

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH

By Paul Penno Jr.

August 14, 2010

Trials and troubles are an evidence of the personal love of the Heavenly Father, “for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son [daughter] whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons [daughters]” (Heb 12:6, 7). Someone says that’s Bad News. “This mocks my disability [Heb 12:1-13]. I have ‘striven unto blood’ and find no comfort . . . so many days in the fetal position. . . . Am I supposed to feel comforted that God is chastening me! I am utterly discouraged.”

Dear-Abby-like, shall I tell her, “Go for professional help”? She already has (is on medical prescription). And yes, there are things this person needs to do, like get out and help somebody else, forget her troubles, exercise, etc. But she is in the condition Paul describes in Romans 5:6, “without strength.” How can a person “without strength” perform properly?

Some have said, Ignore the her, but to be a Christian, I must respond somehow. Shall I (a) tell her what to do? Or (b), what to believe? If (a), she has already received from some, plenty of instruction on what to do, but is “without strength.”

Shall I (b), tell her what Paul says in that verse that people “without strength” need to believe, “in due time Christ died for the ungodly”? This person is in the condition that a wise writer says some Israelites were when bitten by the poisonous “serpents in the wilderness,” with the shadow of death upon them, with

almost closed “glazed eyes,” they were encouraged to look upon the “serpent” uplifted on the pole, the symbol of a Saviour who died for “the ungodly” who haven’t *done* (nor know how to *do*), what they should. I can’t force her (or anybody) to believe. But O Lord, teach us how to “heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the slaves, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Lk 4:18)!

Here is a morsel of common sense that may help us understand something perplexing that Jesus said. I find this bit of wisdom in Eccl. 4:9, 10: “Two are better than one, . . . for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe unto him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to lift him up.” That is so true; if you want to climb Mt. McKinley, take someone with you!

But now shift gears to a perplexity in the words of Jesus that troubles many people. He says in Mt. 11:28-30, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden. . . . My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” And yet He also tells us that the way to eternal life is so narrow (*thilbo*, Greek) that “few there be that find it” (Mt 7:14), and He urges us to “strive to enter in at the narrow gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able” (Lk. 13:24).

Sounds like a direct contradiction, doesn’t it? We have to strive, we have to deny self, we have to resist strong pressures of temptation, we have to obey God’s law when our sinful human nature doesn’t want to, on and on. The disciples were so overwhelmed with all the sacrifice that is necessary if one wants to go to heaven that they asked in bewilderment, “Who then *can* be saved?” (Lk 18:26). And then Jesus said frankly that it’s “impossible with men, [but] possible with God.”

Now shift gears back to our homely little tidbit of common sense in Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one.” When you choose to enter in at the narrow gate, you *never* walk the path alone. “I am crucified with Christ,” says Paul (Gal 2:20); you are never crucified alone. You may think your trials and self-sacrifices are painful to bear, but you never suffer Gethsemane alone; you always kneel down with Him. You never carry that heavy “burden” alone; the reason why Jesus says His burden is “light” is because *he does the lifting*. Very true! But if you don’t *believe* the Good News, then it seems “heavy” and “hard” to you! And that could be your problem.

Most of us have never experienced a genuine Depression where you are literally hungry and you have no roof over your head. Bible prophecy indicates that the final test that will determine whether a person truly serves God or joins in rebellion against Him, will be linked to economic security. The stories in Daniel of a few of God’s people remaining loyal in the face of death (Daniel in the lion’s den, the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace) illustrate the dynamics of the final test of the seal of God or the mark of the beast (Rev. 7:1-4; 13:11-18). God’s true people are those who “love not their lives unto the death” (12:11). Their loyalty to Him is not mere fanatical stubbornness; they see the honor of God in the fiery trial as more important than their own security. And they will be the ones who will be so highly honored that they will be invited to “sit with [Christ] on His throne” (Rev 3:20), the princes of the realm.

What will transform these world-loving, luxury-loving, gourmet diners into such heroes? They “overcome” “the great dragon” (Satan), “by the blood of the Lamb” (vs. 11). A heart-melting appreciation of what it

cost the Son of God to save them, the comprehension of the reality of His sacrifice on His cross—this alone can motivate people who by nature revel in this world’s luxury to unite voluntarily with the One who said that He had not where to lay His head (Mt 8:19, 20). Overcoming the lure of the shopping sprees at the mall, learning to say “No” to appetite and covetousness (which is sin! see Col. 3:5)—this is possible for anyone who will “survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died.” And what will honor Him truly is the witness of those who do so voluntarily *before* they are driven to it by losing their wealth in the stock market crash, a world Depression, or even persecution.

