

## The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian Revelation Chapter 2

**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; 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: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 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. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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 2:1** *Unto the angel [messenger/bishop] of the church of Ephesus [in Ephesus as the Constantinople 1904 text reads] write;*



The port city of Ephesus, on the mid west coast of today's Turkey, was one of the largest cities in the Empire with population estimates of up to 250,000, with a theater containing 24,000

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seats. It was famous for its wealth, and as a center for trade, full of art, science, witchcraft, gladiators, and especially idolatry -- a center for idolatry because it was home to the Temple of Artemis (Diana), the goddess of fertility, whose idol/image in their temple was believed by the Ephesians to have fallen from the heavens, from Jupiter. And that Temple was immense-- considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world (see photo below).

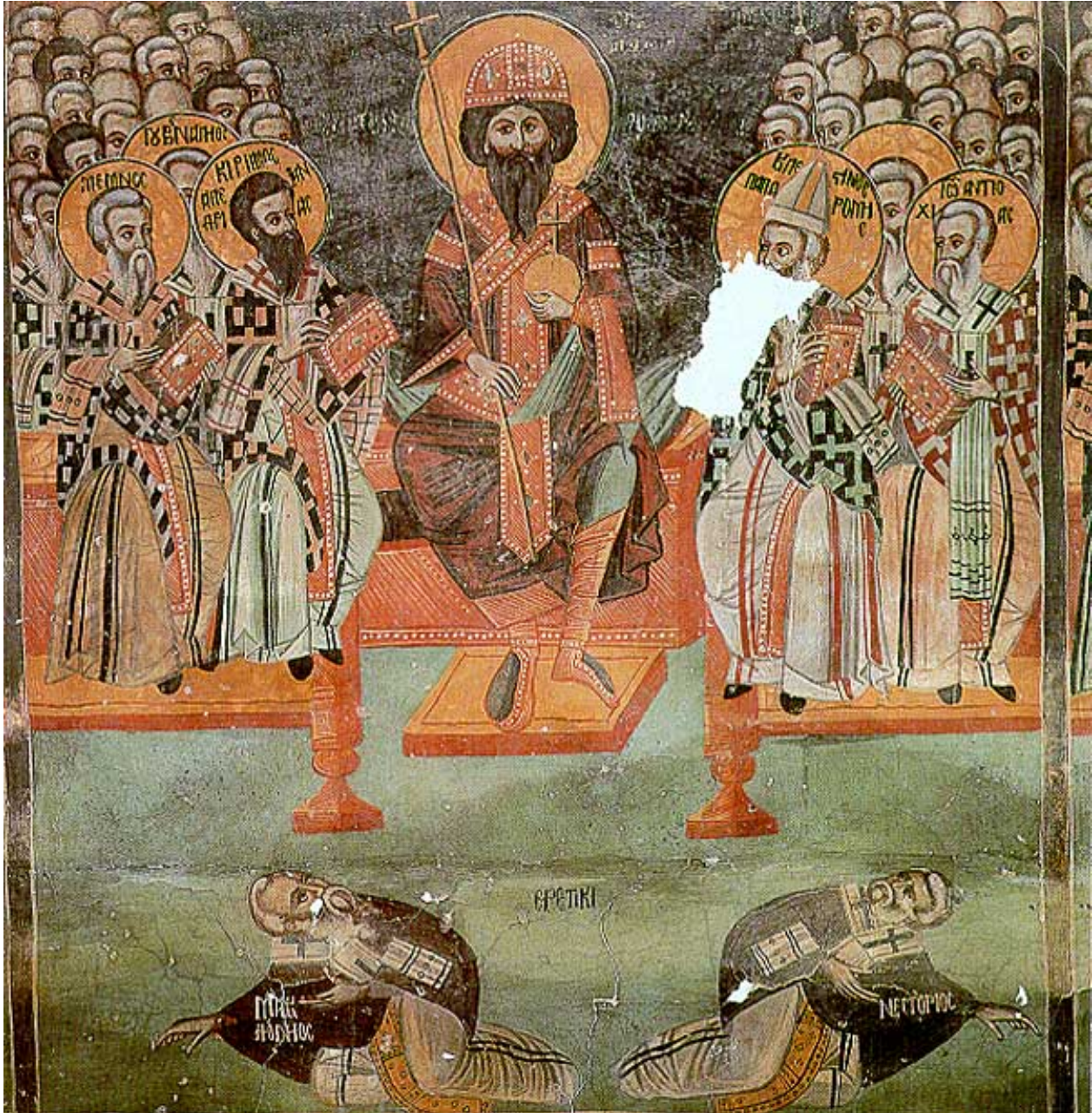


Despite all this idolatry and depravity in Ephesus, the LORD Jesus Christ brought St. Paul to it and established His Church there. This Church would be well known for its toil and hard

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work for the faith, its perseverance in the face of opposition and persecution, and its uncompromising stand against false apostles and teachings.

The Holy Apostle Paul preached and taught in Ephesus for more than two years, and, eventually, ordained his beloved disciple Timothy as its bishop. Later, our Holy Apostle John the Theologian lived in Ephesus for a long time and died there. The 3rd Ecumenical Council, which was held in Ephesus in AD 431, [30 years after the final destruction of the Temple of Artemis], confessed the Most Holy Virgin Mary to be the Theotokos, and struck down the heretical teachings of Nestorius.



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ORTHODOX FRESCO OF THE 3RD ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Who is the Source of the information in the letter?

***Revelation 2:1 ... These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand,  
who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;***



Here Jesus comforts the Church in Ephesus, assuring its angel that it is He Who now holds the 7 stars, not just on His right, but in His right hand-- those stars being the 7 churches which He now upholds and protects. Further, He is not just in the midst of the 7 lampstands, but is walking among them, even as He did with the children of Israel after He brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand. As He told Moses in the wilderness: *Lev 26:11 ... I will set my*

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*tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. 12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.*

So here we have a visual representation of the Lord Jesus Christ abiding among His children in the Church, drawing close to them -- just as He is among us today and desires us to draw close to Him! He is our God and we are His people. Consequently, He knows us intimately, better than we know ourselves:

***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: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*

He knew who the true Christians were and who were the false ones, i.e., those who were the wolves in sheep's clothing, and who would attack and ravage the flock from the inside. Those true Christians had works of faith that the Lord Himself acknowledged here. Some dozen years later in AD 108, when St. Ignatius the Godbearer was on his way to his death in Rome, he noted the following about the Ephesians in his Letter to them:

**St. Ignatius (AD 35- AD 108): *Letter to the Ephesians: Chapter IX.*—Ye have given no heed to false teachers.**

Nevertheless, **I have heard of some who have passed in among you, holding the wicked doctrine of the strange and evil spirit; to whom ye did not allow entrance to sow their tares, but stopped your ears that ye might not receive that error which was proclaimed by them, as being persuaded that that spirit which deceives the people does not speak the things of Christ, but his own, for he is a lying spirit.** But the Holy Spirit does not speak His own things, but those of Christ, and that not from Himself, but from the Lord; even as the Lord also announced to us the things that He received from the Father. For, says He, “the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, who sent Me.” And says He of the Holy Spirit, “He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever things He shall hear from Me.” And He says of Himself to the Father, “I have,” says He, “glorified Thee upon the earth; I have finished the work which, Thou gavest Me; I have manifested Thy name to men.” And of the Holy Ghost, “He shall glorify Me, for He receives of Mine.” But the spirit of deceit preaches himself, and speaks his own things, for he seeks to please himself. He glorifies himself, for he is full of arrogance. He is lying, fraudulent, soothing, flattering, treacherous, rhapsodical, trifling, inharmonious, verbose, sordid, and timorous. From his power Jesus Christ will deliver you, who has founded you upon the rock, as being chosen stones, well fitted for the divine edifice of the Father, and who are raised up on high by Christ, who was crucified for you, making use of the Holy Spirit as a rope, and being borne up by faith, while exalted by love from earth to heaven, walking in company with those that are undefiled. For, says [the Scripture], “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” Now the way is unerring, namely, Jesus Christ. For, says He, “I am the way and the life.” And this way leads to the Father. For “no man,” says He, “cometh to the Father but by Me.” Blessed, then, are ye who are God-bearers, spirit-bearers, temple-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ, being “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar

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people,” on whose account I rejoice exceedingly, and have had the privilege, by this Epistle, of conversing with “the saints which are at Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” I rejoice, therefore, over you, that ye do not give heed to vanity, and love nothing according to the flesh, but according to God.

