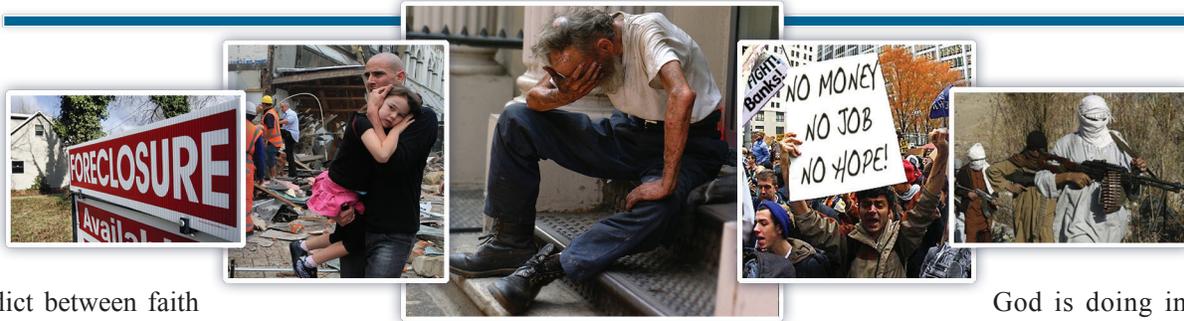


MAINTAINING FAITH IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

“Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.” — Mark 9:24



The conflict between faith and doubt is the great reality of the time in which we live. Never before in human history has so much tragedy been witnessed in such vivid display to so many. News events are transmitted via cell phones worldwide as they happen — hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, sickness, murder, terrorism, and every imaginable evil. Even more disheartening are news reports filled with the hypocrisy of those who were supposed to be pillars of the community and faithful shepherds of the church—their crimes against the innocent have now been exposed and add an even greater burden to the weak in faith. At times like these, doubt can plague even the most earnest Christian.

God is doing in the earth in preparation for His Kingdom is a critical remedy to dispel our doubts and fears. The Apostle Peter urges: “Add to your faith, knowledge...” 2 Peter 1:5

God has provided in His Word an understanding of prophecy at this time so that His children will not be in distress when they see earth-shattering events unfold. However, a misinterpretation of prophecy can cause confusion and unfounded fear. And so, it is important to *prove all things* by harmonizing the Scriptures. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) But, be aware that in Christian bookstores today there are many books which sensationalize and fictionalize the events of prophecy. In these books, highly symbolic passages are interpreted as literal, and although the Bible does indicate trouble in the earth at this time, the wrong interpretation of Scripture can totally distort the loving character and plans of God.

Thus, it is a good practice to square every doctrine with two pivotal truths: 1. Jesus’ *ransom for all to be testified in due time*; and 2. The fact that “*God is love*” and “*His compassions fail not.*” (1 Timothy 2:3-6; 1 John 4:16; Lamentations 3:22) We should test doctrinal interpretations to see if they are in harmony with the loving character of God who has provided for a full and fair opportunity of salvation for all mankind *in due time*. This is *the hope* for a world now in crisis, and it should reinforce our faith and put our minds at peace.

CAUSE # 2: OVERWHELMING PERSONAL TRIALS REMEDY: KNOWING WHY GOD TESTS FAITH

Why do Christians have to endure pain and sorrow? Many Christians are losing their jobs, some are losing their life’s savings, and some are even watching their families go homeless and hungry. Why doesn’t God protect Christians from these troubles? There are two primary reasons why God permits His children to endure hardness under the pressures of this world in crisis.

First, it is good to remember that Christians are not exempt from the common troubles of this life. “*Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people...*”

WHY DOES FAITH FALTER AND HOW CAN WE INCREASE OUR FAITH TO WITHSTAND THE STORMS OF LIFE?

To bring stability to our faith, we must first understand the root causes of doubt. There are at least five underlying conditions which undermine faith: **1. a lack of proper Scriptural understanding of prophetic events and the plan of God;** **2. an overwhelming personal experience which is very difficult to endure;** **3. a sense of helplessness when viewing the broad spectrum of trouble throughout the earth;** **4. an underlying physical condition which exhausts our spiritual strength;** and **5. repeated exposure to temptations which we permit to constantly plague us.** To complicate matters, Satan and the fallen angels take advantage of these areas of our weakness, suggesting thoughts which make us question our faith even more. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us of this: “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*”

CAUSE # 1: LACK OF SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING REMEDY: A SOLID FOUNDATION

For faith to survive the storms of life we must seek to know God’s character, plans and purposes as revealed in His Word. Indeed, truth—a faith based upon knowledge—is the *shield and buckler* of a child of God. (Psalm 91:4) Knowing what

but at the time that you are put to the test, He will give you the strength to endure it..." (1 Corinthians 10:13 GNB) True heart sympathy for others can only be gained by going through the hard experiences common to all. Jesus is referred to as a "sympathetic high priest," and like our Master, Christians must be developed through the trials of life to have sympathy for mankind and their sufferings.

