

THE PROFIT IN TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, AND PERSECUTIONS

An Attempt to Explain an Apparent Contradiction

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These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Our Saviour Jesus Christ, being the only begotten of the Father (John 3:16) came to this world fulfill his Father's will, which was primarily to give himself a ransom for many. He was a lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). And he rejoices when one who was lost is found (Luke 16:5).

As we meditate on the passion of the Lord, we cannot ignore that for "the joy that was set before him" that he endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2). It may seem as a contradiction that joy, contentment, and good cheer come as a result of difficulties – trials, tribulations, and persecutions – but this is true none the less.

Allow a simple illustration: Although it seems humanly logical that if parents raise a child in a smooth and easy lifestyle, never allowing the child to suffer even a small bit of discomfort, giving that child his every whim so he is happy and content at all times; then that the child would grow to adulthood and be happy, thankful, and appreciative of his parents. The human logic is that joy and contentment come from a lack of trouble – that a person's joy comes as a result of our circumstances.

But we know from generations of experience and observations that if a family were to raise a child according to the illustration above, that the child would grow to be spoiled, whiney, unhappy, unappreciative of parents (non-honoring), murmuring, selfish, self-seeking, and overall a person given to excess and one lacking true love. This is not the program for raising productive, healthy, reasonable, loving, human beings. There is something about the balanced struggle in a person's life that tempers him into a wonderful person.

God understands human nature. Consequently, he has set for his children a path of righteous struggle; primarily giving his Son as the ensample for suffering, victory, and joy. And we believers are being conformed by God to the image of God's dear Son (Romans 8:29).

In this paper I shall try to disassemble this Godly principle to better understand why these things are so, and why at first it appears to be a contradiction. In reality there is great profit in trials, tribulations, and persecutions.

Ultimately, besides the personal blessing of producing joy, contentment, and good cheer; struggles also increase faith, hope, and love; which are attributes most pleasing to our Father. I have listed the process below:

- God Allows an adversary in our lives
- The Adversary produces Tribulation
- Tribulation produces strength (maturity)
- Strength produces victory

- Victory produces joy
- Joy produces faith (fearlessness)
- Faith produces hope, peace, and patience
- Hope produces love (charity)
- Faith, hope, and charity please God

Let us consider 1 Corinthians 13:11-13 compared with 1 John 2:13, 14:

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

There are a few things I can see when comparing these two scriptures:

1. As I mature I put away childish things
2. As I mature become strong
3. As I mature I can overcome the wicked one
4. A characteristic of strength and maturity is that the word of God abides in me
5. The mature attributes of a mature believer is to have faith, hope, and charity
6. The greatest attribute is charity

In fact, a life of charity (or love) is the highest degree of maturity a Christian can achieve. God is love, and when a believer has the Christ-like love, he is most like God (1 John 4:7, 8, 16; John 3:16; 15:13).

Paul referred to charity as the “bond of perfectness.” Read Colossians 3:14: *“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”*

Read what Peter wrote about maturing in Christ:

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.
5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;
6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;
7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.
8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.
10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:
11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:1-11

The Apostle Peter simply shows the progression of a believer's election, which brings an abundant entrance into the kingdom. These are the eight building blocks for maturity:

- Faith
- Virtue
- Knowledge
- Temperance
- Patience
- Godliness
- Brotherly kindness
- Charity

You will notice that charity is the top ingredient.

The above verses show that God desires his children to mature. They show how we mature as believers, and the attributes connected with the particular steps of maturity. It is set by God. We should accept that God will deal with us in our lives so that we mature – God will apply spiritual pressure at just the right times so we react rightly. I list below some right reactions to the pressures God allows toward us. When trials, tribulations, and persecutions come, we should be provoked to do the following:

- Pray
- Read the word of God
- Trust God
- Be thankful
- Be patient
- Be joyful (rejoice)

The wrong reactions would be to:

- Murmur
- Complain
- Charge God foolishly
- Run

- Speak evil
- Have a bad spirit
- Sin
- Desire the old ways of the flesh

As we endure hardship patiently we gain spiritual strength. This spiritual strength makes us more effective for God. This strength I shall call temperance. This strength means we are not moved easily to complain. Instead, we praise God. Instead of murmuring we thank God. Instead of sorrow we have joy. Instead of fear we have faith. We see the miracles of God. Small things bring us great pleasure. We enjoy the simpler things that only God provides. We grow in grace. We grow in love.

Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote:

- 1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
- 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
- 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
- 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 5:1-5

As Paul said, we “glory in tribulations.” Why? Because that “knowledge” we added to our faith and virtue proves to us that the tribulation will work patience.