**Oecumenius**, a Bishop of Trikka in Thessaly, central Greece, c. 6th century AD) in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* gives us additional information:

“Those in Ephesus fulfilled the divine command that they should not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. [1 John 4:1] therefore, they tested those who preached the gospel among them, and through this testing they found some to be false apostles who were proclaiming counterfeit doctrines. He speaks of those who were disciples of Cerinthus, who were contemporary with the Evangelist and were proclaiming profane teaching.”

But who was this Cerinthus and what lies were he spreading?

**St. Irenaeus (AD 130- AD 202)**, in his book *Against Heresies 1.26.1*. describes him as follows:

“Cerinthus, again, a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, taught that the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him, and at a distance from that Principality who is supreme over all the universe, and [this primary God was] ignorant of him who is above all. He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he [Jesus] nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him [Jesus] in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while the Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.” --all great heresies that the Church in Ephesus opposed with great effort and success as the Lord further praises them.

*Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

Here, **St. Andrew of Caesarea (AD 563-637)**, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, writes:

“Although in two matters he approves of the church, in one particular He finds fault with her. He mentions her fault in the middle of his comments, while placing the accomplishments of the church on either side. He praised the church’s labor and her patient endurance for the faith and her separation from evil people, for she did not believe every spirit, but tested the false apostles, and when the church found them to be false, she sent them away ... However, He blames the church because she has become tepid in her love and [in] good works toward her neighbor ... ”

**Oecumenius**, again notes in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*:

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“He, means, just as your good works have not escaped my notice, so I am also aware that you have ceased your love toward those in need. Return, therefore, to you previous charity, which was taught by me but which you have to some extent forsaken.”

*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.*

**St. Andrew of Caesarea (AD 563-637), *Commentary on the Apocalypse*,**

“To remove the [candlestick of the] church is to deprive her of the divine grace. In this manner distress and turmoil by evil spirits and by evil people who are in their employ are brought on the church.

In due time, that candlestick actually was removed from Ephesus. The great port city of Ephesus became a city of ruins, its harbor silted up to the point that the Mediterranean Sea was 3 miles away, and only a tiny Moslem village remained. So the threat was not without consequence.

*Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

St. John mentions the Nicolaitans in the letters to Ephesus here and, later, to Pergamum, and then possibly alludes to them in the Letter to Thyatira. According to St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas, one of the 7 deacons ordained in Acts 6:5. The Nicolaitans led lives of “unrestrained indulgence” and taught that “it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (*Heresies 1.26.3 Ante-Nicene Fathers*). This is the standard Orthodox view of the Nicolaitan heresy. **However, according to one ancient “Christian” writer and philosopher Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-AD 215), Nicholas was an “admirable man” who practiced a rigorous asceticism.** His saying that “One must misuse the flesh,” aimed at asceticism, was perverted and adopted by the Nicolaitans to justify their own vice (*Stromata (or Miscellanities Bk.III, Chap. IV, p. 385, Latin), Fathers of the Church Vol 2. 385*). We have to note that the Lord states that He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, but not the Nicolaitans themselves. So we need to remember to hate the sin, but not the sinner.

Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanities Bk.III, Chap. IV — WHAT PRETESTS DO THE HERETICS USE TO EXERCISE LISTENING AND LIQUIDITY TO ALL GENES*. [Google translation from the original Latin text]

Of those who are led by heresy, we have indeed mentioned Marcius Pontius, who, because of the struggle which he undertook against the Creator, refuses the use of worldly things. And the cause of his restraint, if such restraint is to be called, is the Creator himself, whom he thinks himself to be an adversary, this giant fighting with God, is reluctantly restrained, while he is drawn into the creation and the work of God. But if they usurp the voice of the Lord, who says to Philip: "Do not bury the dead, but follow me." How, then, when he had a carcass, did he not have a corpse? Because he rose from the grave, his infirmities affected death to the Lord, but he lived for Christ. But we remember the evil also from Carpocrates' opinion of the communion of women. But when we were to speak of the said Nicolaus, we have finished that: When, they say, he had a beautiful wife, and after the assumption of the Savior he had been reproached by the apostles for his jealousy, brought into the midst of a woman, he allowed whomever he wished to marry her. For they say that this action is in accordance with that word which says that "the flesh must be abused." Accordingly, following his deeds and words absolutely and inconsiderately, those who persecute his heresy commit shamelessly and lavishly fornication. Now I hear that Nicholas was never taken as wife by any other than the one he had

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married; and of his children, indeed, the daughters were born virgins, but the son remained uncorrupted. That being so, vice was repelled and purged, in the midst of the apostles the circumcision of the wife, whose jealousy was said to be afflicting; and abstinence from pleasures, which are usually prepared with great effort, taught that, "abuse the flesh," that is, exercise the flesh. Nor, as I think, did they want, in accordance with the Lord's commandment, "to serve two masters," pleasure and God. They therefore say that Matthias also taught thus: "With the flesh indeed to fight, and to use it, by giving it nothing unseemly for pleasure; but to increase the soul through faith and knowledge. Now there are those who also publicly venerate the mystical communion; and so insults affect the name itself. For just as we say that he works, both he who does some evil, and also he who does good, giving the same name to both; "communion" is usually used in no other way; for there is indeed good in the communication of both sex, nourishment, and nourishment: but they impiously called every romantic conjunction "communion." And they say that one of them, when he came to our fair-faced virgin, said: It is written: "Give thee to every one that asketh." O impiety! even the words of the Lord (386) these communicants of intemperance, and brothers of lust, are lied to, not only the vices of philosophy, but also of the whole of life; who adulterate and corrupt the truth, as far as it is situated in them, or rather dig it up; the most unhappy people consecrate the communion of carnal intercourse, and think that this will lead them to the kingdom of God. He therefore brought the communion to the sheepfolds, and took care that the pigs and the goats shared with them, and the greatest hope among them were the harlots, who are ready in the brothels, and they admit all who wish. "But you did not learn Christ in this way, for you heard him, and were taught in him, as the truth is in Christ Jesus, so that you put away the things that are according to the old behavior, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desires of deception. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of truth," 2460 in the likeness of God. "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet aroma. But fornication, and all impurity, or covetousness, should not even be mentioned among you, as befits saints, and profligacy, and foolish talk." and the rest, up to that: "But argue more." And to this extent I will quote the saying which is the mother and origin of their intemperance: and whether the writers of this book themselves admit that, as a record of them, they may falsely ascribe him to God, led by the intemperance of lust; His words are the same: "All things were one: but when his unity saw that it was not alone, inspiration went forth from him, and he entered into communion with it, and made his beloved." And from thence forth the inspiration went forth from him, with which he had entered into communion, and made pores, which can neither be seen nor heard," until that, "each one in its proper name." For if these too, like the Valentinians, had instituted spiritual communions

***Revelation 2:7*** *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh [ Literally: to the (one continuously) overcoming ] will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

Here the Lord indicates that this letter, and the other letters which follow, are not just for the churches specified by name, but for everyone *that hath an ear, to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

**St. Andrew of Caesarea** (AD 563-637), notes in his ***Commentary on the Apocalypse***:

"Every person has a physical ear, but only the spiritual person has spiritual ears, such was granted to Isaiah. And to such as conquer in the struggle against the demons, he promised to give to eat from the tree of life, that is, to grant them to share in the blessings of the future age."

**Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios**, ***Homilies on the Book of the Revelation, Volume I***, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2009, p. 141.

"The tree of life promised by the Lord is a reference to the tree [in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from. Their expulsion from the Garden of Eden after eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] was precisely to keep them from eating from the tree of life, so they would not become immortal in their sin, thus making evil immortal, as the Church Fathers interpret ... Now, however, the fruit of the tree of life is offered, by Christ Himself, Who opened the road leading to the paradise of God. This expression *of my God* is



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similar to what He said to the Myrrh-bearing women, *I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God* (St. John 20:17). This refers to the human nature of Christ, Who opened the gate of paradise as [the] God-man. It would be peculiar for Him to open the door as God, since God kept mankind away from immortality, far away from eternal life. The Incarnate Son of God, in essence -- the human nature -- was the Person Who struggled, worked, and led mankind back again to the Kingdom of God.”

### APPLICATION:

So what importance does this letter have for us in our age?

Yes, we are to discern the spirits around us, to test whether or not they are from the LORD, and to reject those that are not. We need to understand and reject the heresy of ecumenism and not walk in the way of the ecumenists/New Calenderists. We must understand the dangers of Islam, hedonism, and materialism among the many other false roads that lead to destruction. But we are not to lose our first love--a burning love for Christ, like that of St. Sergei of Radonez, whom we commemorated last week. That love needs cultivating.

