the book of life.
And Christ will confess their names before His Father and the angels.
Sardis has been living on a name.
Christ now promises something infinitely greater.
He will speak their names in heaven.

1. “He that overcometh”

The language of conquering has appeared repeatedly in these messages.
Ephesus heard:
“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life.”
Smyrna heard:
“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”
Pergamum heard promises of hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name.
Thyatira heard the promise of authority and the morning star.
Now Sardis hears:
“He that overcometh...”
Each church faces a different challenge.
Yet every church is called to conquer.

That helps us understand what Revelation means by victory.
Ephesus conquers by returning to its first love.
Smyrna conquers by remaining faithful through suffering.
Pergamum conquers by resisting compromise.
Thyatira conquers by refusing corruption and holding fast.
Sardis conquers by waking up and remaining spiritually alive.
The circumstances differ.
The calling remains.
Be faithful to Christ.
This is especially important because Revelation will eventually present enormous images of conflict.
Beasts will appear.
Empires will rage.
Evil will seem powerful.
The saints will suffer.
Some will die.
Yet Revelation will continue describing faithful believers as conquerors.
Why?
Because Christian victory is not measured by whether the world defeats the body.
It is measured by whether the world can take our allegiance from Christ.
The believer who remains faithful has conquered even when the world believes otherwise.

2. “The same shall be clothed in white raiment”

The promise of verse 4 now becomes the promise of verse 5.
The faithful few will walk with Christ in white.
Everyone who conquers will be clothed the same way.
White garments will continue appearing throughout Revelation.
They symbolize purity, victory, and belonging among the redeemed people of God.
But as Revelation unfolds, we will discover something essential about these garments.
They are not ultimately white because human beings managed to keep themselves morally spotless through their own strength.
Later John will see a great multitude standing before the throne, clothed in white robes.
Their robes have been made white through the Lamb.
That strange and beautiful image keeps grace at the center of the promise.
The conquerors are faithful.
Their faithfulness matters.
Their endurance matters.

Their obedience matters.
But their hope rests ultimately in Christ.
The white robe is not a trophy celebrating human perfection.
It is a garment proclaiming belonging.
These are the people of the Lamb.

3. “I will not blot out his name”

Then comes a statement that has generated centuries of theological discussion:
“I will not blot out his name...”
Some readers have focused primarily upon the implied possibility behind the promise.
If Christ promises not to erase a name, can a name therefore be erased?
Does this verse teach that salvation can be lost?
Others understand the statement differently.
They see it as a strong assurance rather than a warning that a genuine believer may lose salvation.
On that reading, Christ is not threatening the conqueror with erasure.
He is promising precisely the opposite:
Your name is secure with Me.
Christians from different theological traditions have answered the larger question of perseverance and salvation differently, and this single verse should not be forced to carry the entire debate.
We should allow the promise to speak before turning it into an argument.
Notice what Christ actually says to the conqueror.
He does not say:
Perhaps I will keep your name.
He does not say:
I will keep your name if you manage never to fail again.
He says:
“I will not blot out his name.”
For the faithful believer in Sardis, these are words of assurance.
The church's earthly reputation may disappear.
Its buildings may someday disappear.
Its influence may disappear.
The city itself may change beyond recognition.
But Christ knows the believer's name.
And He will not forget it.

4. “Out of the book of life”

The image of the book of life has deep biblical roots.
Scripture uses the imagery of heavenly books and of names belonging to God's people in several places, and Revelation will return to the book of life repeatedly.

Later it will be called:
“The Lamb's book of life.”
The image communicates belonging.
These are people known by God.
Their citizenship, identity, and destiny rest with Him.
For Sardis, the imagery becomes especially powerful because of the repeated emphasis upon names.
The church has a **name** for being alive.
Christ knows the faithful **names** within it.
The conqueror's **name** is in the book of life.
And Christ will confess that **name** before His Father.
The movement is remarkable.
Human reputation says:
We know who Sardis is.
Christ says:
I know who belongs to Me.
That is a far deeper identity.
Our names may never become important in the world.
They may never appear in history books.
They may never be attached to buildings.
They may never be remembered generations after we are gone.
But Revelation points us toward another book.
And being known there matters infinitely more.

5. A Promise Before It Is a Debate

Because the phrase “I will not blot out his name” touches questions Christians have debated for centuries, it is easy to approach this verse with our theological systems already in hand.
One tradition may immediately see a warning about apostasy.
Another may immediately see assurance of eternal security.
Each may bring other biblical passages into the discussion.
Those larger conversations are legitimate.
But there is a pastoral danger if the debate causes us to miss the tone of Christ's words to Sardis.
Jesus is speaking to conquerors.
He is encouraging faithfulness.
The sentence is framed as a promise.
I will not erase your name.
Perhaps we should hear the comfort before we construct the argument.
The faithful believer who feels unnoticed can hear:
I know your name.
The believer surrounded by spiritual decline can hear:
I know your name.

The believer wondering whether endurance matters can hear:
I know your name.
The believer whose earthly accomplishments will someday be forgotten can hear:
I know your name.
And Christ's knowledge is not temporary.
The name is written where earthly decay cannot reach it.

6. “I will confess his name”

Then Christ makes the promise intensely personal.
“I will confess his name...”
Not merely:
I will recognize the Church.
Not:
I will acknowledge the faithful collectively.
But:
Your name.
There is something wonderfully personal about salvation in this verse.
Christianity certainly creates a people.
We are part of the Church.
We belong to the body of Christ.
We worship together.
We serve together.
We endure together.
But we are never merely anonymous members of a crowd before God.
Christ knows names.
The shepherd knows His sheep.
The Savior knows those who belong to Him.
And here He promises to speak their names.
The person whose faithfulness was barely noticed on earth will not be overlooked in heaven.

7. “Before my Father and before his angels”

Now consider the setting.
Christ will confess the conqueror's name:
“Before my Father and before his angels.”
The earthly reputation of Sardis suddenly becomes very small.
Perhaps the congregation was admired throughout the region.
Perhaps people spoke highly of it.
Perhaps its name carried influence.
Whatever recognition Sardis possessed, Christ now places another kind of recognition beside it.
There is recognition before people.
And there is recognition before heaven.

Which matters more?
Jesus had spoken similarly during His earthly ministry, promising to acknowledge before His Father those who acknowledged Him before others.
Here the risen Christ makes that promise again.
The believer confesses Christ on earth.
Christ confesses the believer in heaven.
Imagine the scene.
The Father.
The angels.
And Christ speaking your name.
Suddenly the question of whether the world remembers us seems considerably less important.

8. The Name That Ultimately Matters

The message to Sardis has revolved around names from the beginning.
"Thou hast a name that thou livest."
That was the problem.
The church had become dependent upon what others thought its name meant.
But Christ steadily replaces reputation with relationship.
Sardis has a name.
Christ knows names.
Names are written in the book of life.
Names are confessed before the Father.
Perhaps this is one of the most beautiful reversals in the entire message.
Sardis was concerned with having a name before people.
Christ offers His followers something better:
A name known in heaven.
The world may forget us.
History may forget us.
Institutions may forget us.
Even congregations we served may eventually forget us.
That is simply the nature of human life.
Generations pass.
Names disappear.
Photographs fade.
Stories are forgotten.
But Christ says:
I know your name.
I will not erase it.
I will confess it.
For the disciple of Jesus Christ, there can be no greater recognition.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us want our lives to matter.
There is nothing necessarily wrong with that desire.
We hope our work mattered.
We hope our service mattered.
We hope our ministry mattered.
We hope the people we loved remember that we loved them.
We hope something remains after we are gone.
But eventually nearly every earthly name fades.
A few generations pass, and people who were once central to families, churches, communities, and institutions become photographs whose stories are only partly remembered.
That can sound melancholy.
Revelation transforms it into hope.
The Christian does not depend upon human memory for significance.
Christ remembers.
Perhaps you served faithfully and received little recognition.
Christ knows.
Perhaps you prayed for people who never knew you prayed for them.
Christ knows.
Perhaps you gave quietly.
Christ knows.
Perhaps you endured something no one fully understood.
Christ knows.
Perhaps your greatest acts of faithfulness occurred where no one was watching.
Someone was.
And the promise of Revelation 3:5 is not merely that Christ privately remembers.
He says:
"I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."
What earthly recognition could possibly compare with that?

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis teaches us that there are two very different ways of having a name.
We can build a name before people.
Or we can live faithfully before Christ.
Sometimes the two may coincide.
Often they may not.
The danger begins when we become more concerned about protecting our reputation than maintaining our relationship with Christ.
Sardis had a name.

It was impressive.
It was also wrong.
The faithful few had something better.
Christ knew their names.
Perhaps the Christian life becomes much simpler when we finally decide which audience matters most.
We do not need everyone to know our name.
We need to remain faithful to the One who already does.

Ask Yourself This

Whose recognition am I really seeking?
If my years of service were forgotten, if my accomplishments disappeared, if no one remembered what I contributed, and if my name eventually vanished from every earthly place where I once mattered, **would it be enough to know that Christ remembers my name?**
And when I imagine Him saying,
"I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels,"
does that change how important the applause—or silence—of everyone else seems?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:6

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:6, KJV

For the fifth time, Christ closes a message to one of the seven churches with the same call:
Listen.
The words are familiar now.
But familiarity can itself become dangerous.
We can hear something repeatedly until we stop hearing it at all.
Perhaps that makes this refrain especially appropriate for Sardis.
This is a church that has fallen spiritually asleep.
Christ has spoken.
He has diagnosed.
He has warned.
He has commanded.
He has promised.
Now the question becomes:
Will anyone listen?
The message began with Christ declaring:
“I know.”
It ends with Christ asking His people to hear.
Christ knows the church completely.
The question is whether the church will listen to Him honestly.

1. “He that hath an ear”

The invitation is remarkably personal.
“He that hath an ear...”
The condition of the congregation does not determine whether an individual can respond to Christ.
That matters enormously in Sardis.
The church as a whole has been described as dead.
Yet Christ has already identified a few who remain faithful.
Now the invitation broadens again.
Anyone who has an ear may listen.
That means no individual in Sardis can excuse personal spiritual complacency by pointing toward the condition of everyone else.
The church may be asleep.
You can wake up.
Others may be indifferent.

You can listen.
Others may be living on reputation.
You can live faithfully.
Others may refuse to repent.
You can repent.
There is something deeply personal about discipleship.
We live within communities.
We worship within congregations.
We belong to the body of Christ.
But ultimately each of us must respond when Christ speaks.
No one else can listen for us.

2. "That hath an ear"

Obviously Christ is speaking about more than physical hearing.
Nearly everyone receiving these words possesses ears.
The issue is spiritual receptivity.
Jesus used similar language throughout His earthly ministry:
"Let anyone with ears to hear listen."
Hearing, biblically, often means more than receiving sound.
It carries the idea of receiving what is spoken in a way that leads toward response.
That distinction is important.
It is possible to hear Scripture without truly hearing Scripture.
We can sit through sermons.
Read passages.
Attend Bible studies.
Participate in worship.
Discuss theology.
Memorize verses.
And still resist what God is saying.
Sardis probably did not suffer from a complete absence of Christian teaching.
Christ has already told them:
"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard."
They had heard.
The problem was what happened afterward.
That makes verse 6 almost painfully appropriate.
You heard before.
Now listen.

3. Hearing That Leads to Obedience

Verse 3 helps define what listening means:
"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."

True hearing leads somewhere.
It moves toward obedience.
This is a theme running throughout Scripture.
God's Word is not merely information to be collected.
It is truth to which we respond.
There is a danger in becoming so familiar with Scripture that we learn to analyze it without allowing it to examine us.
We ask:
What does this passage mean?
That is necessary.
But eventually another question must follow:
What does this passage require of me?
Sardis does not need another theological lecture about spiritual vitality.
It needs to wake up.
It does not need merely to understand repentance.
It needs to repent.
It does not need to admire the faithful few.
It needs to become faithful.
Listening becomes real when Christ's words begin changing the listener.

4. “Hear what the Spirit saith”

Here we encounter something important about the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in these messages.
At the beginning of the letter Christ says:
“These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.”
Christ speaks.
Yet at the conclusion we read:
“What the Spirit saith.”
The words of Christ are the words the Spirit speaks to the churches.
There is no competition between them.
The risen Christ addresses His Church through the Spirit.
And notice the tense:
“What the Spirit **saith**.”
The message was originally given to Sardis.
But the refrain deliberately opens it beyond Sardis.
The Spirit continues speaking through the message.
That is why we are not merely reading someone else's mail.
We are hearing Christ's word to His Church.
The historical setting matters.
The original congregation matters.
We should understand what these words meant in Sardis.
But having done that, we must allow the Spirit to turn the text toward us.

Where are we asleep?
What remains?
What needs strengthening?
What have we received and heard?
Where have we stopped obeying?
Where do we need to repent?
The Spirit does not preserve this message merely so that we can understand Sardis.
He uses Sardis to help us understand ourselves.

5. “Unto the churches”

Once again the plural matters.
Churches.
The message was addressed to Sardis.
The Spirit speaks it to the churches.
Ephesus must hear what Christ says to Sardis.
Smyrna must hear it.
Pergamum must hear it.
Thyatira must hear it.
Philadelphia and Laodicea must hear it.
And the Church across generations must hear it.
That means none of the seven messages belongs exclusively to the congregation named at the beginning.
A church may see itself in Ephesus's loss of first love.
Another may recognize Smyrna's suffering.
Another may face Pergamum's temptation toward compromise.
Another may struggle with Thyatira's tolerance of destructive teaching.
Another may discover Sardis's danger of reputation without reality.
And sometimes the same congregation may need to hear several messages at once.
Perhaps that is part of the wisdom of placing these seven messages together.
Christ does not give us seven categories so that we can decide which kind of church everyone else is.
He gives us seven messages and repeatedly says:
Listen.

6. The Danger of Hearing Without Listening

There is a sobering possibility hidden inside this verse.
Christ can speak and we can refuse to listen.
That possibility has been present throughout the message to Sardis.
“If therefore thou shalt not watch...”
The warning assumes a choice.
Sardis can remain asleep.

That means exposure to truth does not automatically produce transformation.
A person can know what needs to change and continue unchanged.
A church can recognize its decline and continue declining.
A believer can feel conviction and wait until the conviction fades.
Perhaps one of the most dangerous spiritual habits is learning how to hear God's Word without responding to it.
We hear.
We agree.
We are moved.
Then we continue exactly as before.
Over time, even strong warnings can become familiar.
And familiar warnings become easy to ignore.
Christ therefore does not say merely:
Let anyone who has an ear **hear the sound**.
He says:
Listen.
Receive it.
Take it seriously.
Respond.

7. From “I Know” to “Listen”

The structure of the message to Sardis is worth noticing.
Christ says:
I know.
Then:
Wake up.
Then:
Strengthen.
Then:
Remember.
Then:
Obey.
Then:
Repent.
Then:
Listen.
Christ does not merely expose the church's condition.
He provides a path forward.
And nearly every step requires a response.
Sardis cannot change Christ's knowledge.
He already knows.
But Sardis can change how it responds to what He knows.

It can wake.
It can strengthen.
It can remember.
It can obey.
It can repent.
It can listen.
That is why even this severe message is ultimately filled with grace.
Christ has not stopped speaking to Sardis.
And as long as Christ is speaking, Sardis still has something worth hearing.

8. The Final Word Is an Invitation

Christ could have ended with the warning.
"I will come on thee as a thief."
He could have ended with judgment.
He does not.
He ends with an invitation:
Listen.
That means the final word spoken over Sardis is not:
Dead.
It is:
Listen.
That difference is enormous.
"Thou art dead" describes the condition Christ finds.
"Listen" describes the possibility Christ still offers.
The church does not have to remain where it is.
The risen Christ is speaking.
The Spirit is speaking.
The door to repentance remains open.
The embers have not completely gone out.
A few remain faithful.
Something remains worth strengthening.
And anyone with an ear can still hear.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when we ask God to speak to us.
There is nothing wrong with that prayer.
"Lord, show me what You want me to do."
"Lord, give me direction."
"Lord, help me understand."
"Lord, speak."
But sometimes perhaps the more appropriate prayer is:
"Lord, help me listen to what You have already said."
Sardis had received.

Sardis had heard.
The problem was not that Christ had failed to speak.
The problem was that hearing had stopped producing obedience.
That can happen to us.
Especially after many years of following Christ.
We know the stories.
We know the passages.
We recognize the sermons.
We know when to say Amen.
We can sometimes anticipate what the preacher will say next.
Familiarity with Scripture is a tremendous gift.
But familiarity carries a subtle danger.
We can become so accustomed to hearing the Word that we stop expecting the Word to change us.
Perhaps every time we open Scripture there should remain a simple prayer beneath our reading:
Speak, Lord. I am listening.
Not merely:
Teach me something I do not know.
But:
Show me where I need to obey what I already know.
That kind of listening can awaken a sleeping heart.

Something Worth Pondering

The message to Sardis began with a church that had a reputation.
It ends with an individual who has an ear.
That movement is significant.
A reputation belongs to the crowd.
Listening belongs to the person.
We cannot control whether an entire congregation wakes up.
We cannot make everyone else repent.
We cannot force another person to hear Christ.
But we can listen.
Perhaps renewal sometimes begins exactly there.
Not with everyone.
With someone.
One person hears.
One person wakes.
One person begins praying again.
One person obeys.
One person repents.
One person strengthens what remains.
And perhaps that person strengthens another.

We often imagine revival beginning with crowds.
Maybe sometimes it begins with an ear.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ speaks through Scripture, am I still listening with the expectation that He may ask something of me?
Or have I become so familiar with His words that I can hear them without allowing them to disturb, correct, encourage, or change me?
And if the Spirit is saying to me today,
"Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Remember. Obey. Repent."
what would it look like for me not merely to hear those words—
but actually to listen?

Philadelphia — The Church With an Open Door

Revelation 3:7–13

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith

> **he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;**

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:7–13, KJV

Introduction

Philadelphia is not an impressive church by the measurements human beings commonly use.
Christ Himself says:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
That may describe a congregation that was small, socially insignificant, economically limited, politically powerless, or some combination of these.
Whatever the precise circumstances, Philadelphia is not presented as powerful.
Yet Christ does not criticize them for their weakness.
Instead He says:
“Hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

That makes Philadelphia one of the most encouraging churches among the seven.
Sardis had a reputation for life but lacked the reality.
Philadelphia has little power but possesses faithfulness.
Once again, Christ's evaluation overturns ordinary human measurements.
Philadelphia teaches us that **little power does not mean little faithfulness.**
And perhaps even more importantly:
Little power does not mean little usefulness to Christ.
Christ places before this apparently weak congregation something extraordinary:
“An open door, and no man can shut it.”
The church does not control the door.
Its enemies do not control the door.
The surrounding culture does not control the door.
Christ does.
He has the key.
He opens.
He shuts.
And when Christ opens something, no earthly power can finally close it.

The Movement of the Passage

The message to Philadelphia moves from **Christ's authority → the church's weakness → its faithfulness → Christ's vindication → endurance → promise → belonging.**
Christ first identifies Himself as:
“He that is holy, he that is true.”
He possesses:
“The key of David.”
He opens what no one can shut.
He shuts what no one can open.
Then He turns toward Philadelphia.
“I know thy works.”
But unlike Sardis, what Christ knows brings commendation.
They have little power.
Yet they have kept His word.
They have not denied His name.
Christ then promises vindication in the face of those who oppose them.
He promises to keep them through the coming trial.
He tells them:
“Hold that fast which thou hast.”
And finally He gives one of the richest promises among all seven messages.

The conqueror will become:
A pillar in God's temple.
One who will never again go out.
One bearing the name of God.
The name of the New Jerusalem.
And Christ's own new name.
The church with little power receives an astonishing promise of permanence, identity, and belonging.

1. The Holy One and the True One

Christ begins by describing Himself:
“He that is holy, he that is true.”
These titles immediately establish His character.
He is holy.
He is true.
He is utterly trustworthy.
That matters because Philadelphia is about to receive promises that may appear larger than its circumstances.
The congregation has little power.
Christ promises an open door.
They experience opposition.
Christ promises vindication.
They face trial.
Christ promises His keeping presence.
They live in an uncertain world.
Christ promises permanence.
Why should they believe Him?
Because the One making the promises is:
The Holy One.
The True One.
Christian hope does not rest primarily upon our ability to predict circumstances.
It rests upon the character of the One who makes the promise.

2. The One Who Holds the Key

Christ possesses “the key of David.”
The imagery recalls Isaiah 22:22, where authority over the house of David is represented through a key:
What is opened cannot be shut.
What is shut cannot be opened.
Revelation applies that imagery to Christ.
He possesses authority.
That becomes enormously important for Philadelphia.
Other people may attempt to exclude them.

Other people may tell them they do not belong.
Other people may close doors.
But no human being possesses Christ's key.
The final determination of who belongs to God's kingdom rests with Christ.
He opens.
No one shuts.
He shuts.
No one opens.
There is tremendous security in that truth.
The church's future does not ultimately depend upon its ability to force doors open.
It depends upon the One holding the key.

3. The Open Door

Christ says:
“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.”
The New Testament sometimes uses the imagery of an open door for opportunities to proclaim the gospel, and that may contribute to the meaning here.
But within the immediate context of Philadelphia, the image appears even larger.
Christ has just identified Himself as the One possessing the key of David.
The emphasis is therefore upon His authority to grant access that no opponent can revoke.
The church may be weak.
The door is not.
That distinction is important.
We often assume that effectiveness requires strength.
Christ apparently does not.
Philadelphia has “little strength.”
Yet Christ opens a door before them.
Perhaps one of the great mistakes Christians make is assuming that God can use us only when we feel strong.
We wait until we have more resources.
More confidence.
More influence.
More people.
More money.
More ability.
More certainty.
Christ looks at Philadelphia and says, in effect:

I know you have little power.
Then He opens the door anyway.
The opportunity rests upon Christ's authority, not Philadelphia's strength.

4. “And hast kept my word”

This is the heart of Christ's commendation.
Philadelphia has little power.
Yet.
That word matters.
Weakness has not become an excuse for unfaithfulness.
They have kept Christ's word.
They have not denied His name.
Perhaps they could not change their circumstances.
Perhaps they could not silence their opponents.
Perhaps they could not increase their influence.
But they could remain faithful.
And they did.
That brings us again to one of Revelation's central themes:
Endurance.
Faithfulness is not measured by how much control we possess over circumstances.
It is measured by whether we remain faithful to Christ within them.
Philadelphia cannot control everything around it.
But it can hold onto Christ.
And Christ considers that worthy of commendation.

5. “To know that I have loved thee”

Verse 9 contains difficult language that must be handled carefully.
Christ speaks about opponents whom He calls “the synagogue of Satan,” people who “say they are Jews, and are not.”
The language arises from a specific first-century conflict and must never be detached from that context and turned into hostility toward Jewish people generally.
Jesus Himself was Jewish.
The apostles were Jewish.
The earliest Christian movement emerged within Judaism.
The issue here is not ethnicity.
It is opposition to Christ and His people within the particular conflict facing Philadelphia.
And Christ's promise is ultimately one of vindication:
“To know that I have loved thee.”
That may be the most important part of the verse pastorally.
The Philadelphian Christians may be rejected by others.
Christ says:

I love you.
Others may question whether they belong among God's people.
Christ says:
You belong to Me.
Others may attempt to shame them.
Christ promises that His love for them will ultimately be revealed.
The final verdict over the Church does not belong to its accusers.
It belongs to Christ.

6. “Thou hast kept the word of my patience”

Verse 10 brings us directly into the theme of our entire journey through Revelation.
“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience...”
Philadelphia has endured.
Not spectacularly.
Not triumphantly by worldly standards.
Faithfully.
That is what Revelation repeatedly asks of the Church.
Endure.
Hold fast.
Do not deny Christ.
Do not surrender your allegiance.
Do not allow suffering to determine whom you worship.
And Christ promises:
“I will keep thee.”
Notice the beautiful relationship.
They have kept His word.
He will keep them.
Their keeping rests inside His keeping.
Verse 10 has generated substantial discussion concerning precisely how Christ will “keep” His people from the coming hour of trial. Different Christian traditions understand the promise differently, particularly when connecting it with larger interpretations of Revelation and end-times events.
We will examine those questions carefully when we reach the verse itself.
But before constructing an entire prophetic system from the sentence, we should hear what Philadelphia would have heard first:
The Christ you have remained faithful to will remain faithful to you.

