

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH THROUGH FIERY TRIALS

"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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." – 1 Pet. 1:7.

FAITH MAY BE said to have in it the two elements of intellectual assurance and heart-reliance. Both the head and the heart – the intellect and the affections – are necessary to the faith without which it is impossible to please God. With some, faith is all emotion; with others, it is all intellectuality. But neither of these elements alone can withstand the fiery tests to which faith is subjected. Both must be present and remain, if our faith be that which will endure to the end and be found unto praise, honor and glory at the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The trial of our faith to which our Lord and the Apostles refer is a trial, not only of our *intellectual knowledge* of Divine Truth, but also of our *heart-reliance upon God*. In both respects, the true child of God will find himself severely tried. Let him see to it that he has a "Thus saith the Lord" for every item of his belief. Let him study the doctrine and get a clear understanding of every element of the Truth. Let him become rooted, grounded, settled and established in the doctrines of God, and give earnest heed lest at any time he let them slip. – Heb. 2:1.

When he has his faith well grounded in the *fundamental principles* of Divine Truth, let every consecrated child of God see to it that he also continue to cultivate heart-reliance in the "*great and precious promises.*" St. Peter tells us that a faith which has stood the tests of fiery ordeal and has come off victorious is very precious in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Whenever we pass through a fiery trial and still retain, not only our faith in the doctrines, but also our *confidence in God*, our *reliance in His promises*, our integrity of heart and purpose, and our zeal for Truth and righteousness, then our

characters have grown more Christ-like and hence more pleasing to God, who subjects us to discipline for this very purpose.

St. Peter intimates in our text that the faith of those called throughout the Gospel Age will receive a severe testing. He says, "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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." In the present [R5115 : page 321] time, when gold is comparatively a rare metal, it has a special value. Therefore, the Apostle compares it to the faith of the Little Flock, to whom alone, of all humanity, will be given the glory, honor and immortality promised to those who overcome.

Hence the trial of the faith of this class is very important. None will be admitted to membership in the Body of Christ who has not been tested and proved by the Lord. But let us remember that our testing is not to see whether we are perfect according to the *flesh*. On the contrary, God knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. – Psa. 103:14.

What God is seeking in us is the development and perfection of faith. We are tested to see whether we believe in Him as a faithful, wise, loving and true God; and in His Son as our Redeemer, who purchased us with His own precious blood, and as our Advocate, who now covers our blemishes, past, present and future, with the Robe of His imputed Righteousness. These are the elements of faith which He will test thoroughly and which must grow stronger as time goes by. Without strong, well-tested faith in God and His promises, we cannot please Him and become members of the Elect class which He is now selecting.

THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH FAITH IS TRIED

The trial of our faith is not left to *chance*. It is supervised by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is represented by the Prophet Malachi as a refiner and purifier of gold and of silver, that He may purify the antitypical House of Levi, and separate the dross from the precious metal. (Mal. 3:3.) In one sense of the word, He came as that refiner at

the First Advent. During the entire Gospel Age, He has been doing the refining work in His people, that the offering to the Father might be an acceptable one.

First of all, our Lord laid down His life in *fulfilment* of the *types of the Law*, thus demonstrating His absolute trust, loyalty, and faith in God. The Church of Christ must be similarly tested and proved in respect to their obedience, trust, loyalty to the Father. They must be willing, not only to trust God when things are favorable, but to trust in His providences when they cannot see the outcome. To attain this degree of faith, they must pass through manifold trials and testings, that they may demonstrate their faith and loyalty.

During the Gospel Age a peculiar, special and called-out class is being dealt with. We can see that God is not dealing with the world, but allows it to "lie in the Wicked One." (I John 5:19, *Diaglott.*) St. Paul tells us that during those times when the people were in ignorance, God paid no particular attention to their conduct, except when it went to an extreme. (Acts 17:30.) But during the next Age, whoever does not repent when he hears the Gospel will make no advancement; but will, in conjunction with the Divine Plan, have punishments, stripes, for anything that he knowingly does that is wrong. This Gospel Age, however, is for the development of a specially *called-out* class – a *people for a purpose* – the Church of Christ.

The question naturally arises, Why should God test *faith* rather than *works*? The answer is that all kinds of works are dependent upon the ability of the worker, and that the whole race of Adam has become unable to do perfect works, on account of the fall of their first parents. None can be perfectly just, perfectly wise, perfectly loving; to be so in our present imperfect condition is impossible.

Therefore, in His Wisdom and Love, God avoids making His test along those lines in which we are absolutely incompetent, and makes it along the line of faith – in His Wisdom, His Love and His promises. To doubt any of these would be to weaken the basis of our hope. We realize

that we are in a fallen condition, that we are dying like the remainder of the race. We have heard through the Word of God that He has provided a Savior, but we see that things continue much as they were, despite all that God and Christ have done. Our faith, however, assures us that God, who knows the end from the beginning, is working all things according to the counsel of His own will and that in due time He will establish righteousness in the earth. – Eph. 1:11; Psa. 72:1-7.

