***Real Wealth and the Sufficiency of Grace

RV09-02***

We are in Revelation 2:8-11, reading the letter to Smyrna. This is the second church to which the Lord Jesus Christ is giving an evaluation of its ministry. This church resides in Asia Minor in the city of Smyrna. Smyrna, you will remember, was a major commercial center in New Testament times, located on the Aegean Sea at the base of an excellent harbor. This city was second in its commercial enterprises only to the city of Ephesus. This city was nestled around a small mountain, Mount Pagus, and on top of this mountain were several public buildings surrounded by a defensive wall. Mount Pagus, therefore, had the appearance of wearing a crown, and thus the ancient expression, The Crown of Smyrna.

The citizens were very proud indeed of the beauty of this city. They called it the ornament of Asia, and the First of Asia in beauty and size. The city had strong loyalties to the Roman government, and it was, in return, greatly honored by the Roman emperors. Smyrna was looked upon as one of the great allies of the Empire. In honor of their relationships to Rome, they were given the privilege of building the temple to the Emperor Tiberius within the city of Smyrna.

**The First and the Last**

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to this church in Smyrna, and introduced Himself under the title of "the first and the last" – this expression to stress His eternity, and thus to stress His deity. This was fitting in a city which was given over to the worship of gods and goddesses, and to the worship of the emperors. The Christians who were in that city were suffering because of their refusal to participate in that worship. They did not consider these gods real, which they were not, nor the emperors as being divine, which they were not. Consequently, part of their suffering was due to this refusal to participate in what was considered a public duty and a patriotic expression.

So the Lord Jesus first approaches these people by reminding them that they're right. These gods and goddesses, and the emperors, are not divine. They are nothing. But He, for whom they are willing to suffer – He indeed is the real and the eternal God.

**The One Who has Died and is Now Forever Alive**

Jesus also refers to Himself as, "The one who has died and is now forever alive." This again was a fitting description to Christians in a city that was threatening their very lives, and some of them did face physical death because of the persecutions which were directed toward them. And the point was, as Jesus Himself triumphed forever over death, so too all those who are His we will triumph. So as they faced death, it was good to know that they were related to the person who had once said the words which were recorded in John 14:19: "Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more. But you see Me, and because I live, you shall live also." That was the point of presenting Himself as the one who had died; who had risen again; and, who was alive forever. If they faced death, because they were in Him, because He lived, they too would live. You want to remember that. It's easy to say that when nobody is threatening you. But sometimes sooner or later, the chips are going to be down, and the situation will arise when you're ticking off the last minutes of your life. Remember where it is you're going.

This may also have been a purposeful selection on the part of the Lord, because, as we're going to find, there is a lot of kind of symbolism here between the experience of this city and what the Lord is saying to these people. Remember that we found that Smyrna was a very old city; something like 1,000 to 1,200 years. Then for a while, for a period of 400 years, it was out of existence. It was just wiped out. Then, in the time of Alexander the Great, it was again restored. So it was almost kind of symbolic of the city. They were a part of this: that our city was once dead, and now our city is alive again. So the Lord is playing on all these ideas that were in people's minds. He's telling the Christians that while the pagans were very proud of Smyrna and that their city was once dead and now it's alive and that's pleases them, "I want to tell you that I was once dead, and I'm alive forever. And because that happened to Me, it's going to happen to you." That's a lot more important than this city coming back into existence.

The Lord Jesus was thus well aware of the sufferings of the Smyrnian Christians, and of the suffering which was near at hand for them, at the hands of the citizens, as well as of the government. These Christians were really good citizens, but they were under relentless pressure. The Greek indicates to us that their souls were under great, relentless pressure because they separated themselves from the evils of society. Therefore, the society was not kindly disposed toward these believers. The word "Smyrna," I remind you, means "myrrh," which was a perfume used in embalming. Therefore, the very name of this city spoke of death and of suffering.