7. “Hold that fast which thou hast”

Then comes the command:
“I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast.”
Philadelphia does not need to recover what it has lost.

That was the challenge at Ephesus.
It does not need to awaken from spiritual death.
That was Sardis.
Philadelphia needs to continue.
Hold fast.
There are seasons of discipleship when repentance is the necessary word.
There are seasons when awakening is necessary.
There are seasons when change is necessary.
And there are seasons when Christ simply says:
Keep going.
Do not abandon what you have learned.
Do not surrender what you have received.
Do not become discouraged because you have little power.
Do not allow opposition to convince you that faithfulness is pointless.
Hold fast.
Sometimes endurance is not dramatic.
Sometimes endurance is simply refusing to let go.

8. A Pillar That Never Leaves

The promise in verse 12 would have carried particular meaning in Philadelphia.
The region was vulnerable to earthquakes, and the city had experienced devastating seismic destruction in its history. People knew what it meant for buildings to fall and for inhabitants to flee unsafe structures.
Against that background Christ says:
"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."
What an image.
People accustomed to instability are promised permanence.
People who may have known what it meant to leave buildings for safety are promised:
You will never go out.
The promise is not ultimately about becoming architectural furniture in a heavenly building.
It is about permanent belonging in the presence of God.
Nothing will shake them loose.
Nothing will drive them away.
Nothing will force them outside.
They will belong.
Permanently.

9. The Name of God, the City, and Christ

Then Christ promises to write names upon the conqueror.
"The name of my God."

“The name of the city of my God.”
“My new name.”
Sardis taught us about names.
Philadelphia develops that theme even further.
Names signify identity and belonging.
The faithful believer belongs to God.
Belongs to God's city.
Belongs to Christ.
And the city named here is enormously important:
“New Jerusalem.”
We will eventually encounter that city in all its glory near the end of Revelation.
But already, here in Chapter 3, Christ points toward it.
The journey has barely begun.
Yet the destination is already visible.
New Jerusalem.
The city that comes down from God.
The home of God's people.
The place of permanent belonging.
Philadelphia may have little power in the present.
But its future is enormous.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something deeply encouraging about Philadelphia for anyone who has ever felt inadequate.
Christ does not say:
I know you are powerful.
He says:
“For thou hast a little strength.”
And then He praises them.
That challenges many of our assumptions.
We often think usefulness to God requires extraordinary ability.
We compare ourselves with people who appear more gifted.
More confident.
More knowledgeable.
More influential.
More energetic.
More successful.
And we quietly conclude:
What could God possibly do with me?
Philadelphia answers:
Quite a lot, apparently.
Christ does not ask this church to manufacture power it does not possess.

He asks for faithfulness.
Keep My word.
Do not deny My name.
Endure.
Hold fast.
Walk through the door I open.
Perhaps we have spent too much time asking whether we are strong enough for God to use.
The better question may be:
Am I faithful enough to walk through the door Christ opens?
Because if Christ opens it, our weakness cannot close it.
And if Christ closes it, our strength cannot force it open.
That takes an enormous burden from our shoulders.
We do not have to control every door.
We have to remain faithful to the One holding the key.

Something Worth Pondering

Sardis and Philadelphia stand beside one another, and the contrast is remarkable.
Sardis has a reputation for life.
Philadelphia has little power.
Sardis looks strong but is dying.
Philadelphia looks weak but is faithful.
Sardis is told:
Wake up.
Philadelphia is told:
Hold fast.
Human evaluation might easily have preferred Sardis.
Christ's evaluation sees something different.
Perhaps that should permanently change how we measure churches—and ourselves.
Christ is apparently far less impressed by appearances of strength than we are.
He notices faithfulness.
He notices endurance.
He notices those who keep His word.
He notices those who refuse to deny His name.
And sometimes He places the largest open doors before people with very little power.
Perhaps because then everyone can see who really opened the door.

Ask Yourself This

Where have I mistaken weakness for uselessness?
Have I convinced myself that Christ could do more with me if only I had more ability, more influence, more resources, more strength, or more opportunity?
And if Christ were to say to me,
"For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word,"
would that be enough?
More importantly:
Is there an open door Christ has placed before me that I have been afraid to walk through because I have been looking at my little power instead of His key?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:7

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith
he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”
— Revelation 3:7, KJV

The message to Philadelphia begins differently from several of the messages that have come before it.
There is no immediate warning.
There is no accusation.
There is no call to repent.
Instead, Christ begins by describing Himself.
He is:
“He that is holy.”
“He that is true.”
The One “he that hath the key of David.”
The One “he that openeth, and no man shutteth.”
The One “shutteth, and no man openeth.”
Every part of that introduction prepares Philadelphia for what follows.
This is a congregation with “a little strength.”
Yet Christ does not begin by talking about their power.
He begins by talking about His.
Philadelphia's circumstances may be uncertain.
Christ's authority is not.
Other people may attempt to exclude them.
Christ holds the key.
Doors may appear closed.
Christ can open them.
Doors may appear secure.
Christ can close them.
Before this little church hears anything about itself, it hears something far more important:
Who Jesus Christ is.

1. “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia”

Once again the familiar pattern begins.
“To the angel of the church...”
As we have noted throughout these messages, the Greek word *angelos* means “messenger,” and interpreters have understood these figures in different ways. Some see heavenly representatives associated with the

congregations; others have understood them as human messengers or leaders.
The text does not require us to settle the question before hearing the message.
What remains unmistakable is that Christ addresses a real congregation in a real place.
Philadelphia.
And yet, as the final verse will remind us, the message is not confined there.
“What the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Plural.
Philadelphia receives the letter.
The Church receives the message.
That matters because Philadelphia's situation is timeless.
What does faithfulness look like when we have little power?
What do we do when others appear capable of closing doors against us?
Where does our security lie when circumstances are outside our control?
Philadelphia is about to hear Christ's answer.

2. Philadelphia

Philadelphia was a city of Roman Asia located southeast of Sardis.
It was a comparatively younger city than some of the others addressed in Revelation and occupied a strategic location along important routes into the interior of Asia Minor.
Its name has become familiar to us because of its association with “brotherly love,” derived from the Greek words behind the city's name.
But the ancient city itself was not named as a description of the Christian congregation.
The name belonged to the city before the church existed.
Philadelphia also stood in a region vulnerable to earthquakes.
A devastating earthquake in the first century severely affected the region, and Philadelphia experienced continuing seismic instability afterward.
That historical setting will become especially meaningful when we reach Christ's promise in verse 12:
“Will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.”
People familiar with unstable buildings and the necessity of fleeing danger are promised permanent security in God's presence.
But before Christ speaks about permanence, He establishes His authority.
The city may shake.
Human institutions may change.
Doors may open and close.
Christ remains:

The Holy One.
The True One.
The One with the key.

3. “He that is holy”

Christ first calls Himself:
“He that is holy.”
Holiness belongs fundamentally to God.
Throughout Scripture, God is the Holy One.
To call Christ “he that is holy” therefore carries enormous theological weight.
Jesus is not merely presenting Himself as a good teacher or a faithful messenger.
He speaks with the identity and authority associated with God.
Holiness means more than moral goodness.
It speaks of God's absolute purity, His uniqueness, His otherness, His complete separation from evil.
The One addressing Philadelphia is therefore completely trustworthy because there is nothing corrupt in Him.
He does not manipulate.
He does not deceive.
He does not make promises He cannot fulfill.
He does not misuse the authority represented by the key He holds.
For a church facing opposition, that matters.
Power in human hands can be frightening because human beings can abuse it.
Christ possesses ultimate authority.
But the One possessing that authority is **holy**.
His power and His character cannot be separated.

4. “He that is true”

Christ is also:
“He that is true.”
Truth here involves more than simply speaking accurate statements.
Christ is genuine.
Reliable.
Authentic.
What He says corresponds completely with who He is.
That becomes particularly significant in Philadelphia because competing claims about identity and belonging appear in the verses that follow.
Some people will claim one thing about themselves.
Christ will reveal another reality.
Some may imply that the Christians in Philadelphia do not belong among God's people.

Christ will say:
“To know that I have loved thee.”
In a world of competing claims, Christ identifies Himself as:
The True One.
His verdict is therefore final.
Human beings may misunderstand us.
They may misrepresent us.
They may reject us.
They may even make religious claims against us.
But their judgment does not determine the truth.
Christ does.
And because He is the True One, His judgment can be trusted.

5. “He that hath the key of David”

Now the imagery shifts.
Christ possesses:
“The key of David.”
The language reaches back to Isaiah 22:22, where authority over the royal household is represented by a key placed upon the shoulder of Eliakim:
What he opens, no one shuts.
What he shuts, no one opens.
Revelation takes that imagery of royal authority and applies it to Christ.
The key represents authority.
And the reference to David places that authority within the biblical hope associated with David's royal line and God's promised kingdom.
Christ is the rightful King.
He possesses the authority to admit.
He possesses the authority to exclude.
He possesses the key.
That becomes particularly powerful in a congregation facing questions about who truly belongs to God's people.
Human beings may close doors.
Religious institutions may close doors.
Governments may close doors.
Communities may close doors.
Families may close doors.
But none of them possesses **the key of David**.
Christ does.

6. “He that openeth, and no man shutteth”

Now Christ describes what His possession of the key means.
He opens.
And when He opens:

“No man shutteth.”
That is an extraordinary promise of divine authority.
Verse 8 will immediately apply the image to Philadelphia:
“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.”
The order matters.
Verse 7 tells us **who opens**.
Verse 8 tells us **what He has opened**.
Before Philadelphia looks at the door, Christ wants them to look at the One holding the key.
That is important because we can become obsessed with doors.
Is this opportunity open?
Is it closed?
Will this work?
Will someone stop us?
Will circumstances cooperate?
Will people approve?
Christ redirects the question.
Who holds the key?
If Christ opens the door, Philadelphia's little power cannot prevent His purpose.
Neither can the opposition of others.
That does not mean every opportunity we desire has been opened by Christ.
Nor does it mean faithful Christians will never encounter obstacles.
It means that when Christ truly opens what He intends for His people, no rival authority can overturn His decision.

7. “Shutteth, and no man openeth”

We usually like the first half better.
Christ opens doors.
Amen.
But Christ also says:
He shuts them.
And no one opens.
That is equally part of His authority.
Sometimes faith means walking through the door Christ opens.
Sometimes faith means accepting the door Christ closes.
The second can be considerably harder.
We may pray for something.
Work toward it.
Prepare for it.
Hope for it.
Become convinced that it would be good.

And the door remains closed.
Our instinct may be to push harder.
But Revelation 3:7 reminds us that not every closed door is an enemy to be defeated.
Some doors may be closed by Christ.
That requires discernment.
We should not automatically assume every disappointment is a divine prohibition.
Circumstances can be complicated.
Human decisions matter.
Our own mistakes matter.
But the theological foundation remains:
Christ possesses authority over the path of His Church.
Therefore faithfulness requires not merely asking Christ to open doors.
It requires trusting Him with closed ones as well.

8. Little Power — Great Authority

Verse 7 never mentions Philadelphia's weakness.
That comes in verse 8.
But knowing what comes next makes Christ's introduction particularly beautiful.
“Thou hast a little strength.”
Yet the One speaking to them possesses absolute authority.
The contrast could hardly be greater.
Little power.
The key of David.
Philadelphia does not need to possess the key.
Christ does.
Philadelphia does not need enough strength to force the door.
Christ opens it.
Philadelphia does not need enough influence to prevent others from closing it.
No one can shut what Christ opens.
Perhaps that is why their weakness is not condemned.
Their usefulness does not depend upon possessing enormous power.
It depends upon remaining faithful to the One who does.
That is one of the great reversals of the Christian life.
We often pray:
Lord, make me stronger.
Sometimes perhaps Christ answers:
You do not need to be stronger. You need to trust the One holding the key.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us encounter doors throughout our lives.
Some open easily.
Some require patience.
Some remain closed no matter how hard we push.
And sometimes we spend years wondering why.
A job we wanted.
A ministry we hoped for.
A relationship we expected.
A plan we carefully constructed.
An opportunity we thought surely belonged to us.
Closed.
Then another door opens that we never expected.
And looking backward, we sometimes discover that the closed door redirected our lives in ways we could never have anticipated.
Revelation 3:7 does not promise that we will always understand those moments.
It promises something better.
Christ holds the key.
Perhaps faith is not knowing why every door opens or closes.
Perhaps faith is knowing whom we trust when it does.
Philadelphia has little power.
That means they cannot control everything around them.
Neither can we.
There is freedom in admitting that.
We do not possess every key.
We were never meant to.
Christ does.
Our responsibility is not to control every door.
Our responsibility is to remain faithful enough to walk through the ones He opens—and trusting enough not to spend our lives beating against the ones He closes.

Something Worth Pondering

There is an interesting difference between a key and a door.
We usually look at the door.
Christ directs our attention toward the key.
The door represents circumstances.
The key represents authority.
We spend enormous amounts of time studying circumstances.
Is the door open?
How wide?
For how long?

Who is standing nearby?
What might happen if I enter?
Christ reminds Philadelphia:
I have the key.
Perhaps peace comes when we stop believing that everything depends upon our ability to manipulate the door.
If Christ opens it, walk faithfully.
If Christ closes it, trust faithfully.
Either way, the key remains in the same hand.

Ask Yourself This

Is there a door in my life that I have been trying desperately to force open—or one Christ has opened that I have been afraid to enter because I feel I have "a little strength"?
Can I trust Christ not only when He opens the door I want, but also when He closes one I desperately wanted opened?
And beneath all those questions lies an even deeper one:
Do I trust the door—or do I trust the One who holds the key?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:8

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”
— Revelation 3:8, KJV

Once again we hear the words:
“I know.”
We heard them at Sardis.
There they introduced a devastating diagnosis:
“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”
Now Christ says the same words to Philadelphia:
“I know thy works.”
But what follows could hardly be more different.
Christ knows their weakness.
He knows their limitations.
He knows their opposition.
He knows they have “a little strength.”
And He knows something else.
They have kept His word.
They have not denied His name.
Then Christ says:
“Behold.”
Something has happened that this little congregation needs to see.
Christ has opened a door.
And no one can shut it.
Philadelphia's weakness has not prevented Christ from acting.
That may be the great surprise of this verse.
Christ does not say:
When you become stronger, I will open the door.
He says:
You have little power.
And:
I have opened the door.
Apparently those two things can exist at the same time.

1. “I know thy works”

For the sixth church, Christ again reminds His people that nothing about their condition is hidden from Him.
“I know thy works.”
These words can comfort or confront.

Their meaning depends upon what Christ sees.
Sardis had a reputation that did not match reality.
Philadelphia apparently has a weakness that does not match its faithfulness.
Perhaps other people could look at Philadelphia and see only what it lacked.
Christ sees what it possesses.
They may not have influence.
Christ knows their works.
They may not have prestige.
Christ knows their works.
They may not have many resources.
Christ knows their works.
They may receive little recognition.
Christ knows their works.
There is tremendous encouragement in that.
Faithful service does not become insignificant simply because it is small.
Christ's knowledge gives value to faithfulness that the world may never notice.
The Church does not serve before an inattentive Lord.
He knows.

2. “Behold”

Christ says:
“Behold.”
The word demands attention.
Philadelphia may be looking at the wrong thing.
Perhaps they are looking at their weakness.
Perhaps they are looking at their opponents.
Perhaps they are looking at their limited resources.
Perhaps they are looking at everything they cannot do.
Christ redirects their vision.
Look.
Do not merely look at what you lack.
Look at what I have done.
“I have set before thee an open door.”
That is an important spiritual movement.
There are times when we become so preoccupied with our limitations that we fail to notice what Christ has placed before us.
We see insufficient resources.
Christ sees an open door.
We see weakness.
Christ sees faithfulness.

We see opposition.
Christ sees something no opponent can shut.
Sometimes faith begins by looking where Christ tells us to look.

3. “I have set before thee an open door”

The identity of the One speaking controls the meaning of the door.
Verse 7 has already told us:
Christ has the key.
Christ opens.
Christ shuts.
Therefore when verse 8 says:
“I have set before thee an open door,”
we know who opened it.
Christ did.
As we noted in the passage overview, the New Testament sometimes uses an open door as an image for opportunities to proclaim the gospel.
That possibility should not be dismissed here.
Philadelphia's strategic location may also have provided opportunities for witness beyond the immediate congregation.
But the immediate context emphasizes something even broader.
Christ possesses the key of David.
He has royal authority.
He determines access.
And He has placed an open door before His faithful people.
The emphasis therefore falls not primarily upon Philadelphia's ability to create opportunity, but upon Christ's authority to provide it.
The church does not pick the lock.
It does not force the hinges.
It does not manufacture the opening.
Christ opens.
Their responsibility is to respond faithfully to what He has opened.

4. “And no man can shut it”

Now Christ makes the promise stronger.
The door is not merely open.
“No man can shut it” it.
Imagine hearing that as a congregation with little power.
Other people may appear much stronger than you.
They may possess social influence you do not have.
They may have institutional authority you do not possess.
They may oppose you.
They may exclude you.
They may attempt to convince you that you do not belong.
But Christ says:

They do not have My key.
That changes everything.
Human beings can certainly create obstacles.
Faithfulness does not mean Christians will never encounter opposition.
Philadelphia already knows otherwise.
But human opposition cannot finally overturn Christ's authority.
If He has opened the door, the people opposing Philadelphia do not possess the authority to reverse His decision.
That is not a promise that Christian life will be easy.
It is a promise about who ultimately holds authority.
And Philadelphia desperately needs to know the difference.

5. “For thou hast a little strength”

Then Christ acknowledges their weakness.
“For thou hast a little strength.”
He does not deny it.
He does not shame them for it.
He does not tell them to pretend otherwise.
They have little power.
Christ knows.
Perhaps this congregation was small.
Perhaps it possessed little social standing.
Perhaps its financial resources were limited.
Perhaps its members had little influence within the city.
The text does not tell us precisely what form their “little strength” took.
That is important.
We should not pretend to know more than Christ tells us.
But whatever their weakness involved, Christ does not regard it as disqualifying.
That may be one of the most liberating truths in the verse.
We spend enormous energy hiding weakness.
We want to appear capable.
Strong.
Prepared.
Competent.
Confident.
Christ looks directly at Philadelphia's limitation and says:
I know.
Then He opens the door anyway.
Weakness known by Christ does not automatically become weakness unusable by Christ.

6. “Yet”

Here again is one of those small words that carries enormous weight.

“Yet.”
You have little power.
Yet you have kept My word.
Their circumstances have not determined their faithfulness.
They could have said:
We are too weak.
We are too small.
We have too few resources.
We have too much opposition.
What difference can we possibly make?
Christ does not hear excuses.
He sees obedience.
They have little power.
Yet they have remained faithful.
This is one of Revelation's great reversals.
The world tends to associate power with success.
Christ associates endurance with faithfulness.
The question is not:
How much power did Philadelphia possess?
The question is:
What did Philadelphia do with the faith it possessed?
And Christ's answer is:
They kept My word.

7. “Hast kept my word”

This is the heart of Philadelphia's commendation.
They kept Christ's word.
The expression involves more than remembering what He said.
They guarded it.
Held onto it.
Obeyed it.
Refused to surrender it.
This church may not be able to control much.
But it can control its response to Christ.
That is worth remembering.
There are many things in life we cannot control.
We cannot control how other people respond.
We cannot control every circumstance.
We cannot control whether opportunities remain available forever.
We cannot control the strength of opposition.
We cannot control the future.
But we can remain faithful.
Philadelphia has done precisely that.

Its strength is not found in controlling circumstances.
Its strength is found in obedience within circumstances it cannot control.

8. “And hast not denied my name”

The second commendation goes even deeper.
They “hast not denied my name.”
That wording suggests that remaining identified with Christ has carried a cost.
There would be little reason to commend them for refusing denial if denial had never been tempting.
Something in Philadelphia has placed pressure upon these believers.
Yet they have remained publicly identified with Jesus Christ.
His name matters more than their security.
His name matters more than acceptance.
His name matters more than avoiding opposition.
They have not denied Him.
This is endurance.
Not dramatic conquest.
Not worldly triumph.
Not political power.
Not cultural dominance.
Simply:
We belong to Jesus Christ, and we will not deny His name.
Revelation calls that victory.

9. Little Power Is Not No Power

Christ says they have “a little strength.”
Notice what He does not say.
He does not say:
You have no power.
Something remains available to them.
Little does not mean nothing.
And apparently little placed into faithful service can be enough.
This resembles a pattern running throughout Scripture.
God repeatedly works through what appears insufficient.
Small beginnings.
Weak people.
Limited resources.
Unexpected servants.
The purpose is not to romanticize weakness.
There is nothing inherently holy about lacking resources.
Nor should Christians refuse legitimate opportunities to grow, learn, prepare, or become more effective.
The point is simpler.

Our limitations do not limit Christ.
Philadelphia does not need infinite power.
Christ already possesses it.
The church needs enough faithfulness to obey.
That is a very different measurement.

10. The Door and the Power

Now place the two statements beside each other:
"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."
And:
"Thou hast a little strength."
Human reasoning might reverse the order.
Become powerful.
Then doors will open.
Gain influence.
Then opportunities will appear.
Build resources.
Then something significant can happen.
Christ says:
You have little power.
I opened the door.
That may be one of the most important lessons Philadelphia gives the Church.
The size of the opportunity does not have to correspond to the size of our strength.
It corresponds to the authority of Christ.
When He opens the door, our task is not to become impressive enough to deserve it.
Our task is to remain faithful enough to walk through it.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when "little strength" describes us rather well.
Perhaps there was a season when we could do more.
We had more energy.
More opportunities.
More influence.
More resources.
More confidence.
Then life changed.
Age can do that.
Illness can do that.
Loss can do that.
Retirement can do that.
Disappointment can do that.

Circumstances we never expected can do that.
And we may begin believing that because we can no longer do everything we once did, there is little left for Christ to do through us.
Philadelphia says otherwise.
Christ does not look at little power and say:
Come back when you have more.
He says: **Look.**
There is a door.
Perhaps the door will not look like the ones we walked through twenty years ago.
Perhaps faithfulness now looks different from faithfulness then.
That is all right.
The important thing is not whether we possess the strength we once had.
The important thing is whether we are still listening when Christ says:
Look. I have opened something before you.
The church with little power may still have a very large calling.
And the disciple with little strength may still have a very open door.

Something Worth Pondering

Philadelphia could have spent all its time asking:
Why are we so weak?
Christ gives them a different question:
What will you do with the door I opened?
That is worth pondering.
We can spend years analyzing what we lack.
Not enough time.
Not enough money.
Not enough education.
Not enough influence.
Not enough energy.
Not enough confidence.
Not enough people.
And perhaps some of those assessments are completely accurate.
Christ may even agree:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
But then He says:
Look.
There is something in front of you that your weakness did not prevent Me from opening.
Perhaps the better question is not:
Do I have enough power?
Perhaps it is:
Has Christ opened the door?

Because if He has, the size of our strength may not be the deciding factor.

