

## SEVEN: Pursuit of the Perfect Church

### "SMYRNA: LESSONS IN ENDURANCE"

#### REVELATION 2:8-11

### This Week's Core Competency

**Church** – I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today. Ephesians 4:15, 16 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Toward the end of the first century relations between Christians and Jews were strained especially in Smyrna where a large Jewish population virulently opposed Christians—especially Jewish ones. One author explains, "We may also probably infer from the strong hatred felt by the Jews, that at first many of the Christians of Smyrna had been converted from Judaism. It was the Jewish Christians, and not the pagan converts, whom the national Jews hated so violently. Except in so far as the converts had been proselytes of the synagogue, the Jews were not likely to care very much whether Pagans were converted to Christianity: their violent hatred was roused by the renegade Jews (as they thought) like St. Paul, who tried to place the unclean Pagans on a level with themselves" (W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 272, 73).

But there may have been more to it than that. Rome had given the Jews the right to practice their

---

***It's more important for the church to be faithful than powerful.***

*-Grant R. Osborne*

---

religion in exchange for the payment of a tax to restore the Temple of Jupiter, and they likely did not want that privilege threatened by associating with Christians—either Jewish or Gentile. This may explain why Judaism excommunicated Christian heretics from their synagogues in the 80s wanting nothing to do with them.

The most striking example of Jewish hostility to Christianity took place in Smyrna some years after John wrote his letter to that church (Re 2:8-11). In A.D. 155 the famous bishop, Polycarp, was burned alive for refusing to call Caesar "Lord" during an extensive persecution instigated by the Jews who ironically gathered the wood for his burning on the Sabbath. The story is told in "The Martyrdom of Polycarp" also called "The Letter of the Smyrnaeans" (available online at [www.earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com))

When Polycarp was brought into the stadium in Smyrna, he was pressed by the proconsul to recant. Roman persecutors called the Christians "atheists" because they refused to worship the Roman gods. In 9:2 Polycarp says "Away with the atheists" in irony, referring to the unbelieving Romans in the stadium.

*9:2 When then he was brought before him, the proconsul asked whether he were the man. And on his confessing that he was, he tried to persuade him to a denial saying, "Have respect to your age," and other things in accordance therewith, as it is their habit to say, "Swear by the genius of Caesar; repent and say, 'Away with the atheists.'" Then Polycarp with solemn countenance looked upon the whole multitude of lawless heathen that were in the stadium, and waved his hand to them; and groaning and looking up to heaven he said, "Away with the atheists."*

con't pg. 2

---

9:3 But when the magistrate pressed him hard and said, "Swear the oath, and I will release you; revile the Christ," Polycarp said, "Eighty-six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Upon which the proconsul warned Polycarp that he would throw him to wild beasts or have him burned alive if he did not repent. But rather than fill him with despair, these things only inspired him, and so, instead of repenting, he openly confessed himself to be a Christian. Hearing this, the crowd clamored for his death.

12:3 Then they thought fit to shout out with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive. For it must needs be that the matter of the vision should be fulfilled, which was shown him concerning his pillow, when he saw it on fire while praying, and turning round he said prophetically to the faithful who were with him, "I must needs be burned alive."

13:1 These things then happened with so great speed, quicker than words could tell, the crowds immediately collected timber and sticks from the workshops and baths, and the Jews more especially assisted in this with zeal, as is their custom.

The description of Polycarp's martyrdom ends with solemn words regarding the possibility that others may be privileged to follow in his footsteps.

(This revision into modern English is by Richard Neil Shrout, from the translation of J.B. Lightfoot).

