

Who Shall Stand?

***“Who may abide
the day of his
coming? and who
shall stand when
he appeareth? for
he is like a
refiner’s fire, and
like fullers’ soap:
And 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.”
—Malachi 3:2,3***

WHO SHALL WITHSTAND

this experience, the prophet asks, at the time of the Lord’s appearing? At his First Advent, Jesus came to his own—the Jewish people—but as a nation they rejected and crucified him. There were only a few who stood the test. (John 1:11,12) Using wheat gathering as a symbol, John the Baptist had said of Jesus: “He will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner.” (Matt. 3:12, *Revised Version*) Here was a testing and cleansing work which took place at our Lord’s first appearing.

Subsequently, throughout the Gospel Age, our Lord has been making himself known to those in the right condition of heart, that he might cleanse, test, purify and assist them in walking in his steps, and in being conformed to his image. Now, in the days in which we live, during the time of our Lord’s

Second Presence, there are also very definite testings. He is proving his people, individually. Each member of the true church is being tested, refined, and purified. Who shall stand these experiences?

We believe there is much evidence, through the fulfillment of prophecy, that soon the church—the bride of Christ, the Lamb’s wife—will be completed and glorified with her Lord beyond the veil. Through this spiritual class, identified as “the holy city, new Jerusalem,” God’s glorious kingdom in the earth will be established.—Rev. 19:7; 21:1-10

A DAY OF PREPARATION

We are today living at a time during which God is making preparation for one of the greatest dispensational changes in the world’s history. Therefore, a pressing question for us is, “Who may abide” and “who may stand” in this day? The Apostle John also asked the question, “Who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:17) Here, however, the context refers to the world’s view of the climactic trouble toward which present arrangements in the earth are rapidly approaching.

The prophets, our Lord, and the apostles all prophesied of this period, in which the old order is to pass away, and the glorious kingdom of God is to be ushered in, which will stand forever. (Dan. 2:44; Matt. 6:10; II Pet. 3:12,13) We rejoice in the knowledge that we are living during this time, and it is in this connection that one of God’s prophets speaks of “the day of his preparation.”—Nah. 2:3

We see around us today that which Jesus foretold: “On the earth there will be dismay among the nations and bewilderment at the roar of the surging sea. Men’s courage will fail completely as they realize

what is threatening the world.” (Luke 21:25,26, *J. B. Phillips*) Selfishness, hatred, pride, and the spirit of aggression have led to the mustering of armies among nations small and great, as well as the rise of powerful dictators, tyrants, and extremist groups of the cruelest sort imaginable to the human mind. Such conditions will surely bring their legitimate awful consequences.

As dire as these conditions are, however, the Bible’s promise is that the human race will not be permitted to destroy itself. The Scriptures reveal that human selfishness would ultimately lead to this, if not restrained by divine intervention. Jesus, speaking of the climax of the period of distress toward which the world is now moving, said, “Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved,” but then adds that these days of trouble “shall be shortened.” (Matt. 24:22) This will mean divine intervention and rescue of the human race from the result of its own madness. Indeed, God’s kingdom, under the leadership of Christ, will solve all national and international problems, and we are promised that it will also eliminate from the earth all sickness, sorrow, pain, and death.—I Cor. 15:25,26; Rev. 21:3-5

Meanwhile, we are presently living in the “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) It is developing and encompassing the world as a trap and a snare. Jesus prophesied of it, saying, “Take heed to yourselves, lest your souls be weighed down with self-indulgence and drunkenness or the anxieties of this life, and that day come upon you, suddenly, like a falling trap; for it will come on all dwellers on the face of the whole earth.”—Luke 21:34,35, *Weymouth New Testament*

To “take heed” means we must be continually prayerful and watchful, meditating upon our Father’s Word and will. We must also be on guard, so that this great worldwide trouble, although not coming upon us unawares, does not so completely fill our mental horizon as to hide from us another vitally important aspect of our earthly sojourn—that being the experiences, tests, and trials which are provided by God to prove us individually.

ON TRIAL

Peter said, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (I Pet. 4:12) Earlier in the same epistle, he stated: “Now for a little while, (since it is necessary,) you are distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being much more precious than that gold which perishes, though proved by fire, may be found to praise and glory and honor, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:6,7, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) We again ask: Who shall stand these experiences?

