***Be Faithful unto Death

RV10-02***

We are studying the letter to Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11. The letter to the local church in the city of Smyrna represents a suffering situation. This letter is, of course, very instructive to Christians in many parts of the world today who find themselves in countries which are dominated by a government which directs persecution toward believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have believers in this church who indeed were attacked by pagan Romans and by unregenerate Jews. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks comfort to them. He does this in the role of the eternal God. He presents Himself as the one who is the first and the last, thus designating His eternity. So right off the bat, He tells these people, "I've been around a long time. I know what's going on. I know the past. I know the present. I know the future as only God can know it, because to me it's all present." In that role, the Lord, as the eternal God is immediately a source of comfort to them. He knows their situation because of the fact He is God.

Furthermore, He calls attention to the fact that He is the one who has been dead, but who is now alive. This is going to be very important because, in time, some of these very Christians in Smyrna were going to die. The persecution was beginning to wind up into an intense furor. At this particular spot in the New Testament world, all hell was going to break loose upon them, because they were hated on the one side by the pagan Romans, and they were intensely hated by the Jewish community which considered itself the real representatives of God, but which the Lord Jesus says, "They are only a synagogue of Satan. They're, not My synagogue."

We pointed out that these people suffered economic poverty. But the Lord says, "Nevertheless, you're rich in rewards which are stored in heaven." Though these people did not have much in their regular day-by-day life, perhaps because of the persecutions which were directed toward them, the Lord said, "Nevertheless, I want you to know that when you get to heaven, I'm up here. I see what's up here. I see what's in your records. I know what you're going to face, and what's awaiting you when you get up here. And I'm telling you, it's going to be great." So whatever we may say about some of the other believers in the New Testament world, this particular group was in for a delightful time when they entered heaven.

The Lord Jesus encourages these suffering Christians to stop being afraid of what their persecutors might do to them. Some of them were afraid. They were getting a little edgy, as the Greek indicates, concerning what might be done to them. But the Lord's point is, "I'm going to carry you through." This was the way, again, that the Lord is calling upon the believers just to faith rest it with Him: "Leave it with Me. Lean on Me. Trust Me to carry you through."

The devil is presented here as the slanderer. So he's called by the name that indicates slander: "devil." He'll cause some of these believers to be in prison. He seeks to lead these imprisoned believers into evil in their trials. That's the point of the trial. That word indicates that the particular kind of trial is a trial to get these people to do evil.

The Lord predicts that they're in for a special ten-day period of persecution. We don't know anything more about that. We may only add to that that the word "ten" in the Bible indicates completion. So ten days may suggest that it's going to be a full treatment of persecution that was going to break upon them.

There is no rebuke given to this church, as you will find was given to some of these other churches in these other letters. In this situation, their suffering was all that was needed to clean out all the summertime soldier Christians. Their suffering was enough to cause them to keep their priorities straight; to keep their eyes on the Lord; and, to turn to the comfort of the Word of God. That's one great value of people who are having hard times and people who are under suffering. When the church is under persecution, it blossoms powerfully, as the pagan Romans discovered. That was their great mistake – to persecute the Christians. The result was that the Christians eventually took over the whole Roman Empire. But it not only causes the church to grow, but it causes the church to grow in purity.

So suffering had evidently done its cleansing work here in Smyrna, and there was no need for the law to rebuke them on any account. They were driven close to the Lord, and they were pure, consequently, in their conduct. The period of trial just simply skims off the expressions of carnality in the life of the believer.

This was the first exhortation given by the Lord of a series of two that we have. Verse 10: "Fear none of those things which you shall suffer." So first is the encouragement and the extrication, "Don't be afraid of your persecutors." That's going to be a fearful thing. It is frightening what they'll do to you, and you're going to have physical pain in the process. But do not be afraid of what they may do to you. Stand stable, and stand relaxed.

**Be Faithful unto Death**

Then the latter part of verse 10, where we begin now, says, "Be faithful unto death, and I'll give you a crown of life." The word "be" is the Greek word "ginomai." "Ginomai" actually means "to become." This is the word that indicates that they are to grow in a certain status. It is present tense, which means that this should be their constant characteristic. The Lord wants us to be true of this all the time. It is active in its expression. Christians are to respond themselves in this way. And it is a command. It's imperative. It's a divine command which is presented to the believers. Again, remember that what we have here for these believers is also a guideline to us.

