

Revelation 2:8-11 The Church in Smyrna

Just as we saw in the church at Ephesus, this church had done some very good things. They were being commended for their “good” works. However, this church was not given any condemnation for anything. Something to pay attention to. The church was noted for being a church of martyrs. *About 5 million Christians were killed for their faith during a 200-year span.*

1. **First and last – vs. 8b** – This is the same phrase that is used in verse 18 of chapter 1. It establishes the credibility and authority of the writer and speaker of the letter. There is nothing before God and nothing after Him. Also when the writer says “Who became dead, and lived,” that resonated with this church because that is what they died believing. That there was life after death. Eternal life.
2. **Works – vs. 9** – It is worthy to note that in each of these dissertations to each of the churches God tells John to write the words, “I know your works or deeds.” You see, there is no escaping God’s watchful eye and His promise that we will be judged for our works. **Matt. 12:36-37**
3. **Your tribulation – vs. 9a** – This is not the Great Tribulation, but only trouble. This church was in the time of the great Roman rule and endured great persecution by the Romans during its time.
4. **Your poverty – vs. 9c** – The church here cared little about the material pleasures of the world at that time and focused rather on the work of God. God also is quick to tell them they are “rich” because of what they have in God. God measures “*riches or wealth in terms of spiritual wealth not material possessions.*” Never forget that. That is the problem with the “Wealth and prosperity” religions. They ignore the fact that Jesus never talked about material wealth but spiritual riches. In fact when Jesus was tempted, He told Satan that He didn’t need the riches that Satan promised Him. **Matt. 4:8-10** We will see by contrast that God tells another church that they just thought they were rich because of the wealth they had but they were really very poor in God’s site.
5. **The blasphemy – vs. 9d** – This church is being commended for not going the way of those who had given up on the true Jewish religious doctrine of the Old Testament. You see, not all Jews acted like Jews. To be a Jew, you had to be born into a Jewish family, but you also had to live by the doctrine of Jewish law. Many in that day did not follow the way of the forefathers. So God calls them “members of the synagogue of Satan.” Strong words for someone. **Romans 9:6**

6. **Do Not Fear – vs. 10a** – Here we see that God is constantly encouraging us to not fear but to remain strong and faithful. We see this throughout all of history. God told Joshua the same thing 1400 years earlier. **Josh. 1:6-9a; Romans 8:1-3; Rev. 1:17**
7. **The Devil is real – vs. 10b** – Often times we don't understand why things happen to us we don't like. Tragedy, sickness, troubles, and all sorts of things we try to find someone or something to blame. Back in the '70's Flip Wilson used to say, "The Devil made me do it." Will that was just a half-truth. God is telling the church here that the Devil is real and that there are real effects that will affect you and me. We need to realize that and act accordingly. It is impossible for us to live in this world without the knowledge and acceptance that the Devil is at work in the world. You see, there is a difference between temptation and testing. God will only test you, but the Devil and only tempt you. Testing to prove the love and goodness and perfect nature of God, and tempting is to have to deny and forsake God and turn away from God's perfect will for your life. Let's look at the world today. Satan is alive and well. I believe he is active or more so than any time in history. Don't fall into Satan's trap of blaming the circumstances or the person Satan uses to bring you grief. It is Satan, the Devil that is responsible for so much of our pain and sorrow. So why? Why would a loving God allow that? If God did not allow things to happen to us, we would not run to Him for comfort, refuge, protection, and His love. We would be so "self-sufficient" that we would not live like we needed Him. He knows that is disastrous. **Acts 10:38; 2 Tim 2:24-26**
8. **You will have Tribulation – vs. 10c** – As we just saw, tribulation is a definite, guaranteed, unavoidable effect of being alive. God just told the church that they would be thrown in jail, persecuted, and all kinds of discomfort and discouragement. Satan is out to "get" believers, so if you are not being persecuted, ask yourself if you "are a true believer." **CAUTION: do not confuse the lack of persecution for a false personal knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ. Phil. 3:10** There is some vagueness as to the meaning of the ten days. As we can look back at history, we see that there were ten specific periods intense persecution of Christians by ten Roman rulers between 64 AD and 313 AD. This began with Nero and ended with Diocletian. Most scholars agree that the ten days is also an encouragement that the tribulation would last a short period of time, which has largely been true. Since 313 AD until now, there were few periods of tribulation. Ten is the number of the world powers hostile to the Church; compare the *ten* horns of the beast, **Rev 13:1** In **John 17:15-26** we see that Jesus knew what was ahead for the disciples and prayed specifically for them and all future believers. This is the most significant prayer Jesus prayer for you and for me.