Our faith, and our whole being as individuals, are on trial at the present time. We are exhorted: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,” and “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (I John 5:4; Rev. 2:10) Faithfulness of the members of the church unto death means joint-heirship with Christ in glory, and the privilege to bless all families of the earth. This is the greatest and most worthy theme in life, and the grandest position God could grant in all the universe. It is well worth our striving to attain, and to seek to be prepared for the blessed responsibilities of the kingdom.

The Lord asks for faithful loyalty and character-likeness to himself. As part of this, he goes about the process of purging out of us everything in the nature of dross, including self-will and all the works of the flesh. Our opening text suggests that God, as a refiner, wishes to purify us. As we picture in our mind a refiner in olden times, we see him seated at his crucible of valuable ore positioned over an intensely hot fire. By means of bellows, the furnace would be made sufficiently fierce to reduce the metal to a liquid state. The refiner, adding certain fluxing agents, and giving every attention to his work, watches the process very closely. It is his business to see to the separation and removal of the dross from the pure, precious metal. It is in such a manner that our Heavenly Father wishes to refine, cleanse, and purify us individually.

“He is . . . like fullers’ soap,” our text continues. An indication respecting the trade of a fuller is given in Mark 9:3. Concerning the shining brightness and whiteness of our Lord’s raiment on the Mount of Transfiguration, this verse reads: “His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.” The work of a fuller, using soaps which had strong cleansing properties, consisted chiefly in cleaning garments and whitening cloth. Concerning us, John says that “if we confess our sins,” God will “forgive us our sins, and . . . cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”—I John 1:9

Throughout all this refining and cleansing work, the Lord is able to read our heart. He can discern our thoughts and intentions, as well as the extent of our faith and love. No human being is able to do this. We may be able to deceive those near and dear

to us on the human plane, but we cannot deceive the Lord. It is his will that we be refined, cleansed and purified, and we will be given experiences which are especially suited for the full accomplishment of this work. If properly exercised by them, we will be purged of pride, selfishness, bitterness, impatience, and all the works and deeds of the flesh.—Gal. 5:19-21

FAITH AND WORKS

It will always be necessary during this time of testing to remember Paul's words, "Thou standest by faith." (Rom. 11:20) Similarly, he says, we must "stand fast in the faith," as it is declared in God's Word. (I Cor. 16:13) If this kind of faith is developed in us, it will surely bear fruit and make an outward manifestation, according to our experiences.

The Apostle James, in dealing with this feature, would awaken those who have a measure of faith, but who have not progressed to the degree of making it a living and working faith. He asks, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14) The answer is no, which the *Diaglott* rendering of the last part of this verse confirms: "This faith is not able to save him."

If we are to endure, and stand fast before God, we must have a living, operative faith. This matter is clearly addressed by the subsequent words of James, in which he says emphatically, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."—James 2:17,18

The reverse is also true. Works are essential and vital to our development. However, without a foundation of faith, works alone will not enable us to stand fast. It is only the proper combination of faith and works that is acceptable to God. True faith will manifest itself in works of obedience, and a life that is lived in harmony with that faith. If our life is not thus affected, we dishonor that faith. Indeed, such “faith without works is dead”—unproductive, and can never bring life.—vs. 20

Continuing his consideration of this important subject, James asks, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he brought up Isaac his son to the altar? Thou seest that the faith cooperated with his works; and that the faith was made complete by the works.” (vss. 21,22, *Diaglott*) If Abraham and other faith heroes had merely discussed their faith with one another they would never have been counted as obtaining “a good report through faith.” (Heb. 11:39) The Scriptures reveal that they walked and lived in faith. Works cooperated with their faith. They were very courageous, and their faith was made complete by works. Similarly, our faith, also, must be alive and active, working in us by love.—Gal. 5:6

ACTIVITY

We learn from God’s Word that consecrated believers constitute the body of Christ. Herein is a blessed, cooperative arrangement. In I Corinthians the 12th chapter, the Apostle Paul explains that in this “body,” of which Jesus is the Head, or controlling power, there are various activities to be engaged in. “There are diversities of operations,

but it is the same God which worketh . . . in all.” If there should cease to be “operations” or activity by a member of the body, he will become unfruitful, and must either be revived or be in danger of losing his place in the body. Rather, Paul explains that there is given to each member of the body some function or activity, and that these all combine to accomplish God’s will, under our one Head, Christ Jesus, and one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. —I Cor. 12:4-11