Ask Yourself This

Where have I allowed awareness of my limitations to become an excuse for not responding to Christ?
Have I been waiting to become stronger, more confident, better equipped, or more influential before believing God can still use me?
And if Christ were standing before me now saying,
"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength,"
would I keep explaining my weakness—
or would I walk through the door?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:9

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”
— Revelation 3:9, KJV

This is one of those verses in Revelation that requires us to slow down.
Its language is severe.
It arises from a conflict that was very real to the Christians in Philadelphia.
And because some of its language has subsequently been misused against Jewish people, responsible interpretation requires us to understand what Christ is—and is not—saying.
This is not a blanket condemnation of Jewish people.
Jesus was Jewish.
His earliest disciples were Jewish.
The apostles were Jewish.
The Christian faith itself emerged from Israel's Scriptures, Israel's history, and Israel's hope for the Messiah.
The conflict reflected in this verse is therefore not Christianity speaking against an alien people from whom it has no connection.
We are looking into a painful first-century struggle over identity, Messiah, covenant, and who truly belongs among the people of God.
And Philadelphia appears to be suffering because of that conflict.
But underneath the harsh language lies the pastoral heart of the verse.
Christ tells this little congregation:
Your opponents do not get the final word about who you are.
And then He promises something even more personal:
They will learn that I have loved you.
That is where we must ultimately allow the verse to take us.

1. “I will make them of the synagogue of Satan”

We encountered essentially the same expression in the message to Smyrna in Revelation 2:9.
It is deliberately strong language.
But “synagogue of Satan” must not be transformed into a synonym for Judaism or applied indiscriminately to Jewish people.
The text addresses a particular group involved in a particular conflict with followers of Christ.

“Satan” in Revelation is fundamentally the adversary and, as we will see especially in Revelation 12, **the accuser**.
That helps us understand what is happening here.
People are opposing Christ's followers.
They are apparently challenging their claims and standing.
Christ identifies that opposition with the work of the adversary.
The issue is not ethnicity.
The issue is allegiance and opposition to Christ.
Whenever this verse has been used to justify hatred, contempt, persecution, or antisemitism, it has been made to serve something entirely contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
The verse is about Christ vindicating persecuted believers.
It is not permission for Christians to become persecutors.

2. “Which say they are Jews, and are not”

This is perhaps the most difficult phrase.
Taken superficially, it might sound as though Christ is denying the Jewish ethnicity of the people involved.
That is unlikely to be the point.
The issue concerns the theological significance of their claim.
In the developing conflict between followers of Jesus and other Jewish communities in the first century, the central question was increasingly:
Who truly represents the covenant people of God?
The Christians confessed that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah.
Those who rejected that confession disagreed.
That disagreement could become bitter.
Philadelphia appears to have experienced that bitterness firsthand.
Therefore when Revelation says they “say they are Jews, and are not,” it is making a theological judgment within that first-century conflict, not offering Christians a racial category by which to judge Jewish people.
And we should be especially careful about carrying that polemical language outside its setting.
The Church did not replace Israel's Scriptures with some unrelated story.
The Church worships Israel's God.
Confesses Israel's Messiah.
Reads Israel's prophets.
And understands its own salvation through promises deeply rooted in Israel's story.
Whatever conclusions Christians reach about the larger relationship between Israel and the Church, Revelation 3:9 cannot responsibly become a warrant for hostility toward Jewish people.

3. “But do lie”

Christ identifies the claims of Philadelphia's opponents as false.

That connects directly with verse 7.
Remember how Christ introduced Himself:
“He that is holy, he that is true.”
Now we encounter people whose claims Christ calls untrue.
That contrast is significant.
The True One stands over against **the lie**.
Philadelphia may not possess enough social authority to defend itself effectively.
It has “a little strength.”
Its opponents may appear capable of defining the situation publicly.
But Christ knows the truth.
That is enormously comforting whenever faithfulness is misunderstood.
There are situations in which we can explain ourselves.
There are situations in which we should.
But sometimes explanations accomplish nothing.
People have already decided who we are.
At that point, Philadelphia reminds us that our identity does not finally depend upon winning every argument.
The True One knows the truth.

4. “I will make them to come”

Now Christ promises that the situation will not remain as it is forever.
“I will make them to come.”
Notice again who acts.
Philadelphia is not commanded to defeat its opponents.
It is not told to retaliate.
It is not instructed to humiliate them.
Christ says:
I will.
That is extremely important.
Vindication belongs to Christ.
The Church's responsibility remains what we saw in verse 8:
Keep Christ's word.
Do not deny His name.
Christ's responsibility is Christ's.
That keeps Philadelphia from having to become its own judge, jury, and avenger.
They can remain faithful and leave the final verdict to Him.

5. “And Worship Before Thy Feet”

This language can sound troubling if we imagine Christians being worshiped by their defeated enemies.
That is not the point.
Revelation consistently reserves worship for God and the Lamb.

The imagery instead echoes Old Testament passages in which those who once oppressed God's people eventually acknowledge that God has vindicated them.
There is a striking reversal taking place.
Those who questioned whether Philadelphia belonged to God's people will eventually have to acknowledge that God has received them.
Those who stood over them in judgment will discover that their judgment was wrong.
Those who regarded this little congregation as insignificant will discover that Christ Himself stands with them.
This is not the triumph of Philadelphia's ego.
It is the triumph of Christ's verdict.

6. Vindication Without Revenge

This distinction is worth emphasizing.
There is a difference between **vindication** and **revenge**.
Revenge says:
I want you to suffer because you hurt me.
Vindication says:
I entrust the truth to God.
Philadelphia is promised vindication.
Christ does not tell them:
Make your enemies bow.
He says:
“I will make them...”
That releases the believer from the exhausting task of settling every score.
There may be times when injustice should be confronted.
There may be situations in which truth must be spoken publicly.
There may be wrongs that require accountability.
But the Christian does not need to live consumed by the desire to make everyone who misunderstood us admit that we were right.
Christ knows.
Christ judges.
Christ vindicates.
And sometimes faithfulness means leaving our reputation in His hands.

7. “To know”

This phrase changes the tone again.
“To know.”
Something will eventually become known that they do not presently understand.
Their current judgment is not the final reality.
They believe something about Philadelphia now.

Christ knows something they do not.
And eventually:
They will learn.
That reminds us of the limitation of human judgment.
We see fragments.
God sees the whole.
We evaluate appearances.
Christ knows hearts.
We know the present.
Christ knows the end from the beginning.
Philadelphia does not have to force everyone to understand today what Christ promises will eventually become clear.
There is tremendous peace in that.

8. “That I have loved thee”

And here we reach the heart of the verse.
After all the difficult language—
After the conflict.
After the accusations.
After the disputed claims.
After the opposition.
After the promise of vindication—
Christ reveals what He ultimately wants Philadelphia to know:
“I have loved thee.”
That may be the most important sentence in the verse.
Philadelphia has little power.
But Christ loves them.
Philadelphia faces opposition.
But Christ loves them.
Others may question their standing.
But Christ loves them.
Others may exclude them.
But Christ loves them.
Others may believe that God stands against them.
Christ says the day will come when even their opponents will have to recognize:
I have loved you.
Perhaps Philadelphia needed to hear that more than it needed to hear that its enemies were wrong.
Because being proven right is not the deepest Christian hope.
Being loved by Christ is.

9. The Accuser and the Defender

Our conversation at Sardis now becomes important.

We observed that Scripture portrays Christ as the One who intercedes for His people, while Revelation will later describe Satan as “the accuser.”
That contrast begins to illuminate Philadelphia.
The adversary accuses.
Christ vindicates.
The adversary attempts to define God's people through accusation.
Christ defines them through His relationship with them.
And the final word is not:
They accused you.
The final word is:
I loved you.
That is a pattern we will want to remember when we eventually reach Revelation 12.
The voice of accusation can be loud.
It can even sound convincing.
But it is not the final voice heard in heaven.
Christ's is.

10. The Verdict That Matters

Now place verses 8 and 9 together.
Philadelphia has little power.
Others oppose them.
Yet Christ says:
“Hast kept my word.”
“Hast not denied my name.”
And:
“I have loved thee.”
Those are Christ's verdicts.
That is what ultimately matters.
Philadelphia does not need the approval of everyone around it.
It needs the approval of Christ.
And it has it.
This little congregation that might appear powerless before the world stands completely known before the Lord of the Church.
He knows their works.
He knows their faithfulness.
He knows their weakness.
He knows their opposition.
And He knows their names.
Perhaps most importantly:
They are known by the One who loves them.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us know what it feels like to be misunderstood.

Sometimes we can correct the misunderstanding.
Sometimes we cannot.
There may even be moments when someone becomes convinced of something about us that simply is not true.
Our instinct is to defend ourselves.
Explain ourselves.
Prove ourselves.
And there are times when doing so is appropriate.
But there are other times when no explanation will be enough.
Philadelphia reminds us that we do not have to win every courtroom of human opinion.
There is another Judge.
The Holy One.
The True One.
The One who holds the key.
He knows.
And if He knows the truth, perhaps we can sometimes release the exhausting need to make everyone else know it immediately.
There is something even more important here.
Christ does not merely say:
They will learn that you were right.
He says:
They will learn that I have loved you.
That is a profoundly different promise.
Our deepest identity is not found in being proven correct.
It is found in being loved by Christ.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps one of the greatest freedoms in the Christian life comes when we no longer need everyone to understand us.
That does not mean truth ceases to matter.
It means Christ's knowledge of the truth matters more than our ability to convince everyone else of it.
Philadelphia had little power.
Perhaps it could not control the story being told about it.
But Christ could.
And His final statement about this church was not about its reputation.
It was about His love.
“To know that I have loved thee.”
Sardis had a name before people.
Philadelphia had the love of Christ.
Given the choice, there really is no comparison.

Ask Yourself This

Is there an accusation, misunderstanding, rejection, or judgment from another person that I am still carrying because I desperately want to be vindicated?
Can I entrust the truth to Christ without becoming bitter toward the person who misunderstood me?
And if I never receive the apology, acknowledgment, or vindication I hoped for in this life, can I rest in the words Christ spoke over Philadelphia:
"I have loved thee"?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:10

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”
— Revelation 3:10, KJV

There is a beautiful relationship at the center of this verse.
Christ says:
“Hast kept my word...”
And then:
“I will keep thee...”
Philadelphia has kept Christ's word.
Christ promises to keep Philadelphia.
We should not make those statements identical. Christ's keeping of His people rests upon His faithfulness and power in a way our keeping of His word never could.
But the relationship is unmistakable.
They have remained faithful to Him.
He assures them that when trial comes, He will remain faithful to them.
That is the pastoral heart of Revelation 3:10.
Unfortunately, this verse has sometimes become almost entirely a battleground over the timing of end-times events. The phrase “keep thee from the hour of temptation” has played an important role in discussions about the tribulation and the rapture.
Those questions deserve respectful treatment.
But Philadelphia did not receive a prophetic chart.
Philadelphia received a promise.
Before asking exactly **when** or **how** this promise will be fulfilled, we should hear what these Christians with “a little strength” heard:
The Christ whose word you have kept will keep you when the trial comes.

1. “Because thou hast kept”

Christ again commends Philadelphia for faithfulness.
“Because thou hast kept...”
This continues directly from verse 8:
“Hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”
Philadelphia's defining characteristic is becoming unmistakable.
They keep.
They hold.
They endure.

They refuse to surrender what Christ has entrusted to them.
This is not spectacular Christianity.
There are no great accomplishments listed.
No enormous congregation.
No impressive resources.
No political influence.
No extraordinary miracles are mentioned.
Christ praises them because they remained faithful.
That is worth noticing.
We often measure Christian effectiveness by what someone accomplished.
Christ repeatedly measures His churches by whether they remained faithful.
Philadelphia kept His word.
And Christ noticed.

2. "The word of my patience"

The KJV's "the word of my patience" can refer to Christ's call to endure or to the endurance Christ Himself shows.
Either way, endurance stands at the center.
And there is our word again.
Endurance.
It is becoming increasingly clear why *When Faith Must Endure* belongs over this entire journey through Revelation.
Endurance is not a minor theme tucked into a few difficult passages.
It is woven into the spiritual fabric of the book.
Revelation is addressed to Christians who must learn how to remain faithful when allegiance to Christ becomes costly.
Endurance means continuing when stopping would be easier.
Remaining when leaving would be easier.
Obeying when compromise would be easier.
Confessing Christ when silence would be easier.
Holding fast when letting go would be easier.
Philadelphia has done precisely that.
They have kept Christ's word of endurance.

3. Endurance Is More Than Surviving

There is an important distinction between endurance and mere survival.
A person can survive something and emerge bitter.
A church can survive conflict and lose its love.
A believer can survive suffering while gradually surrendering trust.
Biblical endurance means more than making it through.
It means remaining faithful **while** going through.
Philadelphia has not merely survived opposition.

They have:
Kept Christ's word.
Not denied Christ's name.
That is endurance.
The question Revelation asks is therefore not merely:
Will you make it through?
It asks:
Whom will you belong to when you come through the other side?
Philadelphia's answer is clear.
Jesus Christ.

4. “I will keep thee”

Now the direction changes.
Philadelphia has kept.
Christ will keep.
“I will keep thee.”
Those may be among the most comforting words Christ speaks to any of the seven churches.
Notice that He does not say:
You are strong enough.
You can handle this.
You have prepared sufficiently.
You will figure it out.
Remember what He has already said:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
Their confidence therefore cannot rest upon their ability to keep themselves.
Their hope rests upon Christ.
I will keep you.
The church with little power is kept by the Christ with the key.
That is an entirely different kind of security.

5. “From the hour of temptation”

Here we reach the phrase that has generated considerable theological discussion.
What does it mean for Christ to “keep” Philadelphia “from the hour of temptation”?
Christians have understood this in different ways.
Some understand the language as promising removal from the coming period of trial and therefore see the verse as supporting a particular understanding of the Church's relationship to a future tribulation.
Others understand the promise as preservation through trial rather than physical removal from it.

Still others emphasize an immediate historical dimension for Philadelphia while recognizing that Revelation's language expands beyond the local congregation toward a broader period of testing.
These differences should be acknowledged.
But we should also recognize what all of those discussions can accidentally obscure.
The main verb is not:
Escape.
It is:
Keep.
Christ's promise centers upon His care for His people.
Whatever precise circumstances Philadelphia will face, their security lies in Him.
And throughout Revelation, God's people are not portrayed as strangers to suffering.
They endure it.
They remain faithful within it.
Some even die because of their testimony.
Therefore we should be cautious about turning this single phrase into a promise that faithfulness always means exemption from suffering.
The larger book will not allow that conclusion.
What Revelation consistently promises is something deeper:
Suffering may touch the faithful, but it cannot finally take them from Christ.

6. Kept From—or Kept Through?

The distinction deserves careful attention without pretending the interpretive debate does not exist.
Does Christ mean:
I will remove you so that you do not enter the trial?
Or:
I will preserve you so that the trial cannot ultimately overcome you?
Faithful Christians have answered differently.
Our purpose here is not to force Philadelphia into a theological system constructed centuries later.
We should first allow the promise to stand in its own pastoral strength.
Christ does not promise that His people will never encounter trouble.
He promises that trouble does not place them outside His keeping.
That is consistent with the entire message of Revelation.
The Lamb's people may suffer.
They may be opposed.
They may be accused.
They may be persecuted.

Some may be killed.
Yet none of those forces possesses the final word over them.
Christ does.
And the One with the final word says:
“I will keep thee.”

7. “The hour of temptation, which shall come”

The language now widens beyond Philadelphia.
Something is coming.
An “hour of temptation.”
Revelation frequently uses the language of testing, judgment, and tribulation as the conflict between God's kingdom and the rebellious powers of the world moves toward its conclusion.
Philadelphia therefore stands within a much larger story.
Its present struggles are not isolated.
The Church's endurance belongs within the unfolding purposes of God.
But notice what Christ does not tell Philadelphia.
He does not give them a date.
He does not provide a timetable.
He does not tell them to calculate how many years remain.
He tells them to endure.
That distinction is enormously important for how we intend to approach Revelation.
The purpose of prophecy is not always to satisfy curiosity about tomorrow.
Often it is to produce faithfulness today.
Philadelphia does not need to know every detail of the coming hour.
It needs to know who will keep them when it arrives.

8. “Come upon all the world”

The scope expands further.
The trial is coming upon:
“All the world.”
We have moved beyond a purely local difficulty in Philadelphia.
Revelation's horizon is widening.
The Greek wording can sometimes refer to the inhabited world, and in first-century usage that could carry associations with the Roman world.
Yet within Revelation's developing vision, the language also participates in the book's broader portrayal of worldwide testing and judgment.
We need not prematurely decide every later question here.
What matters immediately is the contrast.
Philadelphia is small.
The trial is enormous.
Philadelphia has little power.

The trial reaches the world.
If Philadelphia's survival depended upon Philadelphia's strength, this would be terrifying.
But the verse does not say:
You will keep yourselves.
It says:
“I will keep thee.”
The size of the trial does not exceed the authority of the One making the promise.

9. “To try them that dwell upon the earth”

Revelation introduces another expression that will become increasingly important:
“Them that dwell upon the earth.”
As the book develops, this language frequently describes humanity oriented toward the rebellious world order rather than toward God.
The coming trial therefore has a testing function.
It reveals.
It exposes.
It demonstrates where allegiance lies.
And that fits Revelation perfectly.
Pressure reveals loyalty.
When faith costs nothing, allegiance can remain ambiguous.
When faithfulness becomes costly, what we truly worship begins to appear.
Philadelphia has already been tested in smaller ways.
They have little power.
They have experienced opposition.
Yet:
They kept Christ's word.
They did not deny His name.
The coming trial will be greater.
But the Christ who knows their present faithfulness promises His future keeping.

10. You Have Kept — I Will Keep

Perhaps we should end where the verse itself begins and ends.
“Thou hast kept...”
“I also will keep thee...”
There is the relationship.
Christian endurance is never merely gritting our teeth and hanging on to God through our own determination.
We hold onto Christ while discovering that Christ has been holding onto us.

Philadelphia keeps His word.
Christ keeps Philadelphia.
Their endurance is real.
Their obedience matters.
Their faithfulness matters.
But underneath all of it stands a greater faithfulness than their own.
His.
Perhaps that is why Christians can endure at all.
Our endurance ultimately rests within the faithfulness of Christ.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when life asks more of us than we believe we possess.
We look at what is coming and think:
I do not know whether I can handle this.
Perhaps Philadelphia felt something similar.
They already had little power.
Now Christ tells them an hour of trial is coming.
What reassurance could possibly be enough?
Christ does not say:
Do not worry. You are stronger than you think.
Sometimes we are not.
He says something better:
"I will keep thee."
There is a profound difference.
Our hope is not that somewhere deep inside ourselves we possess unlimited strength.
We do not.
Our hope is that our limited strength rests inside Christ's unlimited faithfulness.
That means endurance does not require pretending we are unafraid.
It does not require pretending suffering does not hurt.
It does not require pretending we understand what God is doing.
Sometimes endurance sounds much simpler:
Lord, I still trust You.
And perhaps on the hardest days:
Lord, I barely know how to hold on anymore. Please hold onto me.
Philadelphia tells us that He does.

Something Worth Pondering

We often speak about "holding onto our faith."
There is truth in that.
Philadelphia certainly held fast.
But Revelation 3:10 gives us the other half of the picture.
While we are holding onto Christ,

Christ is holding onto us.
Perhaps that is why endurance is possible.
Not because faithful Christians possess extraordinary strength.
Philadelphia certainly did not.
They had “a little strength.”
Yet little power held inside Christ's keeping becomes enough.
And maybe that is one of the great messages of this entire book:
Faith endures not because the believer is stronger than every trial, but because Christ is greater than everything through which faith must endure.

Ask Yourself This

When I think about the trials I fear most, am I measuring them against my own strength—or against Christ's faithfulness?
Have I quietly assumed that endurance depends entirely upon how tightly I can hold onto Him?
And can I hear Christ's promise to Philadelphia personally enough to pray:
“Lord, I will keep Your word. And when my strength becomes little, I will trust You to keep me”?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:11

“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”
— Revelation 3:11, KJV

Philadelphia has received extraordinary promises.
Christ has opened a door no one can shut.
He has acknowledged their faithfulness despite their little power.
He has promised that their opponents will learn that He has loved them.
He has promised:
“I will keep thee.”
Now comes the command that gathers everything together:
“Hold that fast which thou hast.”
There is no complicated strategy.
No new program.
No demand that Philadelphia become larger, stronger, richer, or more influential.
Christ asks them to continue doing what they have already been doing.
Keep My word.
Do not deny My name.
Endure.
Hold fast.
Sometimes the most difficult part of faithfulness is not beginning.
It is continuing.

1. “I Come”

Christ begins:
“Behold, I come quickly.”
That is one of Revelation's great promises.
We will hear it again.
And again.
Until almost the final words of the book:
“Surely I am coming soon.”
Revelation therefore points the Church toward a future determined not by Rome, persecution, political power, economic systems, or even death.
History is moving toward **Christ**.
That changes the Christian understanding of the future.
We are not merely waiting for something to happen.
We are waiting for **Someone**.
Christian hope is ultimately personal.
Jesus Christ is coming.

And therefore the Church's calling is not to predict every event that might occur before His coming.
It is to remain faithful until He comes.

2. “Quickly”

Then comes one of Revelation's most discussed words:
“Quickly.”
Two thousand years of Christian history understandably make us ask what “quickly” means.
That question should not simply be dismissed.
But neither should we force the word into a timetable Revelation does not provide here.
Biblical prophecy repeatedly places God's people in a posture of expectancy.
Christ's coming is certain.
Its precise timing is not placed under human control.
That means “soon” functions not merely as information about a calendar but as a call to readiness.
The Church lives facing Christ's return.
Not calculating it.
Not scheduling it.
Not matching every headline to a verse.
Expecting it.
That distinction matters enormously for our approach to Revelation.
The proper response to:
“I come quickly”
is not:
“Then let me calculate when.”
It is:
“Then let me be faithful when You come.”

3. “Hold fast”

Here is Philadelphia's command:
“Hold fast.”
The expression carries the idea of retaining firmly what one possesses.
Do not release it.
Do not surrender it.
Do not let pressure loosen your grip.
Philadelphia has already endured.
Now Christ says:
Continue.
There are moments when the Christian life requires dramatic change.
Ephesus needed to return.
Sardis needed to wake up.

Other churches needed to repent.
Philadelphia needs to **hold fast**.
That is important because we sometimes assume spiritual growth always requires doing something new.
Sometimes it does.
But sometimes faithfulness means continuing to do what is already right.
Keep praying.
Keep serving.
Keep forgiving.
Keep worshiping.
Keep loving.
Keep trusting.
Keep obeying.
Keep confessing Christ.
Keep going.
There is nothing glamorous about "hold fast."
But Revelation considers it the language of conquerors.

4. "Which thou hast"

Christ does not merely say:
Hold fast.
He says:
"Hold that fast which thou hast."
What does Philadelphia have?
Not much power.
Christ has already told them that.
So He cannot mean:
Hold onto your strength.
What they possess is something much more important.
They have Christ's word.
They have His name.
They have endurance.
They have faithfulness.
They have an open door.
And above all, they have Christ.
The world may look at Philadelphia and say:
You do not have very much.
Christ looks at Philadelphia and says:
What you have is worth holding onto.
That is a very different evaluation of wealth.

5. You Do Not Need Something New

There is a pastoral lesson here that we should not miss.
Philadelphia is not told to search for the next spiritual novelty.

They already possess what they need for faithfulness.
Sometimes Christians can become restless.
We look for a new method.
A new insight.
A new experience.
A new movement.
A new program.
A new teacher.
A new explanation.
There is nothing wrong with learning or growing.
But spiritual restlessness can sometimes make us undervalue what Christ has already given us.
His word.
His name.
His presence.
His promises.
His calling.
Philadelphia does not need a new gospel.
It needs to hold fast to the one it has received.
Sometimes maturity means discovering that the old truths have not become inadequate simply because they have become familiar.

6. “That no man take thy crown”

Now Christ gives the reason for holding fast:
“That no man take thy crown.”
The crown imagery appears elsewhere in Revelation and the New Testament as a symbol of victory, reward, and faithful endurance.
This is not primarily the royal crown of someone sitting upon a throne.
The imagery is closer to the victor's wreath awarded after a contest.
Philadelphia is running the race.
Christ says:
Do not stop before the finish.
Do not surrender what faithfulness is carrying you toward.
The crown is not presented as something Philadelphia earns by becoming impressive.
It belongs to the imagery of endurance.
They have remained faithful.
Now they must continue.