As the great commandment states: Luke 10:27 ... *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*

Gospel of St. John 14:21, *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.*

We need to spend time with the one we love -- quiet time where the rest of the world is shut out. That love needs to be a living, thriving, growing, enriching, and nourishing love that manifests itself in worshiping the Lord in spirit and in truth -- not allowing the demons to distract us, or our own thoughts to wander, giving Him thanks in everything and for everything, and is expressed further in loving those around us, ministering to their spiritual and physical needs, while maintaining our own spiritual life through prayer, worship, the singing/chanting of hymns, confessing our sins, partaking of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in a worthy manner, taking the love we receive from Him and pouring it forth into the lives of others, individually as Orthodox Christians, and collectively as the Church in San Diego.

So Orthodoxy (right belief) and Orthopraxis (works of faith done out of gratefulness to and love for our Saviour and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ) are both important and necessary for our salvation. We cannot just rely on the fact that we are, quote, “true Orthodox Christians.”

Consider the parable of the sheep and the goats. Let us ask ourselves these questions! How do each of us respond to the thirsty, the hungry, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, orphans and widows? Do I treat everyone I meet as if they were Christ? To be a Christian means to be like Christ. Do I put on Christ daily, or do I only put Christ on when it is convenient, or when I want to? Do I expect the Lord to

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give us a Church building and a priest, but am I, at the same time, failing to redeem the time, squandering my spiritual equity on worldly pleasures? These are questions we and I need to ask ourselves daily. We need to recognize that we are unworthy servants of the Master for falling so far of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And I, most of all, fall so short of this stature. We are called to be holy as Christ is holy. But, truly, since only Christ is holy, do I give up and not strive after that goal? Nevertheless, the proof of our faith is in our continuous striving, i.e., continuous struggle, against the evil one and our own passions--to be continuously overcoming as the Lord Himself exhorts us in this letter. If I fall, and I always do sooner or later, I still need to pick myself up, pray for the Lord's mercy, guidance, and strength--and then start again -- working out my own salvation with fear and tremblings as the Holy Spirit works in me -- that is, if I allow Him to do so!

Moreover consider the following which we will read later in the *Apocalypse*: Rev 3:15-16, *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert [wish that you were] cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue [spit] thee out of my mouth.*

As our Lord Jesus instructs the Church in Ephesus, and us as well, we need to be continuously overcoming--overcoming our passions, our egos, our wills, ourselves. Our St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church provides us with all the tools we need -- she provides us with Christ walking in our midst, upholding and protecting us, speaking to us through the Holy Spirit, if only we sharpen our ears to hear, as St. John tells us: *He who hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me, and He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.* Where? Individually, and wherever 2 or 3 or more are gathered together in His Name, i.e., our tiny parish here. I.e., where He walks in the midst the candlesticks. But do we see Him, feel Him, does He touch our hearts, do we recognize that He is with us in every Divine Liturgy, every Vigil, every Readers Service with the hosts of Heaven. Do we look for Him, hunger and thirst for Him, listen to Him--His Word, and truly talk to Him in our prayers, or to ourselves and our passions?

Let us be like St. Herman of Alaska, one of our few North American Orthodox Saints, who said to the Captain and crew of a Russian frigate that came from St. Petersburg to Kodiak, as recorded by Semyon Ivanovich Yanovsky, governor of the Russian American Company (AD 1818-1820), "... And I, a sinner, have tried to love God for more than 40 years, and I cannot say that I perfectly love Him,. If we love someone, then we always think of that one, we strive to please that one; day and night our heart is preoccupied with that object. Is is this way ... that you love God? Do you often fulfill His Holy commandments? ... For our good, for our happiness, at least let us give a vow to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this minute we shall strive above all else to love God and to fulfill His Holy Will."

O Holy Trinity, have mercy on us, lift us up who have fallen, strengthen us with Thy grace, and help us to draw closer to you, from this minute forward. Help us to continuously strive--overcoming our own fears and weakness by your love and mercy working in and through us. Through the prayers of the Theotokos and our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen.

***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; 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. 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. 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.***

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**Rev. 2: 8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write:**



Smyrna, like Ephesus, was also one of the most ancient cities of Asia Minor, renowned and glorious in pagan antiquity. It was 8 miles north of Ephesus. The people here were strongly devoted to the Emperor cult. Secondly, Smyrna had a large population of Jews who were hostile to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, Smyrna was very early illumined by the light of Christianity and kept its pledge of faith and piety in the midst of persecutions.

The church of Smyrna, according to Holy Tradition, was founded by the Apostle John the Theologian and his disciple St. Polycarp, who was later ordained Bishop of Smyrna, and glorified this church by his ministry and martyrdom. According to the information given by the church historian Eusebius, the first persecution against Christians in Asia Minor broke out almost immediately after this prophecy was given, during which St. Polycarp suffered. [Arbp Averky]

“Orthodox Christianity in Smyrna ended as a result of the [Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922](#). In September 1922, during the events of the [Great Fire of Smyrna](#), thousands of civilians lost their lives and the survivors found refuge to Greece. It is estimated that of a total of 459 priests and bishops of the metropolis of Smyrna, 347 of them were murdered by the Turkish army commanded by Ataturk. Among them was also ... [Met.] Chrysostomos.” (Wikipedia)

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THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PHOTINI, SMYRNA, PRE-1922



GREEK REFUGEES FLEEING THE BURNING CITY OF SMYRNA AWAITING EVACUATION 1922, CAUGHT BETWEEN THE FIRES AND THE SEA.

***Revelation 2:8*** ... *These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;*  
This verse identifies the speaker, as the Christ Jesus, the Lord of Hosts (Sabaoth), the King and Redeemer of Israel as we see He called Himself in the Prophet Isaiah:

*Isaiah 44:6. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

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Together, these verses identifies our Lord Jesus Christ as God, as the supreme Lord, the Creator and Ruler of all creation. We shall see, as we proceed through the Apocalypse, that the this book draws many verses and allusions from the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

This introductory phrase of the Glorified Christ is relevant to the entire theme of the Apocalypse: of persecution, martyrdom, and death. Here Christ advises them not to be afraid. Fear not because the One sending the Revelation and letter, is the One Who died and 3 days later arose from the dead. Thus, there is nothing harmful about death for the faithful. They will be resurrected by the power of the Word of God, Who is the First-Fruits of those risen from the dead. In other words, since Christ is completely victorious over death, He guarantees our resurrection as well. As St. Paul tells us in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians:

*1 Cor 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory.** 55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... 57 But thanks be to God, which **giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***Revelation 2:9a** I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) ...*

Here is the straight and narrow path of Christianity--service, struggle/persecution, and sacrifice for the Kingdom of Heaven. Again the Lord knows the faithful in Pergamon perfectly. Their works are their works of love and charity, how they lived, how they influenced others, how they prayed for others when they themselves may not have been able to help them otherwise, but the Lord discerned the intent of their hearts. A kind word here, prayer, there, alms whenever possible, hospitality like the Patriarch Abraham, and -- a loving heart. But good works such as these didn't go unnoticed by the enemy of mankind. They stirred up the jealousy and malice of Satan who mobilized his demons to stir up passions in the hostile Jewish community against the Church in Smyrna. Perhaps some of their properties were burned, or confiscated, their businesses boycotted, or vandalized, themselves or their families attacked. They suffered for Christ as may all who try to live righteously. But grumbled not, -- instead, bore their tribulation as a badge of honor, thanking the Lord, as do all the Saints, that they were counted worthy of suffering for Him, even for a short time.

But how could the believers in Smyrna be both poor (in poverty), but also rich? They were poor in material wealth, but rich in spiritual wealth. How so? Because they stored up their treasures where thieves don't break in and steal, nor rust and moth destroy. They stored up their treasures in Heaven through service to those around them. We need to remember that poverty, in and of itself, is not a crime, nor a disgrace. But, it is the result of the fall of mankind, and the curse put on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they sinned against the Lord by disobeying His commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The

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seed of corruption had entered mankind, and, consequently, moral/ethical evils entered into mankind as well, e.g., avarice, hoarding, thefts, murders, wars, exploitation, etc., all of which, continue to this day, and may result in poverty. Our Lord said in *Matthew 26:11-13*: **For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.**

Were the poor not always with us, to whom would the rich give their alms? So the poor are essential for the salvation of the rich. They give the rich the opportunity to give alms. And the rich are necessary for the salvation of the poor, since the latter receive alms from the rich. And both pray for the Lord to bless the other unto salvation.