What is your idea of God? Think about it for a moment. Do you wonder what He does all the time. Do you visualize a God hovering, waiting to zap people who do not measure up to His ideals? Perhaps you hope if you work hard enough and do enough “good” things you will be able to see His good favor. Do you see Him as impersonal, someone who knows nothing of the trials and troubles of life on planet Earth? Do you feel that He is far away, far removed from the struggles of the temptations you face today?

Let’s look again at the situation of Israel at the time of Elijah. The Hebrew word for Baal was the common term for lord or master. Consider the dramatic demonstration put on by the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in their prayer so to speak for rain. They called on the name of Baal from morning till noon making long repetitive speeches petitioning Baal for that long awaited rain, but to no avail. Then Elijah mocked them suggesting they cry aloud. So they also danced around in a frenzy hoping to excite Baal’s notice. On and on they went in

increased outbursts, slashing themselves with knives until the blood flowed freely, still no fire from heaven came on their sacrifice. By their demonstration we can learn just how they viewed God. In their minds they were convinced that they were worshiping the true God. They revealed by their long speeches calling lord, lord that they thought needed to gain favor with God. By their dancing frenzy they thought he was far away, so they tried to gain His attention. By slashing themselves with knives they surely thought God was someone to be appeased.

Now there are many theories about God floating around today. Maybe you see God in one of the ways I mentioned. I hope not. But nevertheless God's last day people, yes those of us living on planet Earth just before the coming of Jesus Christ in the clouds of Heaven will need have a clear understanding that the Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, who is the express image of God is not far off, He does not need our long speeches, or frantic running about even in doing the "good" things to impress Him. No He does not even need us try to appease Him. Jesus Christ has already born the full penalty for the sins of every human being, He "tasted death for every man, woman and child" no one need wake up in the night in a cold sweat wondering of "Our Father" in heaven accepts them. No! He is in not far off.

He is near you and will be in you by the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we begin to realize His closeness to us, appreciate His love and sacrifice for the human race, we will no longer call Him "lord", or "master", we will call Him Husband (Hos. 2:6), we will know He loves us and we will appreciate how close He had to come to save us. We will love Him too.

When one suffers a massive assault on one's physical integrity, an outrage inflicted on one's body (like our car crash), he begins to sympathize with others who suffer such painful outrages. Yes, Jesus did; they beat Him, spit in His face, insulted Him with all manner of indignities to His person, including the horror of crucifixion. But we know that in each instance, it was Satan's deliberate, murderous intent.

Did Jesus ever suffer an accident, some disaster to His person that was not deliberately Satanic in origin? I don't read of any such. When the devil attacks you, there is something comforting in the knowledge; but when it's purely accidental, do we have some parallel in the Bible?

Maybe, yes. There is Paul's tragedy in 2 Corinthians 1 when he "had the sentence of death" in himself and "despaired even of life" (vss. 9, 8).

There is no mention that Satan caused it; no chariot crash. It was simply a trial that came upon him inexplicably, and the temptation was sever to "despair." But the Good News is that Paul took the temptation to despair to be a call to "trust in God who raises the dead." And furthermore, the experience was shared by "many persons" who "gave thanks." And best of all, we have this blessed story of a man of God, a prophet, the apostle Paul, who had to undergo the same kind of inexplicable trial that we are called to endure.

I had opportunity to consider what I would do and what I would believe if you and everybody else were to leave me utterly alone with my deepest, heartfelt convictions of truth. The final conclusion I had to come to, after some struggle, was to reaffirm my faith in truth rather than in numbers and human comfort and assistance. Truth is no less truth when it is forsaken by the majority;

nor is it any the less truth when forsaken by everyone. Nor, to carry it to its ultimate conclusion, truth is no less truth when apparently forsaken by God Himself. Did not the Son cry out, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” If the doctrine of the Cross be true, which no one with any regard for truth can deny, it is certain that the experience of the Cross requires a time when the one going to the Cross is forsaken by men, all of them, and apparently (but never really) by God. There is no faith where there is sight; no trust where there is light. For faith to be perfected, in the human soul, the faithful one must go through an experience of being apparently forsaken of God, that he might indeed learn what true faith is, and what it means to trust. Such is a tremendous conflict—it is a wrestling with unseen powers of evil and darkness, a torture of heart and soul. In such a time the soul must become independent of his human concepts of “God” as being with him in his struggles. He will find that there is something to which he must be loyal that is above “God”—something to which God Himself bows in submission.

