

REVELATION: CALL TO HOLINESS IN VIEW OF PROPHECY
Part II: "The Things Which Are": Profiting From God's Words To US"
B. Smyrna: The Persecuted Church - Handling Satan's Attacks
(Revelation 2:8-11)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Last Sunday, starting in the Adult Sunday School Class and going through to the Sunday Evening service, several believers spoke with me about the subject of today's passage in Revelation 2:8-11. In fact, when the issue came up in our Sunday Evening service, I noted publicly that it was the third time that day where people in Nepaug Church had spoken with me on the matter!

We are speaking about persecution trials: they usually come in the form of pressures to make one feel guilty for holding to a belief or a stand that he has.

Now, usually such trials come through the agency of another human party who opposes a believer's stand or belief. However, the pressure to feel such great guilt may come from a seemingly intangible source, involving troubling thoughts that pound in the mind, making one feel so **awful** that he wants to quit, run away and hide somewhere far away!

The question I often face on the matter that we want to address in this message today is as follows: **"When this type of thing happens to me, or to a party I know, WHAT is going on, WHY, and WHAT can be CONSTRUCTIVELY DONE about it?!"**

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

Need: " At times I face threatening, guilt-inducing critics or even tremendous, guilt-inducing THOUGHTS regarding my beliefs or stands! WHAT is going on, and HOW should I respond to it?!"

- I. **In noting how JESUS arranged the book of Revelation, we see He had RELEVANT words for EACH era of CHURCH HISTORY:**
 - A. Christ's reference in Rev. 1:19 to "the things which thou hast seen" pictures what John had **just** seen in Rev. 1:1-18; this leaves "the things which **are** (**are existing**, from the Greek, *esisin*) to be a **current ERA**, and "the things which **shall be hereafter**" to be **future ERAS**.
 - B. Now, as that **current ERA** ends at Rev. 4:1 (as that verse states) and Rev. 2-3 pictures **churches, the current ERA** is the **Church ERA**, & Rev. 4:1-22:5 speaks of eras coming after **the current Church ERA**.
 - C. Now, **in the Church ERA**, a Greek enclitic, **Tade** starts each Rev. 2-3 message, and **Tade** means each message applies only to the church it addresses -- **not the other six**, cf. UBS Grk. N.T., p. 839ff; Liddell & Scott, Grk.-Eng. Lex., p. 1197f; Denniston, The Grk. Particles, p. 513.
 - D. Yet, each of these messages applies to a **group of churches**, 2:7 etc.!
 - E. This all fits the setting where each of these 7 churches stood in towns that were **mail distribution centers** for **smaller rural** towns **around** them, McRay, "Return to Ephesus," Moody Monthly, 10/92, p. 40.
 - F. Also, the phrase in **each consecutive** message of "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." signals **consecutive prophetic fulfillments**:
 1. This phrase is used outside of Rev. 2-3 in the book of Revelation **only** in Rev. 13:9 where readers are to discern via Old Testament texts the revival of the old Roman Empire, Strong's Conc., p. 289.
 2. New Testament uses of the phrase fit the theme of **contemporary** events fulfilling **ancient prophecies**, Ibid. (Matthew 11:13-15)
 - G. Grand Summary: **Jesus** taught the things John had seen were in Rev. 1:1-19 and that Rev. 2-3 predicted seven consecutive stages of Church History. Rev. 4-22 thus foretells what happens after the Church era, and Rev. 2-3 then are Christ's words for all of us in Church History!
- II. **Now, Christ's message to the Persecuted Church taught believers about handling Satanic-induced false-guilt persecution (as follows):**
 - A. "Smyrna" means myrrh, a resin used to embalm the dead, Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 766.
 - B. Smyrna thus depicts the era of the Persecuted Church of A. D. 64-313.
 - C. Believers in this era faced Satanic slander and its ensuing persecution:
 1. Jesus noted the **slander** of Jews claiming to be God's people when they actually belonged to Satan's realm, Rev. 2:9 NIV; Jn. 8:41-44.
 2. History sheds light on this matter: Rome first allowed Christianity, viewing it as a part of Judaism. Yet, Judaizers opposed Christians for not **legalistically** keeping Moses' Law, & **slandered** them unto the **Romans** by claiming Christians practiced **cannibalism** in their **communion** services. Christians were **then** pressured to recant the faith or be persecuted, Walker, A History of the Chr. Ch., p. 43, 45.
 3. Christ's thus predicting Satan's trials of believers for "**ten days**" (2:10) matches Rome's **ten eras** of persecutions of Christians from Nero to Diocletian, A. D. 64 to the Edict of Milan in A. D. 313. ["Day" is

