

To the Church in Smyrna

June 3, 2018

Revelation 2:8-11 ESV

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 "'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- **God is not like human supervisors and managers who may make policies and processes with no knowledge or concern of the consequences.**

Hebrews 2:18 NASB

18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 4:15-16 NASB

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- **Not only does God know, but He's keeping score.**

Psalm 56:8 ESV

8 You have kept count of my tossings (nowd - wanderings, flight, exile); put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

Romans 12:18-19 ESV

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

- **Historical Background**

- **Polycarp**

- Born AD 69 - Martyred AD 155 at the age of 86.
- Both Irenaeus and Tertullian write that Polycarp was a student of the Apostle John.
- According to Saint Jerome, Polycarp was ordained as the Bishop of Smyrna by the Apostle John and some of the other original Apostles.
- Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna were considered the chief of the Apostolic Fathers, a critical link in our Christian heritage as the last to have known some of the original Twelve Apostles.

"I seem to hear him [Polycarp] now relate how he conversed with John and many others who had seen Jesus Christ, the words he had heard from their mouths." —Irenaeus in a letter to Florinus

- *The writings and letters of the Apostolic Fathers include the Didache which outlines guidelines for worship, church governance, Christian ethics, etc.*
- *Contemporary of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch. When Ignatius was arrested and being transported to Rome for trial, he wrote six letters to different churches and one letter to Polycarp.*
- *Ignatius knew he would be martyred by being thrown to wild beasts. Polycarp knew he would be martyred by being burned at the stake. Both predictions came true.*
- **The Book of Revelation**
 - *Believed to have been received and written by the Apostle John around AD 90-96.*
 - *The Book of Revelation, specifically the Letter to the Church in Smyrna, was written while Polycarp was the Bishop. Polycarp pastored this Church for over 60 years.*
- **“a synagogue of Satan”**
 - *The Jews in Smyrna hated and persecuted the Christians.*

"This [Polycarp's execution], then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it."

—The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp

Revelation 2:8-11 ESV

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Psalm 31:15 ESV A Psalm of David

15 My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

Matthew 10:24-31 ESV

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

26 "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Acts 7:54-60 ESV

54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

55 But he [Stephen], full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the

right hand of God.

56 *And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*

57 *But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.*

58 *Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

59 *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

60 *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Excerpts from

—The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp

"And while he [Polycarp] was praying, a vision presented itself to him three days before he was taken; and, behold, the pillow under his head seemed to him on fire. Upon this, turning to those that were with him, he said to them prophetically, 'I must be burnt alive.'"

"His pursuers then, along with horsemen, and taking the youth with them, went forth at supper-time on the day of the preparation with their usual weapons, as if going out against a robber. And being come about evening [to the place where he was], they found him lying down in the upper room of a certain little house, from which he might have escaped into another place; but he refused, saying, 'The will of God be done.' So when he heard that they were come, he went down and spake with them. And as those that were present marvelled at his age and constancy, some of them said, 'Was so much effort made to capture such a venerable man?' Immediately then, in that very hour, he ordered that something to eat and drink should be set before them, as much indeed as they cared for, while he besought them to allow him an hour to pray without disturbance. And on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of them that heard him, insomuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and venerable an old man."

"Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, 'Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!' No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, the proconsul sought to persuade him to deny Christ, saying, 'Have respect to thy old age,' and other similar things, according to their custom, such as, 'Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists.' But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, 'Away with the Atheists.' Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, 'Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;' Polycarp declared, 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?'"

"The proconsul then said to him, 'I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent.' But he answered, 'Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.' But again the proconsul said to him, 'I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent.' But Polycarp said, 'Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt.'"

"While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, 'Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.'"

"Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behooved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, 'I must be burnt alive.'"

"This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals,—a thing he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his holy life, he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, 'Leave me as I am; for He that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile.' They did not nail him then, but simply bound him."

"When he had pronounced this amen, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there. At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church which is in Smyrna."

Revelation 2:8-11 ESV

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

Revelation 20:14, Matthew 5:11-12

Revelation 21:8 ESV

8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Matthew 10:32-33 ESV

*32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,
33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*