## Situation for Discussion

While Christians may face discrimination in North America, they seldom suffer persecution. Too bad the same can't be said for third-world nations where Christians are often a minority. Take India for example. In a press release dated August 20, 2009 Mission India reported the following incident in one of its literacy classes:

*Sapira suffered a fractured hand when a mob of Hindu extremists attacked her literacy class. Praise God, she and the other students are back to their studies.*

*We recently received word about an attack on one of our literacy classes in the western Indian state of Gujarat.*

*The attack happened less than a week ago. A mob of 2 dozen men brazenly marched into the class wielding pipes, stones, and sticks. It was around 6 p.m. and class was just getting underway for the evening. Many of the students had already put in a full day of backbreaking work out in the fields.*

*The Hindu extremist mob shouted threats and began hitting the students. A female student, Sapira, suffered a fractured hand, and several other students had minor injuries.*

*Thankfully, the village sarpanch, or elected leader, quickly arrived when he heard what was going on.*

*Though he is not a Christian, this sarpanch has clearly already seen the benefits of literacy in his village. He stopped the gang of attackers, telling them that the class is helping the underprivileged and illiterate make a better life for their families.*

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Revelation 2:8-11

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. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do 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 the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Highlight "first" and "last" in v. 8.
- \* Highlight "died" and "came to life" in another color.
- \* Box "yet" and "but" indicating contrast in v. 9.
- \* Circle "slander" in v. 9.
- \* Underline "synagogue of Satan" in v. 9.
- \* Bracket "do not be afraid" and "be faithful" in v. 10.
- \* Circle "the devil" in v. 10.
- \* Box "to" indicating purpose in v. 10.
- \* Circle "ten days" in v. 10.
- \* Underline "crown of life" in v. 10.

---

## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain the relevance of the characteristics of Christ mentioned in verse 8 to the needs of the church in Smyrna.
2. They say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Verse 9 implies "wealth" is too. Explain.
3. Jews seem to be the ones largely responsible for the persecution of Christians in Smyrna. How so?
4. Explain the *contrast* introduced by "but" in verse 9.
5. Why were some Christians in Smyrna to be put in prison?
6. Christ tells those facing persecution to do two things. List them.
7. Some will be persecuted "for ten days." What do you infer regarding the duration of their persecution from this phrase?
8. Does verse 11 mean that those who are not "faithful, even to the point of death," will experience the second death? Explain.
9. **Discussion:** This letter is especially relevant to those facing persecution. How relevant is it to those who aren't?

---

## day 3

## EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Finding a good church isn't easy. If you've ever moved to a new community and had to look for a new church home, you know how difficult it is. cursory examinations and evaluations of churches and their ministries can be misleading. Imposing buildings may house dead congregations while more modest ones may be home to vibrant assemblies. Rich churches in our sight may turn out to be poor in God's while the ones that look poor to us may turn out to be rich in his eyes. Only the head of the church, Jesus Christ, knows for sure the condition of his churches because he sees what may not be readily apparent to us. In seven messages to seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gives us a glimpse into what makes a church truly rich or truly poor. These letters while written to individual congregations at the end of the first century were intended to benefit all the churches. What's more they were intended to benefit the individuals that made up those churches and us too.

If you moved to Smyrna, the church there would be one you might think twice about joining. After all, its parishioners were suffering at the hands of their persecutors. They were poverty stricken partly because their faith made it nearly impossible for them to earn a living in city as hostile to Christianity as was Smyrna, a center of the imperial cult, and partly because it made them a target of mobs of pagans and Jews that preyed on them. And if that weren't enough, their faith made them the object of ridicule and slander too. The Romans called them "atheists" because they worshipped neither the emperor nor Rome's traditional deities, and the Jews, wanting nothing to do with them, instigated legal action against them in the Roman courts. Jews, who had obtained the right to practice their religion by paying a tax to the Romans and didn't want to jeopardize it, were only too happy to remind the authorities that Christianity was not a Jewish sect and consequently, that Christians did not enjoy the same protection Rome had granted Jews.