The language of one without faith would be, "I cannot see that God or Christ is accomplishing anything for the world. Man now learns to control himself better than did his ancestors and so he does not fight as did the savages of old, but uses more modern weapons. He builds hospitals and insane asylums; in this way he gets the sick and the insane off his hands and so has more time to devote to business." Present conditions have a strong influence upon the world. Very much depends upon how we look at a matter.

TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS INTEGRAL PARTS OF CHARACTER

From the standpoint of faith we see that Christ has come into the world and during the Gospel Age has been carrying on the work of selecting the Church, which is His Body, and that from these a light has shone out into the surrounding darkness, which has been more or less dispelled by it. The light of the Holy Spirit, shed abroad by the example of many Christian lives, exerts an influence today, and many have a veneer of politeness which may be mistaken for the fruits of the Spirit of God. But the outward conduct alone is not evidence of acceptable heart condition. God desires that truth and righteousness shall become integral parts of our characters and that the principle of Love shall dominate in everything. This development of character we do not find among *all* who profess the name of Christ.

Our faith, looking out into the world, asks of the Lord, "When will the promised time come in which Thy will shall be done on earth as in heaven?" The Scriptures reply that the glorious time for the blessing of

the world will not come until the Church shall have passed into glory; that Messiah will then reign for a thousand years in order to put down sin and opposition to Divine arrangements and to uplift those who desire to come into harmony with God; and that in order to accomplish this work He will establish a government based upon the principles of righteousness. By faith we accept this answer, and await God's due time for the blessing of all mankind.

Meantime, we will not permit ourselves to drift into unbelief while we delude ourselves with the thought that we or others are accomplishing something through "social uplift." We are glad to see efforts put forth to help the unfortunate; but we perceive that there is a force at work in the world that prevents success along this line. Present methods will not eradicate selfishness from the human heart; and until this is accomplished, God's will cannot be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

To bring about this desired result, the Kingdom of Heaven is soon to be established, according to the Word of God. If, while waiting for His due time to arrive, we participate in worldly ambitions and endeavors, our faith will become vague and perhaps die. Although the good that we may do will be in conflict with the darkness around us, nevertheless, it should always be shining forth **[R5115 : page 322]** in our words and in our conduct as the result of the glorious hopes that inspire our lives.

Faith is a quality possessed by all whom God is calling to membership in the Body of Christ, and the appeal of the Scriptures is only to those who have some faith and who are determined to increase it. When we begin our course as Christians, we have comparatively little faith, and it must be developed; our Christian experience is for the purpose of faith development. As St. Peter suggests, our faith, which is on trial, is much more precious than gold, although the gold be tried by fire. The exercise of faith tends to its development, and so our Father gives us numerous trials to test its strength.

THE FAITH OF THE ANGELS SEVERELY TESTED

God purposely permits us to be subject to manifold temptations for the testing of our faith, which is necessary because of the outcome of the trial. We may suppose that *prior to the existence of man* the angels had no such trials of faith and patience as the Church has had, for the angels saw God and knew of His works. Nevertheless, God has been pleased to give them a test of faith, which has continued during all of man's experience.

The primary cause of Satan's deflection, which resulted in his rebellion, was that he lost his faith in God. He formed the idea that he could manage the Universe better than could the Almighty, and thought to secure to himself a little corner where he could show how affairs should be carried on. He succeeded in getting control of our first parents, only to find that, instead of bringing a blessing, he had brought upon the human family the curse of death – the penalty of sin – and all the misery and crime now on the pages of history.

Satan's career became a very important test to the angels. Believing that God had all power, they did not understand why He would permit Satan to pursue so evil a course. They would have restrained the Adversary altogether. So when they saw evil going on unrestrained for centuries, some of them also evidently lost their faith. Thus came about the conditions mentioned in the sixth chapter of Genesis, when some of the angels preferred to materialize and live in human conditions. This was in violation of the Divine arrangement, and was the result of their loss of faith in God's Wisdom and Power. They had seen what Satan had done, although he had not succeeded in doing anything great; and their sentiment was, "Apparently God does not control affairs so completely as we have thought." – Gen. 6:1-4; 2 Pet. 2:4,5; Jude 6,7.

Thus we see that God tested the faith of the holy angels, especially when we understand that the evil conditions [R5116 : page 322] prevailing before the flood have continued to some extent. The holy angels had occasion to doubt, to fear respecting God's Wisdom,

Love and Power. Thus they were all thoroughly tested – more so than humanity; for they saw all that there was to be seen. We admit that there are a great many things that we do not know and cannot see, but the angels have apparently a much wider scope of knowledge. Thus the test of their faith was much greater than is ours.

