

# Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

## An Expository Journey Through **1 Peter** **1 Peter 4:12-19**

### 45 Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal, Part 1

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March 17, 2019

#### **1 Peter 4:12-19**

**12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

**13** but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

**14** If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

**15** Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

**16** but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

**17** For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

**18** *AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?*

**19** Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

To the Glory of God

Now I have been waiting to get to this Passage since we started our "journey" through **1 Peter** in August of 2017. And even though every Word of this Epistle is inspired and inerrant and infallible, the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us is the very *core* of all that Peter was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to say. In other words, if you get what Peter says *here*, you will get the whole Book. In fact, I think so

much about this Passage that I chose part of verse 12 to be the title our "journey". So, needless to say, we will "camp out" here on this Passage for a few weeks so we can get the full impact of what the Apostle Peter has to say to us about the "Issue of Suffering". And we need to look at the Sermon today as a sort of Introduction to the mini-series on the Words of Peter in this Passage

Now this section of Peter's "Memoir"<sup>1</sup> tells us that there are two ways that believers are *not* to relate to the Suffering that we go through:

1. We are NOT to be "**surprised**" (verse 12)
2. We are NOT to be "**ashamed**" (verse 16)

... and *both* of them are related. So, believers should never be "surprised" by Suffering, and our Suffering should never make us "ashamed".

Now the reason that we should not be surprised by our Suffering is because Suffering is *common*. Suffering, like Prayer and the Bible and Love and Grace, is a *common denominator* to those who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth. So, *all* believers suffer. And while *some* believers are *specially* called to suffer in unthinkable ways, and *some* are called to suffer *frequently*, *all* believers suffer to some extent. So, one of the reasons Suffering should never be *surprising* is because it is one of the experiences to which we can all relate. And yet, I would suggest that when Suffering does come to our door, it is, many times, a surprise to us.

But being "ashamed" of our Suffering is quite a different issue. Because *one* of the reasons Peter told us not to be "ashamed" of our Suffering has to do with the mentality of many of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century believers, especially the Jews who were schooled in the dynamic of trying to always find out what sin a person had committed that brought about the Suffering to begin with.

You see, one of the most common traits among the self-righteous Pharisees, that was so cruel and so insulting to Jesus, was their effort to always assign "blame" to those who were suffering. For example, in

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<sup>1</sup> For many years in the early Church- the writings of the Apostles were called, "The Memoirs of the Apostles". As these Books replaced the first five Books of Moses as the "didactic books" (teaching books) of the New Covenant- they were called, "Epistles"

their Theology, a person was blind because either he or his parents had sinned (**John 9**). A lame man was looked at not as someone who needed mercy, but as someone to rebuke. A childless woman was a bad woman, a leper was evil, and the poor and helpless were hindrances to their Ministry.

So, those who suffered, in any capacity, were often seen as those whom God had forsaken, or as those who had sinned past God's ability to forgive and help them. And this is why the Prophet Isaiah said this about Jesus in **Isaiah 53:3**:

**He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him... we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.**

... to not "esteem" someone means that you don't think much about him. And the reason why people did not think very much about Jesus is because He was a "Man of Sorrows and Acquainted with Grief". And the reason that Jesus was acquainted with grief and a Man of Sorrows was because people saw Him as having been "stricken and smitten of God".

So, to many people and in many cultures, and in many areas of our black hearts that we try not to go into very much, we see Suffering as a Sign of God's Curse on ourselves or somebody else. So, the Greek word that was translated here into English as "ashamed" has to do more with "condemnation" than it does with "embarrassment". So, Peter is telling the believers of his day, and ours, that when genuine saints "suffer as a Christian", we are not to buy into the false notion that we have been forsaken by God, and, therefore, we are condemned, but rather we are to:

**glorify God in this name**

It is just human nature to admire and to be attracted to rich and famous people who are the "movers and shakers" of the world. Poor and sick and helpless and suffering people are not usually asked to give anyone their autographs. And sadly, this human trait has carried over into the Church. And so, people, who are classified as "scattered aliens"

are *not* people we would normally admire for their demonstration of great faith. And yet, the writer of **Hebrews** said they:

**Hebrews 11:35b-38**

**were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.**

Now pay close attention. The writer says that those genuine believers, who suffered like this, were:

***men* of whom the world was not worthy**

... which means that, rather than being ashamed of these people, *these* "suffering saints" were actually God's Gifts to the world. And then the writer summed them all up by saying:

**Hebrews 11:39a**

**And all these, having gained approval through their faith...**

The writer of **Hebrews** wrote here, *infallibly*, that the people who were despised by the world, those who were *not* highly sought out, and those who had obviously been forsaken by God and were looked at as being an embarrassment to many in the early Church for their *lack* of faith, were, in reality, the very ones who had:

Gained approval through their faith

Which is simply another way of saying that the very people, whom the Pharisees would have considered to be forsaken by God, and people they would have condemned as having sinned the most as evidenced by their suffering, were, in reality, the most godly and spiritual people in the room.

Now keep in mind, these people did *not* "gain approval through their faith" simply because they suffered. And that is true for two reasons:

- 1) In **Hebrews 11:17-35a**, we see that *some* saved people did great exploits, and saw God move and performed miracles, and saw powerful supernatural manifestations, and they gained approval through their faith as well.
- 2) Unserved people all over the world suffer all the time. And while their suffering is horrible and terrible, and we should do everything we can to *minimize* or *eliminate* the suffering of these people, every time we can, the unsaved do *not* "gain approval through their faith" because they suffered. The only ones who "gain approval through their faith", are genuine believers.

Now my point here is that what many in the modern church teach today about Faith, and about how Faith works, and how we can build up our Faith, and what we can expect from having strong and vibrant Faith, *especially* in how Faith relates to our Suffering, is mostly wrong. And what Peter teaches in this Passage shatters so much of what is being taught in the modern church about this issue.

So, for example, it is *easy* for us to understand that saved people, who love Jesus, *who through faith-* receive great Miracles and Acts of Providence from God, are blessed by God and have great Faith. It is *easy* for us to think they are in the Will of God and are doing God's Will, and that their faith is an example to us all. That's easy.

But what is much *harder* for us to grasp is that saved people, who love Jesus. *who, through their faith,* do *not* receive Miracles or Acts of Providence by God, and people who *don't* get delivered and who *aren't* healed, but who are *tortured*, and who are *destitute* and *persecuted* and *ill-treated*, and who, *through faith,* remain strong and faithful to God throughout their entire agony, are *also* blessed by God.

So, the notion that strong and powerful faith will *always* bring about physical healing or deliverance or some Miracle or Act of Providence is simply not taught in the Bible. Peter says:

**but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you**

**are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

... and their faith is *also* an example to us all, maybe even more than the others. Because the writer of **Hebrews** said these people are:

***men of whom the world was not worthy***

... which simply does not make sense to many of us, who live in the unprecedented prosperity and safety of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America.

Now Peter describes the Suffering of believers in very interesting ways. He said that there are basically five different *kinds* of Suffering:

1. Sharing in the Sufferings of Christ (verse 13).
2. Being reviled for the Name of Christ (verse 14).
3. Suffering as a murderer, thief, evil doer, and troublesome meddler (verse 15).
4. Suffering as a Christian (verse 16).
5. Suffering according to the Will of God (verse 19).

... and four of these are "Good", while one is "Bad". Four of these different kinds of Suffering bring Glory to God and display the infinite Worth and Value of Jesus by demonstrating great and powerful Faith, while the other one *dishonors* God and brings *reproach* to His glorious Name. So, we could probably sum it up by saying there seems to be two main "categories" of Suffering:

- ✓ *Sinful* Suffering
- ✓ *Godly* Suffering

... so, *some* Suffering is the kind of "sowing and reaping" form of God's Judgment on those who are engaged in sinful behavior. But we must be careful here. Since all of us are sinners, and since all of us, periodically, engage in behaviors that we say we don't believe in, we *could* say that *everything* we suffer has a "root cause" in something we said or did that wasn't right. And that would allow us to spend all of our time agreeing with the Pharisees that *all* Suffering is caused by sin.