However, there is another aspect of poverty that we find in the Gospel, one considered a blessing. Consider the Beatitude which reads. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3)*. Many, like the Blessed Theophylact, consider the *poor in spirit* to be the humble, “whose pride is crushed and who are contrite in soul.” There are other Fathers of the Church that have written about simple poverty and not humility or humble-mindedness. But there is a different aspect to the *poor in spirit*, which becomes much more apparent in the original Greek, and probably applies more directly to the Smyrneans.

Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios (Metropolis of Larisa, Greece), in his *Homilies on the Book of Revelation, Vol. 1*, [delivered in 1980 in Greece] St. Nicodemos Publishers, Bethelhem, PA 2009, p. 147, writes about this Beatitude as follows:

“I will show you that the spirit of the verse is not about humility but poverty, and that poverty is portrayed as a great and real blessing. [It is clearer in the Greek where the grammar allows for much more detail and accuracy.] **ΤΩ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ**, Blessed are the poor -- [Not *in spirit* as we translate in English] but *the poor by their own spirit* meaning, ‘Blessed are the poor *by their own free will*, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ This **ΤΩ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ** in the Greek grammar is the third declension of a noun, and it shows *method* -- first [declension], the spirit, second, of the spirit; third, with, by, or through the spirit. The third declension shows method.

“So here, the Scripture refers to voluntary poverty and not humble-mindedness or humble-spiritedness. This reality of the poor being blessed becomes crystal clear in the words of our Lord to the wealthy young man, *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* (cf. Matt. 19:21). Simply put, do not be rich. Come and become poor. Stay poor. give your possessions to the poor. We see here that the Lord encourages voluntary poverty. However, more importantly, when the Gospel of Luke records the Beatitudes, it does not even mention the word spirit. It simply says, *Blessed are the poor.* And what is most significant is that St. Luke writes about the poor in the positive and the negative sense. *Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God* (Luke 6:24). Here we have the positive aspect. In verse twenty-four, we have the negative aspect: *But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.* (Luke 2:25). You have this luxurious lifestyle: your beautiful homes with all the amenities, your expensive cars and boats, gourmet foods and the like. You have received your consolation.”

This is the ascetic spirit best seen in our monastics and, to a lesser degree, in the general ascetical spirit in the Church, and in all those who sacrifice of and from themselves, to serve others.

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**Revelation 2:9b** *...and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

In today's world this type of speech would be considered hate speech. You would be considered insensitive, an anti-semitic, intolerant, fanatical, from the alternative right, perhaps even a Nazi, (unless, of course, you are of the religion of Mohammad). You might get arrested in some countries in Europe or in Canada for such so-called "hate speech." But it is God Who is speaking here. Christ personally labels these Jews in Smyrna a synagogue of Satan, a synagogue of the devil. They blaspheme when they call themselves Jews. The Righteous Judge Himself called them as He saw them, knowing their hearts. Non-Christian Jews are not believers in God, but are covenant breaking apostates and persecutors. Yet more Jews have come to recognize Christ as their Messiah in the last 20-30 years than in the last 20 centuries (mostly to the heterodox sects, and often in Judaizing Hebrew-Christian evangelical fellowships). Something is happening here, but the deception of evangelical Christian sects is great as well, so we must never give up praying for their salvation.

Consider the ***Gospel According to St. John 8:39-44***

*40 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. 42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 **Ye are of your father the devil**, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

So what is a synagogue of Satan? It is the synagogue (*coming together* in Greek) of those unbelieving and apostate descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel who still could trace their physical lineage to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, who had not lost their connection with their forbearers [like the so-called "10 lost tribes of Israel"], all of whom after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem collectively decided to call themselves Jews despite not all of them being descendants of the Patriarch Judah [the tribe of Israel from which the Messiah would come forth]. Those Jews who accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah became "Christians." But those people who refused to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One of Israel, and who instead opposed the Church and followed the teachings of the Pharisees became what we now call "Rabbinic" Judaism. It is precisely this Rabbinic Judaism in Smyrna which Christ is calling the Synagogue of the Jews.

Now why didn't they believe in the messiah? It was because they failed to comprehend the true meaning of the message of the prophets of Israel, the spiritual message. Rather, they lived and thought according to the flesh, and interpreted the messages of the prophets in a fleshly manner. They expected the Messiah would be a King who would free them from their enemies

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and shower them with wealth, better than in the days of King Solomon. So, this synagogue of the fleshly Jews who did not join the Church are still in a state of expectation about the coming of the Messiah as a descendant of David specifically as a national leader, as a ruler of not only their own country but of all the nations. [Or in some cases, for those modernists who don't believe in a literal man being the Messiah, but the nation of Israel itself!]. As we shall read about later, there will be such a leader, the Antichrist, from the tribe of Dan, a fleshly leader who promises them a worldly kingdom and kills the 2 prophets Elijah and Enoch sent to the people of Israel by the Lord, just as they often did with the prophets of old. However, since Christ is the true Messiah, the true Messiah has come! For those that are still waiting, their hope is in vain, although they may live to see the great leader, the Antichrist, from the tribe of Dan. Now if we consider Moses who spoke about the great prophet, about the messiah, anyone who would fail to believe in this great prophet would have to answer to God -- and that was over 3000 years ago.

*Deuteronomy 18:15* **The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken ... 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.** *19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*

*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.**

A short but fierce persecution is prophesied by the Lord for some of the Church in Smyrna -- just as Daniel and the Three Holy Children suffered tribulation in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar for a short time also and were released. The 10 days is not literal, but represents a discernible short time. Many of the numbers we will encounter in the *Apocalypse* are figurative or symbolic.

The persecution of the Church in Smyrna took place in AD 155 some 60 years after the prophecy was written (AD 95), during which St. Polycarp, their bishop was martyred on February 23. Polycarp was of a great age when he was martyred. When he was asked to deny Christ at his trial, Polycarp said, "I have served Christ for 86 years and in no way has He dealt unjustly with me; so how can I blaspheme my King who saved me ... The whole crowd of idolaters and Jews living in the area of Smyrna overtaken by great anger were crying out with a great voice wanting Polycarp to be burned alive. This was all orchestrated and energized by the Jews ... for the fire took the form of an arch like the sail of a ship filled by the wind and encircled the body of the martyr like a wall ... when the lawless pagans saw that his body could not be consumed by fire ... they plunged a dagger into him." So they were forced to kill him by the sword. His blood extinguished the fire. The Jews then advised the idolaters, "Do not allow the Christians to take his body for they may create a new Christ." So they requested the body of St. Polycarp from the idolaters so that they could somehow burn it. At this point the holy biographer records, "As it is usually the style of the Jews to want to stand first in line in these atrocious works." However, persecution is the constant lot of the Church in this world. A Church under persecution gives clear proof that it stands well and is embraced by God. We can see here that Christ praises the



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persecuted Christians ... and the *Apocalypse* is setting the stage for the great tribulation period. So, we need to be prepared. Who knows, we could be next, or soon. True disciples of Christ will remain *faithful unto death*. And the “crown” of life is given to the one who continually struggles against sin until the very moment of death.

*Revelation 2:11* **And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. 12 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.**

What is the *second death* and what is considered to be the first death? The first death is the common death, the death that we all have to go through. We are all subject to biological death, i.e., the separation of the soul from the body, that will happen to all of us. St. Hippolytus writes: **“The second death is the lake of fire that burns.”** -- as does the *Apocalypse* itself in: *Revelation 21:7-8* **He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**

Let’s conclude this section on Smyrna with this quotation from our own St. John of Kronstadt:

"From the promises given to the Churches of Ephesus and Smyrna it is clear that only those who conquer temptations will inherit the eternal good things. There can be no doubt that this relates both to external and internal temptations, for both the former and the latter come, with the permission of God, from the world, the flesh and the devil, to test faith and hope in God. As a rule, they are permitted for a short time, as long as one can bear them. For one person is given greater strength to combat temptation, and another less; but everyone must be a victor. The good things of the future age are not attained easily, since from everyone is demanded victory in temptations. But temptations will become stronger at the end of the world until even the elect will be in great danger of losing the ability to conquer the subtle craftiness of the evil one. In the last times Satan skillfully began to cast out of the saving ark of the Church all those who were not able to resist the false teaching of his hellish servants, the false prophets of this world."<sup>1</sup>

*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; 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. 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 stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things**

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by the Russian Orthodox writer Vladimir Moss in his *Apocalypse, Book of the End*, 2011, p. 54, online text in pdf format at [http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/downloads/524\\_APOCALYPSE\\_THE\\_BOOK\\_OF\\_THE\\_END.pdf](http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/downloads/524_APOCALYPSE_THE_BOOK_OF_THE_END.pdf)

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*sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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 2:12a** *And to the angel of the church in Pergamos [Pergamon] write;*

Pergamon was located only 6 miles north of Smyrna. It was wealthy and the city in which vellum, stretched animal skin, known as pergamenes, was developed for the writing of books. Although much more expensive than papyrus/parchment, it was much more durable as well. As a result, the biggest library in the world was at Pergamon (Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Homilies on the Book of Revelation, Vol. 1*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethel, PA, 2009, p. 164). However, Pergamon was also a center for idolatry. On the citadel, the hill which over it was also a center for the worship of Askelepios (the serpent-god and god of medicine) who was officially designated “Savior.” Many people were attracted to his altar seeking cures. Pergamon also boasted of magnificent temples to all of the Caesars, so it was a center for the “emperor cult” as all living Caesars were worshipped there. The main reason behind emperor worship was to promote national unity, and of course, to boost the esteem and dignity of the Emperor.