9. **Faithful unto Death – vs. 10d** – This church was faithful to the end. They were known as the church of “martyrs.” So what is a martyr? A martyr is somebody who suffers persecution and/or death for advocating, renouncing, refusing to renounce, and/or refusing to advocate a belief or cause of a religious nature. Jesus told His disciples to be faithful “until He came back”, but here the church is being told to be faithful, “even unto death”, which says that they could die before Jesus returns.

I. Faithfulness to the human heart. We sometimes make mistakes by not listening to what our hearts tell us about our fellow-men. When under the power of conscience, in the hard grip of logic, and amid the unyielding dicta of our theological dogmas, we are often in danger of forgetting some of the most fundamental facts of human nature which are witnessed to us by our "heart of hearts."

II. Faithfulness to the conscience. The spirit that overcomes the world is the spirit of Christ. It is only when we arm the soul with the same mind that was in Him, only when we take up the cross to follow Him even to Calvary, and there to suffer with Him, that we can gain the victory. He has promised victory to him that overcomes.

III. Faithfulness to our Master and His word under all circumstances. We may be forgotten by our fellows, hidden from all eyes but His; we may have no sympathy from companions, no cheering words from comrades in the fight; we may even hear nothing further on this score from the great Captain of our salvation. But we must be faithful unto death in our spirit, our trust, our obedience, and our love. He looks at death as a foe whom He has worsted; He knows the mettle and the malice of His great antagonist; He has put him to the proof, and the proof was too great. Whereas we tremble at the thought of the encounter, with Him it is the moment of our discharge from doubt, from temptation, from servitude, from waiting, from patience, from tedious toil; to Him it is our acceptance of the reward, the crown, and the glory. --- Henry Melvill, *Penny Pulpit*, No. 1807.

10. **Crown of Life – vs. 10e** – This is the best part of the message to the church at Smyrna. They that are faithful will receive the “Crown of Life.” **James 1:12** This is the reason we have hope. This is reason we have the ability to smile even in the midst of adversity and know that whatever happens here on earth is not the end of the story. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we receive eternal life. But to those who are faithful even to death, they will get the Crown of Life. This doesn’t mean we have to die to get the Crown of Life, but we must remain faithful. It is what Paul meant when he said we had to “work out our salvation.” It is what we do after we become saved that counts for God. **1 Cor. 3:11-14**

11. **Let him hear – vs. 11a** – This is a warning that is common with each and every church. But it is a warning for us today as well. We must pay attention to what the scriptures say about the end times and the environment in which we live. It is simple but difficult to do sometimes. It is just to “listen and obey” what we have heard. How many times have we asked for advice and not done what we heard? How many times have we been told how to avoid a situation, but ignored that advice? Here, as with all the churches, God admonishes each of us the “if we have ears to hear with, we better listen to what God.”
12. **We who overcome – vs. 11b** – We see this phrase in each of the seven church messages.
 - a. *So what does it mean to overcome?* - To overcome is to conquer, prevail, triumph over, defeat, or rise above.
 - b. *How do you overcome?* - The idea is that we have learned from what God has told us and we have obeyed God. We have not given in to the temptations of the world and to the lies that Satan has told us. As Dr. Stanley always says, “Obey God and leave the consequences to Him!” The problem is that we do not really trust that God can do better than us or really knows what is best.
 - c. *How hard is it to overcome?* - This is the part none of us likes. We have to give up our right to our own ideas, wants, desires, and our belief that we always know more about us than God does. It is the battle of the will that will get us to fail here.
 - d. *What do we get if we overcome?* - God tells us two things here. First He tells us that we will not be hurt. That means that if we are faithful and overcome, God will not do anything that will hurt us. When we get hurt it is usually because of our own stubbornness. Not only will God not hurt us, but we will also be spared the second death. What second death is He talking about? D.L. Moody put it this way, “He who is born once, will die twice, and he who is born twice, will die once.” What a great statement! If we are faithful and overcome, God promises that we will not see the second death, which is total and complete separation from Him for eternity. **Rev. 20:14; 21:6; John 11:25-26;**