

Tried in the Fire

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”

—I Peter 4:12

THESE WORDS WERE WRIT-ten by the Apostle Peter more than thirty years after Jesus had finished his earthly ministry, and reflect the level of discipline that he had experienced in his faithful walk with our Lord. He had learned to recognize that trials were necessary in his own ministry, and as further evidence of his relationship as a son of our loving Heavenly Father. He rejoiced that he had been invited to partake of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

TRIALS OF FAITH

The apostle’s admonition is addressed to all followers of our Lord Jesus who have accepted the invitation during this present Gospel Age. These have gladly left their former earthly hopes, ambitions, and pursuits, and have given their lives to God in full consecration to him. The apostle spoke of this special relationship of the heavenly calling, and put it in perspective, when he added, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall

be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:13

Earlier in his first epistle, Peter also wrote about the trial of faith that would come upon the Lord’s special people. He thus addressed them, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—chap. 1:2-5

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

The apostle encouraged the people of God and said, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—vss. 6,7

The trials of which Peter wrote may come into our lives, but we must always keep in mind his words ‘think it not strange,’ because these experiences are permitted by God to prove us, to strengthen our character, and to cause the principles of Truth and righteousness to take deeper root in our consecrated hearts.

From Job, we read, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10) The Prophet Malachi wrote, “He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”—Mal. 3:3

The revelator recorded our Lord’s words concerning the church at Laodicea. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”—Rev. 3:15-19

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Fiery trials will come upon us as fiery darts from our great adversary, Satan, whose wrath against the children of light is permitted to manifest itself in various ways. But these darts cannot injure us if we have securely buckled on the divinely provided armor of Truth and righteousness of which the Apostle Paul spoke. He admonishes us, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities,

against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”—Eph. 6:11-13

The Apostle Paul enumerates the various items that the child of God would need to fight the good fight of faith. He thus encourages, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vss. 14-18

Each of these distinct items of the armor has a deeper meaning and spiritual significance. The breastplate of righteousness covers the heart of the consecrated follower of Jesus, and suggests the need to keep it pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) During this present Gospel Age the Lord’s people are walking in the narrow and difficult way of sacrifice, and their feet will need to be properly shod. “Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” (Heb. 12:13) The shield of faith will be required to ward off the fiery darts that will be aimed at them. “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4

The helmet of salvation represents that part of the soldier's armor that protects the head. This represents the individual's knowledge, reasoning, and understanding concerning spiritual things. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." (Eph. 1:18) The sword is used as a weapon, and represents the Christian warrior's only weapon—the Word of God that he uses to defend the precious Truth. "Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."—Rev. 19:15

TESTINGS NECESSARY

The Apostle Paul, when writing to Timothy concerning the faithful members of the church during the present Gospel Age, reminded them, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."—II Tim. 3:10-12

God allows his people to have difficult experiences and to suffer for right doing. During the present time, he is calling out a fully consecrated company who will be the royal priesthood of our Lord's kingdom, and will have the power and authority to bless the sin-sick world of mankind during Christ's future reign of truth and righteousness. We are assured

that trial and testing is needed to prove and prepare the hearts and characters of each one of the Lord's faithful followers.

Our loving Father watches to see how loyal we are to the principles of righteousness. Some who have been called may endure a certain amount of trial and testing and then withdraw, while others will endure more. The Lord is seeking those who are willing to give up everything in their desire to prove faithful to their covenant of consecration with him. This higher level of faithfulness means a new life of entire loyalty to God and to his laws, which are the laws of righteousness.

FIERY TRIALS

Trials test the various members of the church and are designed to do a purifying work in their characters. It is an experience that must be endured by each one individually. Not only will the church as a whole have opposition against them, but each individual will be personally exposed to the fiery trials of which both the Apostles Peter and Paul wrote.

The trial and testing of the members of the Christ is different from that which comes to any other people. The explanation of this difference can be briefly quoted in the words of Peter in our opening passage of scripture, when he pointed to this and explained, "Inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." (I Pet. 4:13) We know that each member of the body of Christ must be tried, and we can rejoice when some of these experiences touch us also. In our own heart we can say, I am glad to have a share in the sufferings of Christ and in God's wonderful

providence. Without this divine arrangement we could never share as a body member of the Christ.

PATIENT CONTINUANCE

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." (Rom. 2:7) He was pointing them to the wonderful blessings in connection with the High Calling in Christ Jesus.