**Persecution**

These people, we were told, suffered abject poverty. This was due probably in large part to the treatment of the unbelievers and the civil authorities. It was possible for a person in those days to bring accusation against something that was illegal religiously against a person, as was true of the Christians, and then to have that person's property confiscated. And because you turned him in, you benefited by his possessions. So the Christians were constantly under the threat of confiscations of one kind or another here in Smyrna because they were believers.

This is a significant letter because, while the shadow of death was over them, as the name of the city (myrrh) indicates, yet at the same time, you want to remember that myrrh was also a pleasant, fragrant perfume. In the eyes of God (in the nostrils of God), these same people which were a stench to their contemporaries, were beautiful people to God. So the concept of myrrh works both ways: both as death; and, as an attractive quality before God.

This is a significant letter for Christians in time of suffering in any dispensation; in any age; or, in any era. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ and because we champion Bible doctrine principles, we invite the resentments and the attacks and thus the suffering of the society around us. Believers through the centuries have experienced the suffering and the pressures of a human viewpoint society who functions on evolutionary humanism. The kingdom of man sees the super grace type of believer as a great threat to his own ambitions; to his own viewpoints; and, to his own concepts. Things were very hard in Smyrna for God's people, and the Lord has no rebuke for this particular church. He has only tender comfort for them.

So we read in verse 8, "'And unto the angel (that is, the pastor-teacher) of the church in Smyrna, write these things,' says the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive. I know your tribulation (the pressures) and poverty, but." The Greek word for "but" is "alla." This is a conjunction introducing a contrast of God's evaluation of their true condition. When they look upon themselves, they found that their lives were under threat. They found that their employment was restricted, and that their business was restricted. They found a great deal of suffering that consequently made them poor. You remember that the word for "poor" there is "dirt poor" – abject poverty. But, here's a word that says, "Now, God is going to give you His viewpoint on your status."

It says, "You are." This is the verb "eimi." This is a verb expressing the present true status of the Smyrna Christians. It is present tense. This is constantly their case. It's is active. This is truly the condition – the status of this church. It's indicative – a statement of fact. It is in the second person singular (not plural). So He's not talking to a bunch of individuals. Second person singular means that He is talking to the church as a whole. That's very interesting. It's very hard to talk about a church (a congregation as a whole). It's very hard to evaluate and to describe a congregation as a whole. You have a lot of different attitudes; different opinions; and, different viewpoints. But here, for some reason, obviously, there was a unity; there was a camaraderie; and, there was a quality that was generally true of the believers of this congregation.

**Spiritual Wealth**

So as a whole, the Holy Spirit described something that's true of them as a whole. He says that, "You are "plousios." The word "plousios" means "wealthy." Of course, you can see that's where we get our English word "plutocrat," which means "a wealthy person." Obviously, these people lacked material wealth. That has been made clear. Yet, they were the truly rich. God is actually calling them His plutocrats. They were the plutocrats of God. You know, it's very hard to be rich, and to have spiritual treasures at the same time. That's very hard. But this congregation had spiritual treasures. They didn't have anything material, but they had great spiritual wealth.

Down the road, when we get to that seventh letter around that circle of churches, we're going to come to one called Laodicea. They were just the reverse. They had money galore in that church. Everybody was loaded in that Laodicean congregation. They were just well off. Good times were the only kind of times they ever knew in Laodicea. Yet, God has a terrible, terrible condemnation of that church. To that church, the Lord said just the opposite: "You are poor. You think you're rich, but you're naked, man. That's how poor you are. You don't have anything. As a matter of fact, your smug attitude toward yourself in Laodicea makes me vomit." That's strong language for deity to be using.

This church was just the very opposite. They were poor in material things, but very rich in spiritual things, including treasures in heaven. Laodicea was very rich in material things, but very, very poor in spiritual things. That's a principle that's we cannot emphasize enough. Yet, it's one that keeps reoccurring in Scripture. The Bible keeps trying to make it clear to us that people who have money are people who will have a very, very hard time storing treasures in heaven. For example, Mark 10:21 says, "Then Jesus, beholding him (the rich young ruler), loved him and said unto him, 'There is one thing you lack. Go your way and sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come; take up the cross; and, follow Me.'"