So here you have a command for a situation of suffering that you may find yourself in simply because you're a believer. First, the command was, "Don't be afraid of what the persecutors will do to you." Secondly, it says, "Become faithful." The word "faithful" is the Greek word "pistos." This is actually what we call a verbal adjective. It is passive in meaning here, so it means "to be trusted," or "to be reliable." Become a trusted Christian. The Lord said, "I want you to be the kind of a believer that I can trust." Jesus Christ cannot trust all of the sheep in His family. Some of them, He knows, are very untrustworthy. Some of them are very unreliable people. But He says to these people, "I want you to be uncompromising in your loyalty to Me, and in your profession of faith. You stand for the truth; you stand for doctrine; and, you stand up in the face of your persecutors. I want you to be faithful and uncompromising."

They will demonstrate their loyalty to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God in the midst of Satan's attempt to lead them into evil, if they maintain this kind of reliability. This has to do with the Christian's personal testimony. It is easy for us to testify to what God has done for us within a group of other believers. It is something else to testify in the presence of unbelievers. That's what the Lord is saying: "Christians in Smyrna, you are a great bunch. You're in for some rough times. But I don't want you to, because of that persecution, start compromising with the enemy. I want you to stand in the angelic conflict. When the battle gets hot around you, as it's going to be, I want you to stand as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. I want you to be 'pistos' – reliable."

How far? Just how reliable does Jesus Christ expect us to be when we're under pressure. He says, "Unto." This is the Greek word "achri." "Achri" is a word that indicates the degree, the measure, or the extent. Here it explains just how far a Christian should be faithful in his testimony in the face of persecution. He tells us that we are to go to the point of "thanatos" (death). This refers to physical death – the separation of the soul and spirit of the believer from his body. The Christians in Smyrna were facing a dreaded discrimination against them because they were Christians. They were facing torture. They were facing "thanatos." Jesus Christ exhorts these believers to be uncompromising to the extent that their stand for the Lord Jesus Christ may cost them their very lives.

How far should I be reliable in the face of persecution? To the point of martyrdom. That's how far. That's as far as Stephen, the first Christian martyr, went. He stood up before the leaders of Israel, and he spoke the Word of God to them uncompromisingly. When he was through, they knew exactly where they stood with God. They knew exactly where they were going, but they did not believe him. They responded by taking his life. Stephen exemplified the very thing that Jesus says to these Christians in Smyrna: "I want you to follow the pattern of Stephen. Go to the point of death. I don't want any wishy-washy, compromising, yellow-streaked believers representing Me. I want upright, staunch men and women, who, when necessary, will die for me.

This is the reason that the Lord introduced Himself to this church as the one who had become dead, but who today is alive from the grave. None of the religious leaders of the world can say this. All of the Buddhas and the Muhammads and all the rest of them, once they died, they remained dead, and they're still dead. And furthermore, the worst part of their experience is that they're going to experience the eternal death in the lake of fire.

So the Lord Jesus, because He has gone through the experience of suffering unto the point of death, knows what He's asking them to do. He knows also the victorious consequences of standing firm. Because Christ lives, those who died for His sake will live again also. For a Christian, therefore, what does being faithful unto death mean? Well, it simply means a transfer of residence to heaven where all of his treasures are awaiting him in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to die for your testimony as a believer is not a terrible thing. It may be a painful thing momentarily, but it is the thing that is the ultimate testimony that sticks in the craw of the unbeliever and the persecutor like a broken chicken bone. He cannot understand those who will give their very lives for the testimony of Jesus Christ. That makes the Lord real as nothing else can. That's the point of this passage. For the Christian, all that will happen is that you go to the rewards that you have treasured up in heaven.

**Paul**

We have a great example of this, of course, in the apostle Paul, who eventually faced this very question when Nero brought him back in for that second Roman imprisonment, and he had to face Nero a second time, and was condemned to be beheaded. He sat down and wrote this letter to his young associate, Timothy – the final letters of his life. 2 Timothy 4:6-8: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. (That is, his physical death.) I fought a good fight. I finished my course. I kept the faith." He has been "pistos." That's what he is saying. He has hung on there. He has stayed firm as a reliable Christian. He has not compromised, even when he had to stand eyeball-to-eyeball with Nero. He did not accept the little thing that Nero wanted.