7. Can Someone Take the Crown?

The wording naturally raises a question.
Does “that no man take thy crown” mean another person can literally steal the believer's salvation?

We should exercise the same theological care here that we used with the book of life in Sardis.
Christians from different theological traditions may place this language within different understandings of perseverance, assurance, apostasy, and eternal security.
Those larger discussions are legitimate.
But again, we should first hear the pastoral force of Christ's command.
He is not encouraging Philadelphia to become obsessed with whether someone can technically steal a heavenly object from them.
He is saying:
Do not allow opposition to cause you to surrender your faithfulness.
No opponent can close Christ's door.
But Philadelphia must still hold fast.
No opponent possesses Christ's key.
But Philadelphia must still endure.
Christ promises to keep them.
And Philadelphia is commanded to hold fast.
Divine keeping and human perseverance stand together in the passage.
Revelation does not seem troubled by placing both truths side by side.
Perhaps we should not be either.

8. No One Can Shut the Door—But You Must Still Hold Fast

There is a fascinating balance developing in Philadelphia.
Verse 8:
“No man can shut it” the door.
Verse 10:
“I will keep thee.”
Verse 11:
“Hold fast.”
Christ's sovereignty does not eliminate Philadelphia's responsibility.
And Philadelphia's responsibility does not diminish Christ's sovereignty.
Christ opens.
Christ keeps.
Philadelphia holds fast.
That is the Christian life.
Grace does not make faithfulness unnecessary.
Grace makes faithfulness possible.
And faithfulness does not make grace unnecessary.
Faithfulness depends upon it.

9. Do Not Let Opposition Determine Your Allegiance

Philadelphia has opponents.
Verse 9 made that clear.
But Christ does not tell the church to defeat them.
He does not tell Philadelphia to become more powerful than they are.
He says:
Hold fast.
That means their greatest danger is not ultimately what their opponents can do **to** them.
Their greatest danger is allowing opposition to change what they themselves do **with Christ**.
Others can reject them.
Hold fast.
Others can accuse them.
Hold fast.
Others can misunderstand them.
Hold fast.
Others can pressure them.
Hold fast.
The Church does not conquer by controlling everyone around it.
The Church conquers by refusing to surrender its allegiance to the Lamb.

10. Faithfulness Has a Finish Line

Philadelphia is not being asked to endure forever without hope.
"I come."
That promise gives "hold fast" its meaning.
There is a finish line.
Christian endurance is not endless suffering for suffering's sake.
History is going somewhere.
Christ is coming.
The crown lies ahead.
That means every act of endurance occurs within hope.
Perhaps there are moments when the believer cannot see very far ahead.
Philadelphia probably could not.
Sometimes all we can do is remain faithful for another day.
Then another.
Then another.
And perhaps that is enough.
Because Christ does not ask us to live tomorrow's faithfulness today.
He asks us to hold fast today.
Tomorrow, by His grace, we hold fast again.

Until one day the command:
“Hold fast.”
gives way to the promise:
“I have come.”

Pastoral Reflection

There are seasons when following Christ feels full of beginnings.
New opportunities.
New ministries.
New understanding.
New relationships.
New doors.
Those seasons can be exciting.
But much of Christian life is lived somewhere else.
In the middle.
After the excitement of beginning has faded and before the fulfillment has arrived.
That is where Philadelphia stands.
And Christ's word to people living in the middle is:
Hold fast.
There may be days when faithfulness feels ordinary.
You pray even though nothing dramatic happens.
You read Scripture even though no verse suddenly changes everything.
You worship.
You serve.
You forgive.
You trust.
You show up.
You keep Christ's word.
You refuse to deny His name.
And perhaps nobody notices.
Christ does.
“I know thy works.”
There may be no earthly applause for simply continuing.
But heaven apparently calls it endurance.
And Christ considers endurance worthy of a crown.

Something Worth Pondering

We often celebrate beginnings.
The day someone first believes.
The beginning of a ministry.
The opening of a door.
The discovery of a calling.

But Revelation repeatedly celebrates something our culture notices less often:
Finishing faithfully.
Philadelphia has already begun.
It has already endured.
It has already kept Christ's word.
Now Christ says:
Don't stop.
Perhaps there are times when the most spiritually significant thing a Christian can do is simply refuse to quit.
Not because quitting never crosses the mind.
Not because the journey has been easy.
Not because strength is unlimited.
Remember—Philadelphia has "a little strength."
But because somewhere ahead stands the One who says:
"I come."
And that makes holding fast worthwhile.

Ask Yourself This

Is there something Christ has already entrusted to me that I have become tempted to release simply because holding it has become difficult?
Am I searching for something new when Christ may simply be telling me:
"Hold that fast which thou hast"?
And if I knew with absolute certainty that Christ stood at the end of this road, would I have enough faith for one more step?
Can I hold fast today—and trust Christ with tomorrow?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:12

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”
— Revelation 3:12, KJV

Philadelphia has been told to hold fast.
Now Christ tells them what awaits those who do.
The imagery is extraordinary.
A pillar.
A temple.
A permanent place.
The name of God.
The name of God's city.
The name of Christ.
And for the first time in the messages to the seven churches, Revelation explicitly names the city toward which the entire book is ultimately moving:
New Jerusalem.
We will not arrive there fully until Revelation 21.
But Christ allows Philadelphia to see it from here.
That is important.
Revelation has barely begun, yet Christ already gives His suffering Church a glimpse of the destination.
The journey may be difficult.
The Church may have little power.
Trials may come.
Opposition may continue.
But the destination is not uncertainty.
It is home.

1. “He that overcometh”

Once again we encounter the language of conquering.
By now Revelation has begun teaching us what that word means.
Conquering does not mean Philadelphia becomes stronger than its opponents.
It does not mean gaining political control.
It does not mean defeating enemies through force.

Philadelphia conquers by doing precisely what Christ has already praised:
Keeping His word.
Not denying His name.
Enduring.
Holding fast.
Revelation completely redefines victory.
The world says:
Conquer by overpowering your enemy.
The Lamb says:
Conquer by remaining faithful.
That distinction will become increasingly important as Revelation unfolds.
The Lamb Himself conquers through sacrificial faithfulness.
His followers conquer by following the Lamb.

2. “Will I make a pillar”

Christ promises:
“Will I make a pillar.”
A pillar communicates strength.
Stability.
Permanence.
Something that stands.
That is especially meaningful when spoken to Philadelphia.
The region was prone to seismic activity, and the city had known the devastation and continuing insecurity associated with earthquakes.
Buildings people trusted could suddenly become unsafe.
What appeared permanent could fall.
People might have to leave structures rather than remain inside them.
Against that background, Christ promises the faithful:
I will make you a pillar.
The people with little power will become symbols of permanence.
The people living amid instability will stand.
The people who may have known what it meant to flee unsafe structures will receive a place from which they will never again have to leave.
Christ takes Philadelphia's experience of insecurity and transforms it into an image of eternal security.

3. “In the temple of my God”

The pillar stands:
“In the temple of my God.”
We should not imagine Christ promising believers that they will literally become pieces of heavenly architecture.
The imagery is theological.

The temple represents the presence of God.
To be a pillar in God's temple is to belong permanently within God's presence.
And there is something interesting that Revelation will eventually reveal.
When we finally arrive at New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, John will say that he sees **no temple in the city**, because God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
That means the imagery here points beyond a building.
It points toward **God Himself**.
The ultimate Christian hope is not merely residence in a magnificent heavenly structure.
The ultimate Christian hope is permanent life in the presence of God.
The promise is not primarily:
You will have a place in a building.
It is:
You will have a place with God.

4. "He shall go no more out"

These may be among the most tender words in the verse.
"He shall go no more out."
Never again displaced.
Never again excluded.
Never again driven away.
Never again uncertain whether you belong.
Never again standing outside wondering whether the door will remain open.
Remember where Philadelphia's message began.
Christ holds the key.
Christ opens a door no one can shut.
Now the imagery reaches its destination.
The One who opened the door brings His people inside.
And once they are home:
They never have to leave.
That is beautiful.
The open door of verse 8 leads toward the permanent dwelling of verse 12.
Christ does not merely open opportunities for His people.
Ultimately, **He opens home.**

5. From Little Power to Permanent Security

Consider the transformation within this message.
Verse 8:
"Thou hast a little strength."
Verse 12:

“Will I make a pillar.”
What a reversal.
Philadelphia may feel fragile now.
It will not always be so.
Their present weakness does not define their final condition.
That is one of Revelation's great pastoral gifts.
Revelation repeatedly teaches suffering Christians not to mistake **present circumstances for final reality**.
The martyrs appear defeated.
They are not.
The powerful appear secure.
They are not.
The faithful appear weak.
They are not.
Philadelphia has little power.
But Christ sees a pillar.
Perhaps Christ frequently sees in His people something they cannot yet see in themselves.

6. “I will write upon him the name of my God”

Now the imagery changes from architecture to identity.
Christ says: “I will write upon him the name of my God.”
A name signifies ownership, identity, relationship, and belonging.
Revelation will increasingly develop the contrast between those who belong to God and those who give allegiance to the rebellious powers opposed to Him.
Marks and names will matter.
But already Christ establishes the positive reality.
God's people bear **God's name**.
They belong to Him.
That is enormously important because Philadelphia has faced people who apparently questioned its standing among God's people.
Christ settles the matter.
Whose people are they?
God's.
How do we know?
His name is written upon them.
Human beings may question their belonging.
Christ marks them as God's own.

7. “And the name of the city of my God”

Then Christ adds another name:
“The name of the city of my God.”
People belong not only to God.

They belong somewhere.
That city is about to be named.
For Christians living within the cities of the Roman world, civic identity mattered enormously.
Philadelphia was their earthly city.
Rome represented the great imperial city looming over the world of Revelation.
But neither Philadelphia nor Rome represents the believer's ultimate citizenship.
There is another city.
A city belonging to God.
And Christ writes its name upon His people.
They have an address, so to speak, that no earthly empire can revoke.

8. “New Jerusalem”

And here it appears.
New Jerusalem.
A name we will eventually know very well.
Revelation 21 will describe it descending from heaven.
There will be no death.
No mourning.
No crying.
No pain.
God will dwell with His people.
All things will be made new.
But here in Revelation 3, Christ whispers the destination into the ears of a little congregation with little power:
New Jerusalem.
Philadelphia may feel insignificant within the Roman world.
But its citizens belong to the city of God.
Rome may look permanent.
Philadelphia may look fragile.
Revelation will eventually reverse those appearances completely.
The great earthly city will fall.
The city of God will endure.
The faithful therefore must not determine what is permanent by looking at what appears powerful today.

9. “Which cometh down out of heaven from my God”

Notice the direction.
New Jerusalem comes **down**.
This becomes crucial when we reach Revelation 21.

The biblical hope presented here is not merely humanity escaping earth and traveling upward to live somewhere else forever.
The movement of Revelation's final vision is God bringing His dwelling to humanity.
The city comes down.
God dwells with His people.
Heaven and earth are brought into the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose.
Already in Chapter 3, Christ gives us a small glimpse of where Revelation is heading.
The story ends not simply with people going away to heaven.
It ends with:
"See, the home of God is among mortals."
We will have much more to say about that when we arrive there.
For now Philadelphia simply needs to know:
Your true home is coming.

10. "And I will write upon him my new name"

Finally Christ says:
"And I will write upon him my new name."
Revelation does not explain the name here.
And we should resist the temptation to speculate.
That restraint is particularly important in a book where unexplained details have sometimes generated endless imaginative theories.
Christ says He has a new name.
He does not tell Philadelphia what it is.
Therefore the significance lies not in our ability to guess the name but in the promise that **His people will bear it**.
They belong to Christ.
Once again, name means identity.
Relationship.
Allegiance.
Belonging.
Philadelphia has refused to deny Christ's name.
Now Christ promises to place His name upon them.
Do you see the beautiful relationship?
Verse 8:
"Hast not denied my name."
Verse 12:
"I will write upon him my new name."
They remained faithful to His name.
He marks them forever with His name.

11. Three Names — One Identity

Look at the three names Christ promises:
The name of my God.
The name of the city of my God.
My own new name.
Together they answer three profound questions.
Whose am I?
I belong to God.
Where do I belong?
I belong to New Jerusalem.
To whom have I given my allegiance?
I belong to Christ.
God.
Home.
Christ.
Identity is complete.
Philadelphia may be rejected by others.
But heaven knows exactly where they belong.

12. From an Open Door to Home

Now step back and look at the whole message.
Christ has the key.
Christ opens the door.
No one can shut it.
Philadelphia walks faithfully.
They hold fast.
And eventually Christ says:
You will never go out again.
That gives the open door imagery an unexpectedly beautiful conclusion.
At first the door seems to represent access and opportunity.
By verse 12 it has become something more.
The open door ultimately leads into **belonging**.
And perhaps that is where every door Christ opens finally leads.
Not merely toward usefulness.
Not merely toward ministry.
Not merely toward accomplishment.
Ultimately toward Him.
The Christian journey begins with Christ calling us through the door.
It ends with Christ saying:
You are home now. You never have to leave.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us spend much of our lives looking for stability.

We build homes.
Careers.
Relationships.
Church communities.
Savings.
Plans.
Routines.
There is nothing wrong with any of those things.
But eventually life teaches us that nearly everything we thought permanent can change.
People move.
Jobs end.
Bodies age.
Institutions change.
Churches change.
People we love die.
Homes we once knew belong to someone else.
Even our own abilities change.
Philadelphia knew something about instability.
Christ answers that uncertainty with an extraordinary promise:
You will never go out.
There is a home from which age cannot remove us.
A citizenship circumstances cannot revoke.
A name time cannot erase.
A belonging death cannot end.
Perhaps that is what eternal life means at its most personal.
Not simply:
I will exist forever.
But:
I will finally be home.
And the One waiting there already knows my name.

Something Worth Pondering

Philadelphia had little power.
Yet look at what Christ gives them.
A pillar.
A permanent place.
God's name.
The city's name.
Christ's name.
New Jerusalem.
Sometimes we measure God's favor by what we possess now.

Revelation asks us to measure life by what Christ has promised at the end.
The present says:
Little power.
Christ says:
Pillar.
The present says:
Opposition.
Christ says:
I have loved you.
The present says:
Hold fast.
Christ says:
I am coming.
The present says:
Uncertainty.
Christ says:
You will never go out.
And perhaps that is what hope really is:
Learning to see our present circumstances in the light of Christ's promised future.

Ask Yourself This

What part of my identity depends upon something that could eventually be taken away?
My work?
My accomplishments?
My reputation?
My abilities?
My possessions?
My place in a community?
And if all of those things changed, could I still rest in the identity Christ gives His people?
I belong to God.
I belong to His city.
I belong to Christ.
And when every temporary address has finally passed away:
Am I prepared to hear Christ say, "You are home now. You never have to leave"?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:13

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:13, KJV

Once again the message ends:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
We have heard these words before.
Ephesus heard them.
Smyrna heard them.r
Pergamum heard them.
Thyatira heard them.
Sardis heard them.
Now Philadelphia hears them.
The repetition might tempt us to hurry past the sentence.
But perhaps repetition is precisely the point.
Christ keeps saying:
Listen.
Because the Church never outgrows its need to hear Him.
Philadelphia is a faithful church.
There is no rebuke in this message.
No accusation of abandoned love.
No compromise with false teaching.
No tolerance of corruption.
No reputation concealing spiritual death.
And yet even Philadelphia must hear:
Listen.
Faithfulness yesterday does not eliminate the need to listen today.
Perhaps that is one reason Philadelphia remained faithful in the first place.
It never stopped listening.

1. “He that hath an ear”

As with the other churches, the invitation becomes personal.
“He that hath an ear...”
Christ has addressed the congregation.
Now the responsibility settles upon the individual hearer.
Philadelphia may be faithful as a church, but no congregation can listen on behalf of its members.
No pastor can listen for us.
No denomination can listen for us.

No family can listen for us.
No history of previous faithfulness can listen for us.
Eventually Christ's word reaches the individual:
Are you listening?
That makes these seven messages impossible to keep at a comfortable distance.
We cannot merely ask:
What was wrong with Sardis?
What was right with Philadelphia?
What did Ephesus lose?
What did Pergamum tolerate?
The question eventually becomes:
What is Christ saying to me?

2. “That hath an ear”

The language is familiar from Jesus' earthly ministry.
Having an ear means more than possessing the physical ability to hear sound.
It means spiritual receptivity.
A willingness to receive.
To understand.
To respond.
That distinction is important because people can hear words without truly listening.
We can hear Scripture read every Sunday.
Hear sermons.
Read commentaries.
Study theology.
Discuss biblical interpretation.
And still resist what Christ is saying.
Philadelphia demonstrates the opposite.
They have not merely heard Christ's word.
Verse 8 says:
“Hast kept my word.”
Verse 10 says:
“Thou hast kept the word of my patience.”
Their hearing became obedience.
That is biblical listening.

3. Listening Is More Than Understanding

We often approach Scripture by asking:
What does this mean?
That is an essential question.
Responsible interpretation matters.

Historical context matters.
Language matters.
Theology matters.
We should seek to understand the text as carefully as possible.
But Revelation repeatedly adds another question:
What am I going to do about what I have heard?
Philadelphia understood enough to remain faithful.
They kept Christ's word.
They refused to deny His name.
They endured.
They held fast.
That means their listening moved beyond information.
It became allegiance.
Perhaps Scripture has not been fully heard until it begins to shape the life of the hearer.

4. “Hear what the Spirit saith”

Christ has spoken throughout the message.
Yet the conclusion says:
“What the Spirit saith.”
That relationship is important.
The risen Christ speaks to His Church through the Spirit.
The message is not merely an ancient document describing a congregation that once existed in Asia Minor.
The Spirit continues to address the churches through the words Christ has given.
That does not mean we can make the text mean whatever we want it to mean.
Quite the opposite.
We listen carefully to what Christ actually said.
But having understood what He said to Philadelphia, we then allow the Spirit to turn the question toward us.
Where do I have little power?
Where has Christ opened a door?
Where am I tempted to deny His name?
Where must I endure?
What must I hold fast?
Where do I need to trust Christ's keeping rather than my own strength?
What temporary identity am I clinging to instead of the name Christ gives me?
Listening makes the ancient message present.

5. “Saith”

Again the tense deserves our attention.

“What the Spirit **saith**.”
Not merely:
What the Spirit said.
Revelation was written to real first-century congregations.
Their historical circumstances matter.
We must never erase them and jump directly to ourselves.
But neither was Revelation intended to remain trapped in the first century.
Every generation of the Church stands beneath these words.
The Spirit is saying.
The Church is listening.
Or at least it should be.
That is one reason these seven messages remain so powerful.
Churches still lose their first love.
Christians still suffer.
Congregations still compromise.
False teaching still appears.
Spiritual reputations still conceal spiritual decline.
Believers still have little power.
And Christ still calls His people to endure.
The circumstances change.
The voice does not.

6. “Unto the churches”

Again, plural.
“The churches.”
Philadelphia receives the message.
All the churches are expected to hear it.
That means Ephesus needs Philadelphia.
Smyrna needs Philadelphia.
Pergamum needs Philadelphia.
Thyatira needs Philadelphia.
Sardis needs Philadelphia.
And eventually Laodicea will need Philadelphia.
Likewise, Philadelphia needs to hear what Christ says to all the others.
No congregation should read these letters merely to determine which category describes somebody else.
They belong together.
Christ is forming His Church through all seven messages.
Love.
Faithfulness.
Discernment.
Purity.

Wakefulness.
Endurance.
Repentance.
These are not seven different Christianities.
They belong to one faithful life before Christ.

7. The Faithful Church Still Needs to Listen

This may be Philadelphia's distinctive lesson in verse 13.
Philadelphia has done well.
Christ commends them.
But commendation can become dangerous if it convinces us that we no longer need correction, instruction, or continued dependence upon Christ.
Yesterday's faithfulness does not guarantee tomorrow's faithfulness.
Therefore Christ tells even the good church:
Listen.
Perhaps faithful Christians remain faithful precisely because they never assume they have finished listening.
They continue learning.
Continue praying.
Continue examining themselves.
Continue hearing Scripture.
Continue responding when Christ speaks.
Humility keeps the ear open.

8. What Has Philadelphia Heard?

Before leaving Philadelphia, perhaps we should gather what this church has heard.
Christ has said:
I am the Holy One and the True One.
I hold the key.
I have opened a door no one can shut.
I know you have little power.
You have kept My word.
You have not denied My name.
I have loved you.
You have kept My word of endurance.
I will keep you.
I am coming soon.
Hold fast.
I will make you a pillar.
You will never go out.
I will write My name upon you.
And then:

Listen.
What an extraordinary message for a church with little power.
Philadelphia may not have much by worldly measurement.
But listen to what it possesses in Christ.
An open door.
Christ's knowledge.
Christ's approval.
Christ's love.
Christ's keeping.
Christ's promise.
Christ's name.
And ultimately:
Christ Himself.
Perhaps Philadelphia was never poor in the ways that mattered most.

9. From Little Power to Great Promise

The message began with Christ's authority.
It ends with the Church's responsibility to listen.
Between those two points stands a congregation with little power.
And look what Christ does with it.
He does not shame its weakness.
He commends its faithfulness.
He opens its door.
He promises vindication.
He promises keeping.
He promises His coming.
He promises permanence.
He promises belonging.
Philadelphia teaches us something that the Church desperately needs to remember:
Christ does not require great power in order to accomplish great faithfulness.
Sometimes little power is enough.
Not because little power is secretly great power.
But because little power placed in the hands of Christ is no longer the most important power in the story.
Christ holds the key.

10. The Last Word to Philadelphia: Listen

Christ could have ended Philadelphia's message with:
“I will write upon him my new name.”
That would have been a magnificent conclusion.
Instead He adds:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”

Perhaps because promises themselves require listening.
The open door means little if Philadelphia refuses to walk through it.
Christ's keeping does not make endurance irrelevant.
The promise of His coming does not make holding fast unnecessary.
The promise of New Jerusalem does not make present faithfulness optional.
Grace invites response.
Promise invites trust.
Love invites allegiance.
And the voice of Christ invites listening.
Philadelphia has listened well.
Christ says:
Keep listening.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a danger that comes with walking with Christ for many years.
We can become familiar with His voice.
We know the stories.
We recognize the passages.
We know how sermons work.
We know the language of church.
We know the hymns.
We may even know what the preacher is going to say before the preacher says it.
Familiarity can be a blessing.
But familiarity can also become a substitute for listening.
Philadelphia reminds us that mature faith is not faith that no longer needs to hear Christ.
Mature faith may be precisely the opposite.
It has learned how desperately it needs His voice.
Perhaps one of the simplest prayers a longtime Christian can pray is still one of the best:
“Lord, I am listening.”
Not:
Tell me something nobody has ever heard before.
Not:
Give me some secret hidden knowledge.
Simply:
Speak through Your Word, Lord. And when You speak, help me obey.
That prayer is enough.
It was enough for Philadelphia.

Something Worth Pondering

Philadelphia had little power.
But perhaps it possessed something far more important.
An open ear.
And maybe that explains much of what we have seen.
How did they keep Christ's word?
They listened.
How did they refuse to deny His name?
They listened.
How did they endure?
They listened.
How would they know which open door to enter?
They listened.
How would they know what to hold fast?
They listened.
Perhaps we sometimes ask God for greater power when what we most need is greater attentiveness.
The Church may survive with little power.
It cannot remain faithful if it stops listening to Christ.

Ask Yourself This

After everything Christ has said to Philadelphia, am I still listening?
Not merely reading.
Not merely studying.
Not merely agreeing.
Listening.
Is there something Christ has already said through His Word that I understand perfectly well but have not yet obeyed?
And if the Spirit were to ask me only one question as we leave Philadelphia behind, perhaps it would be this:
"You have heard what Christ said. What will you do with what you have heard?"