That's a good proposition. The Lord said, "Do you want to be number one with Me? You're a rich man. Here's what I want you to do. As your Lord and as your Savior, I want you to liquidate your holdings; I want you to deliver to the poor as I direct (selective people who need it); then you will have stored fantastic treasures in heaven; and, then I want you to come and find Me as My disciple." That's a great proposition.

Verse 22: "The rich young ruler was sad at that saying, and went away grieved." Why? "For he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about and said unto His disciples, 'With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?'" The answer is with monumental difficulty. A rich person is, in the nature of the case, in a very difficult position relative to being able to store treasures in heaven. The result is that many poor people in material things, such as the Smyrna Christians, will enter heaven with much more eternal rewards waiting for them than do people who are wealthy on earth.

Mark 4:19: "And the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entered in and choked the..." What? "The Word, and it became unfruitful." Here are people who probably were believers in this case, and who had the Word of God. But I'll be: what happens to them? Because they're rich, the Word of God is choked out of their lives. When the Word is choked out of your life, what happens? You become unfruitful. And if you're unfruitful, I guarantee you that there are no treasures which are moving toward heaven.

You better not dismiss this very easily because most of us who live in the United States, in the nature of the case, have a lot of material things. Never forget that by the standards of most other nations of the world, we're all rich. Most of us here are not rich by our own American standards, but by every standard everywhere else in the world, we are indeed very rich. And the fact of the matter is that the good things of life (the high standard of living that we have) cause the average American to face this problem of being able to store treasures in heaven. His high standard of living gives him access to so many activities and so many opportunities to go places and to do things, that it squelches out the time he needs to be able to exercise his spiritual gift.

**Christian Service Means not Doing Something Else**

Never forget that Christian service means not doing something else. If you look around you and see who are the people who are really in there putting in their time in Christian service, it is the people who are not doing something else. It is the people who simply are doing that. They could be doing other things, but they're doing that. And the people who are not storing treasures in heaven are doing their own thing. They are not taking their time to be investing in the things of eternity. The reason they're not is because they have so much money to preoccupy them with other things.

**It is Difficult for a Rich Person to Store Treasures in Heaven**

So there are rich people by various standards, and we fall into that category. And the Word of God says it is difficult for a rich person to store treasures in heaven, when he ought to be the one that most readily could do it. You can add 1 Timothy 6:17 to that, where Paul says, "Charge them that are rich in this age, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share; and, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Paul says, "There is one thing I have to stress to you as a minister, and that you have to keep telling people who have wealth: be careful; that wealth is going to keep you from storing treasures in heaven if you handle it in the wrong way." Remember the rich young ruler. He was a disaster simply because of the money that God has blessed him with, where, indeed, he could have been at the front of the line in storing treasures in heaven in a way that many people who did not have that wealth could not have done.

Lest you misunderstand me, I'm not telling you that it is bad to be rich. I'm not telling you that God is not pleased with people who are rich. What God is not pleased with is rich people who do not use their wealth to store treasures in heaven. It is hard for a rich person to do that. That's all I'm saying. You go from there.

Up the road, in Laodicea, it was just the opposite. Revelation 3:17: "Because you say, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,' and you don't know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." That's really some evaluation. That's some condemnation. They thought they were just right. God says, "You're terrible. You're absolutely a nothing."

So the very persecution, because they were confessing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in Smyrna, was making these people very, very rich eternally. Matthew 5:11 says, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for My sake." Why are you blessed? Because that persecution causes you to get your values straight, and enables you to put your treasures in eternal matters.

James 2:5 also uses this combination of poverty and riches (these two words): "Hearken my beloved brethren. Hasn't God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him?" It is the poor in this world who are rich in faith; and, to be rich in faith means to be storing treasures in heaven.