All Nero wanted was: "Paul, I want you to offer a sacrifice to the emperor, and thus recognize that the spirit of the emperor is the god of the empire. I just want you to address me as 'Lord Caesar.' That's all, Paul. They're only words. What are words? They don't mean anything." Paul says, "They mean everything in the world. If I call you 'Lord Caesar,' I'm suggesting that you're a god, and I'll not have it. So the apostle Paul took his stand. And the result was, he says, "I fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. I've stood by the truth. I've been reliable."

The world likes to take the same thing. You've heard the expression, "Keep the faith, baby." These babies don't have any faith to keep. That's the problem. But Paul had a real faith to keep, and he stood for it. But what was the result? Verse 8: "Henceforth, there was laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing."

We have studied the topic of crowns, and you know that this is not eternal life. This is not rewards as such. This is a Medal of Honor. This is a recognition of honor. This is a crown of recognition for some specific thing. There are various crowns. Paul says, "I'm ready to go. I've got a crown of righteousness (one of the greatest ones) awaiting me. I'm eager to get up there." Paul could say, "I have fought a good fight." What did he mean? He meant that he was "pistos." He meant, "I have been a reliable Christian. I have not compromised. I have stood before nobodies and emperors, and my testimony has been reliable. I haven't cut the corners so that any of the people that I ministered to could ever come up to me and say, 'I'm short-changed here in rewards in heaven because of what you did, because you didn't alert me to the fact that that's what I'm facing. You didn't alert me to the fact of how this would affect my eternity.'"

Paul could say to the Ephesian elders when he gathered with them for the last time: "I have the blood of no man upon my hands," meaning, "I have fulfilled my duty to everybody." He precedes that by saying, "I taught you: night and day; and, in home and outside of homes. Nobody can ever stand up and say, 'Paul, you did not teach me.'"

Sometimes a pastor is at a church for a long time, and they get to certain anniversary times. He's been there for 10 years; he's been there for 20 years; or, he's been there for 25 years. Then they have a kind of a big-bang to celebrate that he hung in there so long without getting hanged. But sometimes I have to smile as I see big churches putting on their 25-year pastor celebrations, because I happen to know those pastors and those churches, and those pathetic people don't know what they're celebrating is their own short-changed treatment by that pastor. What they're celebrating is their own doom at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Their own grief is what they're celebrating. They're exalting a man who can smile; who can shake their hand; who can pat them on the back; and, who can make them feel good for exercising their old sin natures within a local church. Instead, he should have been like a good shepherd of the sheep, taking his crook and slapping them on the back of the neck when it's necessary for them to wake up to the fact that they're out of line with the mind of Christ. He was to be a true and genuine quarterback on the team. And yet these people will gather, because they have a successful organizational structure, and they will celebrate some man who for 25 years has caused them to lose rewards in heaven. How pathetic.

"Be faithful unto death." Such a faithfulness unto death obviously demands a pretty well-developed spiritual maturity structure in the soul, so that you're capable of taking the faith rest position that that requires.

**Polycarp**

One of the great Christian leaders of all time was a man named Polycarp, who lived right here in the city of Smyrna. Polycarp was a second-generation Christian. He was a disciple of the apostle John, and therefore, he is a very significant man in church history to us. He was born in 69 A.D., and he lived to be 86 years old. He had contact with the other apostles as well as John, and consequently, he had a vast store of verbal communication with them, some of which he recorded, and which has been preserved to us to this day. When John was sitting on Patmos writing this letter, the letter of Revelation, part of which was to the church at Smyrna, Polycarp was a young man. He was probably at Ephesus at this time when this letter was being written. Later, Polycarp went to Smyrna, and he became the pastor-teacher of the church in that city.

**Ignatius**

One of the associates of that era, another one of the early church fathers who knew Polycarp, was a man named Ignatius. I want to read to you what he had to say about this man. Ignatius indicated that Polycarp was a devout Christian whose prayers preserved the peace of the church at Antioch; whose faith was unwavering; whose love of the truth was energetic; and, whose mind was established in God as on a rock which is immovable. Polycarp was obviously one of the kinds of Christians that Jesus Christ is telling these people they should be – reliable.