Christians in Smyrna were suffering, and they were to suffer even more. The devil, who was

behind the slanderous accusations of the Jews and at the head of their synagogue, was about to put some of them in prison. He wanted to *tempt* them to renounce their faith; God wanted to *test* them to prove their maturity. Either way they were going to face the real possibility of death before their imprisonment would end for Rome didn't imprison people to punish them. It imprisoned them to await trial or as implied in this case, to await execution. In the face of such dire circumstances, Christ told them "Do not be afraid." Instead, "be faithful, even to the point of death" for "the crown of life" awaits you. "The figure of the crown is not borrowed from royalty but from the festivity of athletic games. Such contestants strove 'to receive a perishable wreath [the same Greek word is used], but we an imperishable' (1 Cor. 9:25). John introduced the promise of the crown of life in this context to remind the Smyrneans that although they suffered physical death, they were assured of the prize of eternal life. The crown itself is eternal life" (George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 44, 45). And while they might lose their lives, they would never experience "the second death," i.e., "the lake of fire." What Christ had stated positively at the end of verse 10 he stated again negatively at the end of verse 11.

This letter is especially relevant for those who are suffering because of their faith, but what about those who are not? Does it have any relevance for them? According to one author, "There are four levels at which persecution can apply in a society like ours where overt persecution seldom occurs: we can identify with the many Christians who are suffering around the world (cf. Rom. 12:15; Heb. 13:3); we can realize that such persecution could happen here in the near future and be ready for it; we can ask ourselves how many compromises we have made in order to avoid any persecution at work or in secular society; and we can endure general trials that draw us away from the world and toward Christ" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 136).

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Don't be afraid to suffer for Christ; be faithful, even to the point of death, and he will give you the crown of life.*

---

# day 4 **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**
  
- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**
  
- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
  - **Belonging**
  - **Becoming**
  - *going Beyond*
  
- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

\* Home Group Discussion (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group).

We recognize that Christians have suffered for Christ in past—take those in Smyrna for example. And we observe that some suffer for him now especially in other parts of the world—take those in India for example. For the most part we don't. Discuss how your group can and whether it should go Beyond in response to these observations.

**“Smyrna: Lessons in Endurance”**  
(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

---

# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 8 **church**

We do not know for certain when the church in Smyrna was founded or by whom—by Jews returning from Pentecost or more likely by Paul when he ministered in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10).

v. 8 **Smyrna**

"Smyrna is the only city that has continued to the present day, having the modern name Izmir [Turkey]. Another harbor city with a thriving export trade thirty-five miles north of Ephesus, it was renowned for its beauty and its civic pride, calling itself 'the first in Asia' as well as the birthplace of Homer (disputed by other cities). It maintained an excellent relationship with Rome and was one of four cities (with Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis) to host the provincial assembly. It was the first city in Asia to erect a temple to the goddess Roma (195 B.C.), and in A.D. 26, because of its long loyalty to Rome, it beat out ten other cities for the privilege of building a temple to the emperor Tiberias. *In succeeding decades it became a center of the imperial cult.* In 600 B.C. it had been destroyed by Alyattes, king of Lydia, but when Alexander the Great came through in 334 B.C. he commissioned that it be rebuilt. This was done in 290 B.C. by Lysimachus and Antigonos, two of his successors. The city was rebuilt closer to the harbor, and its architecture made it one of the most pleasing cities in Asia: famous temples (the temples of Zeus and Cybele were connected by a mall that was the envy of the ancient world), a group of building called 'the crown of Smyrna,' an acropolis on Mount Pagos, and a beautiful roadway called 'the street of gold'" (Osborne, 127 italics added). "This strong allegiance to Rome plus a large Jewish population which was actively hostile to the Christians made it exceptionally difficult to live as a Christian in Smyrna" (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 91).

v. 8 **first, last**

"This title is used only of Christ in the book (1:17; 2:8; 22:13) and in 1:17 is connected to God as the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; the two occur together in 22:13, where they depict Christ). Both titles mean that God and Christ are sovereign over history, in control not only of the past but of the future" (Osborne, 128).

v. 9 **afflictions**

This general term for "distress" (the NET Bible), "troubles" (TEV), or "the burden that crushes" (Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., TNTC, 62) appears to be closely related to the references to "poverty" and "slander" that follow. "It has often been observed that the poverty of the Christians may have been at least partly due to the despoliation of their property by mobs, whether Jewish or pagan. There may have been other contributory causes, the fact that converts were oftener made among the poorer classes (1 Cor. 1.26; James 2.5), and that devoted Christians on occasion reduced themselves to penury by the liberality of their own giving (2 Cor. 2.8; cf. Swete, p. 32), or that it was difficult for an uncompromising Christian to make a living in a pagan city (Caird, p. 35). Jewish hostility was at least likely to have been a factor; their rejection of the Christians placed the latter outside the protection and toleration which the Jews themselves enjoyed" (Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 68).