Well, it's obvious that the congregation in Smyrna was a super grace type of congregation. The normal status in that church was to have a well-developed spiritual maturity structure in the individual believer. It was not the exception as it usually is in most churches. That was the norm. Their stability under spiritual combat was well-demonstrated. They kept witnessing, obviously, even though they were hurt in the process. It indicates another thing about this congregation. They obviously had a pastor-teacher who was doing his job of feeding Bible doctrine to the sheep. Otherwise, they would never have had this kind of spiritual stability. They would never have been able to come into this kind of persecution, and been able to stand up under it and keep going.

Anybody can take persecution, and turn tail and run. But that's not what these people were doing. They were facing up to their opponents. Some of the greatest writings that we have in Christian history came from the era of Christian persecution in these first two-and-a-half centuries when they were standing up and answering the opponents of Christianity. Some of those answers were just fantastically brilliant. It was an era which was rich in Christian literature, because the Christians were not going underground. They were standing up, and they were facing the opponents. The result, as you know, was that, eventually Christianity took over the whole Roman Empire.

**The Sufficiency of Grace**

So these people obviously are an exceptional type. They have a fantastic level of positive volition toward the instruction of the Word of God, and they have the instruction that they need. What they had was the sufficiency that grace brings to us. When we are suffering, sufficiency of grace is what carries us through. In our advanced Bible study in Philippians, we have studied Paul's great personal sufferings. Then remember how he summed it all up: "The grace of God is sufficient for me." That's what God's told Him: "My grace is sufficient for you." Therefore, Paul could say, "I am what I am by the grace of God."

**Real Wealth**

So these people had the sufficiency of grace. What does that do for you? Well, for one thing, if you have a sufficiency of grace, you're rich in eternal things. That's what was true of these people. Notice Luke 12:21: "So is he that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Now, that's the point. If the grace of God is not functioning in your life, you will be laying up treasures for yourself on this earth, but will not be rich toward God. So it's more than eternal life that you have here. This is real wealth. What is real wealth?

Real wealth is not what you leave behind. That's what most people think is real wealth. Real wealth for the Christian is what you go to in heaven. That's what counts. It doesn't matter what you leave behind. It's what you're going to in the future. So in Matthew 6:19-21, the Lord says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." That's not where the real wealth is. "Where moth and rust corrupts, and where thieves break through and steal." Have you ever had to deal with any thieves with your wrath – Christian and otherwise? "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupts, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Luke 12:15: "And He said unto them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." So if you have the grace of God (the sufficiency of God's grace functioning), which you do as a mature believer, then you will find you're rich in eternal things. You will not make the mistake of thinking that because you have a substantial bank account here that you are indeed rich with God. You'll know the difference.

So being rich in divine good deeds is what He's talking about – using your spiritual gifts in the Lord's service. Consequently, for these people, because they had the sufficiency of grace in Smyrna, no persecution was too great for them to face. Grace did not abandon them. When the chips were down, I imagine that these people surprised themselves many times with the courage with which they faced their oppressors.

One of the things about this kind of sufficiency of grace, which mature Christians have, is that you can only appreciate it in this life. You won't appreciate it in heaven. You won't need sufficiency of grace in heaven, because Revelation 21:4 says that all of the reasons that we need sufficiency of grace will be removed: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." So the great thing about the sufficiency of grace is that now is when you need it. Therefore, it is a foolish person who does not prepare his soul to have this kind of sufficiency of grace functioning within him when the time of persecution and adversity has to be faced by him.

I'll tell you something else: you may someday open up your newspaper and say, "Hey, they dropped an atom bomb on New York. We're in it." Then you're not going to be able to come running into the tape room and say, "Man, I've got to have some tapes. I've got to develop some sufficiency because we're in trouble, and things are going to roll across this nation, and we're going to get it. I've got to get ready to face some suffering." You're not going to get ready. It takes time to develop God's sufficiency of grace where it can work in your life. So get ready for that kind of sufficiency. When you do get to it, you do have the hazard of reversionism. That is the hazard of falling away from that sufficiency, and falling back into the old ways.

