Introduction: The church has often faced various types of persecution. In the first century it was physical abuse and even death. In our time it tends to be more overt but it is still there. Recent case of a “church” requiring its members to affirm the Bible teaching of marriage being between a man and a woman. The news media denounced such an action. While I question the need for such a document to be signed, I agree with the subject. How would we respond to various social issues when in conflict with modern woke-ism? Would we just be silent? Ignore the issues in our teaching or would we compromise?

**I) The Church at Smyrna**

**Revelation 2:8–11 (NKJV)**

**8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” ’**

**A) The city of Smyrna**

1. In 23 b.c. Smyrna was given the honor of building a temple to the Emperor Tiberius because of its years of faithfulness to Rome. They were the first given this right.

2. The city became a center for the cult of emperor worship which brought severe persecution for the early church under some of the emperors of Rome.

3. Polycarp was martyred in the stadium at Smyrna in 155 a.d.

a. “86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

b. Not an easy place to live as a “faithful Christian”

**B) Hope because of Jesus.**

**8 . . . "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:**

1. “I am the First and I am the Last, Besides Me there is no God” - a declaration of His uniqueness as deity in contrast with the many idol gods of pagans. - (Isa. 44:6)

2. Several times in Revelation Jesus identifies His own deity and oneness with the Father - (1:8,11,17; 2:8; 22:13, 16; cf Jn 1:1-3; 6:46; 8:58; 16:27-29).

3. “Who was dead, and came to life” - Jesus came into the world for the purpose of suffering death so He could defeat death - Heb. 2:9-15; 1 Cor. 15

4. His resurrection is the ultimate proof He is the Son of God - (“Alive forever more” - 1:18; Romans 1:4

**C) His message of hope to the Christians in Smyrna**

1. The Christians in Smyrna faced tribulation, even to the point of martyrdom, but knowing WHO Christ IS, and His resurrection, gave them faith and hope to face it.

2. The hope of the resurrection to eternal life should give us the strength to face the trials through which we must go.

**II) The Faithful will Suffer**

**Revelation 2:9 (NKJV)**

**9 . . . "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

**A) Tribulation and poverty**1. For faithful Christians to be “under extreme pressure” because of their faith was, (is), common and to be expected.

**Matthew 10:21 "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 23 "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. 24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! 26 "Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. 27 "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. 28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell**.

2. Persecution is an instrument used to pressure Christians to surrender their faith & loyalty to Christ.

3. Tribulation CAN destroy us, (Mat 13:20,21), but CAN also help us grow spiritually - (depends on our perspective & response) –

2 Corinthians 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you. 13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

4. “I know your . . . poverty (ptocheia)” - not one who is merely barely making it - but one who has “nothing” at all.

5. Unbelieving Jews oppressed Christians - persecuted because of their faith.

6. Income often associated with idolatry - Acts 19:19-27

**B) They were rich**

1. “(But you are rich)” - treasure in heaven / in faith & good works - Mt 6:19-21; 1 Ti 6:18; Jm 2:5),

2. “The real enemy, the devil, is behind our suffering …

a. accuses & slanders (12:9-10),

b. sifts us as wheat (Lk 22:31),

c. oppresses by physical suffering (Ac 10:38)

d. as a roaring lion seeks whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8)”

**III) Christ’s Exhortation**

**Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)**

**Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.**

**A) You are about to suffer**

1. Do not be afraid … More severe persecution was coming - (2:10)

2. Christ has not promised to remove us from all trouble but provides all we need to endure – Phil. 4:13

**B) All Trials Are Temporary -**

1. “must through MANY trials …” - Acts 14:22

2. Light affliction, but for a moment, 2 Cor.4:16ff

3. Now for a little while, . . . you have been grieved by various trials, 1 Peter 1:6

4. Life is but a vapor, Jam 4:14

**C) Be faithful unto death**

**Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)**

**Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

1. The remainder of your lives.

2. To the point of dying for the cause of Christ (Polycarp)

3. Not tempted above ability to bear - 1 Cor.10:13

4. Crown of life —“promised imperishable reward of glory” –

Conclusion: More to come next week. We can not control how the world responds to the Gospel of Christ but we control how we respond to the world.