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THE CITADEL OF MODERN DAY PERGAMON, SITE OF THE ALTAR DEDICATED TO ZEUS looked the city, there was a great throne-like altar dedicated to Zeus -- the grandest of all altars in the ancient world.



ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS IN PERGAMON MUSEUM, EAST BERLIN

This is precisely why the Christians, when they refused to offer sacrifice and worship to the reigning emperors, who were considered gods and considered themselves as such, that they were deemed guilty of being atheists and of treason against the empire and the emperor himself. Such treason was considered by the Romans to be a crime of the highest degree. So, it was in this renowned center of idolatry that the Church of Pergamon was planted and grew.

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STATUE OF THE ROMAN EMPEROR TRAJAN, FROM THE MARKETPLACE IN PERGAMON, NOW IN THE PERGAMON MUSEUM IN EAST BERLIN

***Revelation 2:12b*** *These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;*

Oecumenius: “He says, ‘Write to the church at Pergamum; I, who bear a sword in my mouth, say to you, that I shall avenge those who transgress my commandments.’ For the sword in the mouth indicates the imminent danger of those who disobey the divine decrees.

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Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios: “*These things saith he which hath the sharp two edge sword*, is the opening line of the epistle. All the epistles have different opening lines befitting each church. Here, this opening line is taken from the introductory vision of Christ. It is properly stated here that He holds the two-edged sword, which according to the vision of St. John, comes out of the mouth of Christ to show with this imagery that Christ is the One who judges. The two-edged sword is the symbol of judgment but also the word of God, the word of God that will overthrow the altar of Zeus, destroy the idol, and establish the Church of Christ. This is the reason for the placement of this symbol in this particular epistle. Also it was necessary to fight against the devil with this sharp sword. Please remember that St. Paul wrote in his epistle to the Thessalonians about the Antichrist, *The Lord will destroy him with the sword of his mouth*

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(cf. *2 Thess.* 2:8). So here the devil is behind the mask of Zeus. Behind the various faces of divinities, what is worshipped, really worshipped is the devil” (p. 165) ... “Idolatry exists and will always exist -- not only in the nations that never got to know Christ but in the Christian nations as well. Every form of idolatry can be found in the Christians nations” (p. 168) ... “My friends, we only need to recall that some very wise people passed through this world and they were not able to differentiate between God and creation. They equated God with His creation. They worshipped the creation instead of the Creator. Then you tell me that we are justified in mentioning these things even though these things took place in the distant past in some remote areas of the earth. My friends, what if I were to tell you that the same thing happens even today? What if I was to ask you about those people, who slip into Freemasonry, who are educated and have college degrees? How do they come to believe in idolatry. Freemasons are idolaters. Do not forget this. Free masonry is a religion and specifically a religion of idolatry, of ancient mysteries. They admit this themselves in their journals. So, how can an educated person become attracted to the faith that believes that the sun, the great architect of the universe, can be God? How can he confuse the power of the sun, its energy, its light, and the wisdom of its make-up with God and admit that this is God?” (170).

***Revelation 2:13** I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat [throne] 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.*

The Lord Jesus Christ first commends the Christians in Pergamon for their faithfulness of belief and the works that they performed -- right where Satan’s throne was, where Satan dwelled.

Oecumenius: “You dwell,” he says, “near the throne of Satan.” For the whole of Asia [Asia minor, i.e., western Turkey] is full of idols, and that is especially so of Pergamum.

Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios: “Pergamos was considered the city with the most idols in Asia Minor. Pergamos was well known for its multitude of altars. Now the Lord says that the altar, built on that 300 meter hill within the city limits, was the throne of Satan.” “Satan was enthroned in a huge statue of Zeus in the altar in a magnificent temple (173) ... For the devil, pride is incurable. He wants to be satisfied by lurking and enthroning himself within natural objects, which are worshipped by people who have lost their true God. So these poor people begin to worship the reflection of the qualities of God in nature and without realizing it, they are worshipping the devil. However, idolatry is not only the worship of a particular object. Idolatry is not limited to the worship of a tree, a mountain, or a statue. It can be the worship of technology, science, wealth, and money [I can add: pleasure, travel, a political ideology, or leader, a celebrity, a sport or a sports figure, etc.]. All these can become idols that man can worship. The miserable devil nestles within all these things“(175).

We have to realize that there is a great price to pay for idolatry:

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St. Paul **1 Cor. 6:9**: *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, **nor idolaters**, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind; 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

The Lord also mentions his faithful martyr Antipas. Who was this Antipas that was slain in Pergamon?



The holy and glorious martyr Antipas was a contemporary of the Apostles and had been ordained by them as the first Bishop of the Church of Pergamon. In AD 83, at the time of the persecution started by the Emperor Domitian, although he was very old, the holy Bishop was arrested by the pagans, to whom the demons had revealed that it was no longer possible for them to accept the pagan worshippers' sacrifices because Antipas' prayers were driving them out of town. The populace then dragged the Saint before the governor, who attempted to make him deny Christ under the pretext that the worship of idols was older and more respectable than the new religion preached by sinners and nobodies. Antipas stood firm and defended His faith in Christ. Filled with rage against Antipas the governor and the pagans threw the Saint into a red-hot bronze bull. Whereupon Saint Antipas lifted up his ardent prayer to the Lord, giving Him thanks for allowing him to suffer in testimony that the love of God is stronger than death. He also asked Christ to give to all, who called upon his name, deliverance from every illness, especially toothache, and to all who devoutly celebrated his Memory each year, the forgiveness of sins and

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divine favour on the Day of Judgment. Having obtained these promises, he gave his soul into the Lord's hands. His body was buried in the church at Pergamon, and a healing balm flowed from his tomb for many years, for the consolation of the Christians of the city and the many pilgrims from all parts who came to venerate him. He is commemorated on April 11. [*Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church, Vol. 4, March, April*, Holy Convent of Our Lady Ormylia (Chalkidike), Ormylia, Greece, 2003, pp. 393-4.]

*Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac [Balak] to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

After commending the Christians in Pergamon for their faithfulness and works, the Lord then confronts them with the sinful behavior that exists among some of them: the doctrine of the Balaam, which the Lord equates to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which troubled the Church in Ephesus as we have previously discussed. That doctrine was to “misuse their bodies” and to desecrate them by eating foods sacrificed unto the idols, i.e., to Satan or his demons who dwelt within the idols, and to commit sexual immorality with impunity. But why does the Lord not just say that some of them held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, rather than introducing that of Balaam and equating it to that of the Nicolaitans? There has to be a reason. Let's review the story of Balaam and Balak in the Old Testament book of *Numbers* 22-25, 31, and see if we can discern why!

The story is long and involved, but here is the short version. Under Moses leadership, the children of Israel camped east of the Jordan River, in the area of the nations of Moab and Midian.

Balak, the King of the Moabites, having seen the immense camp of Israel just beyond his borders, and in fear of what the Israelites had done to other cities, called upon the “prophet” Balaam, son of Beor, a Midianite, to place a curse on the Israelites. His first attempt to enlist Balaam via messengers to curse Israel was countered by the Lord Who told Balaam not to go with them. So Balaam told them to go back to their own land.

