

God's Promises to His People that Overcome

- Part 2: The Church at Smyrna
(Based on the Seven Churches in Revelation)



Statement of Purpose for these Essays

As I had previously mentioned in Part 1 of this series of essays, I believe that this is the hour of the "forerunner" spirit that is "preparing the way for the second coming of the Lord." Just as John the Baptist, in the "spirit of Elijah," at the first coming of Jesus declared, I believe the Lord is bringing this message forth to prepare the Bride, the Body of Christ, the Church for Jesus' soon return. Many within the Body of Christ have a "warning alarm" that seems to be within them. It is imploring them to exhort every one of us within the Body of Christ to "Consider their Ways;" to "repent for the Kingdom of Heaven (Jesus' return) is at hand;" to "turn towards and kiss towards" the Lord like never before (return to your first love); to beware of false prophets and prophesy; to beware of seductive, "new" doctrines; etc.

Revelation 3:19 and 20 states as follows, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."* I believe that this is the crux of Jesus' message to the seven churches, the seven types of "hearts" of people, the seven types of leaders or leadership within the Body of Christ. He loves us so much that He will rebuke and chasten us. Jesus desires and will have a Bride that is "spotless and without blemish." There is no changing that no matter how we want to spin it to make us feel better. He tells us to repent for He is "at the door" and He is "knocking" - He is speaking to our hearts - the heart of everyone who calls them self a believer. Will we hear His voice? Will we hear the urgency of His heart? Will we "open the door to our hearts" to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, we need to have *"ears to hear and heed what the Spirit is saying"* - to each of us, personally, as well as corporately.

To all of the churches mentioned, Jesus states promises to those who "overcome." As we review each church, we will break down Jesus' message to each of the churches into the following segments:

- A brief history or description of that particular church location
- The description of Jesus given to that particular church
- A description of what that church did well and was commended for
- A description of what that church did not do well and was chastised for
- The things that Jesus told each church to overcome
- The promise given to those who overcome

"He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is Saying"

Seven Churches in Revelation

- Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7
- **Smyrna – Revelation 2:8- 11**
- Pergamum – Revelation 2:12-17
- Thyatira – Revelation 2:18-29
- Sardis – Revelation 3:1-6
- Philadelphia – Revelation 3:7-13
- Laodicea – Revelation 3:14-22



The Church at Smyrna – Revelation 2:8-11

- **A Little about Smyrna** - Smyrna - Greek - meaning *"myrrh"*- Smyrna was a port city with a good harbor that was about thirty-five miles northwest of Ephesus. The city was established as a Roman commercial center with a port on the Aegean Sea. Smyrna was a relatively well off community because of its thriving harbor. However, we read that the members at the Smyrna church were poverty-stricken people most likely due to the harsh persecution they suffered, as we will discuss later. Yet, Jesus says they were spiritually "rich" (2:9). There is no scripture references to show how exactly the church was started. However, Smyrna was probably reached as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.
- **Description of Jesus** - *"...These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"*
Jesus is known as the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." (Revelations 1:8, 11) Jesus' introductory title as the One *"who died and came to life again"* (referring to His death and resurrection) would be encouraging to these potential martyrs of Smyrna (2:8) due to the severe persecution they were under. The church members at Smyrna could face martyrdom in full confidence that they would be resurrected to eternal life by the One who was victorious over His own death through His resurrection.
- **What that Church did well** - *"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."*
They endured the persecution and its consequences to their very lives and lifestyles. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:10, *"...that blessed are those that are persecuted..."* for His name's sake. He states that their main source of persecution seemed to have come from a group which He refers to as *"the synagogue of Satan."*

Not much is truly known concerning what is meant by that phrase *"the synagogue of Satan."* There has been much speculation as well as anti-Semitic doctrines and statements that take and use this particular phrase out of context for their own political and social agendas against the Jewish people as well as Israel, itself. Putting it back into its context as well as taking into account what Jesus actually states it would appear that He could be referring to a specific group of people that were severely persecuting the assembly. It could refer to either religious, pharisaical Jews that

have always persecuted believers or it could refer to secular Jews that really have no true spiritual connection with Judaism other than being of natural Jewish heritage because of His statement, *“they say they are Jews, and are not.”*

Another possibility based on the context of the statement made by Jesus that these are people that *“say they are Jews, and are not,”* is that it could possibly refer to Gentile proselytes to Judaism that took on the Jewish traditions and doctrines and tried to make the believers follow and keep the Jewish Law. When the assembly resisted based on the writings of Paul, they may have come down heavily and initiated and joined in on the persecution of assembly. In this same vein it may be also referring to Gentile proselytes to Judaism that were not believers and just joined in with the general Jewish persecution of the early assembly.

Whatever the case may be, the main issue that Jesus was referring to is that the Smyrna church was being severely persecuted for their faith. Throughout Church history, persecution for being a true believer and living the Christ-like lifestyle was the “mark” of a true disciple of Christ. The Smyrna church was going through severe tribulations that were also affecting them economically. They were very poor, yet Jesus says they are “rich” - rich because of their inheritance in the kingdom of God.

As of yet, in this country, we have not suffered the persecution that is mentioned that will occur in the end times. How would we fare under such severity?

- **What that Church did not do well** - Jesus does not mention any specific issue that this church was not doing well in. However, we can see by His statement of what to overcome, that they were starting to get weary and that fear was beginning to enter into the Body. The severity of the situation was beginning to overwhelm them.

