

Revelation 2:8-17 – Faithful Under Pressure

What can we do to help a fellow Christian who is ready to cave in under pressure? Usually we wouldn't say that things are going to get worse before they get better! But that's what Christ does in several of his letters to churches in Asia. He confronts believers who have compromised morally and spiritually. But he also encourages them. This kind of commendation and critique is essential for spiritual health.

Warm Up Question(s) – choose one

- What kind of pressure have you been under lately? What is the most (or least) helpful advice you've received on how to handle the pressure?
- What different kinds of “riches” are there? When have you felt very rich?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Revelation 2:8-11.** Describe the situation of the church in Smyrna. How do you think they felt when, as they gathered together to listen to the Revelation read, they heard Christ address them and say, “I know the extreme pressure¹ you are under”?
- 2) Smyrna was a beautiful city and was often called “The Crown” or “The Flower of Asia”.² Yet it was also a city with people that displayed ugly hostility towards Christians. What does he who knows the pressure they are under say to them (any commendations or critiques³)? Why is there no promise to lift the pressure? What promise(s) does Christ give them?
- 3) How does Jesus introduce and describe himself to the church in Smyrna (v.8; cf. Is. 41⁴; 44⁶)? Why do you think he drew their attention to these particular features?
- 4) What aspect of Christ’s character or abilities have you been most struck or impacted by recently?
- 5) How might their poverty have been caused by economic persecution (cf. Heb. 10³⁴)? How would it feel to be told by Christ that they are “rich”?
- 6) **Read Revelation 2:12-17.** Pergamum was also a center of emperor worship. This may be why it is called the place “where Satan has his throne.” In addition, temple prostitution was prevalent. How are the Christians in this city being tested? Which do you think is easier to endure: persecution by enemies or seduction by the culture? Why?
- 7) What commendation(s) and critique(s) does Christ have for this church? How had the church responded to the lure of these temptations (vv. 12-17)? What commendations and critiques would you give on how your church is responding to the key temptations in our cultural context?
- 8) How are the title by which Christ reveals himself (v.12) and the promise he gives (v.17) appropriate to these Christians?

Responding in Prayer – Pray for those you know who are under pressure or temptation.

¹ The word translated “afflictions” is the Greek word *thlipsis*, which has the idea of extreme or “crushing pressure”.

² Smyrna rivaled Ephesus as “the first city of Asia”. On their coins were stamped the words “First City of Asia in Size and Beauty”. It was the birthplace of many great writers, chief among them Homer. The city had many magnificent temples and was known as a city of culture.

³ Notice that this is the only one of the seven letters that mentions no problem and gives no warning.