

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 25

June 24, 2012



Joy Despite the Trial

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. (1 Peter 1:6–8, KJV 1900)

Through the first five verses, Peter has focused his thoughts exclusively on things that God has done on behalf of His beloved children. God's merciful actions, here outlined, become the bedrock for stability and joy in believers through any and all of life's trials. In our Bible study, we should take note of themes that appear in various Bible books or sections of Scripture. First Peter serves as an example of this feature in your Bible. Peter's emphasis throughout this letter deals with Christian suffering. Most readers of this study do not suffer from overt persecution for their faith, as the original readers suffered. However, we each face trials of various kinds through the experience of life. In our present season, our nation's culture faces economic setbacks that have caused hard-working, responsible, and godly people to lose their jobs. Facing the daily needs of a family without reliable income can impose a stressful trail on your faith. Most of us live in good health and take our health for granted, but, sooner or later, our bodies will fall under the weight of age or disease, and we will hear shocking news from our physician. Hearing this news definitely adds a distressing trial to life's experience. Regardless the source or character of the trial, First Peter gives us powerful tools to learn how to face life's suffering moments with strong faith and steady footsteps.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.... How is it possible for any of us to hear the bad news from our employer, our physician, a family member, or others and rejoice despite the weight of the news? Peter points us toward a God-honoring answer to the question. He does not suggest that we must live with a perpetual pasted-on artificial smile on our faces. We've seen too many professing Christians who live behind such a superficial façade, but beware when they think no one is looking. Peter's first readers presently struggled with "...heaviness through manifold temptations...." However, they refused to allow those temptations to permanently compromise their faith. They saw it as temporary, "...now for a season...." Even as they struggled under the heavy weight of their trials, Peter also observes that they "...greatly rejoice...."

Peter does not indicate that a temporary reaction to heavy trials is sinful or in any way an indication of inferior faith. He acknowledges the fact and moves on. The power of God in our lives enables us to get over those trials and return to our joy in God. Ten years ago I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. From diagnosis till surgery, I failed to get my fear of the disease controlled. Believe me; I tried. Then in the recovery room, the Lord gave me a precious reminder that, whatever the outcome from my surgery, I would not face the future alone. He would faithfully stand by me. Although the surgeon spoke to Sandra after the surgery, I had not seen him at this point. When the nurses finally rolled me into my room, I immediately told Sandra what I had experienced before she told me what the surgeon said. Later she told folks that my words comforted her more than the surgeon's words. Therefore, I can personally appreciate Peter's point in this verse. My personal heaviness in the trial of disease was temporary, not permanent, and I am to this day convinced that it would have been so, even if my future had been cut short by the disease. The Lord is good, and His goodness is not contingent on our good health or personal comforts.

What difference does Peter's lesson make for us in the heat of life's trials? Consider. If you did not have the knowledge of God's goodness, mercy, and power that Peter has outlined in terms of His grace in and to us, how would you react to the trial? The trial would darken every aspect of your mind. You would have nothing else to think about. Instead of a temporary, "seasonal" trial, you'd paint your whole outlook dark, overwhelmed by the trial. But with the knowledge of God's loving and merciful grace, you can look right through—and past—your trial and find greater comfort in God than the discomfort of the trial. What if you temporarily lost your income? You strive to find work, and you trust God to supply your needs and keep you mindful of a treasure that does not fade, rust, tarnish, or disappear during an economic downturn. That attitude will alter your approach to your problem and just might motivate a prospective employer to hire you. He'd certainly rather hire an upbeat person in the midst of difficulty than a pessimist. If you hold a good outlook in your

personal trial, you'll more likely stand firmly with your employer during his rough times. A sound, Biblical lifestyle actually will make anyone a better employee than any other lifestyle out there. If your physician tells you that you have an incurable disease and need to "Put your house in order," you can rejoice that you shall soon be living in a "...house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1) Whatever your momentary trial, you have more in God to cause rejoicing than any trial should offset.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 KJVP)

Take notice. This upbeat lifestyle is not automatic. God doesn't force it onto you or micromanage your life so as to guarantee it. Paul carefully qualified his point. "While we look...." If you choose to look at your "...light affliction," you will soon view it as an unbearable load. But, if you endure the affliction, keeping your eyes set on "...things which are not seen...eternal" things, the weight of the burden lightens and becomes momentary.

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Regardless of our outlook or state of mind, life's experiences impact us and our moods. At times our culture imposes an unfair and biased stereotype onto women as the "Moody" gender. However, both in churches and in the secular workplace, I have observed fully as many "Moody" men as women, and one is as unpredictable and difficult as the other. A God-honoring outcome of your trial is not automatic or divinely programmed. If it were, Peter would not describe it as a trial. It is a test. We may "Pass" the test, or we may fail it. We may focus our faith on God and His merciful grace, enduring the trial of the moment as seasonal, temporary and soon to pass, or we may focus on the trial, neglect our faith and its focus on God, and our failure shall disappoint us, and it shall dishonor our God who promised to stand by us in our trials. For the fatalistic believers who think that these outcomes are divinely programmed and inevitable, I would urge them to look in the mirror. A careful self-examination will prove the error of their fatalistic view. Paul's commandment to steadfastness in the faith (1 Corinthians 15:58) requires that we confront the trials of faith, the errors against God's truth (as in that chapter, denial of the resurrection), and our own self-absorbed moods. Such steadfastness only occurs when we develop a fixed outlook that "Looks" outside ourselves and our personal interests. If self is our most important topic, we

shall fail the command to steadfastness. If God is truly our most important desire and purpose, we shall find the strength and wisdom to deny our own selfish interests and invest the energies of our lives in attitudes and activities that glorify God.

For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. (2 Timothy 4:10 KJVP)

Paul does not write these words from a self-absorbed attitude. Two companions left him and went to other regions with no complaint from Paul. Only Demas is condemned on two counts. His love for this present world motivated both his forsaking of Paul and his departure to Thessalonica. As a pastor for several decades, I have rejoiced to see new people discover the beauty of gospel truth that changed their lives. I have also on occasion seen some who began well in their faith-walk, but they forsook the way of truth and departed. In every case that I can recall, they forsook their faith before they disappeared from Sunday worship with the church. Attitudes changed. Their authentic fellowship with godly people in the church dwindled away, even when they were physically present. Just as Demas' forsaking of Paul appears prior to his departure for Thessalonica, those who forsake the faith, do so before they physically disappear from the assembly. No church and no individual believer should be so insensitive or abrasive with people as give them reason to walk away from the church. Paul makes this point.

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed. (2 Corinthians 6:3 KJVP)

While preachers may most expose themselves to this danger, every member of a church is liable. If you are contentious or temperamental with other believers, might your bad attitude discourage a weak believer who observes you? How effectively does your contentious mood contribute to the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ?

...at the appearing of Jesus Christ. While we shall experience an unimaginable change at death, our bodies shall surely experience a similar change at the Second Coming in the resurrection. When He appears in glory, raises the dead to be forever with Him, no doubt we shall glorify Him. However, in our study passage, Peter seems to more emphasize a present behavior and a present result. The Lord appears often in our lives, manifesting His approval or disapproval. When He so appears and manifests His approval or disapproval, how do you think your conduct will stand up? Will He smile or frown? Will He bless or chastise? Look in the faces of those believers closest to you. Look long and carefully. Their response to you may give you a faithful clue as to the Lord's reaction in His time. "...ye did it unto me." (Matthew 25:40, 45)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
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