

Revelation 2:6-11 NIV

⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. **To the church in Smyrna** ⁸"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹I know your afflictions and your poverty-yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. ¹¹Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Ephesus... then into SMYRNA

INTRO: In Ephesus, Jesus, thru John commended the church for their hard work, tireless labor, perseverance, not tolerating evil, testing leaders for authenticity. He ordered them to repent, however, of leaving their first love—there were eternal consequences if they did not repent of this.

JESUS WANTS NOT JUST THE HANDS AND FEET OF BELIEVERS; HE WANTS OUR HEARTS!

THE LORD THRU JOHN BASICALLY SAID "KEEP UP YOUR ACTIONS, BUT COME BACK TO YOUR FIRST AFFECTIONS."

"LOVE GOD" IS THE 1ST COMMANDMENT!!! SERVE YES, BUT LOVE COMES FIRST AND MUST NOT BE LEFT BEHIND!

⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

HATE - Greek word *miseo*, which means to find utterly repulsive; find completely objectionable; loathe entirely. Part of loving Jesus is to hate/find repulsive what Jesus hates! The "practices" not the people.

What did the Ephesians hate about the Nicolaitans? Let's turn to scholar Rick Renner for an explanation:

Acts 6:5 tells us that this Nicolas was "a proselyte of Antioch." The fact that he was a proselyte tells us that he was not born a Jew but had converted from paganism to Judaism. Then he experienced a second conversion, this time turning from Judaism to Christianity. SO, HE HAD A BACKGROUND OF SWITCHING RELIGIONS... if we assume this is the same Nicholas, over the years, he may have mixed his background into his present living.

According to the writings of the Early Church leaders, Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying that total separation between Christianity and the practice of immoral living... including occult paganism was not essential. He had no problem intermingling these belief systems and lifestyles, in various concoctions. He saw no reason why believers couldn't fellowship with those still immersed in living immorally, including divination (witchcraft).



Because paganism (with sexual immorality/impure living) and its religions were the center of life, young or weak believers, even seasoned believers who compromised, could/would succumb to the seduction of all the influences.

It is significant that the "deeds" and "doctrines" of the Nicolaitans are *only* mentioned in connection with the churches in Ephesus & Pergamos. It seems that the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was that it was all right to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn't be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian. This, in fact, was the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans that Jesus "hated."

When believers become comfortable allowing sin and compromise to be comingled in their lives, it drains away the power in the work of the Cross and the power of the Spirit that is resident in their life. This is the reason the

name **Nicolas** is so vital to this discussion. **His name means “one who conquers the people.”** The evil fruit of Nicolas’ “doctrine” was that as a Christian, he still encouraged worldly participation, leading people to indulge in sin and a lowered godly standard. In this way he literally conquered the people, by drawing them to himself and leading them into sin. Jesus HATED the teaching and the deeds of the Nicolaitans, because it used who everyone thought was a follower to lead people into sin and compromise...

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

MOVING ON TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (modern Izmir, Turkey)

Revelation 2:8-11 (NLT2) “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead [temporarily dead] but is now alive:

A message from the Eternal One! Earthly rulers have temporary, limited authority. Jesus has eternal, unlimited authority! They think they are in charge, but you know they will stand before God in judgment and must give an account. **If they** temporarily exercise authority in an evil way... they’re not thinking about what’s coming for them. If you’re the victim of an evil authority or someone who acts like their in charge, take heart—it’s temporary, Jesus is with you, and help is on the way!

JESUS SAID TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA...

9 “I know your works [by personal observation...Jesus among the lampstands] about your suffering [pressure of crushing affliction/anguish/torture/debilitating, more than the other churches] ILLUS: man accused of crime...tortured to get him to confess... drop boulder little by little until crushed.

and your poverty [indigent; beggar; deprived of barest essentials]—but you are rich!