The second time a much more dignified group of messengers came, including princes, probably with more and better bribes, beseeching Balaam to come with them. But he appeared to hold firm (*Num 22:18.*) *And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.* This time the Lord allowed Balaam to go with them, but warned him sternly not to say anything other than what He had spoken to him. So Balaam proceeded to Balak and the Moabites riding on a donkey. Nevertheless, the Lord was angry with Balaam for going -- no doubt recognizing in Balaam the love of money [shown in the verse above -- *If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold.* His “Love of money would have won the day too, had not God bidden him hold back from cursing [Israel].” *St. Ambrose*). So, He sent the angel of the



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Lord ahead of Balaam to block the way. Balaam did not recognize the presence of the angel, but the donkey did and deviated from the road twice, and was punished twice by Balaam. The third time the donkey lay down before the angel. Balaam in anger whipped the donkey, but the donkey turned to him and asked why he was angry with him. Then Balaam recognized the presence of the Angel of the Lord and bowed down before him. The Angel of the Lord told Balaam that his way was perverse before Him and came to stop him. Nevertheless, He let Balaam continue only after sternly warning him again to speak only the words that the Lord spoke to him, nothing more.

In Moab, after Balaam provided burnt offering to the Lord, the king Balak asked Balaam to curse Israel on three occasions. But Balaam replied, “How can I curse those whom the Lord has not cursed...” Instead he blessed Israel, not once but three times much to the king's chagrin. Moreover, Balaam poured forth sublime prophecies of Israel's ascendancy in Canaan and the coming of the Messiah, e.g.:

*Numbers 24:17, I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth ... 19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion ...*  
There was nothing more that Balaam could do at that point to help Balak, so it would appear. They parted company.

However, in the next verse in Chapter 25 we see Israel consorting with the women of Midian who invited the Israelites to the sacrifices to their gods, who ate, and then bowed down to their gods -- Baal-peor [the god Baal worshipped at Mt. Peor]. It is generally assumed this occurred through Balaam's avarice and subsequent advice to Balak, to entice Israel to sin and draw the Lord's wrath upon them -- which might allow him to pronounce a curse upon them. Anyway, as a result, the Lord told Moses to slay every Israelite who joined himself to Baal-peor. 24,000 Israelites were subsequently killed for their apostasy from the Lord. The next time the Israelites encountered the Midianites in their journey in the wilderness, they went to war against them and slew the kings, all the males, male children, and every woman who had had intercourse with a man, and Balaam himself, with the sword.

The bottom line is that the eating of foods sacrificed to other gods and bowing down before those gods constitutes apostasy from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and, secondly, immoral sexual behavior, i.e., fornication, is a common way of achieving the former. These are the characteristics of the doctrine of Balaam [Hebrew: “one who swallows down the people]. Please, remember that the eating of foods sacrificed to other gods (which St. James the Brother of the Lord instructed the gentiles to avoid in the first council of the Church in Jerusalem) as well as immoral sexual behavior are the characteristics of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans [Nicholas in Greek: “one who is victorious over the people].

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BRONZE AND GOLD STATUE (IDOL) OF THE GOD BAAL

So the doctrine of Balaam in the time of the Old Covenant with Israel, the people of God, is essentially the same as the doctrine of the Nicolaitans under the New Covenant with the Church, again the people of God. Satan's and his demons' used pretty much the same tactics for both. Those tactics still work and set a deadly trap for the unwary. In the West, where families, traditional marriage, and traditional values are under continuous and profound attack, we can see Satan and his demons still successfully applying this strategy and, in many cases, destroying Christians by corrupting them. The temptations the demons continually whisper in our ears, or present before our eyes, need to be cut off from our hearts and minds as quickly as possible with the sign of the cross, the Jesus prayer, fervently asking for the intercession of the Theotokos, of our guardian angels, of our name and patron saints, etc.

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

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Here, our Lord Jesus Christ presents the solution: The the followers of this heresy are to repent, but also the Bishop himself is to repent, for failing to timely stop and correct the instigators, or, if unrepentant, excommunicate them. The Lord basically admonishes the current bishop, saying, “If you won’t do it, I will.” In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ is holding the Bishop responsible, and what a great responsibility it is for any bishop to keep the Lord’s Church, His pure and spotless Bride both pure and spotless. Other than this particular heresy which had infiltrated several members of the flock, this bishop of Pergamon was a faithful and zealous hierarch. And the Lord further states that He will not war against the bishop, but will war against those who are incurably sick with the *sword of my mouth*, as he puts it. Remember, Balaam, a prophet, was opposed by the Angel of the Lord with a sword, and he later died by the sword at the hands of the Israelites.

Just what is that *sword of [His] mouth*? St. Andrew of Caesarea explains: “The *two-edged sword* is either the word of the gospel, which cuts the heart and separates the faithful from the unfaithful, or it is the relentless judgment against the impious.”

St. Paul, in his **Letter to the Hebrews 4:12**, states: *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

**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.*

Here, for the 3rd time the Lord implores us to listen to, to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. This letter is not just for Pergamon, but for all the Lord’s Churches.

[Archbishop Averky]. “The first image here is taken from the Old Testament manna (**Exodus 16:14-15**), which was a prefiguration of the *bread which cometh down from heaven (John 6:50)*, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. By this manna one must understand living communion with the Lord in the future blessed age.

“The metaphorical expression, *white stone*, had its foundation in a custom of antiquity, according to which the victors at the public games and contests were given white stone tablets, which they later presented in order to receive the rewards conferred upon them. Among Roman judges it was the custom to collect votes by means of white and black stones. White signifies freedom; black signified condemnation. In the mouth of the seer of mysteries, John, the white stone symbolically signified the purity and innocence of Christians, for which they receive a reward in the future age.

“To give names to new members of a kingdom is characteristic of kings and masters. The Heavenly King will also give to all the chosen sons of His Kingdom new names which will signify their inward qualities, their designation and service in the Kingdom of Glory. But since

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no one *knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him (1 Cor. 2:11)*, so also the new name given to a man by the All-knowing Master will be known only to the one who receives this name.”

[Compare *Isaiah 62:2*. *And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name*. Theodoret of Cyrus applies this to the Jews in the future age who have believed in Christ and received a new designation, that of “Christian,” because by holy baptism, they have put on Christ. (in Johanna Manley, *Isaiah through the Ages*, Monastery Books, Menlo Park, CA, 1995, p.918.)]

David Chilton, a contemporary Presbyterian pastor notes:

“One further point about this promise should be explained. *No one knows* the new name, Christ says, *but he who receives it*. The meaning of this expression, rooted in a Hebrew idiom, is that the man is “known” by the receiver in the sense of *owning* it. In other words, the point is not that the new name is secret, but that it is exclusive: Only the overcomer possesses the name, the divinely-ordained definition of himself as belonging to the covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ; no one else has the right to it. In its particular application to the situation at Pergamum, the Nicolaitan heretic[s] who by [their] doctrine or life is [are] traitor[s] to the cause of Christ, [do] not truly own the designation *Christian*. The name belongs only to the overcomers. They, and they alone, are granted re-admittance to the Garden. They gain entrance through the sacrifice of Christ, in whom they have been redefined and renamed.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us continually strive to overcome our adversary the Devil, by putting on the full armor of God and using all the tools of the Orthodox faith to strength us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Revelation 2:18-20.** *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; 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. 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.*

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<sup>2</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance. An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Dominion Press, Ft. Worth, Texas, 1987, p. 110-111.

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**Revelation 2:18a** *And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write;*

“Thyatira was a small town in Lydia [10-15 miles SW of Pergamon and on the main trading road between Pergamon and Laodicia] which has no particular significance in history, but it is known in the history of Christianity because from it there came [a certain woman named] Lydia [a seller of purple], who was enlightened with the light of faith in Christ by the holy Apostle Paul during his second journey of preaching in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:14, 15, 40). Probably this also aided the speedy establishment of Christianity in Thyatira.”<sup>3</sup>

“Thyatira is translated, *for a sacrifice*; and the saints ‘present their bodies a living sacrifice.’”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Averky (Taushev) & Fr. Seraphim Rose (trans.), *The Apocalypse In the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1995, p.84.

<sup>4</sup> Venerable Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse* [https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-07.shtml#\\_Toc385608315](https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-07.shtml#_Toc385608315)

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“One of the most significant things about the city of Thyatira was the dominance of trade guilds over the local economy. Every imaginable manufacturing industry was strictly controlled by the guild: In order to work in a trade, you had to belong to the appropriate guild. And to be a member of a guild meant also to worship pagan gods; heathen worship was integrally connected with the guilds, which held their meetings and common meals in pagan temples. Two central aspects of the required pagan worship were the eating of meat sacrificed to idols [to demons], and illicit sexual relations. Any Christian who worked in a craft or trade was thus presented with severe problems: his faithfulness to Christ would affect his calling, his livelihood, and his ability to feed his family.”<sup>5</sup>

**Revelation 2:18b** *...These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;*

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<sup>5</sup> Chilton, David (Orthodox Presbyterian minister), *The Days of Vengeance* Dominion Press, Ft. Wort, Texas, 1987, p. 112.

