

SUBJECT: "A Good Church"
CHURCH: Trinity Baptist Church
DATE: Sunday, November 8th, 1987
SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:8-11
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Suddenly, in the aftermath of several spiritual embarrassments, the Church has once again taken center stage and is the subject of much debate through our nation. As TV evangelism continues to fall from favor, people all over the world are looking to the Church for spiritual guidance. They're looking for answers to questions, solutions to problems and sound spiritual leadership in a world bent on death and destruction.

They're not looking for just somewhere to past the time on Sunday morning. Nor are they looking for just a name that can be used to further one's social status.

People today are looking for a Church that's dedicated to the practices and principles of God's Word! They're looking for a Church that's honest about its holiness, that sure of it's salvation and committed to the cause of Jesus Christ. People today are looking, searching, NOT just for any Church, but for a **GOOD CHURCH!**

Nevertheless, with the doors of the Church wide open, Church roles are only gradually increasing. There are Churches everywhere and yet many cannot find the Church of their choice anywhere. Some churches are fast to preach, but slow to teach! Some churches major in the gifts of the Spirit, but minor in the fruit of the Spirit. Some churches have choirs that sing, but thy have no pews that pray. Some churches display a high degree of spirituality on Sunday, but some how loose it on Monday.

If you've ever moved and had to go looking for a new Church home, you know it's hard to find a **GOOD CHURCH**. With so many looking and so few finding this phenomenon has developed into a crisis in the Christian community. Churches all over are forced to compete for members and have thereby compromised on the Word of God, trying to build and impress new members. What's worst is that out of the few, who do come and join the Church, fewer are staying and even fewer are committing their lives to Christ.

ONE HAS TO WONDER?

ONE HAS TO ASK THE QUESTION?

"What Is A GOOD CHURCH?"

WHAT DOES IT TALK?

WHAT THE QUALIFICATIONS?

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS?

WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF ... A GOOD CHURCH?

If we look to our text we'll find that the Church at Smyrna is one (1) out of seven (7) churches in Asia. If we look even closer we'll find that the Church at Smyrna is one (1) of the two (2) churches Jesus Himself DID NOT rebuke, reprove or reprimand. In other words, out of the seven (7) churches only two (2) were found by God to be: "**GOOD CHURCHES**".

Churches by about their Father's business. So what is it, about the Church Smyrna? What makes her so special? What separates her from the five (5) other churches that have some how failed to past the test.

WHY IS THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA ... A GOOD CHURCH?

Well, if we study verses nine (9) and ten (10) we'll find three (3) insights into the character of this church. The first is that the Church at Smyrna:

ENDURED EXTERNAL OPPOSITION

External opposition is that force which imposes its will over another from outside sources. For example, the Church today faces, political, social and economic opposition. However, as we apply this to the Church at Smyrna, we learn that these were only minor problems. Not only was the Church politically, socially, and economically limited, but she was also suffering from physically brutal persecution.

Verse ten (10) says they were thrown in prison and forced to endure severe test. Recorded history tells families were separated and businesses were closed. It meant complete humiliation and certain death to be caught having a prayer meeting. Some Christians were hanged to death! Some were thrown into the lion's den! Some were whipped to death. Some were burned alive at the stake. Some were heads down and their heels up.

But despite all of these dangers the Church at Smyrna NEVER stop doing the Lord's work! Every time tragedy would strike, they pray a little longer, preach a little harder, teach a little deeper, NEVER giving up, NEVER compromising the Word of God!

Jesus said: "I know thy words, and tribulations, and poverty (But thou art rich) ..."

NOT rich in earthly treasures. But RICH in works laid up in heaven, that come judgment day, will not burn like hay, wood and stubble, but will come forth and shine like silver and pure gold!

THE CHURCH SMYRNA: ENDURED EXTERNAL OPPOSITION!

They press toward the mark, toward the high calling of Jesus Christ.

If you want to be a **GOOD CHURCH**, you must endure external opposition.