I think the biggest distinction between "Sinful Suffering" and "Godly Suffering" lies in our *ongoing* disposition toward sin. As a genuine believer we *hate* sin, we *despise* sin, and we are constantly sorrowing over our sin and crying out to God for Mercy and Forgiveness, and to help us live according to what we believe. But as we cry out, we are also remembering the Gospel that Jesus died with *all* of our sin on Him. And that means that *all* of God's Wrath against *all* of our sins has already been paid in full! And so, our grief and sorrow over our sin turns to rejoicing over the finished Work of Jesus!

Now I would suggest that the two kinds of godly Suffering that Peter called "Suffering as a Christian" and "Being reviled for the Name of Christ" are the *common* types of Suffering that *all* believers go through, and are the same, while the other two, "Sharing the Sufferings of Christ" and "Suffering according to the Will of God", are *special* and *unique* situations. And the reason I say that is based on what the Apostle Paul said in **Colossians 1:24**:

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

Paul says here that his own personal Sufferings were *special* and *unique* and *different* from the normal kinds of Suffering that all believers go through. He said that *his* Sufferings were "**for your sake**". And he makes a very startling statement at the end of this verse:

**In my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

Paul says here that the Sufferings he was going through were not only for the benefit of the Church as a whole, but that they served a very special and unique Purpose. How?

**In filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

Now my *first* Question would be, "*How could anything that Jesus did be 'lacking'?*" And my second Question would be, "*How could*

anything that Paul did 'fill' that lack"? And we will get into that in this mini-series.

But generally speaking, Jesus promised that *all* genuine believers would suffer to some extent when He said this in **John 15:18-20**:

**If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.**

... and the Apostle Paul promised Suffering to *all* believers, when he said:

## **2 Timothy 3:12**

**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

Now it is true that *most* of our Suffering will come at the hands of other people. This is the kind of Suffering called "Persecution". Satan has filled the hearts of the unregenerate, and they are either angry at us, or jealous or bitter toward us, and so, they lash out. Others, like Saul of Tarsus (before his conversion) will attack believers because they think they are defending their own man-made, pagan religion.

Now the most *common* form of Persecution is carried out *verbally*. Evil people will say things *to* us or *about* us that are attempts at either silencing us or getting us to recant or deny Jesus.

But many times, the evil in their hearts will encourage others to actually "do" things against the saints. So, for example, they could work to undermine us at our place of employment, they could deny raises or promotions at work, they could single you out for ridicule or scorn, or they could deny a loan or a business permit; they could even bring a lawsuit against us, etc. Case in point would be the Christians who were sued because they didn't want to sanction a sexually perverse celebration and suffered, not only the ridicule and scorn by the mostly ungodly Media, but was actually physically attacked and threatened, and had to defend themselves in court.



But there are times when the evil in unsaved people is so strong that they will *physically* attack us. And there are occasions when God *allows* evil people to imprison, beat, torture, or even kill His Own children. And, while imprisoned, others are free to confiscate our earthly possessions, take our children away, or even kill us. Beautiful and precious saints of God have suffered like this for many, many centuries.

But there are occasions where satan doesn't use other people to bring about our Suffering, and he simply uses *himself* or other fallen angels, or even parts of God's created world. This is what Daniel was moved along to say in **Daniel 10:2-21**:

**In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with *a belt of* pure gold of Uphaz. His body also *was* like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the**

vision pertains to the days yet *future*." When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was standing before me, "O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me." Then *this* one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. He said, "O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!" Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, "May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. "However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these *forces* except Michael your prince.

... and after satan had received Permission from God to take all that Job had, someone<sup>2</sup> wrote this in **Job 1:18&19**:

**While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."**

Now reading Passages like this frightens us and makes us feel helpless against fallen angels and winds and storms. But the Bible is crystal clear about this, dear friends, satan *cannot* simply attack a believer without *first* obtaining *Permission* from God to do so.

But if God has given satan Permission to touch the flesh of a genuine believer or to take all that we have, the Promise of God to us is this:

### **Romans 8:28**

**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.**

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<sup>2</sup> We aren't sure who wrote the **Book of Job**. It may have been written many years after the events occurred by Jeremiah.

So, when satan is *allowed* to cross over the Hedge of Protection and touch us, it is only so that God will sovereignly *cause* that “bad thing” to “work together” with all the other things that God has either “allowed” or “caused” to come into our lives to bring about the *greater* “Good” of the Glory of God, and also the fulfilment of our own Joy!