We are all looking forward to the time when the body of Christ will be completed, and when we may share in the glory of abundant life with our glorified Lord Jesus. We rejoice in knowing that during the present time fiery trials are needed to perfect us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and have put ourselves into the Lord's powerful hands. He has promised to supervise all that concerns us during our walk in newness of life, and whatever comes to us we may be sure that it is of his purpose or permission for our spiritual welfare. We know, too, that he has provided a wonderful provision whereby we may go frequently to the throne of grace for help in every time of need.

A LITTLE FIRE KINDLETH

A devilish disposition was manifested toward our Lord that resulted in great sufferings. Satan was permitted to instigate much of this, and also toward our Lord's faithful followers throughout the present Gospel Age. The Apostle James explains the nature of the human tongue in carrying out much of this persecution. He wrote, "Thus also the tongue is a small member, and boasts greatly. Behold! How large a mass of fuel a little fire kindles! (And the

tongue is a fire,—the world of wickedness;) thus is that tongue rendered among our members, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna.” (James 3:5,6, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The tongue and pen are often used as weapons of evil.

OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION

The source of our trials may come not only from the Adversary, but also from the weaknesses and imperfections of others. Those that come from Christian people are often the most difficult to bear. However, we trust that nothing can happen to us unless the Heavenly Father permits it. If they do not come from one source they will be permitted to come from another. This testing is designed to strengthen the elements of our character which need development, and we are to take all these experiences patiently, knowing that they are working out for our spiritual welfare. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18

We recognize the need for these trials and appreciate the grand purpose of God in our spiritual growth. We thus reflect the chiseling and polishing to make us ready for the grand temple of glory. We can look with fortitude and patience on these fiery trials, fully recognizing that we shall receive rich blessings from them if they are received with humble and contrite hearts.

GLORY IN TRIBULATION

In respect to our High Calling we learn to rejoice in all things which our loving Father has done for us. We can have joy in putting our lives in the hands of the one who called us out of the darkness of this sin-sick world. Not that we enjoy the tribulations and persecutions, but we realize that these are working out for us in the development of a character that is pleasing to God. It is proper for us to recognize that in all of our present trials he makes them work together for our spiritual benefit. We can rejoice in any persecution, especially if we are in no way blameworthy. Peter said, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet. 4:16

FAITHFUL AMBASSADORS

The word of reconciliation has been committed to the Christ, and we are to "shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life." (Phil. 2:15,16) The world is a very dark place, and sin and error abound. As we continually strive to be faithful ambassadors for Christ and are following closely in his footsteps, we have the privilege and honor of suffering with him.

Paul has explained, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."—Rom. 8:16,17

Whoever will faithfully exercise their ambassadorship and not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, will come to realize something concerning

the sufferings of Christ. They can truly say, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.”—Ps. 69:9

ENDURING CHASTENING

Satan introduces bitter aggression and painful injustice against the faithful followers of Jesus that is designed to discourage them. Peter wrote, “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”—I Pet. 2:19-25

If not resisted, adverse influences and the powers of darkness would lead to lukewarmness. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"—Heb. 12:1-7

THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, Paul proclaimed, "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we

know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:22-28

PATIENTLY WAITING

The Psalmist David wrote, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”—Ps. 37:5-7

The present mission of the church is to develop in herself every grace, to be God’s witness to the world, and to prepare themselves to be the kings and priests in Christ’s future kingdom. Then, associated with the beloved sympathetic High Priest, the church shall establish God’s glorious kingdom in the earth. The fiery trials experienced this side of the veil will help fit us for a place in that heavenly kingdom.

TRUSTING IN HIM

The wonderful promises of our loving and wise Heavenly Father have never failed, and those who have put their trust in him will never fail. We feel unworthy that our efforts to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice fall short. However, when we are weak and realize our own helplessness and incompetency, we may turn to our loving Heavenly Father. “He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”—II Cor. 12:9

It is when continued trust in the Lord and his responsive providence in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in him. It is when heart answers to heart, when pleading prayer brings recognized answers of peace, when the divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way, that we can recognize the abiding presence with us of the Father and his Son.

However dark may be our way and severe the storm that rages about us, the thought of divine protection is ever with us, so that, as the children of the Lord, we are never in despair. Paul says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."—II Cor. 4:7-10

We must not allow our faith to falter when the test of patient endurance is applied, and while the outward peace and quietness which we crave may tarry long. Outward peace and calm are not always the conditions best suited to our needs as a New Creature in Christ Jesus. We would not desire conditions in which the precious fruits of the Holy Spirit would not grow and develop in us. Therefore, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice."—I Pet. 4:12,13 ■