If we move on, we find Jesus continues His commentary by saying:

"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. "

Here Jesus encourages His Church by acknowledging the **INTERNAL STRUGGLES** that have risen from people who are both cruel and hypocritical. It's from these few words that we find the Church's biggest problems and our second insight into the character of this Church. It is evident from our text that the Church at Smyrna conquered:

INTERNAL CONFLICT

INTERNAL CONFLICT is that which wars against you from the inside.

It is far more deadly than **EXTERNAL OPPOSITION** as one can NEVER be prepared for it. It strikes like a BAD dream and often leaves its victims wondering what went wrong! It NEVER has to break in or sneak in. It just walks in because it is already within and a part of the whole. To us as individuals, the ever-ragging struggle between the flesh and the spirit is personally our **INTERNAL CONFLICT!**

However, for the Church, it's the bitter words, the gossip and the rumors, it's the subtle hostility, the little lies and the blatant acts of un-kindness, between one group and another.

You see many Churches today have fallen from grace and have had to forfeit influential ministries all because of **INTERNAL CONFLICT.**

INTERNAL CONFLICT is certain death to any organization, but especially to the Church. In his first (1st) letter to the church at Corinth, Paul likens the Church to the body. Just as the foot cannot war against the hand for the body to function as a whole, neither can the Church be effective if the choir is at war with the ushers, or the deacons with the trustees, or even the pulpit with the pew.

INTERNAL CONFLICT can only thrive in Church as long as the people are not what they claim to be. In other words, if everybody who claimed to be Christ-Like, was Christ-Like, there be no division in the Church. You see, if the choir loved the ushers there'd be no conflict between the two. if the deacons loved the trustees there'd be no fuss'n and fight'n. If the pulpit loved the pew the work of the Church would get done and the body of Christ would grow.

The Church at Smyrna conquered: **INTERNAL CONFLICT**, because they possessed what they confessed. They had not forgotten their first (1st) love. Because they truly loved Christ, they could truly love their enemies. Because they had been divinely forgiven, they could freely forgive. Because they had received mercy, they could extend mercy. Because they had been richly blessed, they could be blessing to those who would abuse them and despitefully misuse them. You see, they weren't pseudo prophets or counterfeit Christians. As they were graciously saved, so they genuinely gave their lives to Christ.

Because of this, the Church at Smyrna could quench all the fiery darts of Satan. As they refused to hear the gossip and entertain the rumors, as they chose to live only to give God the glory, the Church at Smyrna conquered **INTERNAL CONFLICT**. While you can **ENDURE EXTERNAL** opposition, and fight against all manner of spiritual wickedness in high places ... And while you can conquer **INTERNAL CONFLICT**, and overcome the evil that you would not do, with the good that you would do ...

A Church is still not a **GOOD CHURCH** until she has been found faithful unto death! In verse "10" Jesus says: "... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The key to this passage is anchored in the use of the word unto instead of until.

Often times we use either word as though they were exactly the same. However, this is not true and careful study will show that Jesus chooses His words very carefully. The word **UNTIL** means: "**UP TO THE POINT OF**" or "**UP TO THE TIME OF**". The word **UNTIL** has limits and boundaries. It implies a certain action is to last only so long. It specifies that a certain work is to end at a certain time. It makes it clear that there is a limit or a point at which one can stop whatever he or she is doing.

However, the word **UNTO** means to go beyond the point or past the time. It has no such limits or boundaries. It implies no pre-determined time or point of termination. It specifies that God expects us to believe that He is, when the world around us claims that He isn't!

It makes it clear that God is looking for an unwavering, never ending kind of faith. One that will last, not only up to the storm, but through the storm. The kind of faith that will carry on, not only in the heat of the battle, but also in the fire of the furnace.

God is not looking for a faithfulness that comes as a result of health, wealth and prosperity. He's looking for a faith that money can't buy, that sickness can't stop, that comfort can't compromise. He's looking for the kind of faithfulness that will have joy in the time of sorrow. Peace in the midst of trial and tribulation. Courage in the day of chaos and confusion. Strength in the night of suffering and pain. Hope in the hour of loneliness and despair. Trust, in the belief that He hears and answers prayers. And victory in the face of defeat, knowing that He's coming back again.