So the same grace that sustains us in prosperity needs to sustain us in what maintains that spiritual prosperity. This is the thing that was great about the Smyrna Christians. They possessed the sufficiency of grace because they were this kind of a super grace type of congregation. One of the things that they were suffering under was the blasphemy which was being directed toward them.

Verse 9 says, "I know your tribulation and poverty, but you are rich (spiritually, and in heavenly rewards). And I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." The word "and" is our Greek word "kai" which indicates here an addition. We may translate it as "also." The word "know" is not in the Greek, but it is understood to smooth out the translation. What they have directed against them is called "blasphemia." "Blasphemia" means "slanderous speech." It has the definite article in front of it: "*the* specific slander." It's a specific attack which is being brought upon the Smyrna Christians. This was being brought by the community of Jews which lived in Smyrna, of which there was a very large number. These Jews were particularly enthusiastic for Judaism. They were particularly devoted to their Jewish background. So they had a great antagonism toward anything that had to do with Jesus of Nazareth.

Out of the old sin nature of these Jews in Smyrna there came this blasphemy against the Christian community. In Mark 7:22, we read an expression of what comes out of the old sin nature which characterized these Jews: "Thefts; covetousness; wickedness; deceit; lasciviousness; an evil eye; blasphemy; pride; and, foolishness." There was nothing nice about what these Jewish people were, and what they were doing to the Christians. When Paul was going around preaching, Acts 13:45 tells us what they did with him. We read: "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy (and because of what was in the old sin nature), they spoke against those things (that is, against these Christian things that they saw functioning), which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." "Blaspheming" is a very strong word. They slandered Paul, and they probably were not above cursing him (using swear words against him), and using swear words to describe their attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ. This was really a tough kind of opposition. The Jews thus were doing what they had always done against Christianity from the very first.

**Persecution from the Jews**

So: "I know the blasphemy of." "Of" is the Greek word "ek," and here it means "proceeding from:" "The blasphemy proceeding from them who say." "Say" is the Greek word "lego." The Jews were doing a lot of talking. The idea here is they were claiming something. The word "lego" indicates a claim that these Jews were making. "From the source of those who claim." This is present tense. It was constantly being claimed by these Jews. It is active. It was their personal attitude. It's a participle here. It's a principle stated.

They were stressing that they were claiming this about themselves. In the Greek, you have the word "heautou" which means "themselves." It's a word that points back very emphatically to the Jews: "I know the blasphemy of them who say about themselves" is the idea. They say something – that they are something. Again, that word "eimi" is present tense. It's constantly something they claim about themselves. It's active. The Jews in Smyrna were claiming this. What they claim is that they held a very honored position called "ioudaios." "Ioudaios" is actually an adjective meaning "Jewish." It's used here as a noun in the plural, meaning "Jews."

So the Jews in Smyrna were calling the attention of the Roman authorities to the fact that they were Jews; consequently, that they were a leading religious element who understood the God that the Christians were talking about; and, that these Christians in Smyrna were really frauds. When they said, "We are Jews," what they were saying was, "We are the people of God. When we gather, we are the true assembly of God." And that's what they were calling themselves: the true assembly of God.

Remember that the Christians gathered together, and they called themselves the "ekklesia," and that means "assembly." The Christians were gathering in what they called their assemblies. The Jews said, "You're not the gathering of God. We are the gathering of God." But they used a different word for themselves. When they talked about being the assembly of God, they used the word "sunagoge," from which we get our English word "synagogue." So these people were saying, "We are the true assembly of God." What does God have to say about that? God looks down at this and He says, "I know the slander that you're suffering under from those who say they are Jews and are not." The word "not" is this strong negative "ou." Jesus Christ says that these people who were claiming to be Jews, and so entitled to a special relationship to God under the Abrahamic covenant promise, are absolutely not Jews at all. The Jews were attacking the Christians in Smyrna as being the true people of God.