here like "day of the Lord" to mean an **era** as in the O.T., Ryrie Study Bible, KJV ftn. to Rev. 2:10; Ibid., Walker, p. 43, 101]

- D. However, **Jesus Himself** became the **solution** for facing such trials:
1. As the Beginning and the End, Christ as **God restores** His people from such Satanic attacks, Rev. 2:8 with the context of Isa. 44:3-6.
 2. Christ Who died and rose again gives vigor to believers when they face Satan's slanders and eventual physical persecution, Rev. 2:8.
- E. **Using this insight to the Persecuted Church, we have a concise manual on Satanic persecution we face even today (as follows):**
1. Satan **often** uses legalistic views (like Judaism) with coercive force (like Rome) to get believers to recant Biblical stands, 2:9 (Gal. 4:29. This may come via other humans or come by pressures put into one's thinking directly by Satan, Armerding, Leadership, p. 26-27 in sermon Conclusion notes and Eph. 6:10-12 with 6:18-20.
 2. Having this discernment, we use Christ's enabling as follows:
 - a. If we trust the Lord, He sustains us **in** these trials, Rev. 2:8. We thus stop being anxious in them as we rely upon Him, 2:10a.
 - b. Thus, God gives strength in such trials, 2:10b (mng. of "crown of life," B.K.C., N.T., p. 821), and shields us from the **pain** the trials aim to inflict [unlike those in hell, Rev. 2:11; 20:15]!

Lesson Application: Pressures of a false-guilt kind, be they from others or if they arise in one's own mind itself, are Satanic, and aim to press one to reject a Biblical view or stand. To respond well, (1) we must believe in Christ to be translated from Satan's reign unto Christ's, Jn. 3:16; Col. 1:13. (2) Then, we (a) heed Scripture to (b) discern such false-guilt-inducing pressures as Satanic and (c) to take the right stand. (3) We also trust God for the power to face the trial and (4) for deliverance from its pain.

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

(1) The late Dr. Hudson T. Armerding, former president of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, wrote of a Satanic persecution event he experienced while on a brief study leave he took at a ranch in West Texas. (Armerding, Leadership, p. 26-27)

Living alone in the old ranch house, he would work on manuscripts in the mornings and then go outside to do various ranch work in the afternoons.

One morning, a disturbing memory of a sin he had committed years before began to plague him. All through his morning study time, it increasingly plagued him and finally came to a head as he was washing his lunch dishes over the kitchen sink.

As he bent over the dishwasher, Dr. Armerding recalled the verse in 1 John 1:7 that says, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

He knew the Greek text made the phrase in the King James Version reading, "cleanseth us from all sin" more clearly mean "**continues** to cleanse us from all sin." (Ibid., p. 27)

When he recalled this liberating Biblical truth, Armerding writes: "Immediately, tears mingled with the dishwasher because the Lord Jesus in mercy and through the Holy Spirit had reminded me of the unchanging truth of his word of forgiveness on the basis of his atoning sacrifice. Thus God overcame the persecution of Satan that was calculated to imprison me in guilt and to challenge the deliverance wrought by the Lord."

The Lord also delivered him from the guilt that threatened to offset his manuscript work so that the truth Dr. Armerding was seeking to write out for other believers on his study leave would not be inhibited from reaching and ministering to us as well!

Similarly, the sovereign Lord Jesus ALLOWED this angelic attack upon Dr. Armerding so he could RECORD his testimony concerning it for OUR benefit today!