**Irenaeus**

The description of Polycarp by one of his students, a man named Irenaeus, is also interesting. It's in a document that has come down to us called Against Heresies. In that, Irenaeus says of this man, "Polycarp was not only instructed by apostles and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop (or pastor-teacher) of the church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth. For he tarried on earth a very long time; and, when a very old man, gloriously and most notably, suffered martyrdom. Suffering martyrdom, he departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the church has handed down, and which alone are true."

This man, Polycarp, was very sound doctrinally, in part, because he was a great admirer of the apostle Paul. In a letter which he wrote, called "The Epistle to the Philippians," we have this quotation by Polycarp himself: "For neither I nor any other such one can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. When absent from you, he wrote you a letter which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope and preceded by love toward God and Christ and our neighbors, is the mother of us all."

**Marcion**

Polycarp obviously was a man who understood Bible doctrine and the importance of it. He was a reliable, uncompromising Christian. One of the great heretics of his era was a man named Marcion. On one occasion, Polycarp and Marcion met, and Marcion looked at Polycarp on that occasion and said, "Do you know me?" Polycarp replied, "I do know thee, thou firstborn of Satan." How's that for a remark when you meet a stranger? Somebody may come up to you, and you happen to know exactly what that person is like, and they may say, "Don't I know you?" Then you say, "Yes, I know you, you firstborn of Satan." Obviously, Polycarp wasn't out to make a big hit with people. He understood the angelic conflict, though, and he understood who was behind Marcion.

Marcion was a vile creature. He really took a club to the early Christians and to the early church. He tore the Scriptures to shreds. He was one of the first to attack the authority of the Scriptures themselves. Polycarp, understanding the angelic conflict, went right to the point. He says, "I know who you are. You're Satan's representative. You're the first born of Satan." He knew who motivated Marcion.

Well, inevitably, a man like this, in a city like Smyrna, as we've been learning from this letter, was going to come in conflict with the Roman authorities, and he did. The Roman proconsul finally brought him in and put him on trial. They demanded of Polycarp simply to renounce Jesus Christ, and to swear by the fortune of Caesar. Simply take the oath. It had come to be required that once a year, patriotism would be expressed in the Roman Empire by taking this oath of loyalty to the spirit of Caesar, which was viewed as the spirit of deity.

Well, what's Polycarp going to say on this occasion? Now the chips are really down. The story of his martyrdom is found in an encyclical letter of the church at Smyrna. Here's what it says: "On February 26, 156, the day of his martyrdom in Smyrna, the proconsul pleaded with him to recant, and to swear by the fortune of Caesar, and join with an infuriated mob of both Jews and gentiles in the mad cry, 'Away with the atheists.'"

The early Christians were accused of being atheists because they would not take this oath of allegiance to the spirit of the emperor. Therefore, they were considered as rejecting the gods, and so they were viewed as being atheists.

"When offered his freedom by blaspheming Christ, Polycarp courageously replied." This is one of the great statements of all times that has thrilled the souls of Christians again and again who read it: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury. How, then, can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" As he was being led away to be burned, his final prayer ended with these words: "I praise Thee for all things. I bless Thee. I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy Beloved Son, with whom to Thee and the Holy Ghost be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen."

They lit the torch, and Polycarp was burned alive. He was an 86-year-old man who was reliable to the end, fulfilling the call of Jesus Christ in this very letter to the very city in which he was the pastor-teacher. He was hated. The Romans hated him because he would not recognize their emperor as god. The Jews called him blasphemous for worshiping Jesus Christ. It so happened that this particular day in which they burned Polycarp was a Saturday. This is the significance of this remark: "You Jews in Smyrna are the synagogue of Satan." They so hated this man that they were willing to violate their Sabbath by carrying the wood to help pile around Polycarp. They would never do it on any other occasion, but on this occasion they were willing to carry the wood and violate their Sabbath in order to serve their God so completely.

This man is a fine example of the super grace type believer who is facing persecution unto death. He is the kind of man that Revelation 12:11 speaks of when it says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony and they loved not their lives unto the death."

