

TRIALS ESSENTIAL TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." – James 1:2.

ALL those who have been called of the Lord during this Gospel Age are called with what the Apostle Paul styles the High Calling (Philippians 3:14), the Heavenly Calling (Hebrews 3:1), which is a call to share with Jesus in His glory, honor and immortality. But the call is not the decision in the matter; it is merely an invitation with certain definite conditions. We are called, not only to righteousness, but to walk in the Master's footsteps of suffering and self-sacrifice. These are the only terms on which any are received as disciples of Christ. We understand the Scriptures to teach that during the Millennial Age there will be other terms of acceptance with God, offered the world. But there are no conditions offered now other than those of becoming followers and disciples of Jesus, to walk as He walked.

The Apostle James intimates that temptations may overtake these followers of Christ, into which they will fall as into a snare. As for an army, traps are set by the enemy, so the great Adversary sets traps and snares for us. He endeavors to misguide our minds and to lead us away from proper conceptions of truth and righteousness. We should be very careful to avoid his snares. Nevertheless, in spite of diligence, we may fall into a trap.

The Apostle says we are to rejoice when we fall into various temptations – not that we are to rejoice if we fall into *sin* when tempted, but that we may rejoice if we find ourselves suddenly precipitated into temptation. Temptation is not sin. If we could but keep in mind the fact that every temptation, every trial, every persecution, every difficulty in life, permitted to come upon us who have made the covenant of sacrifice with the Lord, is intended

to *prove us*, to test our love, to see whether or not our characters are *fixed*, rooted and grounded in righteousness and being built up in love, it would put all these trials, difficulties and temptations in a new light before us, and greatly assist us in fighting a good fight and overcoming. When we find ourselves suddenly in temptation, trial, we should say, If by these temptations, or trials, the Lord is proving my love and devotion to Him, then, however trifling they may be or however important, I will diligently use them as favorable opportunities to demonstrate to my Lord the fulness of my love and devotion to Him and His cause. I must fight a good fight against this thing – the world, the flesh or the Adversary – whatever it might be that had brought the snare.

Thus viewed and thus met we can rejoice in every such experience; every trial and every difficulty will prove a blessing; for we shall, first of all, have an opportunity to show the Lord that we will endure, and not compromise His cause or our own position as His servants. We can rejoice also because we know that under such trials our characters will make advancement toward crystallization, if we overcome; and because we know that the Lord would not let us fall into any temptation which He would not cause to work out for us a blessing if we are wholly loyal. Let us dwell often upon the words of the Apostles: "Beloved, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." "Greatly rejoice, though now for a season ye are in manifold temptation, that the trial of your faith, being more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." "Blessed is the man that endureth [faithfully under] temptation; for after his trials he will receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." "These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, *work out* for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" – if rightly utilized; if we are rightly exercised by them. – 1 Peter 1:7; James 1:2,12.

"HE THAT ENDURETH"

We are assured that those who love the Lord, and who because of this will receive the Kingdom, will be those whose love will have been tested by trials and temptations on the way. Those who do not love the Lord with *all* their hearts – in whom self or some other idol has first place – will be seduced by the world, the flesh or the Adversary, into some form of rebellion against the Divine Word or Divine providences. They will have schemes and theories which they will prefer to the Lord's Plan. These when analyzed will usually be found to be based either upon selfishness or upon ambition or an evil spirit of envy, hatred, etc. The Lord's leading and the Lord's words lose their attraction to such, and they lose their interest correspondingly. Like those who turned away from the Lord at the First Advent, declaring, "This is a hard saying," they walk no more with Him.

As there are some substances which are short and brittle, so are there some which have fibre, strength, endurance. The Lord chooses for Himself such characters as have the strong, enduring qualities – fortitude, patience, long-suffering, etc. Some there are who walk close to the Lord, who will not be driven from Him by any of the arts and wiles of the Adversary. They are such as are at heart fully the Lord's – not their own; they follow wherever the Lord may lead, because they have no will except the will of God. These will follow the Lord in the narrow way of trial, discipline and testings during the present life, and by and by, as He has declared, "They shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy." – Revelation 3:4.

He who escapes all trials and temptations and difficulties has every reason to doubt that he is really in relationship to God as a son. If he were a son, the Lord would surely find it necessary to give him trials and difficulties. If he does not have these he should go to the Father and make sure that there is no impediment on his

part – make sure that he has put himself in the proper place where he can be prepared for the Kingdom. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." – Hebrews 12:6.

FAILURES AS "STEPPING-STONES"

All will rejoice when the testings are over and we are accepted as overcomers, to share with the Lord in His Throne. But patience, trust and love must first do a refining work in our hearts, making us mellow, submissive and obedient to God. Let the good work go on! Let us rejoice if our trials have made us stronger in character, more humble and Christlike, more aware of our blemishes and imperfections, more watchful and earnest in our endeavors to correct them so far as possible.