Laodicea — The Church That Needed Nothing and Lacked Everything

Revelation 3:14–22

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;
I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:14–22, KJV

Introduction

Laodicea is comfortable.
That may be its greatest problem.
There is no mention of persecution.
No Balaam.
No Nicolaitans.
No Jezebel.
No synagogue opposing them.
No imprisonment.
No martyrdom.
No obvious external crisis at all.
Instead, Laodicea says:

“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”
Perhaps no sentence spoken by any of the seven churches is more dangerous.
Because Laodicea's greatest problem is not merely that it is spiritually unhealthy.
It is that **it does not know it is spiritually unhealthy.**
Sardis had a reputation for being alive while Christ said it was dead.
Laodicea believes itself prosperous while Christ says it is:
“Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”
The difference between Laodicea's self-evaluation and Christ's evaluation could hardly be greater.
And that brings us back to something we have learned repeatedly among the seven churches:
Christ sees what appearances conceal.
Yet we must not turn Laodicea into a sermon about a disgusted Christ abandoning a worthless church.
Because right in the middle of His severe diagnosis Jesus says:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
Those whom I love.
That changes how we must hear everything around it.
Christ speaks severely because Laodicea matters to Him.
He exposes their poverty because He wants to make them rich.
He exposes their nakedness because He wants to clothe them.
He exposes their blindness because He wants them to see.
He stands outside the door because He wants to come inside.
And He knocks because He has not walked away.
The message to Laodicea is severe.
But severity is not the absence of grace.
Sometimes grace loves us enough to tell us the truth we have become unable to tell ourselves.

The Movement of the Passage

The message moves from **self-sufficiency → exposure → correction → repentance → invitation → fellowship → victory.**
Christ first identifies Himself as:
“The Amen.”
“The faithful and true witness.”
“The beginning of the creation of God.”
Then He gives His diagnosis.
Neither cold nor hot.
Lukewarm.
Laodicea's own diagnosis is completely different:
“Have need of nothing.”

Christ responds:
You do not realize what you actually need.
Then comes His counsel.
Come to Me for true riches.
Come to Me for clothing.
Come to Me for sight.
And then Christ reveals the motive beneath the correction:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
Therefore:
Repent.
Then comes one of the best-known invitations in the New Testament:
“I stand at the door, and knock.”
The church that believes it needs nothing discovers that the One it needs most is standing outside.
Yet He is still knocking.
And if they open?
Fellowship.
Table.
Presence.
Communion.
Then comes the astonishing conclusion.
The church Christ threatens to spit from His mouth is offered a place with Him on His throne.
That is the distance grace is willing to travel.

1. The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness

Christ identifies Himself as:
“The Amen.”
Amen carries the sense of certainty, truth, reliability—“so be it,” “truly.”
Then Christ calls Himself:
“The faithful and true witness.”
That description matters enormously in Laodicea.
Because someone is wrong about Laodicea.
The congregation says:
“We are rich.”
Christ says:
“You are poor.”
The congregation says:
“We need nothing.”
Christ says:
“You need Me.”
Whose evaluation is true?
The faithful and true witness.

Laodicea's greatest problem is that it has become an unreliable witness about itself.
Christ sees clearly what the church cannot.

2. Neither Cold nor Hot

Christ says:
“Thou art neither cold nor hot.”
This imagery is often interpreted as though “hot” means spiritually enthusiastic and “cold” means spiritually hostile or unbelieving, leading to the puzzling conclusion that Christ would rather someone reject Him completely than be moderately committed.
There is good reason to look more carefully.
Laodicea's regional setting gives the imagery richer meaning.
Hot water can be useful.
Cold water can be refreshing.
Lukewarm water can be unpleasant.
The emphasis, then, need not be that Christ prefers hostility to mediocre Christianity.
The problem is that Laodicea has become **spiritually ineffective and complacent**.
It believes itself useful.
Christ finds its condition nauseating.
That is considerably more challenging than merely telling people to become more emotionally enthusiastic.
Christ is not asking for a higher spiritual temperature.
He is confronting a church whose comfortable self-sufficiency has made it spiritually useless.

3. “Have need of nothing”

Here is Laodicea's confession of faith in itself:
“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”
Not:
God has provided for us.
Not:
Christ is sufficient.
But:
I need nothing.
Self-sufficiency has become spiritual blindness.
Material prosperity has convinced the congregation that visible success must indicate spiritual health.
Christ completely overturns that assumption.
“Knowest not...”
Those may be among the most frightening words in the seven letters.
There are things Laodicea does not know about itself.

And what it does not know is precisely what matters most.

4. Poor, Blind, and Naked

Christ chooses His words carefully.
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
Each strikes directly at Laodicea's supposed strength.
A wealthy city is called poor.
A city associated with medical treatment is called blind.
A city known for textiles and clothing is called naked.
Christ takes everything Laodicea believes demonstrates its sufficiency and exposes its inability to satisfy the deepest spiritual need.
Money cannot purchase what Christ calls wealth.
Clothing cannot cover spiritual nakedness.
Medicine cannot cure spiritual blindness.
The problem is not that these earthly things are evil.
The problem is believing they can provide what only Christ can give.

5. “Buy of me”

Then comes grace.
“I counsel thee to buy of me...”
Notice where Christ directs them.
To Himself.
You need gold?
Come to Me.
You need clothing?
Come to Me.
You need sight?
Come to Me.
Laodicea has resources.
But it has been shopping in the wrong marketplace.
Christ offers: Gold refined by fire.
White robes.
Salve for the eyes.
Everything Laodicea believes it already possesses becomes a picture of what it actually needs from Christ.
And here is the irony:
The church that says **“Have need of nothing”** is invited to receive everything.

6. “As many as I love”

Then comes the sentence without which Laodicea can easily be misunderstood:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
Christ's rebuke is not rejection.
It is love refusing to remain silent.
There is a kind of love that comforts.
There is a kind of love that encourages.
And there is a kind of love that says:
You cannot continue like this.
Laodicea needs the third kind.
Christ loves this church too much to agree with its illusions.
He will not tell them they are rich when they are poor.
He will not tell them they can see when they are blind.
He will not tell them they are clothed when they are naked.
Love tells the truth.
And sometimes the truth wounds before it heals.

7. “Be zealous therefore, and repent”

Because Christ loves them:
Repent.
The command is not:
Feel ashamed forever.
It is:
Turn around.
Wake from complacency.
Recognize your need.
Come back to Christ.
Repentance becomes the doorway between Christ's diagnosis and Christ's invitation.
Laodicea cannot receive what Christ offers while continuing to insist: “Have need of nothing.”
The first movement of repentance may therefore be one of the simplest and hardest sentences a human being can say:
“Lord, I need You.”

8. Christ at the Door

Then comes Revelation 3:20:
“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.”
This verse has often been used evangelistically as a picture of Christ standing at the door of an unbeliever's heart.
That application has helped many people understand Christ's invitation.
But within Revelation, something even more sobering is happening.
Christ is speaking to a **church**.
The Lord of the Church is standing outside the door of the church.
Laodicea has apparently become so self-sufficient that it can continue functioning while Christ stands outside.

Yet He has not left.
He knocks.
That may be one of the most astonishing pictures of grace in the seven messages.
Christ could walk away.
Instead:
He knocks.

9. “I will come in to him, and will sup with him”

What happens when the door opens?
Not punishment.
Not humiliation.
A meal.
“I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”
Table fellowship in the ancient world represented relationship, acceptance, intimacy, and shared life.
Christ does not merely want Laodicea to improve its statistics.
He wants fellowship restored.
That reveals what has been missing all along.
Laodicea's deepest poverty is not financial.
Its deepest poverty is relational.
It has attempted to live as the Church without dependence upon the Lord of the Church.
Christ's answer is not merely:
Do better.
It is: **Open the door. Let Me come in.**

10. From Being Spit Out to Sitting on the Throne

Then comes perhaps the most astonishing reversal of all.
Verse 16:
“I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
Verse 21:
“Will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”
Look at the distance between those two statements.
That distance is repentance and grace.
Laodicea's present condition is serious.
But its present condition does not have to become its final condition.
The church Christ rebukes can become the church that conquers.
The church outside fellowship can return to the table.
The church threatened with rejection can share Christ's victory.
The door remains open because Christ is still knocking.

Pastoral Reflection

Laodicea may be the most uncomfortable church for prosperous Christians to read.
It is relatively easy to identify with Smyrna.
We admire faithful suffering.
Philadelphia is encouraging.
We admire endurance despite little power.
Laodicea is harder.
Because Laodicea asks whether comfort itself can become spiritually dangerous.
There is nothing inherently wrong with having enough.
There is nothing inherently holy about poverty.
The danger begins when:
“God has provided for me”
quietly becomes:
“Have need of nothing.”
We can have a home.
Income.
Retirement.
Education.
Technology.
Medical care.
A good church building.
Programs.
Music.
Bible studies.
Libraries full of Christian books.
And still become spiritually poor.
Because none of those things can replace dependence upon Christ.
Perhaps the most dangerous spiritual condition is not knowing that something is wrong.
Laodicea does not cry:
“Lord, save us.”
It says:
“We're fine.”
Christ loves them enough to disagree.

Something Worth Pondering

There is an extraordinary contrast between Philadelphia and Laodicea.
Philadelphia says very little about itself.
Christ says:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
Yet Philadelphia possesses an open door.

Laodicea says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Yet Christ stands outside its door.
Philadelphia has little and possesses much.
Laodicea has much and possesses little.
Human measurement gets both churches wrong.
Christ does not.
And perhaps the greatest danger is not weakness.
Philadelphia proves that.
Perhaps the greatest danger is becoming so comfortable with ourselves that we no longer recognize our need for Christ.
But even then:
He knocks.
That may be the grace-filled ending of all seven churches.
Christ walks among the lampstands.
Christ sees.
Christ knows.
Christ corrects.
Christ warns.
Christ promises.
Christ loves.
And when necessary:
Christ knocks.

Ask Yourself This

Where in my life have I quietly moved from:
“Christ has given me what I need”
to:
“Have need of nothing”?
Are there places where comfort, experience, knowledge, accomplishment, or religious familiarity have made me less dependent upon Him?
And if Christ stood outside the door of some part of my life and knocked, would I recognize His voice?
More importantly:
Would I open the door?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:14

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;”
— Revelation 3:14, KJV

Before Jesus tells the church in Laodicea what is wrong, He tells them **who is speaking**.
That matters.
Because everything Christ is about to say contradicts what Laodicea believes about itself.
They believe they are rich.
Christ will say they are poor.
They believe they have prospered.
Christ will say they are pitiable.
They believe they need nothing.
Christ will say they are blind and naked.
Someone's evaluation of Laodicea is terribly wrong.
Verse 14 establishes whose evaluation can be trusted.
Jesus is:
The Amen.
The faithful and true witness.
The origin of God's creation.
The church may be mistaken about itself.
Christ is not.

1. “Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans”

Once again, the message is addressed:
“To the angel of the church.”
As with the previous six churches, whatever understanding we take of the “angel”—whether a heavenly representative or another way of addressing the church through its representative—the message itself is plainly intended for the congregation.
And this is the seventh and final church.
Ephesus.
Smyrna.
Pergamum.
Thyatira.
Sardis.
Philadelphia.

Laodicea.
By now a pattern has become familiar.
Christ knows His churches.
He knows their works.
He knows their suffering.
He knows their faithfulness.
He knows their compromise.
He knows their reputation.
He knows their weakness.
And He knows the difference between what a church appears to be and what it actually is.
That last truth becomes especially important in Laodicea.

2. Laodicea

Laodicea was a prosperous city in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor, near Colossae and Hierapolis.
It occupied an important commercial position and became associated with considerable wealth. Ancient sources also connect the city with textile production and medical activity.
Those features of Laodicean life become particularly interesting as Christ's message unfolds.
The city known for wealth will be called poor.
The city associated with clothing will be called naked.
The city associated with medicine will be told that it needs something for its eyes.
Christ speaks to Laodicea using images its people could understand.
But He turns those images inside out.
Their earthly prosperity has apparently helped create a dangerous illusion:
Because they possess much materially, they assume they possess much spiritually.
Christ is about to expose that illusion.

3. “These things saith the Amen”

Jesus begins:
“These things saith the Amen.”
We normally encounter *amen* at the end of something.
A prayer concludes:
“Amen.”
A congregation responds:
“Amen.”
The word expresses affirmation, certainty, reliability:
Truly.
Certainly.

So be it.
But here *Amen* is not merely something Jesus says.
It is a title describing **who Jesus is**.
He is reliable.
He is trustworthy.
He is certain.
He is the One upon whom God's purposes rest securely.
That is precisely the Christ Laodicea needs.
Because Laodicea has become confident in something far less reliable:
its own judgment.
The church says:
"Have need of nothing."
The Amen says:
You do.
And when our assessment of ourselves conflicts with the judgment of Christ, the question is not which opinion we prefer.
The question is:
Whom will we believe?

4. "The Faithful and True Witness"

Christ then describes Himself as:
"The faithful and true witness."
We have encountered similar language already in Revelation.
At the beginning of the book, Jesus Christ is called:
"The faithful witness."
Now the description becomes particularly pointed.
A witness tells what is true.
A faithful witness does not distort the evidence.
A true witness does not alter the testimony to make the listener more comfortable.
Jesus will not flatter Laodicea.
He will tell the truth.
That truth is going to hurt.
But painful truth from a faithful witness is more valuable than comforting deception from an unreliable one.
Laodicea has apparently become an unreliable witness concerning itself.
Its testimony is:
"We are doing wonderfully."
Christ's testimony is:
"You do not realize your true condition."
The church sees success.
Christ sees need.
The church sees prosperity.

Christ sees poverty.
The church sees independence.
Christ sees blindness.
And because Christ is the faithful and true witness, **His diagnosis must take precedence over theirs.**

5. The Difference Between Condemnation and Diagnosis

There is an important pastoral distinction here.
Christ is not insulting Laodicea.
He is diagnosing Laodicea.
Those are not the same thing.
A physician who identifies an illness is not cruel because the diagnosis is unpleasant.
In fact, refusing to tell the patient the truth would be far more dangerous.
Christ's words in the verses ahead are severe because the condition is serious.
But we will discover in verse 19 that His motive is love:
"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."
Therefore, when the faithful and true witness tells Laodicea the truth, He is not trying to destroy them.
He is trying to bring them back to life.
Sometimes the most loving thing Christ can do is contradict what we desperately want to believe about ourselves.

6. "The beginning of the creation of God"

Then comes a phrase requiring careful attention:
"The beginning of the creation of God."
The Greek word translated "beginning" is *archē*. It can refer to a beginning or origin and, in some contexts, to rule or authority.
This phrase has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that Christ Himself was the first thing God created.
But that would sit awkwardly with the broader New Testament witness concerning Christ and creation.
John's Gospel declares in John 1:3: "All things were made by him."
Paul writes of Christ in Colossians 1:16:
"All things were created by him, and for him."
The point is not that Jesus belongs among the created things.
Rather, Christ stands at the **origin and source of creation** and exercises authority over it.
The One speaking to Laodicea is therefore not merely another religious teacher offering advice.
He is the One through whom creation itself has its beginning.

7. Creation and the Church

That title may have particular significance for what follows.
Laodicea believes it has created its own security.
Its wealth provides security.
Its commerce provides prosperity.
Its resources provide independence.
“Have need of nothing.”
But standing before this self-sufficient church is the One who is the origin of creation itself.
Everything Laodicea possesses ultimately exists within a creation that belongs to Him.
Its gold.
Its clothing.
Its medicine.
Its buildings.
Its markets.
Its resources.
Its very life.
Laodicea says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Creation itself testifies:
Everything depends upon God.
The illusion of self-sufficiency begins to collapse before Christ has even stated the church's problem.

8. The Three Titles Belong Together

These three descriptions of Christ are not random.
The Amen — He is utterly reliable.
The faithful and true witness — His testimony can be trusted.
The origin of God's creation — His authority is greater than anything Laodicea possesses.
Together they establish the foundation for everything that follows.
Laodicea is about to receive a diagnosis it does not expect.
The church will not agree with it.
Its circumstances appear to contradict it.
Its bank accounts may contradict it.
Its civic reputation may contradict it.
Its comfortable existence may contradict it.
But the One delivering the diagnosis is:
Reliable.
Truthful.
Authoritative.

Before Christ asks Laodicea to reconsider how it sees itself, He gives the church every reason to trust **how He sees it.**

9. When Christ Contradicts Us

This may be where Revelation 3:14 reaches beyond ancient Laodicea and speaks directly to us.
Most of us develop a story about ourselves.
We know who we think we are.
We know what we believe our strengths are.
We know how we think others perceive us.
Churches do the same thing.
"We are a friendly church."
"We are a biblical church."
"We are a growing church."
"We are a traditional church."
"We are a contemporary church."
"We are a successful church."
"We are a faithful church."
Perhaps.
But none of those descriptions is finally decisive.
The question Revelation repeatedly forces upon the churches is:
What does Christ say?
Sardis had a reputation for being alive.
Christ said otherwise.
Philadelphia had little power.
Christ saw faithfulness.
Laodicea believed it needed nothing.
Christ saw desperate need.
Human assessment can be wrong in either direction.
We can believe ourselves stronger than we are.
We can also believe ourselves weaker than Christ knows us to be.
The faithful and true witness sees both correctly.
And perhaps spiritual maturity begins when we become willing to let Christ tell us the truth about ourselves.

Pastoral Reflection

There is something comforting as well as unsettling about Jesus being "the faithful and true witness."
It is unsettling because Christ sees through every illusion.
We cannot impress Him with appearances.
We cannot hide behind reputation.
We cannot substitute prosperity for faithfulness.
We cannot convince Him that everything is fine simply because we have convinced ourselves.

But it is also comforting.
Because Christ does not misjudge us.
He knows the struggle nobody else sees.
He knows the faithfulness nobody applauds.
He knows the wounds hidden beneath appearances.
He knows when we are stronger than we think.
And He knows when we are weaker than we admit.
His assessment is not distorted by rumor, reputation, appearance, wealth, influence, or public opinion.
The faithful and true witness knows the truth.
And because He loves His Church, He tells it.

Something Worth Pondering

Before Christ tells Laodicea:
"Thou art neither cold nor hot,"
He says:
I am the faithful and true witness.
Before He says: "You are poor,"
He establishes that His judgment is trustworthy.
Before He says: "You are blind,"
He establishes that **He sees clearly.**
That order matters.
Christ does not ask Laodicea to accept a harsh diagnosis simply because it is harsh.
He asks them to accept it because **He is true.**
Sometimes faith means trusting Christ when He tells us something we desperately want to hear.
But sometimes faith means trusting Christ when He tells us something we desperately do **not** want to hear.
The same Christ speaks in both moments.
And He remains: **The Amen.**
The faithful and true witness.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ's assessment of my life differs from my own, which voice do I trust?
Am I willing to ask Him not merely to reassure me, but to show me what is true—even when that truth challenges the story, I have been telling myself?
And can I trust that when the faithful and true witness tells me the truth, **He does so because He loves me too much to leave me deceived?**

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:15

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.”
— Revelation 3:15, KJV

Once again, Christ begins with words we have heard throughout the messages to the seven churches:
“I know.”
Nothing about Laodicea is hidden from Him.
He knows what the church possesses.
He knows what the church believes about itself.
He knows what others may think about it.
And He knows its works.
But unlike Philadelphia, where little power existed alongside remarkable faithfulness, Laodicea presents a very different picture.
Christ says:
“Thou art neither cold nor hot.”
Then comes the surprising statement:
“I would thou wert cold or hot.”
At first glance, that seems strange.
Why would Christ wish that a church were spiritually “cold”?
Perhaps because we have too quickly assumed that “cold” means unbelieving and “hot” means faithful.
The imagery deserves a closer look.

1. “I know thy works”

Christ does not say:
“I know your intentions.”
Nor:
“I know your reputation.”
Nor even:
“I know what you say about yourselves.”
He says:
“I know thy works.”
This has been a recurring theme throughout the seven churches.
Christ sees faith as it is actually lived.
Ephesus had works and endurance but had abandoned its first love.
Smyrna endured suffering.
Pergamum remained faithful under pressure but tolerated dangerous teaching.

Thyatira had love, faith, service, and patient endurance but tolerated corruption.
Sardis had a reputation for life that did not correspond to reality.
Philadelphia had little power but had kept Christ's word.
Now Laodicea stands before the same Christ.
And Christ knows.
That immediately places verse 15 alongside verse 14.
The One saying "I know" is:
"the faithful and true witness."
His diagnosis can be trusted.

2. "Neither Cold nor Hot"

The traditional interpretation is familiar.
Hot means spiritually passionate.
Cold means spiritually dead or openly opposed to Christ.
Lukewarm means somewhere in between—someone who believes but is not particularly committed.
That interpretation produces a difficulty.
Why would Jesus say:
"I would thou wert cold or hot"?
Would Christ really prefer outright rejection to imperfect devotion?
Some interpreters have answered yes, reasoning that an openly unbelieving person may be easier to reach than someone who mistakenly believes everything is spiritually fine.
There may be pastoral wisdom in that observation.
But it is not necessarily what the imagery itself requires.
There is another possibility.
Both hot water and cold water can be useful.
Hot water can warm, soothe, cleanse, and heal.
Cold water can refresh and satisfy thirst.
Lukewarm water may accomplish neither purpose particularly well.
If that is the picture, Christ is not saying:
"I wish you either loved Me or hated Me."
He is saying something closer to:
"I wish you were useful for what you were meant to be."

3. Laodicea and Its Water

The geography surrounding Laodicea has often been used to illuminate Christ's imagery.
Nearby Hierapolis was famous for its hot mineral springs.
Colossae, also in the Lycus Valley, has traditionally been associated with cooler water flowing from the surrounding region.

Laodicea, however, did not possess an abundant local water supply comparable to those sources and relied in part upon water brought into the city.
By the time mineral-laden water reached its destination, it could be less than appealing.
This historical background makes Christ's imagery especially vivid.
Hot water has a purpose.
Cold water has a purpose.
But unpleasant lukewarm water invites rejection.
We should be careful not to press every geographical detail beyond what Revelation itself tells us. John does not stop to explain the water systems of the Lycus Valley.
But the broader imagery would have been understandable in a world where the temperature and quality of water directly affected its usefulness.
Christ is describing a church that has ceased to be what it was intended to be.

4. More Than a Lack of Enthusiasm

This changes the pastoral force of the passage.
Laodicea's problem is deeper than insufficient religious enthusiasm.
Jesus is not merely saying:
“You need to get more excited about Me.”
A church can be emotionally enthusiastic and still be spiritually unhealthy.
People can sing loudly.
Preach passionately.
Attend faithfully.
Run programs constantly.
And still become self-sufficient.
The real problem begins to emerge in verse 17:
“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”
That statement helps interpret the temperature language.
Laodicea has become comfortable.
Satisfied.
Self-reliant.
It sees no urgent need for anything Christ might provide.
Its lukewarmness is connected to its **self-sufficiency**.

5. The Danger of Being Comfortable

There is nothing inherently sinful about comfort.
There is nothing virtuous about making ourselves miserable.
But comfort can become spiritually dangerous when it convinces us that we no longer need God.

Need has a remarkable way of sharpening prayer.
When we are frightened, we pray.
When we are grieving, we pray.
When we are uncertain, we pray.
When we are desperate, we pray.
But what happens when everything seems to be working?
Bills are paid.
Health is manageable.
Church attendance is steady.
Career is established.
Life is relatively predictable.
Prayer can quietly become less urgent.
Dependence can slowly become independence.
Gratitude can become assumption.
And eventually:
"God has provided everything I need"
can quietly become:
"Have need of nothing."
Laodicea appears to have crossed that line.

6. Philadelphia and Laodicea

The placement of these two churches beside one another creates a remarkable contrast.
Philadelphia heard:
"Thou hast a little strength."
Laodicea says:
"Have need of nothing."
Philadelphia knows weakness.
Laodicea believes itself strong.
Philadelphia has an open door placed before it by Christ.
Laodicea will soon discover Christ standing outside a door and knocking.
Philadelphia has little power but remains faithful.
Laodicea possesses considerable resources but has become spiritually ineffective.
The contrast overturns our normal measurements of success.
Philadelphia has little and depends upon Christ.
Laodicea has much and believes it does not need Him.
Which church is actually wealthy?
Christ's answer will soon become unmistakable.