The story is told of one father in the days of the Roman Empire's persecution of believers. A father was thrown into the arena with the lions. By his side stood his little son. As the lions were let loose at the other end of the arena, and they saw them moving down, charging toward them, the little boy, holding his father's hand, looked up at his father and said, "Daddy, will it hurt?" And the father said, "Yes, it'll hurt, but not nearly as much as the second death."

That's what these Christians caught: "Yes, if we are faithful unto death, it's going to hurt, but that hurt is going to transfer us into the presence of Jesus Christ, and into the presence of our fantastic reward which has been accumulated because we are super grace believers, and have stood on that position. And that hurt will pass. But the people who turned the lions loose on us are going to hurt forever in the second death, which is the lake of fire. They're going to hurt and hurt and hurt, and there'll be no end to it."

So, you've got to get this in perspective. You've got to get this in balance. If you have to suffer unto death for Jesus Christ, don't get panicky and say, "Oh, I've got so much to live for. I've got my family to leave behind me. I've got so much money to invest in the Lord's work. I've got so much time I need to put in. I've got so many gifts to use." Forget it. Stand firm and uncompromising. That's what He requires you to do.

Most of us, however, thus far, by the grace of God, know nothing about being in the category that these Smyrna Christians were. We're in the category of Hebrews 12:4 which says, "You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin." I doubt that there are any of us here who have shed any of our blood in standing up against sin and resisting sin and being opposed to sin.

**A Crown of Life**

Well, the reason the Lord says that they should stand by, and they should be faithful unto death is because He has a reward that He wants to give them for that stand. The last phrase of verse 10 tells us about that. It says, "And I will give you a crown of life." The word "and," is, of course, our old Greek word "kai" which indicates here the divine response to their faithfulness. The divine response is that, "I will give." This is the Greek word "didomi." "Didomi" expresses what Jesus Christ will do in return for these who do not fear the persecutors, and who will be faithful unto Him unto a martyr's death. This is future tense because it's going to happen sometime in the future for them. It's active. Jesus Christ is going to do it Himself. It's indicative – a statement of fact. It is given to "you." This is singular in the Greek because it's the individual believer that is going to be dealt with. What is going to be given to him?

He's going to be given a "stephanos." "Stephanos" is the Greek word for "crown." He is going to give them a crown. Stephanos is one of the two Greek words that we have for "crown" in the New Testament. The other word is "diadema." "Diadema" denotes a crown of imperial authority. This is the crown that a reigning monarch wears. You can see that we get our English word "diadem" from this Greek word. A diadem represents the crown which sits upon the head of a reigning king. We have this used in the Bible in several places here in Revelation: Revelation 12:03; Revelation 13:1; and, Revelation 19:12. These all speak of "crown," and it uses this word "diadema," representing the crown of a reigning monarch. This is not the word that we have.

The word that we have is "stephanos." "Stephanos" is a crown of a victor. It represents triumph in a game or in a contest. It was actually leaves which were woven into a circle as a victory wreath. It was placed upon the head of the victor. But it is a reward or a prize crown. It's not a reigning monarch's crown. It is a reward crown. It is something that a person can earn. This is indicated in 1 Corinthians 9:24-20 and 2 Timothy 4:7-8. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul says, "It's all over. I've been faithful. Here's what I'm ready for. I fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." There's that crown which is a victor's crown given to him because he is a victor – because he has been faithful. This is a token of honor for distinguished service or distinguished achievement.

This is the word that was used in ridicule of the crown which was placed on the head of Jesus – the crown of thorns in Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, and John 19:2-5. You have the crown of thorns described by this word "stephanos." That is, they were ridiculing Jesus. They were saying, "You're a winner, Jesus." We're going to give you a 'stephanos' crown." That's very important. They were treating him as King of the Jews. What they should have put on him was a "diadema." But they didn't. The crown that they put upon him, they called a "stephanos." They were making fun of Him. You don't get that in English. But it just stands out in the Greek like a red light flashing at you. Here it is. They're making fun of Jesus Christ. They're calling Him a victor when He's standing there bloody, bruised, and beaten, and with the flesh shredded on His back and on His face so that He didn't even look like a human being. They stuck this crown of thorns into His scalp and said, "Here's the victor. Here's the winner." And they brought Him out as a winner. This, of course, is also the source of our English name, Stephen.