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This description of Christ is very similar to that of the angel that appeared to the Prophet Daniel in the 3rd year of King Cyrus the Great of Persia.

**Daniel 10:6** *His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.*

“He who is speaking with the Evangelist further clarifies his title. He says, *The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like flames of fire.* These words indicate the terrifying threat that he directs against sinners.”<sup>6</sup>

“In this vision, His eyes are like a flame of fire. These eyes represent the ability of the Lord to penetrate, to see through the deep things of Satan, a matter that He will address in this epistle. St. John also refers to His feet, which shows that He is not one who will maintain a passive position toward the knowledge and verification of the deep things of Satan, but He will crush His adversaries (with these brass feet).” Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Homilies on the Book of the Revelation, Vol. 1,*

“... and so the first word of Christ to this church is the proclamation that He alone is *the Son of God* (the only place in Revelation where this specific designation of Christ is used). The letter to this church begins with an uncompromising challenge to paganism and statism, affirming the definitive, absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

How so? “The local god, the guardian of the city, was Tyrimnos, the son of Zeus; and Tyrimnos worship was mixed in Thyatira with the worship of Caesar, who was also proclaimed the incarnate Son of God. [Thus] The conflict of Christianity and paganism in Thyatira was immediate and central.”<sup>8</sup>

**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.*

Again, like in previous letters, the Lord Jesus Christ commends the Church of Thyatira-- He knows their works, charity, service, faith, their patience, and their works. He knows all and sees all. And He notes here that their works have increased. They have grown in their spiritual life. One cannot stand still in the spiritual life. Either one advances, or slides backwards. Often it is both: 2 steps forward, 1 step back, or 1 step forward and 2 steps back -- then, with effort, advance again. We have to ask ourselves and our community, “Are we gaining ground? Are we progressing toward holiness? Or are we losing ground? How did we handle the critical times in

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6 Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in *Greek Commentaries on Revelation: Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea* (Ancient Christian Texts Series), Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2011, p. 12

7 Chilton, p. 112

8. *Ibid.*



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our life--courageously following Christ, or cowering in uncertainty or in fear? How do we turn things around? In Orthodoxy we have our spiritual fathers, patristic fathers, and ascetics -- monks and nuns to encourage us and guide us along the way.

**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.*

After commending the Church of Thyatira and her bishop, the Lord, with penetrating insight, mentions what is not commendable. There was a woman in their midst who was teaching/seducing the Christians to commit fornication (which is often in the Scriptures used symbolically to mean heresy/apostasy from God) and to eat food sacrificed to idols. In this regard she was like the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites in Ephesus and Pergamon who also championed fornication and the eating of food sacrificed to idols, the first as an innovation, i.e., a mutation of true Orthodox asceticism; and the second, as a means to defile and corrupt the children of Israel, so that the Lord might turn away from them so that Balaam, “the prophet” could curse them for financial enrichment from Balak, king of the Midianites, who was afraid of being conquered by the Israelite warriors.

So who was this Jezebel, and what was so significant about her life that the Lord. She was an extremely wicked queen of Israel back in the 9th century BC. Again, we see, that to better understand the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, it is necessary that we have a good understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and the lessons contained therein. So let us review her life from the two Old Testament books of 3rd Kingdoms chapters 16-21, and 4th Kingdoms chapter 9.

**3 Kingdoms 16:29** *And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and **Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years.** 30 And Ahab the son of Omri **did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that [were] before him.** 31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that **he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal** [the west Samaritan storm-god Hadad], **and worshipped him.** 32 And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.*

Right away we see a very evil King come to power in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and as if that was not enough, he married a Sidonian (Phoenician) princess, Jezebel, and brought the worship of Baal [meaning *Master, Possessor, Husband*] into Israel (Samaria) which brought her into conflict with the Prophet of the Lord, Elijah/Elias. [Since the LORD Yahweh was the *master* and *husband* to Israel, they therefore called Him *Baal* in all innocence. However, this practice led to confusion of the worship of Yahweh with the Baal rituals once they were introduced.] She subsequently slew all the prophets of the LORD in Israel and replaced them with 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 priests of the pagan groves who worshipped the goddess

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Asherah. All of these were then slain on Mount Carmel by the Israelites led by the Prophet Elijah and all the children of Israel who had been gathered to witness the battle between the priests of Baal and Elijah. Obviously Jezebel was enraged at Elijah and sought to murder him.

*3 Kings 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah (Elias), saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.*

And Elijah fled into the wilderness for 40 days to Horeb the mountain of the Lord. Meanwhile Jezebel showed her evil hand again in the incident of Naboth's vineyard. He was a simple soul who wouldn't sell his vineyard, his familial inheritance to Ahab, who coveted the poor man's vineyard. So she had the Jezreelite Naboth stoned to death so Ahab could take possession of it. When Ahab went to the vineyard to possess it, he was met by Elijah the Prophet, who prophesied the extermination of the whole house of Ahab. He repented earnestly on the spot, so the punishment was delayed on his family for 10 years.

*3 Kingdoms 21:25 But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.*

Apostasy reached such an extent during the reigns of Ahab and Jehoram, that Elijah appointed a prophet to anoint Jehu King of Israel, which instigated a rebellion against the house of Ahab. Jehu, who won the support of the army of Jehoram, then carried out the annihilation of the remainder of the house of Ahab and called for the death of Jezebel as well -- an order which was quickly fulfilled by a few eunuchs who tossed her down from an upstairs window onto the street below.

*4 Kingdoms 9:30 And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. 31 And as Jehu entered in at the gate, ... and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. 33 And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. 34 And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. 35 And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. 36 Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: 37 And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.*

**Revelation 2:21-28** *And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 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. 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. 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*

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*will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 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. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

**Revelation 2:21** *And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.*

**Jeremiah 3:6** *The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot 7 And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. 9 And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. 11 And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. 12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. 13 Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.*

**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. 23a And I will kill her children with death;*

So just like Queen Jezebel and her daughter aroused the Lord's wrath and chastisement against unbelieving ancient Israel and Judah, and the Lord gave *unto every one of [them] according to [their] works*, so does He now threaten to do the same to the Christians in Thyatira who do not cease their apostasy by communing in the knowledge of the depths of Satan.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: "He [Christ] continues to speak figuratively and compares the union with heretics to that with a harlot, and he threatens to throw her into sickness and death as well as those that have become defiled with her and have committed fornication before God, unless they should turn to Him in repentance."

And Oecumenius adds: "But if she does not wish to repent, He says, I will do such and such to her and to those who commit adultery with her, so that all might know that it is I Whom am God -- for it is the prerogative of God to search minds and hearts."

**Revelation 2:23b** *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. 24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not*

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*known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.*

So, the Question arises: What are the “Depths of Satan”? The answer: The depths of Satan is the name given to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, the predecessors of the Gnostics, who called their false teachings *the depths of God*.

Archbishop Averky Taushev writes: “Apparently, a central part of Jezebel’s heresy involved a search into *the deep things of Satan, as they call them* ... that is, that Christians would attain new and greater levels of sanctification by their immersion into the depths of Satanism: worshiping idols, committing fornication, entering to the fullest extent into the depravities of the heathen around them -- sinning that grace might abound.”

Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios: “The heretics speak about the depths of their wisdom as an exclusive wisdom, as secretive knowledge, and as an unapproachable and untouchable wisdom to the infidels, that is, to the unsacred and uninitiated. The secret work of lawlessness is constantly at work according to St. Paul, especially today as we have an offspring of Gnosticism, which is Freemasonry, or simply, Masonry. Masonry is a Gnostic heresy. Sure enough, the books of the Masons call us, the non-Masons, defiled, or unsacred. They claim to have the light, the illumination, and the pathway to the *depth* of knowledge, the *depth* of wisdom, the *depth* of philosophy, of which as they claim we are ignorant...

“Please keep in mind that there are great variations within Gnostic philosophy... However, all these different Gnostic systems [, old and new,] maintain the foundation of dualism, which is the existence of two gods, the good god, and the evil god ... [who] are always at war against one another and in the midst of this battle man is always the unfortunate victim. [According to them] Man is forever struggling to become free from the evil god...