Fear is a powerful tool of the enemy to try to influence the believer in giving in and compromising. The end time prophecies are filled with statements declaring how difficult it will be to be a Christian. Throughout the world, today, Christians are being persecuted through tremendous, sufferings, hardships and even death. We here in America are just beginning to hear the rumblings of the persecution to come. If we stand up for our Biblical Judeo-Christian values we are increasingly becoming known as “bigots,” “prejudicial,” “radical fundamentalists,” “homophobic,” and so on. We are becoming the enemies of the culture and pretty soon we will become known as the “counter-culture” which may or may not be a bad thing.

This changing of the tide will begin to affect us, not just in our culture but it will and already has begun to affect the believer, economically. Businesses are being attacked and being forced to either close or be sued because of their Christian values and beliefs. If businesses and or individuals do not go along with the new Health Care initiative because sections of it directly would cause us to compromise our values and doctrines, we will be forced to pay heavy “fees” (a.k.a. - taxes). We may be heading towards the hour when we may be forced to be poor for the sake of the Gospel. Will we be willing to take that on just as the church at Smyrna did? Or will fear creep in and cause us to justify us doing things contrary to our values and begin to compromise.

Will churches be willing to give up their 501c3 (IRS tax exempt status) for the sake of the Gospel? Will we as believers still tithe even though we may not be able to get a “tax credit” off of our tax returns? Will we as believers be willing to face the true hardships that come with true persecution that will cause us to make the tough choices based on our spiritual and Biblical beliefs

or will we justify and compromise so that we will not lose those earthly, carnal and temporary items that we possess? Will we be ready to be cast into prison for the Word's sake?

- **What to Overcome - "Fear"**

Jesus implores the believers, "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer...*" Throughout the scriptures the Word exhorts us to "**fear not**." Below are just a few of the "**fear nots**" found in the scriptures:

Genesis 26:24 - "*And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: **fear not**, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.*"

- Just as God told Isaac to fear not because He would be with him throughout his life's journey, so shall He be with us in our life's journey.

1Kings 17:13 - "*And Elijah said unto her, **Fear not**; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*"

- Just as Elijah comforted the woman who was on her last items of food to fear not, God will supply, we can rest assured to "fear not because God will supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

2Kings 6:16 - "*And he answered, **Fear not**: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*"

- Just as Elisha comforted his servant with this truth so can we rest assured that if God is "for us" than who can be against us in times of trouble.

Isaiah 41:10 - "**Fear thou not**; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

- In times of weakness and frailty we can be assured that God is always with us.

Isaiah 43:1 - "*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, **Fear not**: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*"

- We can be assured that we are His and that He knows us by name at all times.

Matthew 10: 30, 31 - "*But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **Fear ye not** therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"

- Jesus tells us that we are so very valuable to God.

Revelation 1:17, 18 - "*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, **Fear not**; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*"

- Jesus tells us to have no fear of death because of who He is and what He has done.

Jesus implores the believers in Smyrna as well as the believers today to "*...be thou faithful unto death.*"

- **The Promise of Overcoming** - *"...and I will give thee a crown of life." "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."*

Those that resist the temptation to fear and overcome will be given a *"crown of life."* This is also mentioned in James 1:12, *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."* Matthew 24: 3 states that, *"only those who endure to the end will be saved."* The word used for "crown" is *stephanos*, which can also refer to a "reward" or "laurel wreath." In the original Greek Olympics, the winner of a sporting contest was awarded the *"stephanos,"* a laurel crown. It was a crown given to those that finish the race or win an event. Such is what Jesus was referring when He said to the church in Smyrna that if you be faithful and endure to the end you will be rewarded with the crown of one who endures, a faithful servant. This is similar to words that Jesus said in His parable concerning the faithful servant and the words that he will hear said to him by the Lord, *"Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter in to the joy of your Lord."* It is the "crown" given to one who perseveres in faith through temptation, tribulation, and persecution. Ultimately, any crown we receive will be "cast before the throne" as an act of worship recognizing that whatever we may have achieved and received was only by the Blood of Lamb and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also says that he that resists and overcomes the temptation to fear shall, *"not be hurt of the second death."* Revelation reveals what this "second death" is. It is the final judgment of anyone who does not accept and receive the gift of salvation through the Blood of the Lamb. They will be subject to the "second death." It is appointed to everyone to die (physically) once and after that every individual then will receive judgment. (Hebrews 9:27) However, at the final, Great, White Throne Judgment a person's destiny is sealed for eternity - either eternal Life or the "second death," the "Lake of Fire," that blazes with fire and brimstone forever and ever and ever. (Read Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8)

Praise the Lord!!! Isn't that wonderful? Do not be fearful. Do not get weary. Yes, persecution will come and is now here. If we stand strong in the power of His might and faint not the reward is overwhelming. We have the wonderful promise of eternity with our God.

To the church at Smyrna as well as all of the brothers and sisters throughout the Body of Christ today, Jesus is encouraging us that if we stay steadfast it will truly be worth it all - all the suffering, all the trials and tribulations, all the persecution that may even result in physical death. Our eternity will be sealed and we will live forever. *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* - 2Corinthians 15:55.

"He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is saying,"
- Both, corporately as a Body of Christ and individually as the Bride of Christ.