Secondly, at the end of their Christian journey, the followers of Christ will be tested upon their faith. Therefore, God-like character must be developed over time by experience, and then tested to be proven worthy of a *crown of life*. (Revelation 2:10) "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..." (1 Peter 1:7) For those who seek the reward of living and reigning with Christ in God's Kingdom, they must have a developed, crystallized character which has remained loyal to Him, even under pressure. This is why God permits repeated testings.

This Christian era has been a time to educate and develop a select group of faithful saints taken out from this imperfect and corrupt world—a *Bride* for God's Son. This *Bride class*, also known as *the body of Christ* or *the Church*, will be willing to submit to the same kind of death as her bridegroom—a sacrificial death. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection..." (Romans 6:5) For some this will mean giving up a successful career to live a more humble and simple life, and thus, be more available for service to God. For another it will mean the alienation from loved ones who are repelled by God's Truth. For another it will mean a life of illness or tragedy, and the joyful acceptance of enduring this as a *momentary affliction* during this short life. Only God knows what is best for His children's education, and by providence, He will work *all things together for their good*. (Romans 8:28) Yes, for the Christian, "...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 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 the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

CAUSE #3: HELPLESSNESS IN THE MIDST OF GLOBAL TROUBLES

REMEDY: UNDERSTANDING THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

To have a stable faith in God, we must be convinced by the Scriptures that He *is* loving and wise—providing all things for man's eternal welfare. God, whose character is supreme love, would not have *permitted* 6,000 years of evil to reign over His creation without a useful purpose and, ultimately, a grand outcome. 1 John 4:8

To understand why God permits suffering, we must first realize the difference between *permitting* and *causing*. God has *permitted* man to have a *temporary* experience with evil, but He

did not *cause* the evil. No, Satan, the "god of this world" is the *great first cause* of all evil in the universe. He is the unrelenting enemy of God and God's creation. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2

Our Heavenly Father desires mankind to live in peace, health and happiness, but He now *allows* Satan to rule for a limited time in order that each individual may learn valuable lessons—experiencing the results of evil and selfishness. Thus we read, "This sore travail has God given to man to be exercised therewith." (Ecclesiastes 1:13) As an illustration, although parents will try to intervene at times when a child ventures off onto a dangerous path, often, it takes the hard lessons of a rebellious life to learn that trust and obedience would have saved much pain and suffering. Just as the loving parents were waiting—ready to take back the child with love and open arms—so, God is long-suffering with humanity. He knew that Adam and Eve would not comprehend His warning about sin and its dire consequences. Out of love, God formulated a plan whereby Adam's disobedience might provide a valuable, though difficult lesson for all mankind



CAUSE # 4: PHYSICAL CONDITION EXHAUSTS SPIRITUAL STRENGTH REMEDY: KEEP LOOKING FORWARD

Physical and mental weakness is a fact of fallen human life. Everyone at some time will experience some condition which will cause real suffering. At times like these, we need to see how our Master Jesus handled his trials. Of Jesus, the Apostle Paul states: "...who for the joy set before him, endured the cross..." Christians must learn through their experiences to have this same *hopeful attitude*. (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:5) The joy which allowed Jesus to endure even the heaviness of his cross—a cross which he bore for three and a half years—was the knowledge of God's loving plan for all mankind. Keeping in mind the big picture of how God's plan is working out good for His entire creation is what provided the *joy* that helped Jesus endure his cross. This is the same joy which will carry the faithful through every trial. And so, we can rejoice, even though there are times of fear and distress, for we realize that there is a purpose to our suffering.

Discovering how and when God will end the world's suffering is critical in strengthening our faith structure, as well. The Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus' death as "a ransom for all to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:6) This ransom makes possible two primary phases of God's redemptive plan. The first is the selection of Christ's Church which is taking place now. The test of faithfulness, under adverse conditions, is one of character refinement to the end that each might be able ministers in God's Kingdom to those who were not capable of accepting Christ now. Note the words in Acts 15:14-17: "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name [the true church]. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue [remainder] of men might seek after the Lord..."

Note the point that a small group, “*a people for His name,*” is selected *first* out of the Gentiles. During this Christian Age, the Lord is only converting a few, a “*little flock*” “*who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality.*” (Romans 2:7) The second phase of God’s redemptive plan is setting up the “*tabernacle of David,*” which was an Old Testament illustration of the Kingdom of Christ. After Christ returns, believers are united with him, and their work will be the conversion of “*the residue of men*” [the rest of mankind—NAS version]. Revelation 22:17 prophesied of that time: “*And the Spirit [the returned Christ] and the bride [the true church] say, Come [to the residue of men]. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that thirsts come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*”

**CAUSE #5: CONSTANT EXPOSURE TO TEMPTATIONS
REMEDY: AVOIDANCE & RESISTANCE**

Sin sickness is a foe which undermines faith. It must be fought with determined effort and prayer for grace and strength.