I have been thinking of this some—the thought was suggested by a passage in Sheen’s book where he (page 27) speaks of a pyramid with things at the bottom, above that man, and above all, God, whoever that may be. I drew a little pyramid in the margin, tried to work it out, came to the conclusion that if the Roman Catholic man is right, he is right, but I new he was wrong, because he is Roman Catholic. So what? I could only decide that the top of the pyramid is not “above all”—anything to which God yields or surrenders is necessarily above Him. Rom. 6:16. He yielded and surrendered Himself to the Cross. So I drew a little Cross at the top of the pyramid. God

surrenders to Truth. And the soul who becomes “a man after His own heart” will also surrender to Truth and the cross, though in doing so he apparently is forsaken by “God”. He will indeed be forsaken by the “god” of which Sheen speaks—to place “God” above all is to give Satan the very position he has been seeking for so long. See the point? I think that is how God tests men, and certainly that was how he tested old father Abraham, “who is the father of us all” if we believe.

In fact I have gone so far in my thinking as to realize that it is in this experience of bowing in ultimate submission to Truth and the Cross when it means being apparently forsaken by God that is the point where man indeed becomes “partaker of the divine nature”, and becomes a true son of God. As long as we are conscious of being under the patronizing approval of “God” who wields the big stick in our defense, I think the quality of our faith is defective. Truth and the Cross need not be issues with us—it is an issue merely of being true to “God”. All sorts of delusions and misconceptions can result, and Old Nick enter in to take control.

God’s end-time remnant are to learn the lessons of suffering from the past 6000 years of the history of the Gospel. “The Saviour’s chosen” “in all ages” have also suffered trials as do the 144,000. One could argue from this passage, if he wished, that the 144,000 are the people of God from all past ages, who have suffered with Christ. By anticipation the people of God of past ages have endured the trials of the 144,000, or actually known the fellowship of Christ in His sufferings. They have *tasted* of the same, but only the 144,000 will actually drink of that cup and be baptized with that baptism. The latter will

stand “without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God’s judgments”, and therefore are indeed unique.

Individuals, of past ages have approached unto the measure of devotion, maturity, and faithfulness to Christ which is implicit in a bride’s relation to her husband, never has a *community* of God’s people attained to that experience. It is as doubtful that even individuals have ever known it fully as it is doubtful that individuals have in the past ever “stood without an intercessor”, despite the fact that some have tasted something of it, as did Job. Hence, one may consider that the saints of all ages who have suffered with Christ are as much a part of the 144,000 as the church of all ages has been the Bride of Christ. It can be so only by the faith of anticipation.

The unique features (GC 648, 649) of the experience of the 144,000 are such that this group alone are qualified to enter into a mature relationship with Christ on the basis of intimate experience—“an experience such as no other company [community] have ever had,” “the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb”. A bride enters into an experience with her husband such as no other woman has ever had with him. Who is this “company”? To call them the guests at the wedding would be absurd. (Cf. GC 426, 427). Inspiration says that the “people of God . . . cannot be represented . . . as the bride.” The Bride is expressly said to be the “New Jerusalem”.

But we have other Inspired statements just as emphatic and categorical that “the church is the bride, the Lamb’s wife”. (The clear statement occurs at least three times in 7BC 985, 986.)

The key to the difficulty must be the 144,000. Note the statement again in GC 427, “In the Revelation the people of God are said to be guests at the marriage

supper,” and Rev. 19:9 is cited. But verses 7 and 8 have just spoken of the Bride as one who “hath made herself ready,” and by virtue of having made herself ready has made it possible for the marriage of the Lamb to come, and herself to be granted to be arrayed in fine linen, namely the righteousness of saints.

Here we have three personalities involved in the three verses of Revelation 19:7-9: the Lamb, the “Bride,” and “the people of God”, the latter those “which are called unto the marriage supper.”