This crown then indicates some kind of honor. It's a victory crown, and it's a Medal of Honor, which is what the crowns are that the Scriptures speak about. This particular one is called a crown of life. The Greek word for "life" is "zoe" which is a noun for a life principle; that is, a crown that is alive to all the realities of God. It represents life as capacity, which is evidenced by their victory under persecution. This particular title of "the crown of life" is found one other place. We have it in James 1:12, which says, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him." You'll see from James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10, that this crown is associated with reward in heaven for resisting temptation and enduring terrific trial. It is meeting temptation with the capacities which God has provided. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us about that. It is being victorious in suffering because you have developed spiritual capacity (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). It is stability in the face of sin that is honored with this crown.

You see how fitting this is for the people in Smyrna. This was all that they were facing. They were facing personal spiritual stability when "diabolos" (the devil) was trying to put pressure on them – sufferings which would lead them to react to this in an evil way. This crown of life is not for salvation. You don't get salvation by earning it. Therefore, you could not receive this crown for salvation – for something you earn. So don't make that mistake. This crown of life is not for salvation. What does it refer to?

It is the capacity for entering into the abundant Christian life that John 10:10 speaks about. It is being able to live. It is the crown that God gives to Christians who get to heaven, and the Lord looks at them and says, "You have developed a capacity for life, and I'm going to give you a Medal of Honor for having done that," because what you did was moved up to the super grace level in spiritual maturity.

James 4:6, you'll remember, tells us that this is possible: "But He gives super grace. Wherefore He said, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.'" God gives more grace. This is abounding, overflowing grace. This refers to the super grace maturity level. When you start off in the Christian life, you're on an inclined plane, and you're a baby. You go up to adolescence. You come up to adulthood. Finally you level off with a fully developed spiritual maturity structure, and you're at super grace living. There are Christians who are going to be all along this inclined plane at various stages. If you're not up at super grace, you can just kiss the crown of life goodbye, because you'll never see it.

These people in Smyrna, as I've indicated to you, were obviously a congregation where super grace Christians were in abundance. This was evidenced by the nature of their resistance to the opposition to them. It is perhaps also evident by the fact that you can go to western Turkey today, and you can still visit the church in Smyrna. You can't do that in Ephesus anymore. It's long since gone and wiped off the face of the earth. But there is Smyrna. A Christian population still exists, and it's strong. The suffering church made its mark.

How are you going to get this kind of super grace? Well, we're not going to go into that here except in passing. We'll just remind you that you're not going to get it by hustling. You're going to get it by the only way that you can get it – by developing a capacity through the intake of doctrine (John 6:63). The pattern is to take in the Word of God. That gives you the capacity for life.

The crown of life then honors the super grace Christian in heaven. This is the Christian who stayed with learning of doctrine. This is the Christian who is so positive toward the Word of God that God could teach him. God could teach your spirit. This is the Christian who, every time the church doors were open, he was banging his way in. We have seen what doctrine did in the soul of Abraham. It was absolutely fantastic. Abraham knew how to faith rest, and it was the doctrine in his soul that was enabling him to do that. This is what taking in the Word of God will do for you. There is no other way to get it. No Christian can really live grace to its fullest extent until you're up here at super grace level. That's your prime of spiritual life. You're at the prime of your spiritual life when you get to that.

In a natural realm, a child does not have a lot of capacity for life. When that child gets to be an adult, he has capacity for life in its fullest sense. That's what we're saying here. So only Christians at the super grace level can enter the abundant level that God has for believers. These people are revealed to be super grace by how they can handle temptations, trials, sufferings, and depression that are on them. These people in Smyrna showed they could handle it because they went right on to martyrdom. They were not distressed at all by it. They took it in stride. But the Christian who does not have super grace capacity is the one who whines, and becomes depressed, and wants to know why God is doing this to him. "I will give the crown of life."

Then the Lord Jesus Christ says that believers in this capacity are actually the ones that are living. They are the ones who are really alive. It's kind of a joke to listen to the world talk about coming alive through its slavery to sin; to drugs; to sex; to demonism; and, to everything else.