Well, as you know, the Bible makes it very clear that there are racial Jews, then there are true, genuine, real Jews. That's the difference here. Notice Romans 9:6-8: "Not as though the Word of God had taken no effect, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children; but in Isaac shall Your seed be called. That is, they who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted as seed." We have learned in our study of Romans that the children of the promise are those who are born again.

So the point He is making here is that just because you're a racial Jew does not give you the claim to say, "I am the people of God." So what about all the people in Israel today? They're very definitely claiming to be the people of God. But they're not. They're not the true Jews. There are no true Jews, except those who are born again. Then they're not Jews anymore. They're Christians. They've joined a totally new group in this dispensation of grace. So the real Jew had to be a person who was of the spiritual seed of Abraham, as well as of the physical seed of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-7 give us another expression of this: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know, therefore, that they who are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham." Those are the real Jews. In John 8:37-39, the Lord angered a crowd that He was talking to because He pointed this out to them – that just because they're racial Jews doesn't mean they're Jews in God's eyes: "'I know that you are Abraham's seed, but you seek to kill Me because My Word has no place in you. I speak that which I've seen with My Father. You do that which you have seen with your father.' They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.'" Then He goes on and points out to them that their father is not Abraham, but of all things, He says, "Your father is the devil." Verse 44: "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father, you will do."

Well, you can see why they rose up and tried to kill Him. Here they are so proud of the fact that they are the true Jews, descendants of Abraham, and He turns around and says, "You're not even Jewish. You're just not even Jewish, because Abraham has to be your father." They said, "Well, Abraham *is* our father." He said, "No, Satan is your father." What the Lord meant was, "Because you're not born again, and because you're not spiritual seed of Abraham, you're not a true Jew." So there are no true Jews in Palestine in the land of Israel today. Though they consider themselves the people of God, they are now cast off people of God.

Then probably one of the best verses establishing this point is found in Romans 2:28-29: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly. Neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly. And circumcision is that of the heart – in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

As these verses all indicate, the smug Jews in Smyrna, claiming to be the true representatives of God, were in fact blasphemers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They were not the true representatives of God. The people who, in fact, were the true representatives of God were the very ones they were persecuting – the Christians.

Then the text says, "But." This is the Greek word "alla." Again, I want to remind you that that's the conjunction which is of contrast which is a strong one. He says, "But you (what you really are) are a synagogue (a "sunagoge") of Satan." The synagogue was a religious organization. This would be the same thing as saying to a church today, "You're Satan's church." A synagogue was the place that people gathered on the Sabbath day to hear the Mosaic Law read and explained. The synagogue in Smyrna was in full operation. It was the focal point, as a matter of fact, for the organization of the persecution against the Christians. The Jews in Smyrna were bitterly antagonistic to the Christians. The Jews were joining the pagans in the attacks.

The Lord says, "They have been claiming to be the true assembly of God, calling themselves the Jews, and you're suffering at their hands. But I know what they really are, and what they really are are the synagogue of "satanas." This is an Aramaic word. It comes from Hebrew. Remember that this is the word for Satan that means "adversary." He is the opponent. This is the angelic personality who is leading the angelic warfare against God; against his people; and, against mankind. He is the source of religion. That's what was flourishing in the Roman temples, and that's what was flourishing in the Jewish synagogues. Satan was the father of these Jews, and they rejected Jesus Christ. Therefore, they were not the true Jews. They were not the synagogues of God as they were claiming, but they were the synagogue of Satan. Satan was the father of the Jews who rejected Jesus Christ – not God.

This is what the Lord pointed out to the Jews on one occasion, as we have recorded in John 8:40-45, Jesus said, "'But now you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This Abraham did not do. You do the deeds of your father.' Then they said to Him, 'We are not born of fornication. We had one father, even God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither did I come out of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Even because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father, you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and did not abide in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, you did not believe Me.'"

So the Jews very clearly demonstrated that indeed they were following the leadings of Satan rather than of God, because of their attitude toward the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was a comfort to the Christians in Smyrna who also were being rejected for the same reason. They were following the true God rather than the false god Satan.