We have been slow to understand this problem. We have also assumed that the material city, the New Jerusalem, is the “Bride”, thus involving ourselves in at least two serious difficulties: (a) Such an identification makes Christ to be an idolater in love with a material city of gold, precious stones, pearls, and the like, something which can be made or created by a word from His lips. As though a bridegroom loves the apartment more than he loves the woman who is to dwell in the apartment with him! (b) This material city is magically endowed with the capacity to make itself “ready”; and thus, by clear implication, the failure to get all the celestial “bricks” laid or all the “mortar” in place must be understood as the reason for the long delay in the arrival of the marriage of the Lamb. The heavenly contractors are behind schedule. Or the angels have become bogged down in the judicial processes of the Investigative Judgment so they haven’t been able to wind up its business yet. I speak very baldly—no one dares to put it into such crude terms. But that’s what we mean when we say “God” isn’t yet ready to bring the second advent, or hasn’t yet got around to the “names of the living”. The truth must necessarily elude us that the one who has not yet “made herself ready” is not a

material city, but the “company” on earth who professes to be God’s people in the last days. This confusion in the identifying of the “Bride of Christ” contributes to lukewarmness.

But the difficulties are removed when we understand that the 144,000 have a distinctly unique experience, an experience parallel to and consistent with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary which is also a distinctly unique ministry known as “the final atonement”. This “company” are “the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb,” first in uniqueness and also first in point of time in that they are the only group to attain to that maturity of experience which qualifies them to be Christ’s mate. No other “company” of God’s people in all ages have been so qualified, and hence they are “guests” at the wedding.

“The capital and representative of the kingdom” is the New Jerusalem. But what is the City? When Jesus cried out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children, . . . and ye would not,” was He addressing the tiles on the roofs, the stones in the walls, the cobbled pavements?

Your “home” is the relationship you enjoy with your wife, not the timber and masonry of your temporary house.

We can conclude, therefore, that as individuals the people of God “of all ages” are guests at the “wedding”; but that “company” qualified to sympathize with Christ fully through mature experience, must be the Bride at the wedding.

A clear understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary alone can impart to God’s people the motivation so desperately needed to finish His work on

earth. A Christ-centered motive must replace our self-centered motive for the finishing of the work. How often we hear the prayer, “Lord, finish Thy work so we can go home to glory!” How can God’s people enter into a conjugal relationship with the Lord Jesus as a mate until they consider the finishing of the work from His viewpoint rather than from their own selfish one? *His* honor and glory is the important thing, not our own reward.

The 144,000 must therefore be those who have come to see something more important than reward for themselves. Moses’ experience long ago in Exodus 32:32 must be prophetic of theirs. The relinquishing thus of reward is true *agape*.

It is true—the Bible predicts a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time” (Dan 12:1). Jesus also predicted it; as does Revelation, yes, and many prophets and apostles. Could the final “time of trouble” be related to technological failures? If so, it would follow that preparedness consists of better electronics.

No, the Bible paints a different picture of the final time of trouble. Jeremiah 30:7 likens it to Jacob’s nighttime struggle with the Angel when in near despair he felt that God could not bless him but then he chose to trust that God would bless him, trusting in the dark that His character was love.

In the final crisis, God’s people will endure a similar trial of faith. They will “drink of the cup” that Jesus drank of and be “baptized” with His “baptism,” a trial of faith much more severe than Jacob’s. Jesus said that “the world [will] hate” them (Jn. 17:14); and it will appear to them so far as outward appearances are, that God has forsaken them. On His cross in the darkness, Jesus could

see not one ray of light; there was not an iota of evidence on which He could rest His faith. He was “made to be sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, as Luther said, He felt the guilt and condemnation of every sinner on earth; He was cast out of the cosmos into that outer darkness where He had said there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:30). He heard no welcome Voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Heaven was silent; the Father apparently turned His back on Him. No angel could minister to Him; there was nothing but darkness and despair. But even though there was not even a visible twig He could hold on to above the precipice, He chose to believe in the character of God, in His promises, in His acceptance when everything seemed to say there was no acceptance, only rejection.

The real problem in “the time of trouble” yet to come will not be merely no electricity, no water, no gasoline, etc. It will be that ultimate trial of faith that the “Bride” of Christ will experience, that white-hot fusion of human hearts to the divine heart of the Son of God, that ultimate trusting and believing in total spiritual darkness. They will live in the sight of a holy God as though there were no Intercessor. Don’t run away from the Lord who is seeking to prepare you for it. What’s more important than our selfish victory is His honor and vindication.