

SUMMARY

The topic of trials and sanctification is core to the human experience under Father God – and is perhaps only second in importance and difficulty to the understanding His Theology. Our difficulty comes from many directions, including an inability to understand His mind (“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. **Isa 55.8**), that our perceptions and affections are directed towards us and not Him (Haughty eyes and a proud heart – the unplowed field of the wicked – produce sin. **Prov 21.4**), and we fall short if we do not progress in learning surrender and trust to Him in the circumstances He allows (...you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **Jas 1.3-4**). The question ‘What is your cup?’ can illuminate our understanding of God and our alignment with Him. Yet, we can learn faith and peace in it all, because ‘we are all God’s handiwork’, and He loves us recklessly.

KEY POINTS

Two perspectives, yet only one must prevail.

It is very understandable that we as fallen people favor our view from our perspective. In the moment that ushered in the Fall, mankind’s gaze swung from God to ourselves – and every human since then born of an earthly father has suffered the consequences brought upon us by Adam - The seeing of ourselves as more important than God. This is a Theological fact, demonstrated through billions of life experiences throughout history. The only Human to escape the consequence had to be “born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.” (**Gal 4.4b-5**). Jesus was born of God the Father: “And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (**Luke 1.35**). Coming from a lineage outside of our ‘sin-infection’, Jesus arrived Holy. This Holy Jesus, being and knowing God personally, explained to us the reality of our situation and how we can be rescued. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” (**John 3.17**) Our perspective – self focused and incorrect – may be countered with His perspective – God focused and true. And as God is Sovereign, His perspective will prevail. The question is, will we strive to understand and cooperate?

Head and Heart Knowledge

A ‘head knowledge’ is inferior to a ‘heart knowledge’. A reformed heart is His goal because the ‘heart’ is the root and seat of character, not the head. Consider:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (**Matt 6.21**)

And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (**Matt 22.37**)

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. **(Matt 15.18)**

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **(Ezek 36.26)**

Head knowledge is necessary to advance towards a faith in what is true, but unless that knowledge lands on a contrite and willing heart by faith, knowledge does no good.

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” **(Matt 23.1)**

“...but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.” **(Rom 9.31-32a)**

The (otherwise) incorrigible heart

And so, our otherwise irredeemable problem. Contrary to current and popular opinion, we are not a race that is inwardly good, and can choose wrongly. Rather, we are inwardly wrong and, save godliness, will also choose wrongly. Corrective glasses are of no use to a blind man. And as the eye must first be repaired, so too our heart.

This is, aside from the work of God, an impossible task to us. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.” **(Jeremiah 13.23, sarcasm by God intended)**

Faith comes from God alone (**Jas 1.17**), through our hearing His Word (**Rom 10.17**), asking His understanding (**Jas 1.5**), and stepping forward on His statements before we would see the results appear (**Jas 2.17**). Consider: The moment before you found an assurance of Salvation, had you ever tasted it beforehand? No, each of us learned we needed it, heard and understood His promise of it, and asked Him in faith believing He would answer as He said He would. This would have been your first taste of His reforming an otherwise irredeemable heart. And so the boot camp of the rest of our lives in Christ began.

Sweating it out of us

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **(Heb 11.1)**

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. **(Heb 11.7a)**

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. **(Jesus, Matt 21.22)**

The faith God intends to increasingly forge in us will always focus on Him (**Mk 11.22**), fully grounded in His Character which is explained to us in His Word (**Ps 119.142**), and affirmed

in His response (**John 14.21**). God and the faith He intends is not the problem, our blind and stubborn hearts are.

So, how would He inform a heart that can't understand Him, or penetrate the callouses on a heart that is free to defy Him? Ask any parent, and hear that a child's error might be from either ignorance or from disobedience. Do we use the same correction for both cases? Both cases are to be instructed to the degree they can, and grace tempers the response.

Father holds unquestionable love, the gift of faith, the sovereignty over circumstance, and the wisdom to instruct. All of these He employs in our training. We commonly call them trials. And so, knowing what He is achieving, why He does it, that He loves and protects us, and that He intends us to know/understand/trust Him – we can embrace James' command:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (**Jas 1.2-8**)

Is James alone in this admonition? Consider:

Peter – “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (**1 Pet 4.19**)

and, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. (**1 Pet 5.6-7**)

Paul – “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...” (**Phil 3.7-9**)

and, “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” (**Phil 4.11-12**)

and, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (**2 Cor 12.7-10**)

As Creator, Father has a right over us and an obligation to us. This is the consequence of coming into His family, of becoming His child. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (**Prov 13.24**). This is a corrective rod of love, one that refuses to see His child turn back to the slop (**Lk 15.16**) and to protect your faith (**2 Thes 3.3, Heb 12.2**). And so, does the Potter have no right over the clay? (**Rom 9.21**) Doesn't Jesus offer us a yoke? (**Matt 11.30**)

This is why it is imperative to learn the Character of God, because He surely will prevail over you, His child. The excellent news is that He is loving, patient, merciful, kind, wise, and righteous. True, our trials are often utterly painful, but should we expect it to be an easy exercise to dislodge the opinions and beliefs of a blind or stubborn heart that conflict with a holy understanding and trust in Him, an understanding and faith He insists upon? To this point Peter points out that it is surely a difficult task for us and for God – “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” (1 Pet 4.18)

But more so, we have assurance of His intent and love for us through these difficulties, which glorify Him and benefit us: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8.28), and that we “might obtain a better resurrection”.

Praying for help

Shall we pray for relief, peace, or faith in deliverance through the One behind it all? The Word tells us to pray for all of these. However, praying only for the parts we want instead of what Father intends will not get us very far. True, Scripture reports many, many times where removal of the problem occurs. However, is there in any of Scripture this response without the inclusion of faith in the Deliverer? It is easy for us to go right to the pain and ask that it goes away, but if it is not faith building, can we expect God to do it? He wants peace for us, but never at the expense of faith in Him (remember Paul, 2 Cor 12.7-10). Father intends us to learn and rely upon and expect peace through faith in Him, as a child. An early removal of the circumstance He superintends is counter to what He tells us to expect, if it removes His opportunity for us to grow. So, we pray for relief, faith, and peace in Him.

He knows each of His children intimately and crafts life to fit each one of us unto His end goal. Learning to trust Him can truly only come through experience, else it would only be head knowledge. He loves us and perfectly protects our faith. His purpose will be realized for each one of us. In all of this He calls us to learn Him, to trust Him, to find real peace.

A PERSONAL NOTE

Several years ago, I found myself deep in the weeds in trials – it was heading into the hardest point in my life and I felt almost hopeless. Struggling towards Father, I asked Him for a lifeline, and He gave me a reprieve I hope to always remember.

Our family went to the theater see a movie, and before the show they played the following Pixar short film. As I watched it, I thanked God for His care, and wept. He graciously helped me begin putting things into His perspective. God answers, and He can show up wherever He pleases. He encouraged me to be still and know He had everything covered.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkUi4gdZStQ>

Hint: Father God drives the truck, the Jackalope is a Jesus figure 😊