
COMFORT *for* TROUBLED CHRISTIANS

From the beginning of time, fire and water have been two of man's most essential needs. He cannot live without them, but they can be turned into his worst enemies.

In southern California recently a raging forest fire destroyed dozens of beautiful and expensive homes. As the people began to clear their property and make preparation for rebuilding, they became aware of a new danger—water. The priceless watershed had been destroyed, and with the coming of the winter rains a worse damage threatened than had caused the fire.

Is anything more dangerous than fire and water? In describing the trials of the saints, God uses these terms: “We went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place” (Psalm 66:12). The word *wealthy* means abundant, a wide place, recovery, or refreshment. God describes the trials, troubles, and afflictions of His children as “fire and water” indicating that they are very severe. At first this would seem to be discouraging, but the joy, the victory, and the comfort are wrapped up in that word “through.”

A Christian is never submerged in the flood and he is not consumed by the fire; he always passes “through.” Even at the end of life the psalmist declared, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” These metaphors do not necessarily refer to different types of affliction, but teach the same truth regarding God’s hand upon us. So we will consider the trial by fire.

God’s Presence in Our Trial by Fire

Job compared his affliction to being cast into a “furnace.” “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). Note

the triumphant words “I shall come forth” (“through the fire”). It is one thing to testify after you have passed through the fire, but Job is still in the furnace. The heat is on, his boils shoot flashes of hot pain through his body, fever parches his lips, he scrapes his oozing boils with broken pieces of pottery. His head throbs with pain and his friends falsely accuse him, but he looks beyond his present fiery trial and shouts in vibrant, reassuring faith, “I shall come through.”

Job saw himself “as gold” in the furnace. David saw the children of God “as silver” in the refiner’s fire. “Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried” (Psalm 66:10). Malachi links both metals together in explaining divine chastening. “And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver . . . and purge them as gold and silver” (Malachi 3:3). Why? Here is his answer, “that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

The divine method—“fire”

The divine motive—to “purge” and “purify”

The divine objective—our “righteousness”

There are five lessons we should and may learn from this refining and purging process.

He Cares

“He shall . . . purge them as gold and silver” (Malachi 3:3). Never let Satan inject a doubt into your mind regarding God’s love for you. Satan would take advantage of your present trial and grief to whisper in your ear that “God doesn’t care.” But He does—you are so precious in His sight that nothing but the terms “gold and silver” can describe His concern. If “gold” and “silver” are precious to the refiner, how much more precious we must be to God. He paid a price far more than “silver and gold” for our redemption. It cost Him the blood of His only begotten Son. By comparison He refers to “silver and gold” as “corruptible.” God gave all He had, the atoning blood of His precious Son to purchase our redemption.

What a comfort this should be! We are His most prized possessions, and He will allow nothing to harm us. That thing that happened to you is His means of increasing the value of His precious property. This is accomplished by increasing its beauty and purity. If we were worthless objects, we would never know the heat of the refiner’s fire or the touch of His skillful hand. Beloved, the next time you feel

the heat of a fiery trial, thank God. It is proof of your preciousness to Him. You are His blood-bought child, you belong to Him, you may be sure that He cares for His own.

He Cleanses

“He shall sit . . . and purge them” (Malachi 3:3). Every Christian who has ever been drawn near to the Lord knows something of the sinfulness of his heart and the impurity of his life. The closer we are to Him, the more conscious we become of our sinfulness and of our unworthiness.

Paul calls it the “flesh” (Romans 7) and “the body of this death.” It is the self in our lives, the carnality, the unholiness, and it dogs our footsteps all along the Christian pathway. Chastening is a divine means of answering our prayer for cleansing. Did you not pray for God to cleanse you? He answered by putting you in the fire. He is cleansing as “a refiner and purifier of silver.” The “dross” in your life is being burned in the fire of affliction.

Spend a moment in solemn reflection. What is the “dross” in your life that needs to be purged? It may be arrogance, pride, love of praise, love of attention, self-will, stubbornness,

an unteachable spirit, peevishness, immaturity, jealousy, anger, impatience, love of money, selfishness, or an unforgiving spirit. All such “dross” grieves the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, and so we must be “refined” and “purged.” This means we must pass “through the fire,” but there’s some comfort for you here. The refiner has a purpose—it is not to destroy his precious gold and silver, but to consume the “dross” and bring out the beauty and purity of the gold. Fire cannot destroy the gold; it only melts it. Oh, how we need to be melted before God! When the gold is melted, the dross floats on the top and it is easy for the refiner to skim it off. How long since you have been melted?

The three unyielding Hebrews were cast into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. It was seven times hotter than usual. Please note that they went into the furnace fully clothed and securely bound, but when they came out, three things were apparent. Not a hair of their heads was singed. More than that—the fire burned off their bands; and more wonderful still—the Lord had walked with them in the fire.

The same three things happen to the Christian in the fiery trial.

1. First, he is never harmed by the fire. Can you tell me that you were ever harmed by God's chastening? Oh, this doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt, but always the hurt is for our good.
2. Second, the fire sets him free from the shackles of carnality that hindered. The most radiant Christians are the ones who have suffered the most.
3. Third, God's presence is very real and precious in the fire.

The next time you feel the heat from the fire of affliction thank God that He is consuming not you, but the "dross" out of your life, and that you shall come *"through the fire"* purified and cleansed.

He Comforts

"And he shall sit as a refiner" (Malachi 3:3). This is a beautiful and comforting picture. The refiner never leaves his precious metal, but he sits by the fire and watches closely. He watches for that moment when the heat is sufficient to burn the dross and to leave the metal perfect. He knows just the right amount

of heat to apply, and he applies it just the right length of time.

Have you ever felt like crying “I can’t stand it” or “It’s more than I can bear”? No, my friend, it’s not more than you can bear. Remember, “He sits by the fire”—He knows. So you *can* stand it. At a time like that, recall His promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “But God is faithful, [He sits by the fire] who will not suffer you to be tempted [tested] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [trial] also make a way to escape, that *ye may be able to bear it.*” So you *can* bear it. Never forget His promise “my grace *is* sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

I have gained help and inspiration in the preparation of this Bible study from David Kirk’s book, *The Mystery of Divine Chastening*. He tells the story of two Christian martyrs during the Reformation. One was a veteran saint, Latimer, and the other was a young believer, Riley. They were condemned to be burned at the stake. The night before the execution young Riley was highly nervous and very agitated. He looked through the iron bars of their dungeon prison and saw the people preparing the stakes. In his panic he tried to