In Smyrna, there were trade guilds. To work you must be a member of a trade guild (a worker Union). Christians couldn’t retain membership in guilds. Why? Smyrna was the center for the worship of Zeus...god of the sky/thunder. Pagan things, orgies, drunkenness... every trade guild had its own patron god. Believers wouldn’t conform so they couldn’t work! They refused to be part of the world’s system, so they suffered greatly. Their property was confiscated because the state had to be the first loyalty of a citizen. They showed this by going before local gov’t officials and making the statement: “Caesar is Lord.” The believer just simply could not do that. **JESUS AWARE OF THEIR SITUATION. AND!!! HE IS AWARE OF YOUR SITUATION—ALWAYS!!!**

Believers felt poor, looked poor, were treated as poor. Jesus said “but you are rich.”

They had joy... peace of mind AND peace with God... love! And an eternity to look forward to!!!

I know the blasphemy of those opposing you [people speaking against you; turning others against you. This Gk. Word translated blasphemy means to vilify – the act of saying or writing unpleasant things about someone or something, in order to cause other people to have a bad opinion of them:]. They took something true, created a narrative about it that wasn’t true. Such as, Communion – body/blood of Jesus. Jesus told disciples to be part of Him, people had to eat his body and drink His blood (figuratively)... blasphemers said that was literally.

They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan [their assembling together ends in the works of Satan (accusing others of what they themselves are doing), not God].

Remember Zeus’ lightning bolt! Thrown at people

Here, those who say they are Jews but are not, were slandering the believers. Here, John is saying that people who slander & persecute believers say they are of God, but they are not. The followers of the Lord love God and love people... unconditionally, therefore, don’t slander. Those who slandered, He called them followers of Satan.

SUFFERING IS COMMON FOR CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT HISTORY. **According** to the Voice of the Martyrs ministry, 200,000,000/year right now! **If our Lord** & Savior suffered, so will we. Don’t think it strange. In suffering do you love or lash out at those who cause you to suffer? Do you entrust yourself and the situation to God, or must somehow bring them down/get them back?

Smyrna was said to be the most beautiful city of the 7. **Yet, its** very name is derived from the Hebrew word “myrrh,” a resinous substance (dried tree sap) used as a perfume for the living... (one of the gifts brought to the baby Jesus). Myrrh was produced by crushing a fragrant plant...by crushing it, it gave off a fragrant aroma. So did people from Smyrna! **YET MYRRH WAS LARGELY USED IN THE EMBALMING PROCESS** (Gifts brought to baby Jesus = Gold-King, Frankincense-worship, Myrrh-death



Myrrh is collected from a small 5 to 15-foot tall tree about one foot in diameter called the dindin tree. The tree looks like a short flat-topped hawthorn tree with gnarly branches and sparse leaves in that grow in groups of three. The whitish-green flowers appear before the leaves in the spring. The plant looks scrubby and desolate among the rocks and sands of the desert.
https://fruitexplorer.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-fruit-explorer-ponders-frankincense_97.html



True myrrh is crumbly and dark red inside. The exterior is white and powdery. The best myrrh has little odor and no oily texture. High-quality myrrh demanded the best prices in the Roman Empire,

To the world, Christians may look small, scrawny, unappealing. On the outside, the church may not look so appealing to the casual observer. Myrrh is used as an essential oil, and natural medicine and perfume. As an incense when we're crushed, we provide a spiritual sweet smelling savor to the Lord!!!

In my study, I found out that the “dindin” tree grows in groups of 3...

Peter denied Jesus 3 times!

Matt. 17:4 – At Jesus' transfiguration (His glory shown)... it included Jesus, Moses, Elijah (3 of them)!!!

Jesus rose on the 3rd day!

Matthew 18:20 (NIV) “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

After acknowledging their poverty, being vilified, and their extreme suffering, he then goes on to say...

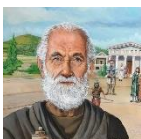
¹⁰ Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days.

Here, it states that the suffering is going to intensify. THE DEVIL WILL TEST YOU! **ARE YOU AUTHENTIC OR NOT???** The Lord indicates it will be temporary (10 days)—yet could bring them to the point of facing death. But don't be afraid!!!

But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

Remember, for the Christian, death causes us to receive the CROWN OF LIFE (ETERNAL LIFE)!!!

