

A Theology of Trials

1 Peter 4:12-19

Chase Fluhart

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I. Introduction

II. Text, 1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 Now

*"If the righteous one is scarcely saved,
Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

III. What are trials?

First, a definition. Trials are any outward or inward circumstance that forces you to choose between **Christ** or sin, between faithful obedience to your Lord or unfaithfulness and disobedience. Your **faith** is put on *trial*, 1 Pet. 1:7; James 1:3. You've professed belief in Christ, belief in His promises, and these circumstances test whether your heart is where your mouth is. Trials test the **genuineness** of your faith. They ask whether the Word of God has in fact taken **root** in your heart so that it bears fruit to the glory of God Almighty. Or, like the seed sown among the rocks, does it sprout up only to wither when scorched by the sun (Matt. 13:6)? Or, like the seed sown among the thorns, will it be choked out by the pleasures and cares of the world (Matt. 13:22)?

Secondly, trials come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. There are a **variety** of trials, as Peter says, we are "grieved by various trials" (1 Pet. 1:6). A trial for you might not be a trial for me. "Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He is not picky about **how** he devours you. He is very pragmatic in that respect.

Third, trials and temptations are also **common** to man. Whatever you're facing, while it might be different from the person sitting next to you, it's still common to mankind. The exact circumstance might be new, but the essence of the trial is not.

1 Corinthians 10:13 — *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

IV. What are trials *for*?

1. Through trials, God is raising children that look like Christ.

Trials test your faith, that's what we might call their *immediate* purpose. But they test your faith for a greater end. They don't just test your faith for the fun of it. God doesn't delight in seeing His children squirm. But He does delight in seeing His children matured and **conformed** to the image of Christ so "that He—Christ—might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

"For it was fitting for [God], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Heb. 2:10

As Christ our Head and Elder Brother was perfected through sufferings, so we His body and brothers undergo the same program. We're enrolled in the same **class**. And as His sufferings ended in glory, so we can take heart. We can rejoice to the extent that we partake of Christ's sufferings, so that when His glory is revealed, we may also be glad with exceeding joy. His sufferings didn't destroy Him. Ours will not destroy us. God our Father knows what He is doing. God knows how to raise sons and daughters. He has raised many before us. He is raising many in our day. He will raise many after us. In all of our trials, we can therefore take heart.

2. Through trials, our Lord refines His people like gold in a furnace.

Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with *fire* (Lk. 3:16).

"And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years." Malachi 3:1-4 (ESV)

Through the fiery trials we face, our Lord, like a refiner over His flame, is cleansing and purifying us so that we might **worship** Him in righteousness, and so that *we ourselves* might be a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to Him.

3. Through trials, God gets glory from His people.

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. . . . If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. . . . Let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" 1 Peter 4:14, 16, 19

V. Conclusion