So, normally, God has “set a hedge” of protection around all those who are saved that keeps satanic attacks away. But as we learned from our “journey” through **Luke** and from periodically examining portions of the **Book of Job**, there are times when satan pleads with God for Permission to “cross- over” the “Divine Hedge of Protection” that God has placed around every believer and attack a believer. Here is what Jesus told Peter about this phenomenon in **Luke 22:31**:

**Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;**

Now the phrase that Dr. Luke used here “**has demanded**” comes from a Greek word that means: *begging with earnest desire*. So, satan *really* wants to hurt Peter. He wants to “sift Peter like wheat”. But what does that mean? Satan wanted to be able to cast doubt into Peter’s mind through a series of events so that Peter would lose faith and trust in hope that Jesus was the promised Messiah. *That* is what it means for your “Faith to fail”.

So, satan was not interested in “sifting” Peter so that Peter failed to escape imprisonment, or that he failed to always be healed when he got sick, or that he failed in not having enough material possessions, or that he failed in removing the Roman Army from Israel and restoring Israel’s Kingdom. No, satan was interested in providing an opportunity for evil people to do what was already in their hearts anyway. And through them, *voluntarily* doing wicked things, Peter would lose faith in “Who Jesus is”. And that is *always* the Issue with any Test that we go through, even now.

We must understand that “Who Jesus is” is *always* the Issue. It always *has* been and always *will be*. “Who Jesus is” is the Issue that determines whether we are saved or not, and it is the Issue that determines whether we *remain* saved. Lost people are saved by “confessing with their mouth” that Jesus is “Lord”, that Jesus is “God Almighty in human flesh”, that Jesus is “Yahweh with a body”. Nobody can be saved and they will not go to Heaven unless they believe and

trust and openly confess that “*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!*” That Confession is the “Rock” upon which the Christian Church is built, and every human, who is truly a part of that Church, *joyfully* and *repeatedly* confesses that.

And that means that even though satan may receive Permission to test our health, or our money, or our children, or our marriage, or our possessions, that when you boil it all down, *all* Tests and *all* Trials are really just a “Test of our Faith”. Will we remain fully trusting in Jesus, or will we turn away from Jesus and place our trust and hope and confidence in something or someone else? Will we continue to seek after Jesus and His Will, or will we reject His Will and seek our own? Will we strive to find happiness and the fullness of Joy in Jesus, or will we seek after the pleasures that the pagan world offers us? And will we live in such a way that proves that we truly believe that “Jesus is Lord”, or will we only give “lip-service” to God in Church on Sunday?

Now a little background here is warranted. We must understand that “having faith” is *not* an end to itself. We are never told anywhere in the Bible to simply “have faith” in *whatever* we are thinking about. When Jesus made Statements like:

### **Mark 11:23&24**

**Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.**

... far too many people concentrate only on the part that *seems* to suggest that whatever we ask will happen, as long as we believe. But they seldom remember that *before* Jesus said any of this, He prefaced it with this Statement:

### **Mark 11:22b**

**... Have faith in God.**

... and before Jesus said any of this, He had already taught us how to pray:

**... Your Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...**

So, we are never to simply “have faith” that we will win the game, or that we will get the promotion, or that we will be healed, or that we will acquire some material blessing. That is *paganism*, not Christianity. In the Bible, “having faith” *always* had a “destination”, an “object” of that faith. And that “destination” and “object”, in the Bible, is always God, *not* the thing we want. So, we are not to merely “have faith” or “have faith that we will get that thing”. We are told to “have faith *in God*”.

After the Flood, as men multiplied on the earth, a man named Nimrod rose up to be the one who took all the false teachings that had been developed over the centuries, and he *formalized* and *codified* them and wrote them down so they could be taught to succeeding generations and deceive the world.<sup>3</sup> And those collected false Teachings came to be known as the “Babylonian Mystery Religions”<sup>4</sup>. And the people who were deceived by them came to be known as “pagans” and “barbarians”. And these people were not given those titles simply because they ate their own children or sacrificed them to their gods, but rather they carried out these barbaric and pagan practices precisely because of what they believed and trusted in. Because a person *cannot* live (long term) in contradiction to what he genuinely believes.