7. "I would thou wert cold or hot"

There is something almost mournful in these words.
"I would..."
Christ knows what this church could be.

It was not created for spiritual uselessness.
It was not called merely to exist.
It was not given the gospel simply to become comfortable.
Christ desires something more for Laodicea.
That means even this rebuke contains hope.
If Christ had finished with the church, there would be no reason to speak.
There would be no reason to correct.
There would be no reason to say:
"I would..."
Once again we encounter the principle we have seen throughout these messages:
As long as Christ is speaking, the invitation to respond remains.
Laodicea is in serious trouble.
But Christ is still speaking.

8. Lukewarmness May Be Hardest to Recognize

Cold water knows it is cold.
Hot water knows it is hot.
But lukewarm water has settled toward the temperature of its surroundings.
That gives us a useful pastoral image, even if we do not press it as the primary historical meaning of the verse.
The greatest danger may not always be deliberate rebellion.
Sometimes it is gradual accommodation.
Nothing dramatic happens.
There is no morning when someone announces:
"Today I will become spiritually complacent."
It happens slowly.
Prayer becomes occasional.
Scripture becomes familiar rather than formative.
Worship becomes routine.
Grace becomes assumed.
Christ becomes part of life rather than the center of life.
And because nothing catastrophic has happened, we tell ourselves:
Everything is fine.
Laodicea will say exactly that in verse 17.
Christ says otherwise.

9. The Temperature of the Surroundings

There is another pastoral implication worth considering.
Water tends toward the temperature of its surroundings unless something acts upon it.

So can churches.
So can Christians.
Culture exerts pressure.
Comfort exerts pressure.
Prosperity exerts pressure.
Routine exerts pressure.
Familiarity exerts pressure.
Over time, it becomes remarkably easy to assume the spiritual temperature of whatever surrounds us.
The question is no longer:
"What is Christ calling us to become?"
It becomes:
"What seems normal around here?"
That is a subtle form of spiritual danger because nothing necessarily looks wrong.
Laodicea still has a church.
Presumably it still gathers.
It still possesses resources.
It may even appear successful.
But Christ sees something else.

10. Christ Wants More Than Attendance

Jesus does not merely want Laodicea to continue existing as an institution.
He wants His Church to participate in His purposes.
That distinction matters.
A congregation can survive organizationally long after it has stopped asking why Christ placed it there.
Budgets can continue.
Buildings can remain open.
Committees can meet.
Programs can operate.
Services can occur every week.
And yet the question remains:
Are we becoming what Christ called us to be?
The goal of the Church is not merely continuation.
It is faithfulness.
Laodicea seems to have confused successful continuation with spiritual health.
Christ refuses to make that mistake.

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps the most challenging part of Revelation 3:15 is that lukewarmness may not feel particularly dangerous.

There may be no obvious crisis.
That is precisely the problem.
We usually recognize spiritual danger when something dramatic happens.
Laodicea reminds us that comfort can also become a spiritual test.
We should therefore be cautious about measuring our relationship with Christ by how smoothly life is going.
Prosperity does not necessarily mean spiritual health.
Difficulty does not necessarily mean spiritual failure.
Philadelphia had little power and received Christ's praise.
Laodicea believed it needed nothing and received Christ's warning.
The difference was not how much each church possessed.
The difference was **what each church did with Christ.**

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps we have sometimes asked the wrong question about this verse.
We ask: **"Am I hot or cold?"**
Perhaps Christ is asking:
"Are you becoming what I called you to be?"
Hot water can serve a purpose.
Cold water can serve a purpose.
The tragedy of Laodicea is not simply that its spiritual temperature falls somewhere in the middle.
It has become satisfied with a condition that Christ finds unacceptable.
And perhaps the most sobering part is this:
Laodicea does not know it.
The church thinks everything is fine.
Only the faithful and true witness sees the problem clearly.
Thankfully: He speaks.

Ask Yourself This

Have I mistaken comfort for spiritual health?
Are there places where familiarity with Christ has quietly replaced dependence upon Christ?
Have I become so accustomed to the Christian life that I am merely maintaining it rather than allowing Christ to continue transforming me?
And if the faithful and true witness said:
"There is something in your life that you cannot presently see,"
would I be willing to listen?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:16

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
— Revelation 3:16, KJV

There is no gentle way to make this image sound pleasant.
Nor should we try.
Jesus intends the image to disturb Laodicea.
“Because thou art lukewarm...”
“I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
The church that believes everything is fine discovers that Christ finds its spiritual condition intolerable.
Yet we must notice something important.
Jesus says:
“I will...”
The warning has not yet become the final act.
Christ is speaking before He acts.
And as we have already discovered among these churches:
As long as Christ is speaking, the invitation to respond remains.
Laodicea is being warned because Laodicea can still repent.

1. “So then because thou art lukewarm”

Verse 16 continues the thought of verse 15.
Christ said:
“Thou art neither cold nor hot.”
Now He names their condition:
“Lukewarm.”
As we saw previously, we should be cautious about reducing these temperatures to a simple spiritual scale:
Cold = unbelieving.
Lukewarm = somewhat committed.
Hot = completely committed.
The text does not explicitly define them that way.
The broader imagery allows another possibility.
Cold water can be refreshing.
Hot water can be useful.
Lukewarm water—especially unpleasant, mineral-laden water—can be something one immediately wants to expel from the mouth.
The image therefore points toward a church that has become spiritually ineffective while remaining remarkably satisfied with itself.
Laodicea does not recognize the problem.

Christ does.

2. “Neither Cold nor Hot”

Jesus repeats the language.
“Neither cold nor hot.”
Repetition emphasizes the condition.
Laodicea has become something in between—not necessarily between belief and unbelief, but between **calling and usefulness**.
It exists.
It functions.
It apparently possesses considerable resources.
But something essential has been lost.
This is why religious activity alone cannot be our measurement of spiritual health.
A church can be busy without being faithful.
A Christian can be knowledgeable without being transformed.
A congregation can be prosperous without being dependent upon Christ.
Laodicea apparently has enough religious life remaining to believe everything is fine.
But not enough spiritual perception to realize that everything is not.

3. “I will spue thee out”

The KJV gives Christ’s warning in vivid terms.
“I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
“Spue” means to vomit.
The Greek verb is vivid and unpleasant.
That is intentional.
Jesus wants Laodicea to understand the seriousness of its condition.
This is not:
“I am somewhat disappointed.”
Nor:
“I would prefer greater enthusiasm.”
Christ describes their condition as something His mouth rejects.
We should not sanitize the imagery simply because it makes us uncomfortable.
It is supposed to make us uncomfortable.
The church is comfortable.
Christ's words are designed to disturb that comfort.

4. The Irony of Laodicea

Imagine the contrast.
Laodicea says:
“I am rich.”
Christ says:

You make Me sick.
Laodicea says:
“Increased with goods.”
Christ says:
You do not understand your condition.
Laodicea says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ says:
You need almost everything you believe you already possess.
This is the central irony of the message.
Laodicea is satisfied with Laodicea.
Christ is not.
That difference matters more than every outward measurement of success.

5. When Satisfaction Becomes Dangerous

Contentment is a Christian virtue.
Complacency is not.
There is an important difference.
Contentment says:
“Christ is sufficient for me.”
Complacency says:
“I am sufficient without Christ.”
Paul could speak of learning contentment in every circumstance because his sufficiency rested in Christ.
Laodicea's satisfaction rests somewhere else.
Its prosperity.
Its resources.
Its security.
Its accomplishments.
Its ability to provide for itself.
The problem is not that Laodicea possesses things.
The problem is that its possessions have helped convince the church that it no longer desperately needs Christ.

6. The Gospel's Warning Against Divided Allegiance

This is where the concern you remembered from the Gospels becomes important.
Jesus repeatedly warns against forms of discipleship in which allegiance becomes divided.
“No one can serve two masters.”
A tree is known by its fruit.

Hearing Christ's words without doing them is compared to building on sand.
Calling Jesus “Lord” is not presented as a substitute for actually following Him.
The vocabulary differs, but the underlying concern is related:
Discipleship cannot merely occupy a comfortable portion of life while something else possesses the center.
Laodicea appears to have retained Christianity while losing dependence upon Christ.
That may be one of the most dangerous forms of spiritual complacency because it still looks religious.

7. Christ Is Not Asking for Emotional Excitement

We should return to this point because it matters pastorally.
The solution to lukewarmness is not simply:
“Become more emotional.”
Some people naturally express faith enthusiastically.
Others are quieter.
Neither temperament determines faithfulness.
Christ is not measuring the volume of our singing.
He is not measuring how emotionally demonstrative we are during worship.
He is measuring the reality of our dependence upon Him.
Laodicea's problem is not insufficient excitement.
It is **self-sufficiency that has displaced dependence upon Christ.**
That is much deeper.

8. “I Am About To”

These words are easy to overlook.
“I am about to...”
The judgment is imminent.
But it has not happened yet.
Christ could simply reject Laodicea.
Instead He warns Laodicea.
That warning itself is grace.
A warning says:
There is still time to respond.
This pattern has appeared repeatedly among the churches.
Christ exposes the problem before bringing judgment.
He calls for repentance.
He gives opportunity to respond.
He speaks because He desires restoration.

And verse 19 will make His motive explicit:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
Even this severe image comes from the Christ who loves this church.

9. Severe Words Can Still Be Loving Words

Modern ears sometimes struggle with this.
We can assume that loving speech must always be gentle speech.
Jesus demonstrates otherwise.
Sometimes love comforts.
Sometimes love encourages.
Sometimes love reassures.
And sometimes love says:
This must change.
The severity of Revelation 3:16 should therefore not be separated from the love of Revelation 3:19.
They come from the same Christ.
The One who says:
“I will spue thee out”
will shortly say:
“As many as I love...”
The rebuke is severe precisely because the relationship matters.
Indifference would remain silent.
Love speaks.

10. The Church Christ Has Not Abandoned

There is something else remarkable here.
Laodicea may be the most severely criticized of the seven churches.
There is no obvious commendation.
Nothing comparable to Smyrna's faithfulness.
Nothing like Philadelphia's endurance.
Nothing even like the good works Christ acknowledged at Thyatira.
And yet Christ has not abandoned Laodicea.
He speaks.
He counsels.
He corrects.
He loves.
He knocks.
And ultimately He promises the conqueror a place with Him on His throne.
That means Revelation 3:16 cannot be read as though the story is already over.
It is a warning at the edge of judgment.
But it is still a warning.
The door to repentance remains open.

Indeed, in a few verses Christ Himself will be standing at that door.

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps we should occasionally ask ourselves a difficult question:
Have I become comfortable with a version of Christianity that requires very little dependence upon Christ?
We can know the vocabulary.
Attend church.
Read Scripture.
Serve.
Sing.
Teach.
Give.
And gradually begin doing all of it from habit rather than dependence.
Nothing necessarily disappears.
Except urgency.
Prayer becomes less necessary.
Grace becomes less astonishing.
Repentance becomes less frequent.
Christ becomes familiar.
And slowly we can become comfortable with a spiritual condition that Christ desires to change.
That is why Laodicea matters.
It reminds us that the absence of crisis does not necessarily indicate the presence of spiritual health.
Sometimes the greatest danger is believing:
"Everything is fine."

Something Worth Pondering

The strongest image in this verse may not actually be the spitting out.
It may be the fact that Christ warns them first.
He could reject Laodicea without another word.
Instead He says:
You are lukewarm.
He identifies the problem.
He explains the danger.
He will tell them what they need.
He will call them to repent.
He will tell them He loves them.
And then:
He will knock.
The church that makes Christ want to spit it from His mouth is still a church at whose door Christ is willing to stand and knock.
That is severe grace.

Christ loves Laodicea enough to make it uncomfortable before its comfort destroys it.

Ask Yourself This

Have I become comfortable in some area where Christ is trying to make me uncomfortable?
Is there a habit, attitude, priority, or form of self-sufficiency that I have learned to tolerate simply because it has become familiar?
And when Christ disturbs my comfort, do I immediately resist Him?
Or can I recognize that sometimes:
the discomfort of Christ's correction is evidence that He has not given up on me?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:17

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:”
— Revelation 3:17, KJV

There may be no more revealing sentence spoken by any of the seven churches than this:
“Have need of nothing.”
Laodicea does not deny Christ.
It does not openly reject the faith.
It does not announce allegiance to another god.
Its problem is subtler.
Laodicea has reached the point where it believes it can provide for itself.
“I am rich.”
“Increased with goods.”
“Have need of nothing.”
Then Christ speaks.
“Knowest not...”
Those words expose the tragedy.
Laodicea's greatest poverty is not simply that it lacks something.
It does not know that it lacks something.
The church has confused prosperity with spiritual health, possessions with security, and independence with maturity.
Christ sees something entirely different.

1. “Because thou sayest”

Notice that Jesus begins with what Laodicea says about itself.
“Because thou sayest...”
This is the church's testimony concerning its own condition.
And it follows immediately after Christ has identified Himself as:
“The faithful and true witness.”
Two witnesses are now speaking.
Laodicea bears witness about Laodicea.
Christ bears witness about Laodicea.
Their testimonies could hardly be more different.
The church says:
Rich.
Prosperous.
Needing nothing.
Christ says:

Wretched.
Pitiable.
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
The question is not whether Laodicea sincerely believes its own testimony.
It probably does.
The question is whether its testimony is true.
And Revelation has already told us which witness is faithful and true.

2. “I Am Rich”

Laodicea begins with wealth.
“I am rich.”
This would have sounded perfectly reasonable in a prosperous commercial city.
Wealth itself is not condemned here.
Scripture does not teach that possessing resources automatically separates someone from God.
The danger lies elsewhere.
Laodicea has allowed what it possesses to define what it believes itself to be.
It has moved from:
“I possess wealth”
to:
“I am rich.”
And eventually from there to:
“Have need of nothing.”
Possessions have become identity.
Material condition has become spiritual evaluation.
The church has looked at what surrounds it and concluded that nothing important could possibly be missing.

3. “Increased with goods”

Then:
“Increased with goods.”
There is accomplishment in those words.
Laodicea has apparently done well.
The city had reason for civic pride, and the congregation seems to have absorbed something of that spirit.
Prosperity can be received with gratitude.
But prosperity can also produce a dangerous illusion:
If things are going well, God must be pleased with everything we are doing.

That conclusion does not necessarily follow.
Philadelphia had “little strength” and received no rebuke.
Laodicea has prospered and receives Christ's strongest warning.
Once again, Revelation overturns our measurements.
Circumstances are not always reliable indicators of spiritual condition.
Success does not automatically mean faithfulness.
Difficulty does not automatically mean failure.
Christ must remain the measure.

4. “Have need of nothing”

Then comes the sentence that reveals everything:
“Have need of nothing.”
This is where prosperity becomes spiritually dangerous.
The Christian faith begins with need.
We need grace.
We need forgiveness.
We need reconciliation.
We need wisdom.
We need strength.
We need one another.
Above all:
We need Christ.
The mature Christian does not eventually graduate from dependence upon Christ.
Spiritual maturity actually teaches us more deeply how dependent upon Him we have always been.
Laodicea has reversed that movement.
Its prosperity has convinced it that dependence is no longer necessary.
The church has enough.
Perhaps enough money.
Enough resources.
Enough experience.
Enough organization.
Enough knowledge.
Enough confidence.
Enough religion.
But Christianity without dependence upon Christ eventually becomes something other than Christianity.

5. “Knowest not”

Christ responds:
“Knowest not...”
This may be the most frightening part of the verse.
If Laodicea knew it was poor, it might ask for help.

If it knew it was blind, it might ask to see.
If it knew it was naked, it might ask to be clothed.
But it does not know.
Its condition prevents it from recognizing its condition.
That is the danger of spiritual blindness.
A person with physical blindness usually knows that sight is impaired.
Spiritual blindness can be different.
We may be unable to see while remaining completely convinced that we see perfectly.
Laodicea's confidence therefore becomes part of its problem.

6. Wretched and Pitiable

Christ first calls them:
"Wretched, and miserable..."
Those words dismantle the image Laodicea has constructed.
The church sees itself as admirable.
Christ says its condition should evoke pity.
Again, this is not cruelty.
Verse 19 will make clear that Christ speaks from love.
The faithful and true witness refuses to flatter people He intends to restore.
False reassurance would leave Laodicea exactly where it is.
Truth creates the possibility of repentance.
Christ wounds their pride because their pride has made healing impossible.

7. Poor

Then Christ says:
"Poor."
The wealthy church is poor.
The irony is deliberate.
Laodicea may possess currency, property, influence, commerce, and resources.
But none of those things can purchase what the church actually needs.
This distinction runs throughout Scripture.
There is wealth that can be deposited in an account.
And there is wealth that exists only in relationship with God.
Jesus had already said to Smyrna:
"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich."
Now He effectively says the opposite to Laodicea:
You think you are rich.
You are poor.
What an extraordinary contrast.
Smyrna appears poor and is rich.

Laodicea appears rich and is poor.
Christ measures wealth differently.

8. Blind

Then:
“Blind.”
This is particularly devastating because Laodicea believes it sees its condition accurately.
It does not.
Its blindness is demonstrated by the sentence it has just spoken:
“Have need of nothing.”
The church's inability to recognize its need is evidence of its inability to see.
This is why Christ will soon counsel them to obtain salve:
“That thou mayest see.”
Before healing can begin, blindness must be acknowledged.
That is difficult.
We naturally prefer Christ to confirm what we already believe.
Laodicea needs Christ to do something much more uncomfortable.
It needs Him to correct its vision.

9. Naked

Finally:
“Naked.”
A city and culture familiar with textiles and clothing hears Christ say that the church is unclothed.
Again the contrast is striking.
Laodicea may be able to manufacture clothing.
But it cannot clothe its own spiritual nakedness.
Human beings have been trying to cover themselves since Genesis.
After Adam and Eve recognize their nakedness, they sew fig leaves together.
Humanity has been sewing variations of those fig leaves ever since.
Achievement.
Reputation.
Possessions.
Status.
Religion.
Respectability.
We construct coverings and hope they will conceal what lies beneath.
Christ sees through them all.
And what He exposes, He intends to cover with something better.
Verse 18 will offer:
“white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed.”

Christ does not expose nakedness merely to shame.
He exposes it because He intends to provide clothing.

10. Five Words Against Three Claims

Notice the structure of the verse.
Laodicea makes three claims:
Rich.
Prosperous.
Need nothing.
Christ answers with five descriptions:
Wretched.
Pitiable.
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
The church's self-assessment collapses completely.
But there is something important about what Christ does next.
He does not simply say:
"You are wrong."
And walk away.
Verse 18 begins:
"I counsel thee..."
Christ diagnoses before He prescribes.
He exposes the disease before offering the remedy.
Poor?
Christ has gold.
Naked?
Christ has white robes.
Blind?
Christ has salve.
Every deficiency Christ identifies becomes something **Christ Himself can supply.**

11. The Danger of Measuring Ourselves by Ourselves

Laodicea demonstrates what happens when we become our own standard.
If we compare ourselves only with ourselves, we can usually find reasons to feel successful.
Churches can do the same thing.
Attendance is stable.
Giving is adequate.
Programs are operating.

The building is maintained.
People seem happy.
Therefore:
“We are doing well.”
Perhaps.
But Revelation asks a different question.
What does Christ see?
That question has followed us through every church.
Ephesus could point to endurance.
Sardis could point to reputation.
Laodicea could point to prosperity.
None of those things was sufficient to answer the question.
Only Christ sees the whole church.
Only Christ knows the heart.
Only Christ is the faithful and true witness.

12. The Poverty of Self-Sufficiency

There is a paradox at the center of this verse.
The more Laodicea believes it possesses, the less it recognizes what it needs.
That makes self-sufficiency a peculiar form of poverty.
The person who knows he needs grace can receive grace.
The person who knows she needs wisdom can ask for wisdom.
The church that knows it needs Christ can depend upon Christ.
But what can be given to the person who says:
“Have need of nothing”?
Before Laodicea can receive Christ's provision, Christ must first dismantle its illusion of sufficiency.
That may be why His words are so severe.
The church must become aware of its poverty before it will reach for true riches.

13. Philadelphia and Laodicea Once More

The contrast with Philadelphia becomes even sharper.
Philadelphia:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
Laodicea:
“Have need of nothing.”
Philadelphia knows limitation and remains faithful.
Laodicea believes itself sufficient and becomes lukewarm.
Philadelphia receives an open door.
At Laodicea, Christ will stand outside a door and knock.
Perhaps there is a profound spiritual principle here:
Recognized weakness can lead us toward dependence upon Christ.

Unrecognized weakness can convince us that dependence is unnecessary.
The danger is not simply being weak.
We are all weak.
The danger is becoming unable to recognize that we are.

Pastoral Reflection

"Have need of nothing."
Most Christians would probably never say those words directly to God.
But we can live them.
We live them when prayer becomes optional because we believe we can handle things ourselves.
We live them when Scripture becomes familiar enough that we no longer expect it to challenge us.
We live them when experience replaces dependence.
We live them when financial security begins to feel like ultimate security.
We live them when church becomes something we manage rather than a people Christ leads.
We live them whenever we stop expecting that Christ may still have something to show us about ourselves.
The opposite of Laodicea is not misery.
It is dependence.
Christian maturity does not eventually arrive at:
"Lord, I no longer need You."
It increasingly discovers:
"Lord, I need You more deeply than I ever understood."

Something Worth Pondering

There are two kinds of poverty in Revelation 2–3.
Smyrna is poor and Christ calls it rich.
Laodicea is rich and Christ calls it poor.
One church has little and knows its dependence.
The other has much and has forgotten its dependence.
Perhaps the question is not:
"How much do I have?"
Perhaps the question is:
"What has what I have taught me to believe about what I need?"
Prosperity can become gratitude.
Or prosperity can become self-sufficiency.
Experience can become wisdom.
Or experience can become independence.
Knowledge can produce humility.
Or knowledge can convince us that we no longer need to listen.

The danger is not possessing much.
The danger is possessing enough that we begin to imagine we no longer need the One from whom everything came.

Ask Yourself This

Where am I most tempted to say, perhaps without words:
“I can handle this. I need nothing”?
Have any of God's blessings gradually become substitutes for dependence upon the God who gave them?
And if Christ were to say:
“Knowest not...”
would I defend my assessment of myself?
Or would I trust the faithful and true witness enough to ask:
“Lord, what am I not seeing?”

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:18

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”
— Revelation 3:18, KJV

“I counsel thee...”
Those words may be among the most gracious words in the message to Laodicea.
Christ has just exposed the church's true condition.
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
He could stop there.
He could simply pronounce judgment.
Instead, He offers counsel.
And every deficiency Christ identified in verse 17 is met by something Christ offers in verse 18.
Poor?
“Buy of me gold tried in the fire.”
Naked?
Receive white robes.
Blind?
Receive salve so that you may see.
Laodicea has spent its life acquiring things.
Now Christ tells the church where true riches are found:
“Of me.”
Those two words may be the center of the verse.
Everything Laodicea actually needs is found in Christ.

1. “Therefore”

The verse begins:
“Therefore...”
Christ's counsel follows directly from Christ's diagnosis.
Because you are poor:
Come to Me.
Because you are naked:
Come to Me.
Because you are blind:
Come to Me.

The diagnosis of verse 17 is not intended to produce despair.
It is intended to produce movement.
Christ exposes what is wrong so that Laodicea will finally seek what can make it whole.
That is often how grace works.
Grace does not always begin by making us feel better about ourselves.
Sometimes grace begins by showing us something we have refused to see.
But Christ never exposes our need merely to leave us standing helplessly before it.
He exposes need in order to lead us toward provision.

2. “I counsel thee”

There is something remarkable about the wording:
“I counsel thee.”
The Lord of the Church counsels the church.
He does not merely condemn.
He teaches.
He directs.
He tells Laodicea what to do next.
That means repentance is still possible.
The church threatened with being spit from Christ's mouth is still being instructed by Christ.
Once again:
As long as Christ is speaking, the invitation to respond remains.
Laodicea has not reached the end.
Christ is showing them the way back.

