

Revelation: Smyrna and the Synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:8-11).

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (5/10/2015)

Introduction

“The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.”

1. Jesus introduced Himself with words that suited the situation of the church at Smyrna.

Jesus is the sovereign eternal God (first and last, Isa. 41:4) who rules over all, even those who suffer tribulation and poverty (v. 2), especially those who suffer for His sake (His name).

2. Smyrna had a Roman military headquarters, and the city eagerly promoted imperial cult worship. Thus, the church was called upon to suffer Roman persecution (v. 10).

This probably came about because of the “slander” (*blasphemia*) of the Jews—their reporting on the Christians to Roman authorities.

I. The Overcoming

1. The church was to demonstrate to the enemy the power of Jesus Christ and the strength of eternal life.

a. The necessary condition: overcoming

“He who has an ear [a regenerate person], let him hear [because he can] what the Spirit says to the churches, ‘To the one who conquers [proof of regeneration] . . .’ (2:7).

b. The promise to the overcomer: eternal life

“I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God [promise of eternal life]” (2:7).

c. The overcomer’s description

“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

This is the very issue that distinguishes the church at Smyrna from the synagogue of Satan.

2. Clearly, tribulation and suffering for saints is God’s means of confronting and defeating evil in the world.

a. Kingdom business requires the church at Smyrna to face a cruel attack from the devil.

b. That attack involves testing (comp. Dan. 1:12-15) for the purpose of ascertaining the quantity of the saints and strengthening them in the faith.

II. The Enemy

1. Jesus contrasts the true people of God (the church, 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10) with the false people of God (the synagogue of Satan).

2. He calls them the synagogue of Satan because Satan is the father of slander and blasphemy (to revile and bring accusations against Yahweh, 13:6).

3. What did Jesus mean by “those who say that they are Jews and are not”?

- a. The term Jews refers to descendants of the tribe of Judah. John often specified Jews as the leaders.
- b. The scribes and Pharisees understood the term to refer to the true and only people of God because they conformed to the oral tradition of the elders (see Mark 7:5-8).
 - 1) Modern Judaism is the perpetuation, not of the written Torah (teaching or doctrine)—the OT, but of the oral tradition of the elders (the *Talmud*). (See John 8:31-58, note especially John 5:43-47.)
 - 2) The *Talmud* teaches that the Jews are the highest emanation of God, and, thus, all others (goyim) are but animals to be used and abused (Acts 2:23).
 - 3) The rabbinic system arose during the Babylonian captivity because there was no temple. Scribes (lawyers) became the authorities on the morals and dogma of Jewish life (the traditions of the elders).
 - 4) That system competed with priests (Sadducees) in post-exile times but rose to prominence after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.
 - 5) Jesus severely condemned the rabbinic Jews of His day (Matt. 23:1-36), after which He lamented over Jerusalem's dire spiritual condition because of them.
 - 6) Modern Christians have been duped into supporting Zionism in Israel (the modern version of Talmudic rabbinic Judaism).

How can one call them God's people when Jesus clearly said that they are not God's people because they did not believe in Him (John 8:31, 37, 54ff)?

Reflections

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

1. How can a believer joyfully submit to such counsel?
 - a. How can a saint be faithful, knowing he could die?
 - b. It is only possible when Jesus means everything and is seen as worthy of any sacrifice.
2. Does not a “condition” suggest that one either prevails in order to be saved or if he fails he will not be saved—that it is up to the believer himself?
 - a. Salvation is a sovereign work of God based on His love, mercy, and grace, never on human merit.
 - 1) Only by the cross-work of Christ and not by works
 - 2) Initiated by the Spirit (cf. John 6:44, 65) applying the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, not willingness
 - b. Although there must be a response of faith and repentance, initially and continually, the ability to meet that response requires the work of God's Spirit.
 - c. God works with His people on a covenant basis, which involves both privileges and responsibilities.