So the Jews in Smyrna were really the assembly of Satan, and they were guilty themselves of blasphemy by claiming to be directed by God in the persecution of the Christians. God was not directing them to persecute His people. It was Satan who was seeking to attack the believers because, thereby, he would be able to attack the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as he attacked the body of Christ – the believers who are here on this earth. Christians are under Satan's attack because he cannot strike at Jesus Christ in heaven. So he hits His body, which is here on earth in the form of the church.

So here to these people, the Lord is saying, I know that they're giving you a hard time. I know that they're parading as being My representatives on this earth. But I want to tell you that what they are are the representatives of Satan. That's very comforting. If a small group of believers (as has happened through the centuries) are true to the Word of God, and the mass of Christendom around them opposes the Word of God (the huge systems – the wealthy churches where all the action is opposes the Word of God), it is kind of comforting to the people who are small and true for God to come and say, "That church (of Christendom) is the church of Satan. I know what's going on. I don't want you to be buffaloed and snowed and awed because they're big and they're impressive, because they do not represent Me." That, to these people under persecution where their lives were threatened, was a great comfort. It was a great help to know that they were really on the beam.

**The Angelic Warfare**

So the Christians in Smyrna are suffering. Why? Well, because "satanas" wants to hit only one person. That's the Lord Jesus Christ. But where is he? He's in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. He can no longer strike Him. The only way he can hit Christ is to hit the body of Christ. That's why he's after you. I think it is significant that here the Lord is bringing in this particular fact. He reminds these people who are the suffering church that they're in what? That they're in the angelic warfare. Now, that's the problem that we Christians have – to remember that the angelic conflict is whirling about us all day long.

So the Christians in Smyrna were suffering under Satan. They were suffering from an agency (an organization) that was really sponsored by Satan. But the great thing that the Lord wanted them to remember was the thing that Paul said in Romans 16:20: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." This was a comfort to the believers – knowing that Satan had already been defeated. So while the synagogue in Smyrna was giving them a lot of trouble and a lot of pressure, God says, "It's part of the angelic conflict. It's Satan who is doing this."

So today, Satan has his churches. He has many assemblies who sell us on the idea that they are indeed the people of God, but they are dispensing false doctrine. God is looking down upon these organizations (sometimes whole denominations) and saying, "You're not the church of God. You're the church of Satan. You're not My people. You don't represent Me. You represent Satan. You represent My adversary."

There are two main teachings that came from these Jewish unbelievers. One was the false teaching about the deity of Jesus Christ. Secondly, there was the false teaching that you could mix law and grace in your approach to God. Almost all the false doctrines that Satan promotes today come from these two false ideas: about the deity of Christ; and, that you can mix law and grace. That's what comes out of churches all around us. So whose churches are they if they are teaching that? If they are denying that Jesus Christ is indeed the God-man (100% deity), you know whose church they are. If they are telling us that you can get to heaven by trusting in Christ as Savior (so you're orthodox about the person of Christ as the God-man, and His death upon the cross), but then you must have water baptism; you must have the Lord's Supper; or, you must perform circumcision, you know whose church it is. It's not God's church. The minute they have interjected that, they have branded themselves as the church of Satan.

So California isn't the only place that has the church of Satan. We hear a lot about the satanic churches in California, but it's all around us in this city. Everybody who is doing exactly what this synagogue in Smyrna did is in the same category as being the devil's organization.

So the more a local church is functioning (as the Smyrna church was) on the will of Jesus Christ and the purpose of Christ in their lives, the greater will be the hindrances and the attacks on that congregation. Consequently, suffering is going to come into it. There was a variety of suffering in Smyrna. Some of it was physical. Lucifer has another name. He has the name of devil. And under the name of devil, he can do something to the body of a believer that is very, very awesome. In Smyrna, this is part of what the devil was doing that was causing their suffering. We'll look into that next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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