And *part* of these pagan beliefs was that a person who had gained favor with the “gods” could “have” or “achieve” whatever he wanted simply by “believing”. And so, to the pagans, both “god” and “faith” were merely *tools* that were available to get whatever you wanted. These are the pagan beliefs that the Old Testament Prophets cried out against.

Now as Western Civilization was birthed, through the development of Christian Thought<sup>5</sup>, we *rejected* those pagan beliefs as being inherently *contradictory* to fundamental Christianity that put the Will and Plan and Interests of God ahead of the individual believer. But at some point in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a man named Essek William Kenyon was used by satan to develop what has now become known as the “Prosperity Gospel”. And Kenyon *manufactured* a Theology that

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<sup>3</sup> **Genesis 10; Micah 5**

<sup>4</sup> The collection of false teachings that plagued Israel during the Ministry of many of the OT Prophets

<sup>5</sup> The term “Christian Thought” is not the same thing as “Church Doctrine” or even Salvation. Christian Thought is what obeying the Bible looks like within a society. So, Western Civilization is a civilization that is based on Morality that has been developed from the Bible- as opposed to anything else.

became known as “Positive Confession”, where an individual believer could actually “create matter” or “make things happen” by the confession of his mouth. Other terms for this false teaching was “Name it and Claim it” and “Speaking the Creative Word”. These false Teachings soon spread around the world and today is one of the largest religious movements in history, even though it is a radical departure from biblical Christianity. Kenyon was used greatly by satan to twist and pervert both meaning and application of the word “faith”, and to this very day it is from the false Doctrine of Kenyon that various cults like “Christian Science” came forth.<sup>6</sup> In 1962, Kenyon’s Teachings became the foundation of the Teachings of a man named Kenneth Hagin, who then made the unbiblical Teachings of EW Kenyon popular. Today, the twisting of the concept of “having faith” has been so successful that it is common to hear, even genuine believers, make statements about “faith” and “believing” that are direct quotes from EW Kenyon rather than from the Bible. So, to the ungodly, “having faith” that “god” would do this or that was nothing more than *using* “faith” to further their own selfish and self-centered lives, rather than as a way to make Jesus look magnificent.

So, satan wanted Peter to lose his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. And so, as Peter saw Jesus arrested and beaten, and the other disciples scattered, his faith in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God”<sup>7</sup> was tested. *“How can God allow Himself to be captured and beaten? How do you kill God? If Jesus really is the Messiah, why is He allowing all this to happen? What Good could possibly come from Jesus being killed? How is any of this the Will of God? And now that Jesus is being taken out, what will happen to me?”*

And all that Peter had seen and heard, and personally witnessed for the last three years, began to melt. He had certainly not anticipated any of this. This was not *anything* like Peter thought was going to happen. And so, Peter’s faith is being sifted just like the farmers sifted wheat, and this man was being thrown up in the air and the wind was blowing him in every direction.

Now what we have to understand, dear friends, is that this phenomenon is common among *all* genuine believers. Something happens, and it seems as though it has come upon us *suddenly*, and

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Science is neither “Christian” nor “Science”.

<sup>7</sup> **Matthew 16:13-20**

that we are being tossed up in the air and sifted. *Everything* about us is being thrown around, and we are at a loss as to where this came from and where it is headed.

But it is very important for us to know at this point, that things are *not* "out of hand". God has *not* gone on vacation, He has *not* left His Throne, and satan has *not* taken over and is *not* in charge. The Bible says we are being "tested". Look again at what Peter said in verse 12:

**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;**

... so, the sudden, strange fiery ordeal that you find yourself entangled in is not *random*, it isn't an *accident*, it isn't a freak of nature, and it is *not* a sign that God has lost control, or that He is angry with you, or that you have failed so much that God is through with you. Peter said that this is a Test. And that means several things:

- The sudden, strange, fiery, Ordeal is a "Test".
- This Test has been *specially* designed just for you.
- This Test has both a "Beginning" and an "End", it is *not* eternal.
- This Test has both "Purpose" and "Meaning", it is *not* arbitrary.
- This Test is God's Will.