“The danger behind Gnosticism is that it does not officially deny Christianity... However, when you hide and you do not show any denial; if you move about, you exist, breathe and slither *within* the Church [Note: he is talking about the New Calendar ecumenist Greek Church here in the 1980s]; you take Holy Communion; you attend Church, and yet you are an enemy and estranged from the Body, *then* there is real danger. This is plainly seen in the Freemasons; they take Holy Communion, they may be on the parish council, they are always in church and they will use this to their advantage. If one would question them they would have no problem responding, ‘Yes I am a Mason, but I am also a good Christian. I come to church. I take Holy Communion. I love my brothers.’ This is the exact [parallel] of the woman, Jezebel, who moved freely within the church of Thyatira.”

Jezebel is representative of the contemporary Gnostics and Masons in the Church today, as she was personally for the ancient Gnostics. We need to remember that Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis IV of Constantinople, the innovator who brought ecumenism into the Greek Orthodox Church in 1924, was a Mason and was trying to unite the Orthodox Church with the Anglican and Episcopal Churches in Great Britain and America by colluding with his Masonic brethren in those

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countries. Russia has also had a long masonic history. The contemporary Russian Orthodox scholar Vladimir Moss writes:

“The February revolution was a carefully hatched plot involving about three hundred Masons; its organizer was Guchkov. The plot was successful. But it succeeded in eventually bringing to power, not the Masonic plotters, but the Bolsheviks, who destroyed all the plotters and all their Masonic lodges, forcing the Masons themselves to flee back to their mother lodges abroad...”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1995 the Masons were reestablished in Russia. Even President Vladimir Putin is thought to be a Mason as well as a “former” KGB officer.

We know that Masons have been in and are in the priesthood and hierarchy of the state Greek Orthodox Church despite the fact that the Traditional Orthodoxy Church has condemned masonry on numerous occasions over the past 2 centuries, and for very good reasons:

At the highest levels of Masonry, the 33rd level, the Masons openly worship Satan as the good god, and consider the god of the Old Testament to be the evil god:

“The Masons of the thirty-third degree kneel in front of Bathomet, a statue of Satan who is raised above the altar, and they consider him to be none other than the great architect of the universe [in their deluded opinion]. So the great architect of the universe, Bathomet, is the devil. This is whom the Masons worship [at the highest level]. By the way, pay attention here, this is not revealed to new initiates--it is hidden from them. As the disciples of Masonry advance, little by little they are taught more of the great secret of Masonry ... that *the great architect of the universe is the devil* -- the one whom the Masons truly worship, and not the God of the Christians, Whom the Masons need to destroy at all costs.

“This, my friends, encompasses the deep secrets of Masonry ...

[and, might I add, of the Mormons, whose religion in part is derived from the Masons. Joseph Smith their founder, was a Mason himself and much of their doctrine and practices are derived from the Masons, including the worship of the devil at their highest levels as well, as revealed by a few of those fleeing/escaping from this otherwise respectable appearing pseudo-Christian cult. I have had some interest in this subject because my grandfather was a 33rd degree Mason, and I meticulously investigated the Mormons for 1 year prior to becoming an evangelical Christian some 40 years ago.]

“ ... Again, Masons of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th degrees have no clue about these things [nor do lower ranking Mormons]. They simply go through some rituals and if the higher-ups do not see that they are the type they want to promote in their organizations, then they do not promote them and keep them in the dark as to their true ultimate purpose and object of worship.”

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<sup>9</sup> Moss, Vladimir, at <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/articles/753/nicholas-ii-plot-against-his-throne/>

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These deep secrets of Masonry include the worship of the devil by their leadership. So the modern Gnostics, the Jezebel's in the midst of our modern Christianity may include pentecostals, charismatics, Masons, Mormons, and ecumenists, among many others.

***Revelation 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.***

The Lord Jesus Christ here instructs us again to hold on to our true orthodox teachings which have been handed down to us from Christ from the Apostles through our right-believing Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, and holy men and women of the Church and are reaffirmed by the Holy Spirit working within the faithful Church. We have the Holy Scriptures, our Divine Liturgy and other services, unparalleled iconography and hymnology, the martyrs, the saints, and blessed ones. And we have their holy relics.

(Bishop Sergios Black): “We have exactly what anyone in the Church has ever had: we have baptismal Grace; the chrismational Gifts of the Holy Spirit; the inestimable Grace of the eucharistic Gifts; and we have an ever-expanding library of the primary documentation of the Christian life to feed our hungering minds and compose a Christian mindset within each of us.”

What secret wisdom is there in Papism, Protestantism, Pentecostalism, Masonry, Mormonism, or Ecumenism that can add to the fullness of the treasures of Orthodoxy. We already have the Pearl of Great Price. We have no need to seek another, but need to *hold on to* and cherish what we have, purify our hearts and minds through obedience to Christ so that He may dwell within us, and then pass on this entire παραδοσις, this Holy Tradition, unaltered, to the next generation.

Archimandrite Athanasios: “The verb *hold on* here in the Greek, κρατισητε, is a very strong verb. It means to grasp very firmly, tenaciously, and not simply to keep it on your mind or on your list of priorities, but to hang on as if the thing being held were truly alive. When Christ says, *Hold on until I come [back]*, He is indicating that this faith must be kept unaltered, unblemished until His Second Coming. Therefore it must be held tenaciously without alterations, changes, reductions, innovations, and adaptations according to the worldly scheme of things.”

Interestingly, Archimandrite Athanasios writes, in the ordination of priests, the bishop places the Lamb, the Host, i.e., the body of Christ on the palm of the one being ordained and states: “Receive this παρακαταθικι, this holy deposit, this spiritual treasure, and guard it until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, at which time it will be demanded by Him from you.”

Thus, like the 10, 5, or 1 talents given by the Master unto His servants in the parable, this holy deposit is entrusted to every member of the clergy to the end of his life, at which point, the priest will be required to give an account to Christ of what he did with it--a great responsibility, really an overwhelming responsibility.

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**Revelation 2:26** *And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 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.*

This is a reference to the Father's promise to the Son, as recorded in Psalm 2:8-9 read every Saturday night at Vigil/Vespers in the 1st Kathisma of the Psalter: *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

Bishop Oecumenius: "In the Gospels this was spoken to those who had managed well the money and the talents that had been entrusted to them -- *you will be over ten cities*, and to another, *you will be over 5 cities* (Luke 19:17-19) -- and even to Daniel it was said, *the kingdom will be given to the saints* [of God] (Daniel 7:27). These passages make it clear that a certain rule and authority will be granted to the saints as a kind of compensation for those times of lack and want. Therefore, He says, He will govern them with a harsh authority, and, to be sure, those who are disobedient He will crush as though they were clay pots."

St. Andrew of Caesarea notes: "The words *as I myself received from the Father* refer to His human nature, which He assumed through the flesh.

**Revelation 2:28** *And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

St. Andrew of Caesarea: "By *morning star* He means either that one of whom Isaiah spoke, *How have you fallen from heaven, O Day Star, O Morning Star* (Isaiah 14:12) and of whom it is promised that he will be *crushed under the feet by the saints* (Romans 16:20), or the Lord means that one of whom the blessed Peter speaks, of the *morning star who rises in the hearts of the faithful* (2 Peter 1:19), clearly meaning the illumination of Christ. Both John the Baptist and Elijah the Tishbite were called light bringers. For the one foretold of the first rising of the *sun of righteousness* (Malachi 4:2), and the other is known as the forerunner of the second rising. And after these we believe that those who have conquered the devil will receive their inheritance. Nor is it surprising that we should interpret this in so opposite a fashion. For we learn from the holy Scriptures that the *lion* from Judah is Christ, while the *lion* from Bashan is the antichrist (*cf.* St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, ¶ 14),<sup>10</sup> the same image signifying both. And so is noted the rising of the coming day, in which the darkness of the

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<sup>10</sup> Note: Bashan [ܒܫܢܐ *ha-Bashan = the Fruitful*] is in SW Syria and includes the Golan Heights and Laish/Leshem where the tribe of Dan migrated (Judges 18, 19). The mountains of Bashan are 100 miles directly east of the Sea of Galilee. Mt. Bashan is the tallest peak there. *Ps. 68:15-16 (MT, lit.) Mt. Bashan is God's towering mountain; Mt. Bashan is a mountain of many tall peaks. 16 Why gaze with envy, you mountain peaks, at the mountain God desired for His dwelling [Mt. Zion]? The Lord will tabernacle there forever.* Contrast this quite literal translation of the Hebrew with the pre figurative translation of the Septuagint's (*Lxx's*) *Ps. 67:15-16 (HTM)* of "*butter/curdled mountain(s).*"

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present life will be hidden, and the angel proclaims this. For this precedes the *sun of righteousness* that will shine on the saints and dispel the gloom of the present life, by whose rays may also we be made bright, by the good pleasure of the Father with the all-holy Spirit, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”