

Seven pt2

Ryan Abernathy / General

Seven / Revelation 2:8–11

One of the odd things we have seen in the last 2 decades in American Christianity has been the rise in the use of the term persecution. It pops up in news articles about once or twice a month even in mainstream publications with Christians in the US saying they are being persecuted for their faith. And the things they call persecution are baffling.

I read those accusations and I often pray that our brothers and sisters in China or Iran or India do not read them or hear them as I read another account of people being burned out of churches, or imprisoned, or put to death for their faith. We have lost all perspective when we think that persecution is being disagreed with or not being the dominant cultural force in America anymore.

The letter we are going to look at today is to a church that faced real persecution. It will be obvious from the first few words that they are in peril. I want us to look at their reaction and their calling from Jesus, and start to plan our responses to opposition, much less persecution in light of them, and not the rhetoric of the day.

Read [Revelation 2:8-11](#).

The church at Smyrna get a letter from Jesus who calls Himself first and last and who died and came to life. In both these phrases we get encouragement. We do not serve a God who is unable to endure, much less one who has not suffered.

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

The intent of both statements is relatively clear. The One who speaks to the angel of the church at Smyrna is the One who precedes all creation and will remain when all else is gone. The statement is in keeping with the high Christology provided the reader in the prologue to John's Gospel and moves along the same lines in suggesting both the preexistence and the eternity of Christ. **It serves as a providential reminder that whatever intervenes in the process of life and death is presided over by One who knew about all from its inception and ultimately controls it all**

When we encounter suffering, we need to remember that Jesus suffered too, yet He endured. (And I am not talking about suffering from sin or from tragedy...He dealt with those too, but here I am talking about suffering b/c of your faith)

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

There is certain purpose that seems to be written into the expression "who became dead." Whatever the case, **the fact that he came back to life again is even more refreshing news to saints facing possible persecution and death** than the story of the death and revival of the city could possibly have been to a Smyrnan citizen, though the allusion would not have been lost on the first-century reader

So the suffering of the church is laid out in vs 9

- **Tribulation**- they are going thru a season of difficult trial

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

afflictions (thlipsis), the word has the sense of extensive tribulation rather than mere affliction

- **Poverty**- they are in financial distress

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

Poverty (ptōcheia) is not just general poverty but denies even the basics of life

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

Here is a promise that because of the conditions of poverty and tribulation through which Smyrnan believers were walking, their value in God's eyes was exponentially increasing

- **Slander**- they are being spoken of falsely by those who claim to be of God and are actually not- in many ways their slander mirrors some of our own- their words were misunderstood, their positions not investigated, and their practices not observed merely assumed...**which is all the more reason in a time such as this that we should speak slowly, clearly, and deliberately...and with as much winsomeness and love as possible...so that when we are heard we are understood...**

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

characteristic accusations hurled at first- and second-century Christians are fairly well known. These included the charge of cannibalism since Christians were heard to talk about "eating the body" and "drinking the blood" of Christ. Because they had "love feasts," they were accused of immorality, specifically of an orgiastic nature. Because they did not accept the Greek gods, they were accused of atheism; and because they spoke so much about the fire of the Spirit and the fires of divine judgment, they were accused of being arsonists or incendiaries. In addition to that, their unwillingness to pay homage to Caesar as lord earned them the accusation of disloyalty to Rome

"synagogue of Satan"- not that they worshiped Satan but that they were liars and accusers...both characteristics of the term

One of those would be bad, but they are getting all three at once. From within and without, they are facing a season of persecution and difficulty. And that is normal.

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

Rather than offering to the Smyrnan Christians a reprieve from this, the letter seems to anticipate the worsening of conditions but with the promise that God, being faithful to walk with them in the experience, will reward them.

I want to say this as clear as I can. **Being a follower of Jesus is hard.** And in a lot of cases, the more you pursue Him the worse it gets. The Enemy targets those who are growing stronger spiritually. He sees you as a threat and he doesn't take threats lightly.

But not all difficulty is persecution. In this case, the threats are coming from those who have some power to do more than just make their lives miserable. And that's the hallmark of persecution. Is your life and well being on the line?

We need to make this distinction because if we do not we will develop one of two debilitating mindsets that have infected American Christianity:

1. Persecution complex- where we see any question or push back as a threat
2. Victim mindset- where we see ourselves as constantly on the defensive

Jesus didn't call us to either of these. **He called us Victors.** And the sooner we live like one, the sooner we can handle being opposed and learn to love those who oppose us- because Jesus died for them too.

So what is our response? Look at verse 10.

1. Do not fear- Rather than cowering, act like the victor you are. Walk in that victory. **That is not a call to arrogance but it is a call to confidence-** not self confidence but God confidence- there is nothing thrown at you God didn't know about before hand, prepare you for, and will see you thru
2. Be faithful- in the midst of trial and struggle and opposition dig deeper into the Word, pray more, seek to act more like Jesus, not less. **Our response to opposition should be to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.**

Why? Because we are going to win. We are going to endure. Even to death, we find victory. We have nothing to fear even from those who can destroy our bodies, because we know the One who has saved us from Hell.

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

The crown promised here is the *stephanos*, the victor's crown, as opposed to the *diadēma* or diadem. The *stephanos* was not worn by royalty, at least not as a sign of that position, but rather was awarded to the athlete who had won an athletic event. In other words, it was a "winner's crown," and the Smyrnans are invited to see themselves, whatever their sufferings, not as losers but as winners.

John ends asking us to hear again (v11) but also reminding us, we have nothing to fear from hell because we are in Christ.

Revelation 2. To Smyrna (2:8–11)

Consequently, the first death is defined as the separation of the soul from the body, whereas the second death is the separation of the soul from God and its confinement in the place the Bible denominates as hell. Overcoming saints at Smyrna may have to face physical death, but they will have no fear of the second death and by it will be untouched and unhurt

So where are you in the context of these options?