v. 9 **slander**

Or "accusations." "This slander most likely refers to 'informers,' what the Romans called *delatores*. Roman officials normally depended on informers as accusers before they would prosecute a case, and this was true for prosecution of Christians in Asia in the decades immediately following Revelation's publication" (Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation*, 116).

v. 9 **Jews . . . not**

"These 'Jews' are without question Jews by race and religion, who met together in the synagogue to worship the Lord. But in reality, inwardly, they are not Jews, because they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah and confirmed their rejection by persecuting his church" (Ladd, 43).

v. 9 **Satan**

How fitting seeing Satan means "adversary" (Heb.); its Greek equivalent means "slanderer" or "false accuser." "Instead of being as they called themselves and were doubtless known, a synagogue, a congregation of Jews, which would be 'the congregation of Jehovah' (Num. 16:3; 20:4), as also they probably called themselves, they were really a synagogue serving Satan (cf. Jno. 8:44), whom they served in this persecution of the Christians" (Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 454).

v. 10 **prison**

Imprisonment was not in and of itself used as punishment for criminal activity by the Romans (cf. Ramsay, 274). "In the present context the sense that 'prison' conveyed was probably that of a temporary, interim period of suffering in anticipation of martyrdom" (Hemer, 68). The Christians in Smyrna were facing a desperate situation, the very real possibility of dying for their faith.

v. 10 **test**

Lit., "so you may be tested" (the NET Bible; cf. ESV). The passive voice of the verb leaves the source of the "testing" (i.e., God) or the source of the "tempting" (i.e., Satan) ambiguous. "Some think there may be a double meaning. It is Satan's purpose to 'tempt' them to apostatize, but God's purpose was to 'test' their faith" (Osborne, 133).

v. 10 **ten days**

Not necessarily ten literal days, but a fixed time of limited duration in which the danger of immanent death was great (see Hemer, 69, 70).

v. 10 **crown of life**

A victor's crown. Cf., "the crown that is life itself" (the NET Bible).

v. 11 **second death**

Cf. Re 20:14.

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

### Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Using a some exaggeration and a little humor, describe what a bad day at school might look like. Read Acts 4:1-22 to learn about a difficult day Peter and John encountered. No matter how bad things were, the men trusted God to take care of them. You can trust God to take care of you in hard times.



### Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray \_\_\_\_\_ will be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances. 1Th 5:16-17

### Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

**Church** – I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

**Memory verse** – "Now you are the body of Christ (the church), and each one of you is a part of it." 1Co 12:27

### Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- \*Why were the Sadducees upset that Peter and John were teaching about Jesus?
- \*Explain what Peter meant when he said, "Salvation is found in no one else (but Jesus)."
- \*What were some of the words used to describe Peter and John?
- \*What did Peter and John do after they were told not preach anymore?

### Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Over the next few weeks families at Pantego Bible Church will be collecting their spare change to give to the Crisis Pregnancy Center. Join the rest of the church in doing God's work as your family fills a baby bottles with money. Parents, learn more about the Crisis Pregnancy Center at [www.arlingtonnpc.org](http://www.arlingtonnpc.org).



## Challenge

*Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.*

Family completes **Experience It** \_\_\_\_\_ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** \_\_\_\_\_

Family participates in **Live It** \_\_\_\_\_ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** \_\_\_\_\_

**Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:**

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** \_\_\_\_\_ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than thirty-five years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty years and have one son, Zach.

**Keith Smith** (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith is a featured communicator for Song of Solomon for Students and speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



8001 Anderson Blvd.  
Ft. Worth, TX 76120  
1-866-PANTEGO  
Fax 817-275-6403  
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).