3. “Buy of me”

This is wonderfully ironic language.
Laodicea understands buying.
It understands commerce.
It understands wealth.
It understands transactions.
So Christ speaks in language a prosperous commercial city can understand:
“Buy of me.”
But what could Laodicea possibly use to purchase something from Christ?
The church Christ has just called poor has nothing with which to purchase true spiritual riches.
That paradox appears elsewhere in Scripture.
Isaiah invites:

“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!”
The language of buying therefore does not mean that grace can literally be purchased.
It emphasizes receiving from the only One who possesses what we truly need.
Laodicea has been accustomed to saying:
“What do we need, and where can we buy it?”
Christ answers:
“What you need cannot be obtained from your marketplace. Come to Me.”

4. The Most Important Words May Be “From Me”

Laodicea has resources.
Christ does not tell them merely to acquire different resources.
He says:
“Buy **of me**.”
That distinction is crucial.
Christianity is not ultimately a program of spiritual self-improvement.
Christ does not hand Laodicea a list and say:
“Fix yourselves.”
He directs them toward Himself.
Need gold?
From Me.
Need clothing?
From Me.
Need sight?
From Me.
The solution to Laodicea's self-sufficiency is not better self-sufficiency.
The solution is dependence upon Christ.

5. “Gold tried in the fire”

First:
“Gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.”
Laodicea believes it already possesses wealth.
Christ says it needs a different kind.
Gold refined by fire has been purified.
Impurities have been removed.
Throughout Scripture, fire can serve as an image of testing, purification, and refinement.
Christ therefore offers something far more enduring than ordinary wealth.

Earthly gold can purchase many things.
It can provide comfort.
Security.
Influence.
Opportunity.
But it cannot purchase reconciliation with God.
It cannot purchase faithfulness.
It cannot purchase eternal life.
It cannot purchase the kingdom.
The church that says:
"I am rich"
must learn what true riches are.

6. "That thou mayest be rich"

The irony continues:
"That thou mayest be rich."
Christ does not object to richness.
He objects to **mistaking the wrong things for riches.**
That distinction matters.
The problem with Laodicea is not simply that it possesses material wealth.
The problem is that material wealth has become its definition of wealth.
Jesus replaces that definition.
True wealth is what remains valuable before God.
Smyrna understood this paradox from the opposite direction.
Christ told Smyrna:
"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich."
Smyrna possessed little and was rich.
Laodicea possesses much and is poor.
The difference cannot be found in their bank accounts.
It is found in their relationship with Christ.

7. "White raiment, that thou mayest be clothed"

Next Christ offers:
"White raiment, that thou mayest be clothed."
Laodicea had reason to understand the value of textiles and clothing.
But once again Christ takes something familiar and transforms it into a spiritual picture.
The church that can clothe itself materially cannot cover its spiritual nakedness.
It needs clothing Christ provides.
White garments appear repeatedly throughout Revelation.

They are associated with purity, faithfulness, victory, and belonging among God's people.
We have already encountered white clothing in the message to Sardis.
Now Laodicea is offered what it cannot manufacture for itself.
The church has clothing.
Christ offers **covering**.
There is a difference.

8. “The shame of thy nakedness”

Christ continues:
“That the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.”
Nakedness in Scripture can represent exposure, vulnerability, and shame.
The image reaches far back into the biblical story.
In Genesis, after Adam and Eve disobey God, they become aware of their nakedness and attempt to cover themselves.
Human beings have been constructing coverings ever since.
Some are made from fabric.
Others are made from:
Achievement.
Reputation.
Wealth.
Education.
Religious activity.
Social standing.
Respectability.
We create ways of saying:
“Look at this rather than what lies underneath.”
Christ sees beneath every covering.
But here is the grace:
Christ does not expose Laodicea's nakedness so that He can leave the church ashamed.
He exposes it because He intends to clothe them.
The purpose of His truth is restoration.

9. “Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve”

Finally:
“Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”
Laodicea's blindness is particularly serious because it is blindness about itself.
The church does not know that it cannot see.
It believes:
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ says:
“Knowest not...”

Therefore the first thing Laodicea needs to see clearly is **Laodicea**.
We often think spiritual sight means understanding mysterious things.
Sometimes spiritual sight begins much closer to home.
Lord, help me see myself truthfully.
Help me see where I have become complacent.
Help me see what I have mistaken for security.
Help me see what I have allowed to replace dependence upon You.
Help me see what You see.
That prayer requires humility.

10. “That thou mayest see”

Christ does not want Laodicea to remain blind.
That is important.
His diagnosis is not:
“You are blind, and that is what you will always be.”
It is:
Receive what I give you **“that thou mayest see.”**
There is possibility in those words.
Sight can be restored.
The church can recognize its condition.
It can recognize Christ's provision.
It can recognize the danger of self-sufficiency.
It can recognize the One standing at the door.
Laodicea's blindness is serious.
But it is not beyond Christ's ability to heal.

11. Poor — Christ Offers Riches

The structure of the verse is beautiful.
Verse 17:
Poor.
Verse 18:
Gold.
Christ does not merely point toward poverty.
He provides true wealth.
Laodicea thought it was rich because it possessed gold.
Christ teaches that true riches are received from Him.

12. Naked — Christ Offers Clothing

Verse 17:
Naked.
Verse 18:
White robes.
Christ does not expose merely to humiliate.
He exposes in order to clothe.

This is grace.
God's answer to human nakedness has never ultimately been better fig leaves.
It is God's provision.
Laodicea must stop trusting what it can manufacture and receive what only Christ can give.

13. Blind — Christ Offers Sight

Verse 17:
Blind.
Verse 18:
Salve so that you may see.
Again, Christ provides exactly what the diagnosis requires.
There is something wonderfully pastoral about the pattern.
Christ never says:
"You are poor—good luck."
"You are naked—cover yourself somehow."
"You are blind—find your own way."
Instead:
Poor?
I have riches.
Naked?
I have clothing.
Blind?
I can give sight.
The answer to every need points back to the same Person.
Christ.

14. Everything They Need Is Standing Before Them

Laodicea says:
"Have need of nothing."
Christ responds by naming everything it needs.
But then He does something even greater.
He offers Himself as the source of every remedy.
That means Laodicea's greatest problem is not ultimately the absence of gold, clothing, or sight.
Its greatest problem is **distance from Christ.**
And its greatest need is therefore not simply spiritual improvement.
Its greatest need is restored relationship.
That prepares us for verse 20.
Soon Christ will say:
"I stand at the door, and knock."

The One who possesses everything Laodicea needs is standing just outside.
What an extraordinary picture.
The church says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ says:
Christ stands at the door, offering what the church cannot provide for itself.

15. Grace Does Not Merely Expose — Grace Provides

This may be the great movement from verse 17 to verse 18.
Verse 17 exposes.
Verse 18 provides.
Truth says:
You are poor.
Grace says:
Here is gold.
Truth says:
You are naked.
Grace says:
Here are white robes.
Truth says:
You are blind.
Grace says:
Here is salve.
Truth and grace are not enemies.
Christ embodies both.
He tells Laodicea the truth precisely because He intends to extend grace.
A physician who refuses to diagnose cannot heal.
A Savior who pretends there is no problem cannot save us from it.
Christ tells the truth.
Then Christ provides the remedy.

Pastoral Reflection

There are times when God shows us something about ourselves that is difficult to accept.
Our first instinct may be embarrassment.
Defensiveness.
Denial.
Perhaps even shame.
But Revelation 3:18 reminds us to look at what Christ does after exposing Laodicea.

He provides.
Christ does not reveal our poverty because He delights in poverty.
He wants to make us rich in what matters.
He does not expose our nakedness because He delights in shame.
He wants to clothe us.
He does not reveal our blindness because He delights in darkness.
He wants us to see.
Perhaps we can trust Christ enough to let Him show us the truth because **the One who reveals our need is also the One who supplies what we need.**

Something Worth Pondering

Laodicea says:
"Have need of nothing."
Christ answers:
You need gold.
You need clothing.
You need sight.
But beneath all three is something deeper.
You need Me.
That is the gospel hidden inside Christ's severe words to Laodicea.
Our deepest need is not merely something Christ possesses.
Our deepest need is Christ Himself.
The church has spent its life acquiring things.
Christ invites it to receive something its wealth could never purchase.
Him.
And perhaps that is why spiritual poverty can exist in the middle of enormous prosperity.
We can possess almost everything we once prayed for and still discover:
Nothing God gives can replace our need for God Himself.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ reveals something lacking in my life, do I hear only the diagnosis?
Or do I also hear His invitation?
Am I still trying to manufacture for myself something that can only be received from Him?
And beneath all the things I believe I need, am I willing to recognize the deepest truth of all:
What I need most is not something from Christ. What I need most is Christ?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:19

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”
— Revelation 3:19, KJV

If we stopped reading the message to Laodicea at verse 18, we might misunderstand the heart of Christ.
His words have been severe.
“Thou art lukewarm.”
“I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
“Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”
Those are difficult words.
But now Jesus tells us why He has spoken them:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
There it is.
Love.
Not disgust alone.
Not abandonment.
Not rejection for rejection's sake.
Love.
Christ has not exposed Laodicea because He wants to humiliate the church.
He has exposed Laodicea because He wants to restore it.
He has not diagnosed its disease because He wants it to die.
He has diagnosed the disease because He wants it to become well.
The severity of Christ's words and the depth of Christ's love are not opposites.
In Laodicea, they belong together.

1. “As many as I love”

We might have expected Jesus to say:
“I reprove those with whom I am angry.”
Instead:
“As many as I love.”
That changes the entire passage.
The church threatened with being spit from Christ's mouth is still loved by Christ.
The church that has become self-sufficient is still loved.
The church that does not recognize its poverty is still loved.
The church that is blind to its own condition is still loved.
Laodicea has not stopped mattering to Jesus.

Indeed, Christ's willingness to confront the church demonstrates precisely how much it matters.
Indifference would simply walk away.
Love remains engaged.

2. Love Does Not Always Sound Gentle

We sometimes assume that love must always speak softly.
Often it does.
Jesus comforts the grieving.
He welcomes the weary.
He receives the broken.
He speaks peace to the frightened.
But love is not always gentle in tone.
Sometimes love must say:
“This cannot continue.”
A parent who sees a child moving toward danger does not whisper politely because a raised voice might sound unkind.
A physician who discovers a serious illness does not soften the diagnosis until it becomes meaningless.
Truth may be painful without being cruel.
Christ's words to Laodicea are severe because Laodicea's condition is serious.
Love that refuses to tell the truth is not the kind of love Christ demonstrates here.

3. “I rebuke”

To reprove is to expose what is wrong and bring it into the light.
That is precisely what Christ has been doing.
Laodicea says:
“I am rich.”
Christ reproves:
You are poor.
Laodicea says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ reproves:
You need gold, clothing, and sight.
Laodicea sees prosperity.
Christ reveals poverty.
Reproof interrupts self-deception.
That is uncomfortable.
But without reproof, Laodicea would continue living confidently inside an illusion.
Christ loves the church too much to allow that illusion to remain unchallenged.

4. “And chasten”

Christ does more than reprove.
He disciplines.
Discipline is different from destruction.
Its purpose is corrective.
It seeks formation. Growth. Restoration. Maturity.
The language echoes a broad biblical theme: God disciplines those who belong to Him.
The writer of Hebrews develops this idea at length, connecting divine discipline with parental love.
Discipline is therefore not necessarily evidence that God has abandoned someone.
Sometimes it is evidence of precisely the opposite.
God cares enough about what we are becoming to intervene.
That does not mean every hardship should automatically be interpreted as divine discipline.
Scripture does not permit us to look at every difficulty in someone's life and announce that God must be correcting some hidden sin.
But when Christ explicitly identifies something that must change, as He does here, His corrective purpose is clear.
Laodicea needs discipline because Laodicea needs restoration.

5. Correction Is Evidence of Relationship

There is something deeply pastoral here.
Christ still claims this church.
He does not speak about Laodicea as though it were irrelevant to Him.
He addresses it.
Corrects it.
Counsels it.
Calls it.
Loves it.
Soon He will knock at its door.
All of those actions reveal continued relationship.
The frightening moment would not be Christ saying:
“You must repent.”
The truly frightening moment would be Christ no longer speaking at all.
Once again we return to the principle that has emerged throughout these seven churches:
As long as Christ is speaking, the invitation to respond remains.
Laodicea is being corrected because Christ has not finished with Laodicea.

6. “Be zealous therefore”

Then comes the response Christ desires:
“Be zealous therefore...”
The word translated “zealous” calls for an earnest, wholehearted response.
That is especially appropriate after the language of lukewarmness.
Christ does not call Laodicea merely to feel guilty.
He calls the church to become serious about what He has revealed.
There is an enormous difference between conviction and shame.
Shame says:
“There is something wrong with me, therefore I should hide.”
Conviction says:
“Christ has shown me something that must change, therefore I should turn toward Him.”
Christ's purpose is not to drive Laodicea away.
It is to draw Laodicea back.

7. Earnestness Is More Than Emotion

Just as “hot” should not simply be reduced to emotional enthusiasm, neither should “be zealous” be reduced to becoming more visibly excited.
Christ is asking for seriousness of response.
Listen.
Recognize.
Turn.
Act.
Depend.
A person can become emotional during worship and remain unchanged afterward.
A congregation can experience a powerful service and return immediately to the same patterns of self-sufficiency.
Christ seeks something deeper.
He seeks repentance.
Earnestness means taking Christ seriously enough to respond.

8. “And Repent”

There is the word we have heard repeatedly among the churches:
Repent.
Ephesus heard it.
Pergamum heard it.
Thyatira was given opportunity for it.
Sardis heard it.
Now Laodicea hears it.

Repentance is not merely feeling badly about what we have done.
It is turning.
A change of mind that produces a change of direction.
For Laodicea, repentance means abandoning the confession:
"Have need of nothing."
And replacing it with something like:
"Lord, I need You."
That may be the entire journey of Laodicea in four words.
From:
I need nothing.
To:
Lord, I need You.

9. Repentance Is an Invitation, Not Merely an Accusation

We sometimes hear the word *repent* primarily as a threat.
But repentance is also an extraordinary gift.
If change were impossible, there would be no reason for Christ to command it.
When Jesus says:
"Repent,"
He is declaring that Laodicea's present condition does not have to remain its permanent condition.
The lukewarm can become useful.
The poor can become rich.
The naked can be clothed.
The blind can see.
The self-sufficient can rediscover dependence.
The church outside fellowship can return to the table.
Repentance means:
This is not where your story has to end.

10. The Purpose of Conviction

Christ's conviction always has direction.
He does not expose Laodicea merely so that the congregation will sit around discussing how terrible it is.
He tells them what is wrong so that they will move toward what is right.
This is an important distinction in the Christian life.
Conviction that comes from Christ points toward restoration.
It says:
This must change.
Come back.
Turn around.

Open the door.
There is hope embedded within the command to repent because repentance assumes that another direction remains available.

11. Love That Refuses to Leave Us Alone

There is a form of love that says:
"I accept you, therefore nothing about you ever needs to change."
That is not the love Christ demonstrates here.
Christ's love accepts people deeply enough to transform them.
He loves Laodicea where it is.
But He loves Laodicea too much to leave it where it is.
That distinction runs throughout discipleship.
Jesus receives us by grace.
Then grace begins changing us.
He forgives.
Then He forms.
He welcomes.
Then He teaches.
He saves.
Then He sanctifies.
The love of Christ is not passive affection.
It is active, transforming love.

12. The Rebuke Proves the Door Is Still Open

Verse 20 will soon give us the literal image of a door.
But verse 19 has already shown us that the possibility of restoration remains.
Christ is still addressing Laodicea.
Still counseling.
Still calling.
Still loving.
Still inviting repentance.
The church may be dangerously close to judgment.
But it is not beyond grace.
That may be one of the most important pastoral truths in the entire message.
Christ's correction is evidence that He has not stopped calling us home.

Pastoral Reflection

Most of us enjoy encouragement more than correction.
We like the passages where Christ says:
"Well done."
We are less comfortable when He says:

“This needs to change.”
But if we trust Christ as the faithful and true witness, perhaps we must learn to receive both from the same hand.
The Christ who comforts us is the Christ who corrects us.
The Christ who reassures us is the Christ who disciplines us.
The Christ who tells Philadelphia:
“Hast kept my word”
is the same Christ who tells Laodicea:
“Repent.”
Both are expressions of His faithful presence among His churches.
Perhaps spiritual maturity includes learning to pray:
“Lord, do not merely tell me what comforts me. Tell me what will make me more like You.”
That prayer requires courage.
But it also requires trust.
We can allow Christ to correct us because we know why He does it:
“As many as I love.”

Something Worth Pondering

Laodicea may hear the harshest words among the seven churches.
Yet tucked inside those words is one of the tenderest declarations:
“As many as I love.”
Perhaps that is no accident.
The severity of correction does not measure the absence of love.
Sometimes it measures the seriousness of love.
Christ could leave Laodicea alone.
He refuses.
He could allow the church to continue believing:
“Have need of nothing.”
He refuses.
He could simply walk away from the door.
He refuses.
Instead He corrects.
Calls.
Waits.
Knocks.
Christ's correction is not evidence that He has stopped loving Laodicea. It is evidence that He refuses to stop loving Laodicea.

Ask Yourself This

When Christ corrects me, do I immediately hear rejection?
Or can I recognize the voice of the One who says:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”?
Am I willing to let Christ challenge something in me precisely because I trust His love?
And when He says:
“Repent,”
can I hear beneath the command something else as well?
“Come back. I have not given up on you.”

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”
— Revelation 3:20, KJV

Few verses in Revelation are more familiar than this one.
For generations it has been used as an invitation to those who do not yet know Christ:
Jesus stands at the door.
Jesus knocks.
You must open the door.
That application has helped countless people understand the personal nature of responding to Christ.
But before we apply the verse elsewhere, we must hear it where John first places it.
Jesus is speaking to a **church**.
That makes the picture considerably more unsettling.
The Lord of the Church is standing outside the door of the church.
Laodicea has become so self-sufficient that it apparently believes it can continue without recognizing how far its fellowship with Christ has deteriorated.
Yet the most astonishing part of the picture may not be that Christ is outside.
It is that:
He is still there.
And He is knocking.

1. “Behold”

The opening word calls the church to pay attention.
“Behold.”
Before the door can be opened, the voice must be heard.
That immediately connects this verse with the repeated conclusion to every message:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
Laodicea's problem is not that Christ has stopped speaking.
Christ is speaking.
The question is whether the church will hear Him.
Self-sufficiency has a way of making listening difficult.
If I truly believe:

“Have need of nothing,”
then why would I listen for someone offering what I need?
The first act of repentance may therefore be simply becoming quiet enough to hear the knock.

2. “I stand at the door”

The image is startling.
Christ is at the door.
The question immediately arises:
How did the Church reach a point where Christ is outside?
Revelation does not describe some dramatic moment when Laodicea expelled Him.
Perhaps that is part of the warning.
Spiritual distance does not always begin with deliberate rejection.
Sometimes it develops gradually.
Dependence becomes routine.
Routine becomes familiarity.
Familiarity becomes complacency.
Complacency becomes self-sufficiency.
And eventually the church says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Meanwhile, Christ stands at the door.
No one necessarily announced:
“We no longer need Jesus.”
They simply learned to function as though they did not.

3. A Church Can Continue While Christ Is at the Door

That may be one of the most sobering implications of this verse.
Apparently religious activity can continue even when fellowship with Christ has become profoundly damaged.
The congregation can still gather.
Songs can still be sung.
Sermons can still be preached.
Offerings can still be received.
Committees can still meet.
Programs can still operate.
Buildings can still be maintained.
The machinery of religion can continue running.
And yet Revelation forces us to ask:
Where is Christ?
A church is not ultimately defined by the efficiency of its organization.
It is defined by its relationship with its Lord.

Laodicea possesses resources.
But it desperately needs presence.

4. “Knocking”

Christ does not break down the door.
He knocks.
There is patience in that image.
There is invitation.
There is persistence.
And there is respect for response.
The One who identified Himself as the origin of God's creation certainly possesses the authority to command.
Yet here He knocks.
The church must respond.
This is not weakness on Christ's part.
It is invitation.
He is calling Laodicea back into the fellowship it has neglected.
The knock itself says: **The relationship can still be restored.**

5. He Has Not Walked Away

This may be the most beautiful part of the verse.
Consider everything Christ has said about Laodicea.
Lukewarm.
Wretched.
Pitiable.
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
He has threatened to spit the church from His mouth.
And yet:
He remains at the door.
Christ could leave.
He does not.
Christ could abandon them to their self-sufficiency.
He does not.
Christ could allow them to continue believing their own illusion.
He does not.
He speaks.
He corrects.
He counsels.
He calls them to repentance.
And then:
He knocks.
The knock is evidence that grace has not withdrawn.

6. “If any man hear my voice”

Notice that Christ is not merely knocking.
He is speaking.
“If any man hear my voice...”
Christian faith is not merely responding to an abstract spiritual feeling.
It is responding to Christ.
His voice has been heard throughout these seven messages.
“I know thy works.”
“Fear none of those things.”
“Repent.”
“Hold fast.”
“Be watchful.”
“I have set before thee an open door.”
“Buy of me.”
And now:
“Behold.”
The sheep know the shepherd's voice.
The question for Laodicea is whether years of self-sufficiency have dulled its ability to recognize the One speaking.

7. “And Open the Door”

Christ knocks.
But Laodicea must open.
Repentance requires response.
Christ has already provided the diagnosis.
He has offered the remedy.
He has declared His love.
He has called them to repent.
Now comes the response:
Open the door.
Opening the door means abandoning the illusion that Christ is unnecessary.
It means moving from:
“Have need of nothing”
to:
“Lord, I need You.”
The door therefore becomes a picture of repentance.
Not merely feeling sorry.
Not merely agreeing that something has gone wrong.
But acting upon Christ's invitation.

8. The Door of Philadelphia and the Door of Laodicea

There is a remarkable contrast between the final two churches.
To Philadelphia Christ said:
"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."
At Laodicea:
Christ Himself stands at a door waiting for it to be opened.
Philadelphia has little power but remains dependent upon Christ.
Christ opens the door before them.
Laodicea believes it needs nothing.
Christ stands outside its door.
The contrast is striking.
At Philadelphia, Christ opens the door for the church.
At Laodicea, the church must open the door for Christ.
One church recognizes its weakness.
The other has become blinded by its strength.
And once again Revelation asks us to reconsider what true spiritual prosperity looks like.

9. "I Will Come In"

Then comes the promise:
"I will come in..."
Christ does not say:
"If you open the door, I will stand there and lecture you about how long you kept Me waiting."
He comes in.
That is grace.
Repentance does not lead merely to condemnation over the past.
It leads to restored presence.
The goal of Christ's correction has been fellowship all along.
He exposed their poverty because He wanted to enrich them.
He exposed their nakedness because He wanted to clothe them.
He exposed their blindness because He wanted them to see.
And He exposed their distance because:
He wants to come in.

10. "And will sup with him"

Then something beautiful happens.
Christ says:
"I will come in to him, and will sup with him."
Not:
Interrogate you.
Not:

Humiliate you.
Not:
Remind you repeatedly of everything you did wrong.
Eat with you.
In the biblical world, table fellowship carried deep meaning.
To share a meal was to share relationship.
Welcome.
Peace.
Community.
Fellowship.
Christ's goal is not simply to make Laodicea behave better.
He wants restored communion.
This is deeply important.
Christianity is not ultimately about maintaining acceptable behavior before a distant God.
It is about restored relationship with God through Christ.
The remedy for Laodicea's lukewarmness is therefore not merely increased religious activity.
It is renewed fellowship with Jesus.