Furthermore, no member of the body can properly say to another, “I have no need of you.” (vs. 21) Neither should anyone have the attitude in which they conclude: ‘There is no service I can render; therefore, I will enjoy the benefits of the body, but not exert myself toward service for the other members, or for the Head, Christ Jesus.’ On the contrary, all should be motivated to assist in providing “that which every joint supplieth.”—Eph. 4:16

As we engage in activity on behalf of the Lord and his cause, we must do so with the proper attitude and motivation. Paul admonished, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.” (Phil. 2:14-16) Although inactivity is an unnatural state for any of God’s intelligent creatures, we must remember that merely being active is not sufficient. It is, perhaps, for this reason that immediately following I Corinthians the 12th chapter, quoted from earlier, the Apostle Paul continues his lesson on the functioning of the body of Christ with the sober warning that without love

as the motivating power, no activity we might engage in would have God's approval.—I Cor. 13:1-3, *Diaglott*

LOVE

The importance of this attribute of love cannot be overemphasized. We are not to suppose, however, that it can merely replace other important considerations in the Christian life. For example, love cannot take the place of the fundamental doctrines of God's plan, but it does guide us in the proper use of these teachings. Love cannot take the place of faith, nor of activity in the Lord's name, but it should be the motivation for faith and for service acceptable to God.

We are to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." (Phil. 1:27) As we do so, we must "love one another with a pure heart fervently," and "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (I Pet. 1:22; Heb. 10:24) We are not to antagonize, but avoid every word and act, so far as possible, that might incite to misunderstanding, strife, envy, bitterness, hatred, and evil speaking. (Eph. 4:31) All of these are of the fallen flesh and of the Adversary. If we "stand fast" in a faith which is impelled by love, we will have a living faith and surely be "kept by the power of God . . . unto salvation."—I Pet. 1:5

Jesus prophesied of a time when "the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12) Let this not be true of us. Our love toward others, as we stand fast in the faith, must remain fervent, even though it may be ridiculed and spurned. We may be criticized and belittled, but we must see to it that "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it." (I Cor. 4:12)

Though we may be persecuted, let us never join the ranks of the persecutors.

ENDURANCE

To us the questions again come, “Who may abide?” and “Who shall stand?” Will we bear up under trials and stand fast while our beloved Lord refines and purifies us, that we may render to him “an offering in righteousness?” To do so will mean, as Jesus clearly stated, that we must “deny” self utterly, “take up [our] cross daily,” and follow him. (Luke 9:23) Endurance is vital for this work to be completed, but we are promised, “Blessed is he who patiently endures trials; for when he has stood the test, he will gain the victor’s crown—even the crown of Life—which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”—James 1:12, *Weymouth*

The beloved refiner is graciously working upon us, to bring us forth as “vessels of gold.” (II Tim. 2:20) Individually, we are to submit willingly to his work in us. We all need refining, because of the dross inherent in the earthen, fleshly vessel in which our spiritual treasure resides. “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark [observe or watch] iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3) How true it is that from the beginning to the end of our pilgrim journey, we cannot stand before God without a covering for our sins. The Scriptures declare this gracious provision, stating that God has covered us “with the robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10) Paul explains that it is “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 3:22, *Revised Version*) We are exceedingly grateful for this loving provision which is by faith.

As consecrated believers, we are all being tried and tested. There will be subtle tests as to what we believe, and why. In these tests, God will always be with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us, so that we can boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Heb. 13:5,6) Our loving Heavenly Father desires that we be conformed to his image, and that of his dear Son, Christ Jesus, as he views us in the crucible of his workmanship. Therefore, let us strive daily to bear up courageously under the refining and cleansing of his all-wise methods.

Let us not become “weary in well doing,” and remember that our test is not one simply of well doing, but of “patient continuance in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9; Rom. 2:7) Thus, keeping on “the whole armour of God,” that we may be able to stand in this “evil day,” we shall surely be able to say: “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”—Eph. 6:13; Job 23:10 ■