There are other victor crowns. I'll just mentioned this in passing. These are also Medals of Honor. You can get the series on our study in Philippians, and you'll have it in more detail. But there is a crown of righteousness that Paul spoke about. This is honor for a life of godly living. This is the Christian who spends most of his time in the inner circle of temporal fellowship. It is the Christian who is logging time that is going on his record in that relationship, and therefore, the Spirit of God is able to do maximum things with him. That Christian will get a crown of righteousness.

There is a crown of rejoicing or the crown of joy. This is honor for a life of maximum divine good production in your spiritual life. Using your life in divine production in a maximum way will bring you the crown of rejoicing.

Then there is the crown of glory that most of you here will not have access to. I would, because it's a crown that is exclusively reserved for pastor-teachers. Those who faithfully and effectively feed Bible doctrine to the flock are the pastors who are going to be given the crown of glory to wear someday in heaven.

Let's close it down with verse 11: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This is exactly the same words (and the same in the Greek too) as we concluded in the previous letter to the Ephesians. It simply is referring to the fact that if you have physical ears to hear instruction in the Word of God, you should listen to that specifically which God the Holy Spirit is saying here in the Word of God. This is directed to the churches. That means that it's not only in that era, but it's in our time also. This is an admonition to pay attention.

Then we have a promise. All of these letters end up with a specific promise. Let's look at the promise to close this one. This is the promise to the responder: "He who overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death." The word "overcomes" is the word "nikao" which means "to conquer," or "to be victorious." We have previously read in 1 John 5:4-5 who the overcomer is, and we have found that this term "overcomer" simply refers to somebody who is born again. Every one of you here today is an overcomer. I don't care how things got balled up and fouled up in your life this week, and how many failures there were, and how disappointing you were to yourself or to anybody else. Please don't ever forget that you're an overcomer, no matter how negligent you have been of the Word of God, and to the grace of God in your life, and to the opportunities that God gives you for growing in spiritual things and storing treasures in heaven. Forget it. You're an overcomer. Therefore, you can always go on.

1 John 5:4-5: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" In other words, He's speaking of the born again person.

**The Overcomer will not be Hurt**

Back to Revelation 2:11, this is the person who will, "Not be hurt." This is the Greek word "adikeo." This is aorist – at a point of time. The particular point of time here is at the Great White Throne judgment spoken of in Revelation 20:11-12. He will not be hurt. It's passive. He will not receive consequences for lacking absolute righteousness after death. It's subjunctive mood which means it's potential, for everybody potentially faces this unless he is an overcomer. But the overcomer will not. Here's one of those strong expressions in Greek. You know this word, "ou," in the Greek, don't you? That's the strong "not." You know this one: "me." That's a little weaker. But when you put them both together, you have a real "No, no" in Greek. This is what the Greek does. It puts both of these together. Therefore, you have a powerful negative – something that you are absolutely assured, as an overcomer, that will not happen to you. What is that? That you will not be hurt – that you will not be injured. That's what the word means.

**The Second Death**

You will not be hurt and you'll not be injured by the second death (the second "thanatos") – the absence of life. What is the second death? Well, as you look in the Word of God, you discover that the second death refers to the lake of fire, where people are separated for all eternity from the presence of God. Revelation 20:14, for example, says, "And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and the unbelievers, and the abominable, and the murderers, and the fornicators, and the sorcerers, and the idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake, which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

So the eternal state of suffering of the unbelievers is what is referred to here. Will your persecution hurt? Maybe, but not nearly as much as the second death. Suffering is going to hurt your very persecutors. The second death is not annihilation. If you will compare Revelation 19:20, you will see the false prophet thrown into the lake of fire. You can compare that to Revelation 20:10, 1,000 years later, and you'll see that they're still there alive and kicking and screaming. You are not annihilated in the second death. It hurts. It is the place where all the non-overcomers go.

So you suffer, and take the Lord's advice when He says, "I want you to go." You say, "How far?" And He says, "I want you to go unto death for Me if, necessary." If you take His advice, it may hurt in the process, but the one thing that He is ready to remind us of is that it won't hurt nearly as much as the people who are going to face the second death, because we are going to absolutely preserve from this. Here, again, you have an assurance. This is one of those eternal security assurances. If you are a believer (an overcomer), you'll never face the second death. This is a great letter to a very precious church. It is one that indeed each of us should seek to emulate.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

[**Back to the Revelation index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/revelation.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)