This strange, sudden, fiery ordeal that has come upon you is God's Good and Merciful and Kind *fulfillment* of the Promise that Jesus made when He saved you, and said in **John 6:37-40**:

**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.**

You and I are "creatures from the dust". And even though we are forgiven and saved, we came from the ground and we will go back to the ground. So, even though we have experienced the Miracle of the New

Birth, we are still classified as being “fallen”. And even though our souls are saved, and we have received the new, divine nature, our bodies are still fallen, and so, we still struggle.

Now we must understand that human beings can only have one nature at a time, so saved people are not struggling between our old fallen nature and our new redeemed nature. That isn't true. We are struggling between our new redeemed nature and our fallen flesh. So, as “saved saints” (sanctified ones), our struggle involves sin and temptation, and with the remaining loves and affections of our fallen and unredeemed flesh that do not please or honor God.

Martin Luther classified our struggle as being with “the world, the flesh, and the devil”. Our flesh is still just as attracted to the world and sin as it always was. But since we have been born again, our souls do not agree with our flesh. So, the battle is on. And as truly regenerate saints of God, we live in this fallen world, that is dominated by the devil, in an unredeemed body.

And normally, that would be a recipe for failure. But, in His Mercy, God has provided several wonderful “Means” by which His Grace and Mercy can continue to flow to us and in us and through us, so that we will not simply “be kept”, but that we can actually become “more holy”, and “more obedient”, and “more loving”, and “more faithful”, and “more humble”, and more like Jesus over time.

And, of course, I am talking about the “Process of Sanctification”, or “*Holification*”, that all believers are engaged in after we have been adopted into the Family of God, whereby our own, personal, intrinsic righteousness is becoming more and more like Jesus.

And this Sanctification is *progressive* and it is *relentless* and it is an *ever-present Reality* in the life of every genuine believer from the moment we are adopted until we die. Sanctification is the burning out of all the hay, wood, and stubble from our lives, it is the purification of our faith, and thus, it is what keeps us saved. And so, because we still contain some impurities, even though we are saved, God is determined to not allow those impurities to cause us to fall, or allow us to miss out on what God has promised to us.

We rejoice that Salvation is eternal. The Bible teaches clearly and repeatedly that once a sinner has truly been born again, and has been washed and forgiven and “made righteous”, he is *guaranteed* to also be



“glorified” in Heaven with Jesus. In **Romans 8:29&30**, the Apostle Paul said:

**For [all] those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and [all] these whom He predestined, He also called; and [all] these whom He called, He also justified; and [all] these whom He justified, He also glorified.**

... so true, genuine, biblical Salvation is eternal. That is true. But what many people do not comprehend is that what makes Salvation to be “eternal” is that a genuinely born-again saint *perseveres*. And without that “Perseverance”, Salvation would *not* be eternal. So, part and parcel to what it means to be “born-again” is that God equips and empowers all genuine believers with the desire and the ability to “keep on”. True saints *keep on* believing, they *keep on* repenting, they *keep on* trusting, they *keep on* following, they *keep on* loving, and they *keep on* pursuing Holiness on purpose, in how they live their daily lives.

Saved people are *ongoingly* convicted by God the Holy Spirit, Who now dwells continually in them, about the remaining sin that is in their flesh. They despise their sin and they are brought low by the knowledge that they do not always please God. And as they see their mistakes, they pray and seek God, and struggle by and through the power of the Holy Spirit, to joyfully and humbly submit to the Authority of the Scriptures in their daily life, all to the Glory of God. This continual process is called “Sanctification”.

So, *part* of continually being made holy is overcoming sin in our lives. But, we must remember that simply becoming more “moral” is *not* the same thing as being sanctified. Because we are fallen, we can struggle to be more moral and miss out on being more holy. Case in point are the many deceived souls that have bought into the false Teaching of Mormonism. Mormons “hang their hat” on being upstanding and clean and very moral people, who promote the family, and who don’t curse, drink, smoke, dip, chew, snort, or go with girls who do. And yet, they are deceived about “Who Jesus is” and how lost people are saved, the very *fundamental* elements of biblical Christianity (Orthodoxy).