Even the conflicts in which we have had only partial victory may have resulted in blessings to us. Even in those experiences where we have suffered absolute failure, there may be, through the humiliation and the pain of defeat, a strengthening of our character, a firm determination for greater watchfulness in that direction, and a more fervent prayer for the Lord's sustaining grace, the need of which has been more deeply impressed upon our hearts. Thus even failures may become "stepping-stones" by which we rise toward God and Heaven. Only through much tribulation shall we enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all. If, therefore, the Lord's people **[R5459 : page 150]** find themselves involved in temptations, tribulations, instead of feeling downcast they are to rejoice and say, These are evidences that the Lord is preparing me for a place in the Kingdom. This should give one courage to fight the good fight against the world, the flesh and the Adversary. The flesh is suffering; but the new mind, the new will, has this joy; and the New Creature can rejoice, knowing that these trials are not for his harm, but for his good. – 1 Peter 4:13.

A WAY OF ESCAPE PROVIDED

The Heavenly Father will with every temptation provide a way of escape. Hence when we find ourselves in difficulty we are to say, The Heavenly Father is permitting this trial – the Lord Jesus will help me, and so I will rejoice in the fact that the Lord will not allow me to be overthrown; for He has promised that all things shall work out for my good.

As our text expressly says: We are to count it all joy when we *fall* into temptations – not when we *walk* into them. We are not to seek temptation. In our own fallen condition and that of those around us, with the Adversary alert to harm us, we know that there will be plenty of temptations without our walking into them. But if we fall into temptation we are to say, I have been striving against this thing, but the Lord has permitted it; and there must, therefore, come some blessing out of it for me. Even temptations that come through negligence are not to be disesteemed. Some of our greatest lessons in *carefulness* have resulted from the effect of our own *carelessness*. **[R5460 : page 150]**

Our joy is largely dependent upon our study of the Word and our knowledge of the precious promises contained therein for those who overcome. The Lord wants those who will endure a great fight of afflictions, who will endure patiently, though the temptations continue long and the tribulations become more and more severe. But if they should lose faith, all their previous good resolutions and standing for what is right would not make them overcomers.

These trials are intended to develop in us patience – that this quality may be deeply ingrained. We are building character for all eternity; and patience could not be thus developed and maintained except by repeated difficulties, tests – by our resolving again and again to be stronger and firmer in building the character-likeness of our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

A WORD OF WARNING

To those who are of this anointed company and who are striving to attain the glory promised to the faithful followers of Christ, the Apostle Peter issues a word of warning. In the first chapter of his second Epistle, he urges the Church to add quality after quality of character-preparation, that thus they may be fitted for the glorious things that God has promised to the faithful. He specifies *faith* as the primary qualification. To this he says that we are to add fortitude, knowledge, patience, self-control, godliness, brotherly kindness and a broad, generous love for all mankind. The reason why the Scriptures declare that our judgment will be according to our *faith* is that while in the flesh we shall never be able to perform *works* such as God could approve.

What God approves is the New Creature. By exercising faith and by demonstrating loyalty these New Creatures will be able to please Him, and to work out the proper character as enjoined in His Word, developing the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. "*If ye do these things,*" says the Apostle, "ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Faith is necessary *all along the line*. Without faith we could not have courage to go on. If we did not have faith what would be our source of encouragement? The fall mentioned in the text above quoted (2 Peter 1:10), is evidently a fall from the position to which we have been invited and to which invitation we respond. We were called to be joint-heirs with our Lord. If we are obedient to the Word of the Lord and are properly exercised by the experiences which are given us in the School of Christ, we shall gain His approval; for "Faithful is He that hath called us." If there is a fall in our case, it will be due to failure to do our part. If we fail to cultivate character, we shall fail to gain the Kingdom.

CAUSES INDUCING A FALL

Among those who fall some will fall more seriously than others. Those who fail to go on will receive certain tests which will determine whether they will turn back to the world or will continue in the narrow way. Some will fail in that they will not manifest sufficient zeal. These will come through great tribulations. If by these experiences they are brought to a full loyalty to the Lord, they will be granted everlasting life, but not on so high a plane as if they had not failed in their manifestation of zeal for the Lord, and of faith, energy and perseverance in doing the Lord's will.

Again, from lack of zeal in the Lord's service or from cultivating a spirit of bitterness, one may deteriorate until he becomes an enemy of the Lord, loving sin rather than righteousness. As an opponent of God such a one would suffer a complete fall. But those who have a temporary fall, but who afterwards overcome in the trials which the Lord will allow to come upon them, thus showing their loyalty to Him, will be fully recovered. Those who fall utterly can never be recovered. Such will lose *everything*. They had sacrificed their *human* hopes before they could be accepted at first; therefore their falling away from this condition of a New Creature will be a hopeless fall.

The fall of such will be far worse than the fall of Adam, whose fall resulted from having only limited knowledge and from lack of experience in the results of evil, for these have come to a clear knowledge of the Truth and have experienced a share in the redemption. The falling away of such would mean a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation – of destruction as enemies of God. Adam had only a small knowledge of the grace of God, and therefore is to be redeemed and ultimately restored, if he shall come into harmony with God.

Dear brethren, let us take heed to our ways. Let us earnestly cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, that we may indeed be

presented "*faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

"From glory unto glory' that ever lies before,
Still wondering, adoring, rejoicing more and more;
Still following where He leadeth, from shining field to field,
Himself the goal of glory, Revealer and revealed!

"Then let our hearts be surely fixed where truest joys are found,
And let our burning, loving praise yet more and more abound;
And gazing on the 'things not seen' eternal in the skies,
'From glory unto glory,' O Savior, let us rise!"

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