

Int'l Training for Elders and Responsible Ones

(Fall 2016)

Returning to the Orthodoxy of the Church

Message Three

The Church in Smyrna

Scripture Reading: Rev. 2:8-11; 1:18; 22:13

- Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
- Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death.
- Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
- Rev 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

I. The church in Smyrna was a church under the suffering of persecution—Rev. 2:8-11:

- Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
- Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death.

A. In Greek Smyrna means “myrrh,” a sweet spice that, in figure, signifies suffering; the church in Smyrna was a suffering church—v. 10:

- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

1. This persecuted church suffered in the sweetness and fragrance of Christ.

2. This church was in the tribulation in Jesus and was in the fellowship of His sufferings—1:9; Phil. 3:10.

- Rev 1:9 I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

3. The church in Smyrna suffered as Christ Himself did and thereby became a continuation of His suffering—Col. 1:24:

Col 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church;

- a. The afflictions of Christ are of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption, which have been completed by Christ Himself, and those for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers.
- b. “The afflictions of Christ...for His Body, which is the church” (v. 24) must be completed by His followers both individually and collectively.

Col 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church;

- c. In the church in Smyrna we see the collective continuation of the sufferings of Jesus.
- d. Because this church was a continuation of Jesus’ suffering, it was truly the testimony of Jesus—Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10.

Rev 1:2 Who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all that he saw.

Rev 1:9 I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Rev 19:10 And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, Do not do this. I am your fellow slave and a fellow slave of your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy.

- B. The church in Smyrna suffered “the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”—2:9:

Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

1. The Judaizers slandered the suffering church by evilly criticizing her; they stubbornly insisted on keeping their Judaistic system, consisting of the Levitical priesthood, the sacrificial rituals, and the material temple, which were all types that had been fulfilled and replaced by Christ.
2. Since the church under the new covenant in God’s economy had no part in their religious practice, the Judaizers slanderously criticized her.
3. In principle, it is the same today, in that religious people slander the churches in the Lord’s recovery, which seek the Lord and follow Him in spirit and in life and do not care for the religious system.
4. According to the Lord’s word in John 15:1, 4-5, and 18-24, the vine and the branches are opposed by the religious world (Judaism); today Christianity is the religious world, the religious system that opposes not only Christ, the true vine, but also the church, the branches of the vine—cf. Gal. 1:4.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman.

John 15:4 Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:18 If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you.

John 15:19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

John 15:20 Remember the word which I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also; if they have kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 15:21 But all these things they will do to you because of My name, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

John 15:22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.

John 15:23 He who hates Me hates My Father also.

John 15:24 If I did not do among them the works which no one else has done, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.

Gal 1:4 Who gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us out of the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father,

- C. The persecution suffered by the church began from the religious synagogue of the Jews instigated by Satan, the adversary, and it was consummated by the Roman Empire used by the devil, the slanderer; the persecution of the suffering church was a cooperation of satanic religion and devilish politics—Rev. 2:9-10.

Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- D. To the suffering church the Lord Jesus said, “I know your tribulation”—v. 9:

Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

1. Tribulation is precious to the church because it tests the life of the church.

2. The Lord’s purpose in allowing the church to suffer tribulation is not only to testify that His resurrection life overcomes death but also to enable the church to enjoy the riches of His life—John 11:25; Rev. 1:18; Eph. 3:8.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;

Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Eph 3:8 To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel

II. In speaking to the church in Smyrna, the Lord said that He is “the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again”—Rev. 2:8:

Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:

- A. The fact that Christ is the First and the Last means that He never changes:

1. In suffering, the church must know that the Lord is the First and the Last, the ever-existing, unchanging One.
 2. Whatever the persecuting environment may be, the Lord remains the same; nothing can precede Him, nor can anything exist after Him; all things are within the limits of His control.
- B. The Lord's declaration in verse 8 implies the creation—the First—and the completion—the Last—and it also implies Christ's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection:
- Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
1. This is a declaration to strengthen the suffering church in Smyrna, which was experiencing and suffering martyrdom.
 2. The only thing that can support the saints in their martyrdom is seeing the One who created and will complete the entire universe and who was incarnated, lived on earth, was crucified, and resurrected; such a vision sustains the martyrs to stand in their sufferings—v. 10.
- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
3. All the local churches need to believe that the Lord Jesus is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End; He will accomplish what He has begun in His recovery—22:13.
- Rev 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
- C. As the One who became dead and lived again, Christ is the living One—2:8; 1:18:
- Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
- Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
1. The Lord Jesus suffered death and lived again; He entered into death, but death could not hold Him, because He is the resurrection—Acts 2:24; John 11:25.
- Acts 2:24 Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it.
- John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;
2. "I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever"—Rev. 1:18:
- Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
- a. Resurrection is a life that passes through death and still remains living.
 - b. Christ's resurrection is the lengthening of His days; He will exist forever and ever in His resurrection.
3. The resurrected Christ, the living One, is living in us and among us; therefore, all the churches should be living as He is, full of life and overcoming death—1 Tim. 3:15.
- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

4. The Lord's living forever is His testimony; the more living we are, the more we are the testimony of the living Jesus—Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10.

Rev 1:2 Who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all that he saw.

Rev 1:9 I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Rev 19:10 And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, Do not do this. I am your fellow slave and a fellow slave of your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy.

5. For us to be living, we must have not only life but the life supply; as the living One, Christ cares for the churches by giving us Himself not only as life but also as the life supply—John 4:10, 14; 6:48, 51; Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:20.

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.

John 4:14 But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life.

John 6:48 I am the bread of life.

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world.

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Rev 2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.

Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.

D. As the One who became dead and lived again, Christ has the keys of death and of Hades—1:18:

Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

1. The Lord Jesus overcame death and destroyed the devil, the keys of death and of Hades are now in His hand, and He is victorious over the grave—Heb. 2:14; Rev. 1:18.

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children have shared in blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil,

Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

2. In His resurrection the Lord Jesus took away the authority of death and of Hades; death is subject to Him, and Hades is under His control—v. 18.

Rev 1:18 And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

3. In the church life today, we are no longer subject to death and Hades, for Christ abolished death and overcame Hades in His resurrection—Heb. 2:14.

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children have shared in blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil,

4. Christ not only defeated death—He nullified it; 2 Timothy 1:10 reveals that Christ nullified death, making it of none effect, through His devil-destroying death and death-swallowing resurrection—Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:52-54.

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children have shared in blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil,

1 Cor 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.

1 Cor 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1 Cor 15:54 And when this corruptible will put on incorruption and this mortal will put on immortality, then the word which is written will come to pass, "Death has been swallowed up unto victory."

III. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”—Rev. 2:10:

Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

A. “Be faithful unto death”:

1. The Lord insists that the life of all those who serve Him belongs to Him; this is why we must be faithful even unto death.

2. Being faithful unto death is a matter both of attitude and of time:

- a. As to our attitude, we must be faithful even unto death—12:11.

Rev 12:11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death.

- b. As to time, we must be faithful until death.

B. “I will give you the crown of life”:

1. The crown of life, as a prize to those who are faithful unto death in overcoming persecution, denotes the overcoming strength that is the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10); it also denotes that these overcomers have attained to the out-resurrection from the dead (v. 11), the outstanding resurrection.

Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Phil 3:11 If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.

2. Not only the tree of life but the crown of life will be a reward to the suffering church—Rev. 2:7, 10:

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- a. The eating of the tree of life is inward for supply, and the crown of life is outward for glory.
- b. The promises concerning the tree of life and the crown of life are wrapped up with the divine life (John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 1 John 5:11-13); this life must be our food, and then it will be our expression and our glorification as the crown of life.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;

1 John 5:11 And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

1 John 5:13 I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God.