What makes us "holy", and not merely "moral", is what we continue to "*believe in*" and what we continue to "*trust in*", and *not* merely what we "do". All of our "doing" is really nothing more than a human *response* to what we already believe in and trust in. So, the main focus in the Bible is always on "right believing", because "right believing" always leads to "right living".

But the danger is that there is a "counterfeit faith" that *masquerades* as genuine belief. And this false belief can actually produce a very high degree of human morality. So, *part* of being continually "made holy" through this ongoing struggle is being able to prove that our faith and trust is genuine. Peter says that happens through the sudden, strange, fiery ordeal that comes to us, to test us.

But there will be no lasting transformation into Christ-likeness without first seeing. And so, in His Mercy, God has devised a method by which the scales from our eyes are dropped and we can see. And we can see ourselves as God sees us. It is the method of "spiritual burning". God uses satan to test us to prove that our Faith is genuine and real and lasting and eternal. And so, satan has gone to God and demanded Permission to sift us like wheat. And we need to know two things about this:

1. The Bible was written to help us navigate through these times.
2. Jesus is praying that our Faith will not fail.

Look what Jesus told Peter about this:

**but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**

Now, Jesus *could* have prayed that God would simply deny the request that satan had demanded from God. And satan would then be *forced* to leave Peter alone. But He didn't. And we have to answer that. Why didn't Jesus ask God to deny satan's request? Wouldn't that be better for us? I mean I thought Jesus loved Peter. So, why would a Good and Merciful God give Permission to a being as evil as satan, and *risk* Peter falling away? The Answer lies in what Jesus said:

**I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**

God the Father gave Satan Permission to "sift Peter like wheat". And then, Jesus, personally, *interceded* on Peter's behalf that his Faith would not "Fail", thus *guaranteeing* three things:

- A. Satan would be able to cross the Hedge and attack Peter, and thus, *test* Peter's Faith.
- B. Peter's initial failure in the Test, where he sinned and betrayed the Lord and denied that he even knew Jesus, would require Repentance, but would *not* be *eternally* destructive.
- C. That once strengthened (by the sifting) Peter would "turn" and "strengthen" the others (including us).

Now remember what the aged Apostle said in **1 Peter 4:12**:

**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;**

... so, right out of the block, Peter is talking here to saved people. He called them "**Beloved**". So, this Truth is not for unbelievers. They are completely left out here. This Truth is being written only to those who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth. And the first thing Peter tells saved people about our Suffering is:

**... do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you ... as though some strange thing were happening to you**

... which I would suggest, is *exactly* how we are when our time of Testing comes. We are *very* "surprised" when Trials come, and we see our Testing as *very* "strange" indeed. And we do that not because we are evil, but because we see "Pain" and "Pleasure", and "Suffering" and "Rejoicing" as diametrically *opposed* to one another. But Peter wrote this Epistle to teach us that we are wrong about that. Our human impulse to despise Suffering and avoid it at all costs is actually a result of being fallen and part of what it means to look at the "things of the Spirit of God" as patently "foolish".

Paul Brand was the man that God used to treat Leprosy in India for many years. He developed a surgical technique that allowed children, suffering with Leprosy, to use their hands and feet. And in a 1994 magazine article entitled, “*And God Created Pain*”, Dr. Brand said:

“I have come to see that pain and pleasure come to us not as opposites but as Siamese twins, strangely joined and intertwined. Nearly all my memories of acute happiness, in fact, involve some element of pain or struggle.”<sup>8</sup>

And even though we are constantly being indoctrinated by many humanistic voices that tell us that “Happiness” is the result of being “self-centered” and building up our own “self-esteem”, it is hard to find anyone who says:

“The deepest and rarest and most satisfying joys of my life have come in times of extended ease and earthly comfort.”

Nobody says that, because it isn’t true. What *is* true is what Samuel Rutherford said when he was put in what he called “the Cellars of Affliction”:

“The Great King keeps his wine there — not in the courtyard where the sun shines.”

What is true is what Charles Spurgeon said:

“They who dive in the Sea of Affliction bring up rare pearls.”

... and what is true is what the Apostle Peter said:

**but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

Amen. Let’s pray.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/january10/and-god-created-pain.html>

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.