11. “And he with me”

Jesus adds:
“And he with me.”
The fellowship is mutual.
Christ with us.
We with Christ.
The language is intimate.
The church that said:
“Have need of nothing”
is invited to sit at the table with the One it needed most.
Perhaps this is the deepest poverty Christ identified in verse 17.
Laodicea's greatest poverty was never lack of gold.
Its greatest poverty was **broken fellowship with Christ.**
And therefore its greatest wealth is not the gold of verse 18.
It is the table of verse 20.
Because what Christ ultimately offers Laodicea is not merely something.
He offers Himself.

12. From Marketplace to Table

Notice how the imagery has changed.
Verse 18 speaks the language of commerce:
“Buy of me.”
Verse 20 speaks the language of relationship:
“Eat with me.”

Laodicea understands the marketplace.
Christ leads them from the marketplace to the table.
At the marketplace we ask:
What can I acquire?
At the table we ask:
With whom am I sharing life?
Laodicea has become very good at acquiring.
Christ calls the church back to communion.
Perhaps that is the journey the church must make.
From possession to presence.
From acquisition to relationship.
From:
"Increased with goods"
to:
"I am eating with Christ."

13. More Than an Evangelistic Invitation

Revelation 3:20 certainly contains principles that can speak to someone encountering Christ for the first time.
Christ calls.
Human beings respond.
Fellowship follows.
But we lose something important if we remove the verse entirely from its original setting.
This is a message to Christians.
That means the verse asks a difficult question of churches and believers:
Can we become so accustomed to Christianity that we continue practicing it while fellowship with Christ grows distant?
Laodicea says yes.
But the verse also gives us hope.
Can fellowship be restored?
Christ says yes.
Open the door.

14. Christ Wants More Than a Place in the Building

There is another temptation hidden in this passage.
We might imagine opening the door just enough to allow Christ into some portion of our lives.
But Christ is Lord.
He is not an invited consultant.
He does not simply become one more item among our priorities.

Laodicea's problem began when Christ became unnecessary to its sense of sufficiency.
Restoration therefore means more than adding a little more Jesus to an otherwise self-sufficient life.
It means recognizing again:
Everything depends upon Him.

15. The Knock Is Grace

Perhaps we should hear the knock differently.
We often hear knocking as interruption.
Someone is at the door.
Whatever we are doing must stop.
We must respond.
That may be precisely the point.
Grace sometimes interrupts us.
Christ interrupts our complacency.
Our routines.
Our self-confidence.
Our assumptions.
Our carefully constructed sense that everything is fine.
Knock.
Knock.
Knock.
And perhaps the interruption itself is mercy.
Because the worst thing Christ could do to Laodicea would be to stop knocking.

Pastoral Reflection

There may be moments in the Christian life when Christ's presence feels less immediate than it once did.
Prayer becomes routine.
Scripture becomes familiar.
Worship becomes predictable.
Faith becomes something we know how to do.
That familiarity can be a gift.
But it can also become dangerous if knowing how to practice Christianity replaces depending upon Christ.
Revelation 3:20 asks us something uncomfortable:
Have we become good at doing Christian things without consciously sharing life with Christ?
If so, His response is not:
“You have failed, so I am leaving.”
It is:
Knock.

Listen.
Open.
Let Me come in.
Let us sit at the table again.

Something Worth Pondering

Perhaps the saddest picture in Laodicea is Christ standing outside His own church.
But perhaps the most beautiful picture is:
He is still standing there.
He has not abandoned the church.
He has not stopped speaking.
He has not stopped loving.
He has not stopped inviting.
He has not stopped knocking.
The door separating Laodicea from restored fellowship is not locked from Christ's side.
And the moment it opens, Christ's response is not vengeance.
It is fellowship.
A table.
A meal.
Presence.
The Christ who exposes our distance is the same Christ who waits at the door to restore our fellowship.

Ask Yourself This

Have I become so familiar with Christianity that I sometimes practice my faith without consciously depending upon Christ?
Is there a door in my life where I can hear Him knocking but have resisted opening because doing so might disturb something comfortable?
And if I hear His voice today, will I merely acknowledge the knock?
Or will I open the door and say:
"Come in, Lord. I need You at the center of my life again."

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:21

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”
— Revelation 3:21, KJV

What an extraordinary promise to this particular church.
If we had encountered verse 21 by itself, we might imagine Christ speaking to one of the strongest and most faithful congregations among the seven.
Instead, He speaks to Laodicea.
The lukewarm church.
The self-sufficient church.
The church that says:
“Have need of nothing.”
The church Christ has called:
Poor.
Blind.
Naked.
The church standing dangerously close to judgment.
And to that church Christ says:
“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”
The distance between verse 16 and verse 21 is enormous.
From being spit from Christ’s mouth—
to sitting with Christ on His throne.
What lies between those two possibilities?
Christ’s counsel.
Christ’s love.
Repentance.
An opened door.
Restored fellowship.
And perseverance.
Laodicea’s present condition is serious.
But grace declares:
Your present condition does not have to become your final condition.

1. “To him that overcometh”

Once again we hear the language that has appeared throughout the seven churches:
“To him that overcometh...”
Ephesus heard it.

Smyrna heard it.
Pergamum heard it.
Thyatira heard it.
Sardis heard it.
Philadelphia heard it.
And now Laodicea hears it.
That repetition tells us something important.
Every church has something to overcome.
For Smyrna, conquering involves faithfulness through suffering.
For Pergamum, it involves resisting compromise.
For Sardis, it involves waking from spiritual death.
For Philadelphia, it involves holding fast.
For Laodicea, conquering means overcoming **self-sufficiency and complacency**.
Not every Christian faces the same battle.
But every Christian is called to faithfulness.

2. Laodicea Can Still Conquer

This may be the first thing we should notice.
Christ still speaks of Laodiceans as potential conquerors.
He has not written them off.
Imagine how differently we might have written this letter.
After everything Christ has said, we might conclude:
"This church is finished."
Jesus does not.
He sees what Laodicea is.
But He also sees what Laodicea can become through repentance and restored fellowship with Him.
That is grace.
Grace does not pretend our present condition is better than it is.
But neither does grace declare that our present condition is all we can ever be.
Christ tells the truth about where we are while calling us toward where His grace can take us.

3. Conquering Does Not Mean Becoming Powerful

This is especially important in Revelation.
The word "conquer" can sound like domination.
Power.
Control.
Defeating enemies by force.
But Revelation repeatedly redefines victory around Jesus Christ.

The Lamb conquers through faithful obedience, sacrificial love, suffering, death, and resurrection.
Therefore the churches conquer by remaining faithful to the Lamb.
They conquer by refusing to surrender their allegiance.
By enduring.
By repenting.
By holding fast.
By bearing faithful witness.
By following Christ.
The Church does not conquer by becoming more powerful than the world.
The Church conquers by remaining faithful to Christ within the world.

4. "I Will Give"

Once again Christ is the giver.
"I will give..."
Laodicea has spent much of its life acquiring.
Verse 17:
"I am rich."
"Increased with goods."
Verse 18:
"Buy of me..."
Verse 20:
"I will come in to him, and will sup with him."
Verse 21:
"I will give..."
The movement away from self-sufficiency continues.
Laodicea does not seize the throne.
It does not purchase the throne.
It does not earn the throne through prosperity.
Christ gives.
Grace remains the foundation.

5. "To sit with me"

Before we become fascinated with the throne, notice two smaller words:
"With me."
Those may be more important than the throne itself.
Verse 20:
"I will come in to him, and will sup **with him**, and he **with me**."
Verse 21:
"Will I grant to sit **with me** in my throne."
The promise is relational before it is royal.
Christ does not merely offer Laodicea status.

He offers Laodicea **His presence**.
At the table:
With Me.
At the throne:
With Me.
This is the answer to the church's deepest poverty.
Laodicea believed wealth was something it possessed.
Christ teaches that true wealth is ultimately found in **being with Him**.

6. From the Table to the Throne

Verse 20 gives us a table.
Verse 21 gives us a throne.
The progression is remarkable.
Christ stands at the door.
The door opens.
Christ enters.
Fellowship is restored.
They share the table.
Then Christ promises:
A place on the throne.
We should not rush past the table to reach the throne.
The relationship comes first.
The throne is not a reward for religious ambition.
It is the culmination of fellowship with the victorious Christ.
The road to the throne passes through the table.
And the road to the table begins by opening the door.

7. "In my throne"

The promise now becomes breathtaking.
"My throne."
In Revelation, the throne represents authority, sovereignty, and rule.
The throne belongs to God.
And Christ shares in divine rule.
Now Christ promises that those who conquer will participate in His victorious reign.
This does not mean believers become divine.
Nor does it mean every Christian becomes an independent ruler exercising personal sovereignty.
The promise is participation in the reign and victory of Christ.
Those who remain faithful to the Lamb will ultimately share in the triumph of the Lamb.
The world may regard them as weak.
Revelation sees them differently.

8. From “Have need of nothing” to the Throne

Consider Laodicea’s original ambition.
It wants security.
Prosperity.
Independence.
It says:
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ offers something infinitely greater than everything Laodicea has accumulated.
Not merely wealth.
Not merely comfort.
Not merely security.
Participation in His kingdom.
Laodicea has settled for far too little while believing it possesses everything.
That may be one of the deepest tragedies of self-sufficiency.
We become satisfied with things that are temporary while Christ offers something eternal.
Laodicea thinks it is rich.
Christ says, in effect:
You do not yet understand what riches are.

9. “Even as I also overcame”

Then Jesus points toward Himself:
“Even as I also overcame...”
Once again Christ is not merely the One who commands endurance.
He is the One who has endured.
He does not stand at a safe distance saying:
“You suffer.”
“You remain faithful.”
“He that overcometh.”
He has walked the path Himself.
Rejection.
Opposition.
Betrayal.
Suffering.
The cross.
Death.
And resurrection.
Christ’s victory comes through apparent defeat.
The Lamb conquers by remaining faithful even unto death.
Therefore Christian victory must always be understood through the cross.

10. The Pattern of Jesus Becomes the Pattern of the Church

"Even as I also overcame..."
Those words establish a pattern.
Christ conquered.
His people conquer.
Christ endured.
His people endure.
Christ remained faithful.
His people remain faithful.
Christ suffered without surrendering His allegiance to the Father.
His people are called to remain faithful to Him.
This is why Revelation's understanding of victory is so different from the world's.
The world says:
Victory means defeating those who oppose you.
The Lamb says:
Victory means remaining faithful to God regardless of what opposition does to you.
That is the victory Revelation celebrates.

11. "And am set down with my Father"

Jesus continues:
"And am set down with my Father in his throne."
Christ's suffering was not the end.
The cross was followed by resurrection.
Humiliation was followed by exaltation.
The rejected One reigns.
The crucified One sits upon the throne.
That pattern gives hope to every church enduring difficulty.
What appears to be defeat from the world's perspective may not be God's final verdict.
Smyrna may suffer.
Philadelphia may have little power.
Faithful believers may appear insignificant.
Some may even die.
But Revelation keeps directing our eyes toward the throne.
The Lamb reigns.
And therefore faithfulness is never wasted.

12. My Father's Throne — My Throne

Notice the relationship.
Christ says He conquered and:

“am set down with my Father in his throne.”
Then He promises the conqueror:
“to sit with me in my throne.”
Father.
Son.
People of God.
The promise moves outward from divine victory toward the participation of the redeemed.
The throne belongs to God.
Christ shares the Father’s reign.
And those who belong to Christ share in Christ’s victory.
Everything depends upon relationship with Him.
Once again:
With Me.

13. The Greatest Reversal in the Seven Churches

Perhaps no church experiences a greater possible reversal than Laodicea.
Verse 16:
“I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
Verse 21:
“Will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”
From rejection—
to fellowship.
From outside the door—
to inside at the table.
From spiritual poverty—
to true riches.
From blindness—
to sight.
From nakedness—
to white robes.
From lukewarmness—
to conquering.
From complacency—
to the throne.
That is not merely improvement.
That is transformation.
And Christ offers it to the church that believed it needed nothing.

14. Repentance Changes the Direction of the Story

This helps us understand repentance.

Repentance does not erase the seriousness of where we have been.
It changes the direction in which we are going.
Laodicea cannot pretend:
“We were never lukewarm.”
Christ has already said otherwise.
But neither must Laodicea conclude:
“We are lukewarm, therefore we will always be lukewarm.”
Christ says otherwise about that too.
Repent.
Open.
Receive.
Fellowship.
Conquer.
The story can move in another direction.
Repentance does not change yesterday. It changes which direction we walk tomorrow.

15. The Promise Is Greater Than the Warning

Christ’s warning is severe.
But His final promise is greater.
The warning:
“I will spue thee out.”
The promise: “With me in my throne.”
That tells us something about Christ’s purpose.
His ultimate desire is not rejection.
It is restoration.
The warning exists to produce repentance.
Repentance restores fellowship.
Fellowship leads toward participation in Christ’s victory.
Judgment is real.
The warning must be taken seriously.
But we should never allow the severity of verse 16 to make us overlook the generosity of verse 21.
The Christ who warns most severely also offers something astonishingly gracious.

Pastoral Reflection

Sometimes we look at ourselves and assume that where we are today determines where we will always be.
Perhaps we see spiritual complacency.
Failure.
Weakness.
Compromise.
Distance from God.

And we conclude:
“This is simply who I am.”
Revelation 3:21 refuses that conclusion.
Laodicea is lukewarm.
But Christ calls Laodicea to conquer.
Laodicea is poor.
Christ offers true riches.
Laodicea is blind.
Christ offers sight.
Laodicea is outside fellowship.
Christ offers the table.
Laodicea stands under warning.
Christ offers the throne.
Grace does not deny where we are.
Grace refuses to believe that where we are is necessarily where Christ intends to leave us.

Something Worth Pondering

The Laodiceans believed they had already arrived.
“I am rich.”
“Increased with goods.”
“Have need of nothing.”
Christ showed them how little they actually possessed.
Then He offered them something greater than anything they had imagined:
“With me in my throne.”
Perhaps self-sufficiency is dangerous not only because it causes us to depend less upon Christ.
Perhaps it also causes us to settle for too little.
We become satisfied with:
Comfort.
Security.
Possessions.
Achievement.
Recognition.
And Christ says:
You were created for something greater than this.
Not greater possessions.
Not greater status.
Not greater earthly power.
Greater fellowship with Him.
The church that believed it needed nothing discovers that everything worth having is found in Christ.

Ask Yourself This

Have I allowed my present spiritual condition to convince me that meaningful change is no longer possible?
Have I settled for comfort when Christ is calling me toward deeper fellowship and faithfulness?
And when I look at the distance between where I am and where Christ calls me to be, do I see only the distance?
Or do I see the One who says:
“Even as I also overcame...”
and realize that I am not being called to walk a road Christ has never walked Himself?

A Closer Look — Revelation 3:22

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
— Revelation 3:22, KJV

We have heard these words before.
Again.
And again.
At Ephesus.
At Smyrna.
At Pergamum.
At Thyatira.
At Sardis.
At Philadelphia.
And now, finally, at Laodicea.
“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”
The words have not changed.
But perhaps after seven churches, **we have.**
We have heard Christ commend.
We have heard Christ encourage.
We have heard Christ warn.
We have heard Christ correct.
We have heard Christ promise.
We have heard Christ call churches to repent.
We have watched Him walk among congregations that are strong and weak, suffering and comfortable, faithful and compromised, alive and dead, poor and wealthy.
And after everything Christ has said, the final command remains remarkably simple:
Listen.

1. “He that hath an ear”

Once again the invitation is personal.
“He that hath an ear...”
The messages were addressed to churches.
But they must be heard by individuals.
It is easy to read Revelation 2–3 and think about someone else.
That church sounds like Ephesus.
That congregation reminds me of Sardis.
Those Christians sound rather Laodicean.

Perhaps.
But Christ does not conclude:
“Let anyone who knows a church like this identify it.”
He says:
“He that hath an ear...”
The listener must first allow Christ's words to come home.
Before we apply the seven churches to everyone around us, we should allow the seven churches to examine us.

2. “That hath an ear”

Christ again uses the familiar language:
“That hath an ear...”
The issue is not physical hearing.
It is spiritual receptivity.
Many people can hear words without truly hearing what those words require of them.
We can hear Scripture read.
Hear sermons preached.
Hear prayers offered.
Hear warnings.
Hear encouragement.
Hear truth.
And still remain unchanged.
Biblical listening therefore involves more than sound reaching the ear.
It involves truth reaching the heart.
The question is not simply:
“Did I hear what Christ said?”
The question is:
“Will I allow what Christ said to change me?”

3. “Listen”

There it is one final time.
Listen.
Not:
Calculate.
Speculate.
Predict.
Decode.
Argue.
Listen.
That is especially important as we move deeper into Revelation.
Soon the imagery will become extraordinary.
Thrones.
Living creatures.

Seals.
Trumpets.
Beasts.
Dragons.
Babylon.
Bowls.
Judgment.
A new heaven.
A new earth.
A New Jerusalem.
There will be much to interpret.
Much to consider.
Much about which faithful Christians have disagreed.
But before Revelation takes us into those visions, Christ teaches His Church how to approach them:
Listen.
Perhaps that is one of the most important interpretive principles we can carry forward.
Revelation was not given merely to satisfy curiosity about the future.
It was given to form faithful disciples in the present.

4. "What the Spirit saith"

The Spirit is speaking through these messages.
Not merely:
"What the Spirit said."
But:
"What the Spirit **saith**."
The words spoken to first-century churches continue to address the Church.
The historical setting matters.
Ephesus was real.
Smyrna was real.
Pergamum was real.
Thyatira was real.
Sardis was real.
Philadelphia was real.
Laodicea was real.
We must understand their circumstances as carefully as we can.
But the messages were never intended to remain locked in the first century.
The Spirit speaks through them to churches in every generation.
Including ours.

5. "Unto the churches"

Notice again the plural.
“The churches.”
The message to Laodicea is not only for Laodicea.
Just as Philadelphia's message was not only for Philadelphia.
Sardis must hear what Christ said to Philadelphia.
Philadelphia must hear what Christ said to Sardis.
The suffering church must hear the warning given to the comfortable church.
The prosperous church must hear Christ's words to the persecuted church.
The faithful church must hear the call to remain vigilant.
The compromised church must hear that repentance remains possible.
Every church needs to hear what Christ says to **all the churches.**
That is why these seven messages belong together.

6. Seven Churches — One Lord

The churches are remarkably different.
Ephesus has endurance but has abandoned its first love.
Smyrna suffers yet remains spiritually rich.
Pergamum holds fast while struggling with compromise.
Thyatira demonstrates love, faith, service, and endurance while tolerating corruption.
Sardis possesses a reputation for life while dying within.
Philadelphia has little power but remarkable faithfulness.
Laodicea possesses great resources while failing to recognize its spiritual poverty.
Seven churches.
Seven situations.
Seven sets of challenges.
But one Christ walks among them all.
The churches differ.
The Lord does not.
He knows every one of them.

7. What Have the Churches Heard?

Perhaps before leaving these seven messages, we should ask what Christ has taught us.
From Ephesus:
Faithfulness without love is incomplete.
From Smyrna:
Suffering does not mean Christ has abandoned us.
From Pergamum:
Faithfulness requires resisting compromise.
From Thyatira:

Love and service do not excuse tolerating what destroys faithfulness.
From Sardis:
Reputation is not the same thing as reality.
From Philadelphia:
Little power does not mean little usefulness in the hands of Christ.
From Laodicea:
Prosperity can become dangerous when it convinces us that we no longer need Christ.
Different diagnoses.
Different circumstances.
But one repeated call:
Listen.

8. Christ Knows His Church

Perhaps the strongest theme running through all seven messages has been:
"I know."
Christ knows the works of His churches.
He knows their suffering.
He knows their poverty.
He knows their endurance.
He knows their compromise.
He knows their love.
He knows their reputation.
He knows their weakness.
He knows their complacency.
Nothing about the Church is hidden from the One who walks among the lampstands.
That truth can be frightening.
But it can also be profoundly comforting.
Christ sees what needs correction.
But He also sees faithfulness nobody else notices.
He sees weakness.
But He also sees endurance.
He sees failure.
But He also sees what remains.
He sees the church as it truly is.
And He continues speaking.

9. Christ Has Not Given Up on His Church

That may be one of the greatest lessons of Revelation 2–3.
Some of these churches are in serious trouble.
Yet Christ keeps speaking.
Ephesus:

Repent.
Pergamum:
Repent.
Thyatira:
Hold fast.
Sardis:
Wake up.
Philadelphia:
Hold fast.
Laodicea:
Be earnest and repent.
Christ corrects because Christ remains engaged with His Church.
He does not pretend everything is acceptable.
Neither does He casually abandon His people when everything is not.
He walks among the lampstands.
He speaks.
He calls.
He warns.
He encourages.
He promises.
He loves.
And sometimes: He knocks.

10. The Seven Churches Prepare Us for the Rest of Revelation

We are about to leave the churches geographically.
Beginning in Revelation 4, John's vision moves into heaven.
But the churches do not disappear from the purpose of the book.
Everything that follows is given **for them**.
The churches that must endure need to see the throne.
The churches facing persecution need to see the Lamb.
The churches tempted by empire need to see where true authority resides.
The churches facing evil need to know evil does not have the final word.
The churches facing death need to see resurrection and new creation.
The churches struggling to remain faithful need to know where history is going.
Before God shows them what is coming, Christ has prepared them for how they must live.
Endure.
Remain faithful.
Hold fast.
Repent when necessary.
Listen.

11. Before We Go Through the Open Door

Soon John will write:
"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven" (Revelation 4:1).
That door will carry us into the throne room.
But perhaps we should not hurry through it.
Before Revelation shows us heaven, Christ has made us look carefully at the Church.
Before we see the throne, we have examined the lampstands.
Before we encounter the great conflict, we have heard the call to faithfulness.
Before we ask what Revelation says about the future, Christ has asked what kind of people we will be in the present.
That order matters.
Revelation does not begin by giving the Church a timetable.
It begins by giving the Church **a mirror.**
And after showing us what He sees in that mirror, Christ says:
Listen.

12. The Final Word to the Seven Churches

There is no new promise in verse 22.
No new warning.
No new symbol.
No additional diagnosis.
Only the repeated invitation:
Listen.
Perhaps that is exactly right.
Christ has said enough.
The question is no longer whether He will speak.
He has.
The question is whether His Church will hear Him.
And that question remains open for every generation that reads these words.
Including ours.

Pastoral Reflection

After seven churches, it would be easy to ask:
"Which church are we?"
Perhaps there is value in that question.
But perhaps an even better question is:
"What is Christ saying to us through all seven?"
There may be something of Ephesus in us.
Something of Smyrna.

Something of Pergamum.
Something of Thyatira.
Something of Sardis.
Something of Philadelphia.
And something of Laodicea.
At different seasons of life, different messages may speak more directly.
Sometimes we need:
“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.”
Sometimes:
“Repent.”
Sometimes:
“Be watchful.”
Sometimes:
“Hold fast.”
Sometimes:
“Thou hast a little strength.”
Sometimes:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”
And sometimes we simply need to hear:
“He that hath an ear, let him hear.”
The Christian life is not lived by hearing Christ once.
It is lived by continuing to hear Him.

Something Worth Pondering

Seven churches have now heard the voice of Christ.
Some received praise.
Some received correction.
Some received both.
But every church received something extraordinary:
Christ spoke to them.
Perhaps that itself is grace.
The Lord of the Church has not abandoned His Church to figure everything out alone.
He walks among the lampstands.
He knows.
He speaks.
He corrects.
He comforts.
He calls.
And after everything else:
He asks us to listen.
We began these messages with Christ walking among His churches.

We end them with the churches being asked whether they will hear His voice.
And perhaps that is where every generation of the Church must remain:
Christ among us.
Christ speaking.
The Church listening.

Ask Yourself This

After hearing Christ speak to all seven churches, what have I heard that I most need to obey?
Is there something I need to recover?
Something I need to endure?
Something I need to reject?
Something I need to strengthen?
Something I need to repent of?
Something I simply need to hold fast?
And before I move with John through the open door into everything Revelation will show us next, am I willing to pray:
"Speak, Lord. I am still listening."