This is a powerful statement: “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” (James 4:7) The heart is the battleground, and Satan is our enemy. We are not, however, to battle directly with Satan, for we are no match against him and his minions. We are to resist his influence, his deceptions, and his endeavors to lead us into error and sin. The instant we resist temptation and stand up for the Lord we become “*strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.*” Ephesians 6:10

From the beginning of creation, God desired the human family to experience the privilege of exercising *free will*. This liberty of choice has, of necessity, been a *hard lesson*. The planetary systems move in mechanical obedience; the animal creation is driven mainly by instinct; and God could have programmed the ideal man to be, likewise, blindly obedient, but man would be no better than a robot. Instead, God created man in His own image, with the ability to love and obey by choice. Because of the vivid lessons provided by the cruel consequences of disobedience, man is learning why obedience to God is the only path to happiness. Ultimately, under the more favorable circumstances of God’s Kingdom, man will *choose* to love and respect his fellow man and his environment. More importantly, he will joyfully render love, respect and perfect obedience to his Creator—trusting in His gracious provisions. Understanding why God has allowed the exercise of *free will* helps us to develop our faith—choosing good and resisting evil.

DEVELOPING A DEEP AND ABIDING FAITH

Sometimes, even with a firm faith built upon the knowledge of God’s plans and purposes, experiences may overwhelm us and our faith begins to sink. The Apostle Peter experienced this, when, in his zeal, he began to walk on the water toward his Master. But when the waves became rough, Peter began to sink, and he called to the Lord for help. (Matthew 14:22-33) This illustrates to the Christian that, when his experiences of life become rough like waves in the ocean, he is to keep his focus

firmly on Jesus for help and strength, and to trust that God will provide every need through His Son. Philippians 4:19

Yes, a deep and abiding faith in God, which will provide peace in times of trouble, is dependent upon, and proportionate to, the development of our faith. “*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*” As we grow in knowledge, we grow in faith, and we come to see that our all-loving and all-wise Father is in control.

We learn to trust Him, even in difficult times, because we know that He has a good purpose for everything that occurs in our lives. “*All things, [not just some things,] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*” Romans 8:28

Looking ahead, we see that there is hope beyond this present time of trouble upon the world. This fearful season at the end of the Christian era *will* usher in the golden age of blessing. Christ and his Bride—sympathetic because of their experience with pain and suffering during the time of this *present evil world*—will be the honored agents of God in bringing the lost world of mankind back into harmony with Him. (Isaiah 35:1-10) At that time, those *now blinded by error, sin and selfishness will*

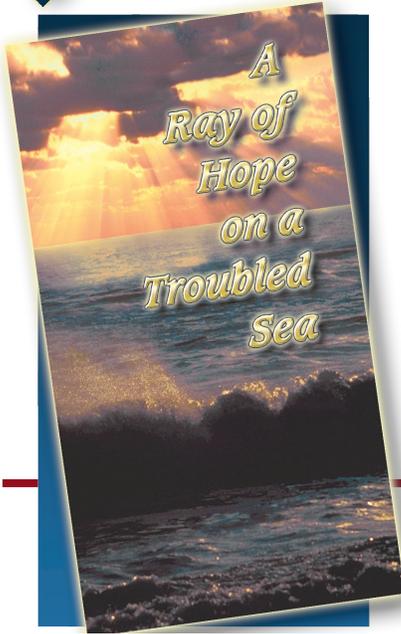
begin to see that the *permission* of evil has been for their education and development, so that their hearts might be ready and willing to accept the new government. “*Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment... And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.*” Isaiah 32:1-4

The refining work now abroad throughout the world will have been a useless torment unless the world of mankind is given an opportunity to use this experience to make positive choices in God’s Kingdom soon to come. His wisdom is too broad to limit compassion for His poor groaning creation. Our great physician only wounds to heal. “*For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory... The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace...*” (Haggai 2:6-9) Then, all the troubles and tribulations of the past and present, instead of being useless sufferings, will be valuable guides toward righteousness. Revelation 20:6 Moffatt translation; Psalm 96:13

Faith is not developed over night, and God understands when we cry out, “*Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!*” The Christian is said to be in a schoolhouse, and every experience, even that which shakes our faith is an opportunity to learn and grow more into the likeness of our Master and example. A faith which has stood the tests of experience and has come off victorious is very precious in our Father’s sight.



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