God tested the faith of the angels because He wished to know which of them had that absolute confidence which would enable them to trust Him, whether it seemed that He *had* or had *not* the power to control affairs. The lesson of the exceeding sinfulness of sin was both wise and necessary. Had the fall of man resulted in the everlasting torture of even a small proportion of the human family, we could not think that God was either wise or just in permitting this test to come upon His creatures.

For more than four thousand years God permitted mankind to go down into death. Then came a manifestation of His Love when He provided for their redemption; and a still further manifestation of His Power will be given in the next Age, when they will be raised from the dead. Furthermore, in the Bride class He is making a special illustration, both to angels and to men, of His Love for those who manifest heart-loyalty to Him, and of His willingness to lift those faithful few far above the angels and even to make them "partakers of the Divine nature." We see, then, that in God's dealings with the angels He had respect to their *faith*.

FAITH PROPORTIONATE TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CHARACTER

The Scriptures say that "without *faith* it is *impossible* to please God." (Heb. 11:6.) If one lose his faith, there is no telling whither he may wander. The Apostle Peter's argument is that this special class who are being selected for exaltation to the Divine nature, must expect to have their faith tested, and that this testing is most important from the Divine point of view. If they have faith, it will control all of their affairs. – Compare Heb. 11:1,6.

Our faith will be in proportion to our knowledge of the character of God. We shall find, upon observation, that in proportion to our faith we can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Since our test is for so brief a time – a few years – it must of necessity be a very severe, a crucial one. God is subjecting our faith to a great heat in order to separate the dross. If we had not the faith, we might fear to take the steps which would bring us into this crucial position. Fear would lead us to decline to take the course that God indicates to be His will. Without faith we would shrink from the fiery trials, the heated furnace. If we have not the faith to stand the trials, then we are not of the kind for whom God is at the present time looking.

If we appreciate this matter, we shall see that "without faith it is impossible to please God"; and that confidence in Him will lead us to weigh His words of precious promise. These promises will make clear to us the reason why these testings are upon us, and will enable us to appreciate our testings as marks of His love for us. The Lord would have us be "a peculiar people," tried and tested, "zealous of good works," a people for a purpose; and so He develops us through suffering.

When the world is on trial during the Millennial Age, knowledge will have come in, and there will be *less opportunity* for the exercise of faith. Mankind will be in much the same condition as that in which the angels now are. For a thousand years, the world will be assisted upward, and at the same time they will have opportunities of cultivating faith – heart-reliance – in God. What *we* now see by *faith*, *they* will actually *know* – that the permission of sin has been working out a great Divine test for both men and angels. Thus gradually, throughout the thousand years, their faith will be established in practically the same way that the faith of the angels is now being established. They will *see* and will walk by *sight*, while we *believe* the promises and so walk by *faith*.

There is a difference between *intellectual belief* and *heart-reliance*. The person who knows God *best* will trust Him *most*. Our Lord Jesus in His glorified position trusts the Father most perfectly at all times. But with us, whose trust is imperfect, it is different. Not until the First Resurrection shall we have perfect trust. The greater the knowledge of God's character, the greater will be the heart-reliance upon Him.

During the Millennium, as *intellectual belief* gives [R5116 : page 323] place to *knowledge*, the heart-reliance of those who are loyal to the principles of righteousness will increase proportionately. It will *always* be in order to trust in God. The Great Creator is the Great Upholder of the Universe; and all of His creatures will ever be recipients of His bounty. If we understand the Scriptures, the only ones who will have deathlessness will be the Lord Jesus and the Church, which is His Body. (I Cor. 15:53.) All others will have dependent lives, and so will be objects of Divine care. In order to have everlasting life, they will need to have a heart-reliance upon their Creator. The more they learn of the unchangeableness of the Divine promises and character, the greater will be their trust.

The faith of the Church will be of a higher character than is that of the angels or than will be that of the world restored. The faith of the Church will have been wrought out amidst the darkness and obscurity of this Age, which are being permitted for the very purpose of developing that faith; for the Church is called to occupy a place much higher than that of angels or men – called to be partakers of the Divine nature. – 2 Pet. 1:3,4.

When, during the Millennial Age, the world shall have learned their lessons along the lines of knowledge, God does not purpose to receive them everlastingly without a thorough test of their heart-reliance. In Rev. 20:3,7-10, we read that at the close of the thousand years, Satan shall be loosed for a little season. Mankind will then *know* what is right and what is wrong, for the principles of

righteousness will have been implanted in their hearts. The experience with Satan will be a test of heart-reliance, of loyalty, in that God will apparently not be in control.

Then all those not in the fullest sympathy with God and His Divine Plan will be misled by this test of faith. Thus they will demonstrate their true character. Those who prove disobedient will be destroyed in the Second Death. God tells us that in the consummation every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to the glory of His Name, and that every creature in Heaven and in earth shall give honor and praise to the Son.
– Rev. 5:13.

