

CHRIST'S COMMENTARY ON CHURCH HISTORY
"Smyrna: Handling The Hardships Of Suffering For Truth"
(Revelation 2:8-11)

Introduction: (To show the need for this message...)

(1) Most of the time when people come calling to my office for counsel, the needs are easily defined. A party might be wondering what God's will is as it relates to moving to another state and taking on a new job. At other times alcoholism or drug abuse is the issue.

(2) But consider the following symptoms:

(a) Waking up in the morning after sleeping all night and feeling like you are going to have a nervous breakdown.

(b) Sensing a great uneasiness with visiting your sister in upstate New York although she has never, to your knowledge, ever been anything but really good to you.

(c) Dreading that you can't quite "measure up" to the expectations of others.

(d) Wondering why you feel so pained when considering your coming free month's vacation in the Fiji Islands this summer!

(e) Wondering and worrying over **why** the car just broke down, the roof blew off the garage, the fridge leaked all over the floor and the house wiring caught fire near the...on **top** of all the **rest**!

Others feel as uneasy as **you** do!!

Providing you are physically healthy, there is **another** explanation--one with a spiritual cause-effect relationship that Christ addressed in Revelation 2:8-11: the message to the messenger of the Church of Smyrna . . .

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon...)

Need: "I or a Christian friend of mine fears the distress, loss, slander and maybe even physical abuse of taking a stand for Scriptural truth! How can we stand firm under these pressures?!"

I. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus Christ commented to the Apostle John on the spiritual welfare of Christians throughout Church History:

- A. The Greek term "**Tade**" introducing each message in Rev. 2-3 means that each message is aimed **only** to the respective church it addresses -- **not** for the **other six**, cf. UBS Gr. N.T., p. 839ff; Liddell & Scott, Grk.-Eng. Lex., p. 1197f; Denniston, The Grk. Particles, p. 513.
- B. Yet, each of these messages applies to a **group** of churches, 2:7 etc.! Indeed, the seven churches of Rev. 2-3 existed in respective town which were **mail distribution centers** for smaller rural towns **around** them, McRay, "Return to Ephesus," Moody Monthly, Oct. '92, p. 40. Walvoord writes that messengers would travel to the towns coupled with these seven churches **in the order** in which the respective churches are listed, Walvoord, Bib. Know. Com., N.T., p. 932.
- C. Also, the expression in each message of "He that hath ears to hear let him hear..." refers to an **immediate** prophecy application: whether we look at the only other occurrence of this phrase in Revelation (13:9) or elsewhere in the New Testament, the phrase always has in view fulfillment of prophecy **at the time the phrase is used!!**
- D. Summary: Christ pictured seven out of many churches of Asia in which the consecutively presented Rev. 2-3 local churches symbolize seven respective, consecutive **eras** of churches in Church History! His messages apply to believers in each era of that history!

II. Christ's message to the Suffering believers of the A.D. 64-313 era instructed them how to handle the hardships of suffering for God's truth :

- A. The name "Smyrna" refers to myrrh which was used for anointing bodies at death, picturing the Suffering Church, A.D. 64-313.
- B. Believers in this era were worried about the pain of persecution :
 1. The Lord, the Solution to His people's needs, is seen at Smyrna as the One Who starts and ends history, Who died and rose from the dead, Rev. 2:8.
 2. Believers in A.D. 64-313 needed answers to facing the trauma of godless persecution.
- C. The challenges these believers faced are laid out symbolically by Christ, challenges which we precisely match in Church History:
 1. Jesus spoke of the slander of those who claimed to be God's Jewish people but who belonged to Satan's synagogue as unbelievers, Rev. 2:9. In reality, Rome initially protected Christianity as a sect of Judaism until

- Jewish opponents of Christianity raised such objection that, to keep the peace, Rome began attacking Christians in A.D. 64, Walker, A Hist. of the Christ. Church, p. 43.
2. The reference to Satan trying believers for "ten days" (v. 10) happens to match the ten distinct Imperial persecutions of Christians from A.D. 64 to the "Edict of Milan" in A.D. 313 which ended such Imperial persecution, Ryrie St. Bi., KJV, fn. Rv. 2:10. (Ibid., Walker, p. 43,101) The term "day" is used to refer to an era such as the "Day of the Lord" and matches ten era of persecution!
- D. In view of these challenges, Christ offered the following message on handling the hardships of suffering for the truth:
1. Item One - Trust in Christ Who controls historical events involving the believer's persecution **and restoration** (Isa. 44:3-6), and Who conquered it all through the resurrection, Rev. 2:8.
 2. Item Two - The believer must not fear future suffering, and here is why:
 - a. God knows about unjust persecution before it comes, 10
 - b. God limits unjust persecution, v. 10 (cf. book of Job).
 - c. If the believer stands for the truth under persecution, he obtains these blessings: (a) he experiences spiritual fervor **while** suffering (meaning of "crown of life," cf. Bib. Kno. Com., N.T., p. 821). (b) he does **not** experience the pain or isolation that those in Hell experience, Rev. 2:11; 20:14 & Lk. 16:23-31.

Application: *To handle persecution for the truth, (1) believe on Christ as Savior from sin to escape hell and gain heaven, Jn. 3:16. (2) Then (a) confess any sins we do as believers to God for cleansing (1 Jn. 1:9) for the Spirit's equipping for suffering and (b) obey Scripture for that blessing to continue, 1 Pet. 4:14-19. (c) This includes not dreading persecution, but trusting God's sovereign control of any persecution to come and waiting for His blessings of spiritual fervor and escape from pain and isolation during the trial. (d) In such a case, we also rejoice in the great eternal reward to come for such suffering, Mt. 5:11-12!*

Lesson: *Believers who face persecution for the truth must take seriously God's promise for support during trouble to handle it well!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message's lesson...)

- (1) I know of cases where Christians whom I have known and worked with came to me with an overwhelming sense of fear and pain.
- (2) In these cases physical exams were performed and the parties were found to be physically healthy.
- (3) The parties were recommended to seek secular counseling for depression.
- (4) However, upon speaking with them and recommending that they treat the problem as a dramatic Satanic attack, I prescribed the following:
 - (a) Confession to Christ of any dependence on the Sin Nature to avoid the lack of peace being experienced, cf. Gal. 5:22 with 1 John 1:9.
 - (b) Reading of the psalms in times of great distress, whether it be emotional, mental or spiritual distress.
 - (c) A re-organization of one's priorities and duties in life through a personal study of Scripture as opposed to taking advice from well-meaning friends.
 - (d) A concentration on seeking to please the Lord alone!
- (5) In these cases, the individuals have returned to health and have grown in the Lord substantially. The turnaround occurred in a matter of days within a week, although the effects of pain are leave continual exposure to Scripture!
- (6) Dr. Frank B. Minirth, M.D., psychiatrist in Dallas, Texas, has written that "Psychological tests were obtained on a group of Christians to determine if time spent with the Word of God made any difference in the maturity level of the people...The maturity level was found to be consistently and proportionately related to the time spent with the Word...those who spent time daily with the Word were found to be more mature, more men-no significant pathology (deviant behavior or thinking patterns)." (You Can Measure Your Mental Health, p. 14) **We identify and overcome Satanic attacks through other people by using of Scripture, 1 John 2:14b!**