REVELATION 2

Four Churches: Return to Your First Love

> *“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”*
> REVELATION 2:4

Where John has brought us

1. Chapter 1 ended with the risen Christ walking among seven golden lampstands, holding seven stars in His right hand.

2. Every letter follows the same pattern: an address, a title of Christ, “I know,” praise, rebuke, a command, “He who has an ear,” and a promise “to him who overcomes.”

THE SHAPE OF EVERY LETTER · REVELATION 2–3

THE PATTERN	AS IT SOUNDS IN THE LETTER TO EPHESUS
Address	*“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write” (v1)*
Title of Christ	holds the seven stars, walks among the lampstands (v1)
“I know”	your deeds, your toil and perseverance (v2)
Praise	tested false apostles; hate the Nicolaitans’ deeds (vv2, 6)
Rebuke	*“you have left your first love” (v4)*
Command	remember, repent, do the deeds you did at first (v5)
Hear	*“He who has an ear, let him hear” (v7)*
Promise	to eat of the tree of life (v7)

Ephesus: Left, Not Lost

Hard work, sound judgment — and a love they had walked away from.

REVELATION 2:1

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

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that Ephesus had the best teachers in the New Testament — Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Timothy and, by tradition, John himself.

WHAT IT MEANS

Jesus doesn't tell Ephesus to feel more; He tells them to go back and do again what they did when love was new: "remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first."

ἀφίημι
APHIĒMI · "LEFT"

"You have left your first love." Aphiēmi means to send away, to let go, to forsake.

The First Four Churches



Chapter 2 walks the first half of the circuit: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira.

Smyrna: The Rich Poor Church

No rebuke — only a warning of prison and the promise of a crown.

REVELATION 2:8

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

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik describes Smyrna as a city devoted to emperor worship, where refusing to say 'Caesar is Lord' could cost a job, property or life.

WHAT IT MEANS

Jesus told Smyrna ahead of time that some would be thrown into prison. He didn't promise to keep them out; He promised a crown and that the second death couldn't touch them.

στέφανος

STEPHANOS · "CROWN"

"I will give you the crown of life." The stephanos is the victor's wreath, the garland placed on the head of the one who finished the contest — not the king's diadem.

Pergamum: Faithful Where Satan Lives

They held fast under persecution — and tolerated compromise inside.

REVELATION 2:12

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

DAVID GUZIK

Pergamum was the provincial capital, with temples to the emperor, a huge altar to Zeus, and the healing cult of Asclepios with its serpent symbol; Guzik surveys them all as candidates for "Satan's throne."

WHAT IT MEANS

Pergamum wasn't rebuked for what it believed but for what it put up with. Compromise rarely kicks the door in; it gets invited to dinner.

ψῆφος

PSĒPHOS · "WHITE STONE"

The overcomer receives "a white stone, and a new name written on the stone." A psēphos was a small, smooth stone used for votes, verdicts and tokens.

Thyatira: Love Growing, Discernment Missing

Deeds greater than at first — and a Jezebel left unchallenged.

REVELATION 2:18

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

DAVID GUZIK

Thyatira was the smallest city of the seven but a city of trade guilds, each with its patron god and feasts. Guzik quotes Barclay: no merchant or trader could hope to prosper outside the guilds.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ephesus had sound doctrine without first love; Thyatira had growing love without sound doctrine. Jesus wants both. Jezebel taught that immorality and idol feasts were fine, and the church let her teach.

ποιμαίνω
POIMAINŌ · "RULE"

The overcomer will "rule them with a rod of iron" (Ps 2:8–9). The word is poimainō: to shepherd, to tend, to rule.

Ephesus and Thyatira

TWO CHURCHES, TWO OPPOSITE DANGERS

EPHESUS · 2:1–7		THYATIRA · 2:18–29	
Truth	STRONG	**Love**	GROWING
tested false apostles, hated the Nicolaitans' deeds		love, faith, service — deeds "greater than at first"	
Love	FADING	**Truth**	MISSING
"you have left your first love" (v4)		"you tolerate the woman Jezebel" (v20)	

Jesus wants both: love that holds the truth, and truth that has not lost its love.

Ephesus kept the truth and lost its love; Thyatira grew in love and lost its grip on the truth.

What to carry from this chapter

1

“I know” — every time.

Jesus opens each letter with what He knows; nothing in His churches is hidden from Him.

2

Leaving is a choice.

Guzik stresses that leaving first love is a deliberate act, even if it happens slowly.

3

Lose love, lose all.

Spurgeon, in Guzik: when love dies, orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse.

4

A rich poor church.

Smyrna had beggarly poverty and no rebuke at all — and Jesus called them rich.

More to carry

5

A victor's wreath.

The crown of life is the stephanos, the wreath for the one who finishes faithful.

6

Compromise from inside.

Balaam couldn't curse Israel, so he taught Balak to seduce them; Pergamum's danger was within.

7

A name only you know.

The white stone was a token of acquittal, admission or victory — with a new name from Christ.

8

Patience is not permission.

"I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent" — and the time runs out.

Talk it through

1. Jesus told Ephesus to remember, repent and do the first works. What were your first works when your love for Christ was new?

2. Smyrna was poor and persecuted, and Jesus said, “but you are rich.” How does Jesus measure riches differently than you do?

3. Pergamum held fast under pressure but tolerated compromise inside. What “small” thing are you tolerating that Jesus is calling you to deal with?

4. Ephesus had truth without love; Thyatira had love without truth. Which way do you tend to lean, and what would balance look like?

5. To the faithful in Thyatira Jesus said only, “hold fast until I come.” What do you have that you need to hold onto this week?

CLOSING

Four churches, four very different reports — and one Lord who knows each of them by name. He sees the cold heart, the prison cell, the compromise and the tolerated sin, and He still offers the tree of life, the crown, the white stone and the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides, reflection journal and film: see the Revelation study page.