Persecution intensified against the Christians in Smyrna. Believers were being fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The crowd began to call for the death of the Bishop of the church in Smyrna—a man known as Polycarp.



Story of Polycarp - <https://christianhof.org/polycarp/> Polycarp was raised as a pagan, but adopted by a Christian woman as a child, and was raised as a lover of God, even though he was born many years after Jesus ascended into heaven. Polycarp got the attention of the Apostle John, who taught/discipled him, and later came from Ephesus to Smyrna to ordain him into ministry.

So, at the age of 86, the authorities sent out a search party to bring Polycarp in. They tortured two slave boys to reveal where Polycarp was being hidden. It was a Friday afternoon. Polycarp was resting upstairs in a country home. They came in like a posse, fully armed as if they were arresting a dangerous criminal. Polycarp's friends wanted to sneak him out, but he refused, saying, "God's will be done."

When the captors arrived, Polycarp welcomed them as if they were friends, talked with them and ordered that food and drink be served to them. Then Polycarp made one request: one hour to pray before they took him away.

The officers overhearing his prayers (that went on for two hours) began to have second thoughts. What were they doing arresting an old man like this?

Martyrdom of Polycarp

Despite the cries of the crowd, the Roman authorities saw the senselessness of making this aged man a martyr. So when Polycarp was brought into the arena, the proconsul pled with him: "Curse Christ and I will release you."

REPLY: "Eighty-six years I have served Him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"

The proconsul searched for an acceptable way out: "Then do this, old man. Just swear by the genius of the emperor and that will be sufficient." (The "genius" was sort of the "spirit" of the emperor. To do this would be a recognition of the pagan gods and [religion](#).)

REPLY: "If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don't know who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian."

More entreaties. Polycarp stood firm.

Then the proconsul threatened him with the wild beasts.

REPLY: "Bring them forth. I would change my mind if it meant going from the worse to the better, but not to change from the right to the wrong."

The proconsul's patience was gone: "I will have you burned alive."

REPLY: "You threaten fire that burns for an hour and is over. But the fires of judgment on the ungodly is forever."

The Death of Polycarp

The fire was prepared. Polycarp lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed: "Father, I bless you that you have deemed me worthy of this day and hour, that I might take a portion of the martyrs in the cup of Christ. . . Among these may I today be welcome before thy face as a rich and acceptable sacrifice."

Polycarp declines, and the officials attempt to burn him alive. However, the fire miraculously avoids him as it forms a circle around him, merely giving him a heavenly glow. So, Polycarp is stabbed; his blood goes everywhere, extinguishing the fire. Yet he dies from the stabbing.

RECEIVED THIS MORNING (9-24-23) The need for prayer is especially urgent right now for Eritrean Christian prisoners and their families. Hundreds are imprisoned because of their Christian faith. As they follow Christ in some of the most difficult conditions in the world, let us remember them and their families in prayer. Eritrea, in East Africa, is governed by a totalitarian regime that seeks to control every aspect of life — including religion. The government maintains control of approved churches and has arrested Christians without warning, providing no opportunity for a trial. **Conditions inside these prisons are some of the worst in the world.** Christian prisoners are provided meager rations and are often held in shipping containers in extreme desert conditions, sometimes for years.

¹¹ **"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.**

LISTEN TO WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING!!!! HEAR WHAT HE IS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES!!! Whoever is...

Victorious = Gk. Word "nikao" where we get our word NIKE! It means that we subdue/become the conqueror.

NOT HARMED BY THE 2nd death

1st death physical,

2nd death eternal!

Rev. 20:14 says the 2nd death is "the lake of fire," and eternal separation from God.

If we let our suffering get us down...or bring us to the place of a flesh vs. flesh fight (against other humans), we lose...even eternally! **If we refuse** to battle spiritual battles "in the flesh" (against human beings) we will be victorious. Staying right with God, we won't be harmed by the 2nd death!... which is eternal separation from God.

God has a glorious future for those who will remain submitted to Him... trusting in Him. Therefore, be victorious. He has given us His Spirit...we have all we need to succeed. It's our choice!