That patience means we wait and trust God. We know God is still in charge. We know he still is good (all the time). We know God will provide what we need by his grace. We know he cares for us and this works together for good because we love him. We are thankful. This patience means we do not charge God foolishly. We do not rebel. We do not fear (faith is the opposite of fear).

We can only know this truly through experience. And because of this experience we have hope. With this hope we are not ashamed. As Paul wrote in Hebrews 13:5 and 6: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

And with this hope we are not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

Brethren, *this* is the victory! The victory starts when we rejoice. That joy in the Holy Ghost we have in spite of circumstances is evidence of the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. That victory can only be experienced when we overcome the obstacles that defeat others. And just as a fighter cannot have victory without winning a bout against his adversary, we cannot have victory without a struggle. We cannot have joy without victory. Joy overcomes the “defeated mentality.” Joy is the fruit of victory. It is the evidence we have overcome. It is the outward manifestation of the win.

This is the joy Jesus had when he endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). This is the joy that comes regardless of outward influences. It is the joy only Jesus can supply:

22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

John 16:22

So, when things are smooth, we rejoice. When things are difficult, we rejoice. When we do not understand, we rejoice. When we fail, we rejoice. When we have victory, we rejoice. Consequently, our faith grows, our hope grows, and our charity grows. We do not live in fear; we live in faith. We are tempered so the little things do not disturb our walk with life. We enjoy God. We enjoy the small things. We love people. We have favor toward God and man. We see God work. These tremendous rewards come from the struggle. They are the profit of trials, tribulations, and persecutions. And God moderates these in our lives according to his perfect will.

I have presented the breakdown. Now it is time to go to the Master. As he speaks we can understand. We know his word is true. We know by doing what he says we will be blessed, whether we understand or not. We know his way is perfect.

As I have said numerous times, the whole Bible is all about Jesus Christ. The Old Testament speaks of Jesus (John 5:39). The four Gospels record what Jesus did and taught. The remainder of the New Testament simply explains and elaborates on the teaching of our Saviour. The gospels are the core of the Bible, the rest of the New Testament is simply the God-inspired commentary on these gospels.

So, when Jesus speaks, we listen. What he says we do. We emphasize what he emphasizes. We read the Apostles' words to help us understand. Read carefully the Saviour's words:

33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

Luke 6:22, 23

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

Luke 15:6

These are not just random words; they are keys to victory. Note further:

- Jesus wants us to be at peace
- This peace comes through the words of Jesus

- Jesus promises we shall have tribulation
- Regardless, we are to be of good cheer, because Jesus overcame the world
- We are blessed when persecuted for Jesus' sake
- We are to rejoice to the point of leaping for joy, because our reward is great in heaven
- We rejoice when those who are lost are found

Our Father in heaven, as a perfect Father, is concerned with bringing us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He knows we must have struggles in our life to mature and be profitable to him. As we overcome we meet new adversities, which in turn make us stronger, more hopeful, more graceful, more thankful, and more loving.

If you have had the great blessing of having godly children, as I have; you see this principal in action. I see my children are strong – they do not whine and fear over every small thing. They are not soon shaken. I see they have faith and hope. I see they love God, love his word, love his ways. They have love one for another. They honor their parents. They enjoy the simple things. They are content. They are happy. They are diligent. They rejoice when a soul is saved.

Now why is this? What lesson can I learn? Is it because I am a great parent? I know that is not true. Is it because my wife is a great mother? Not always. Is it because we have had the perfect environment? That is not the reason. So why is it? I think because of this truth that the Lord gave. It is because of the struggles God has allowed us to endure.

You see, they were not handed everything they wanted. We often lacked, so we learned to enjoy the little things. We were thankful for the blessings we received. We fed on God's word. We fellowshiped with God's people. We followed the way of our Saviour. We often had to patiently wait for what God had for us. We saw God provide through all things. We learned the value of love. We did not tolerate whining, murmuring, bad attitudes, evil speech, or slothful living. And through it all, the circumstances God gave us by his grace, redounded to his glory.

And had life been easy with no struggles, and had these children been spoiled; I know they would be unhappy "brats" lacking love and thankfulness.

I can take a lesson from my kids. I need to know that the things that befall us come from the hand of God and work toward the salvation of those around us. I need to rejoice regardless of the struggle. I need to be thankful always and have a joyful spirit that encourages others. I need not to be easily provoked because things do not go my way.

What I want for my children my heavenly Father wants for me. He brings certain difficulties into my life until I rejoice, overcome, and walk in victory. I become more useful to him. I please him with faith, hope, and charity. But the lessons are not completed. AS long as I live God will care for me, working to make me more profitable for him. I will have struggles until he takes me home. In the meantime, I have access to his grace. And by his grace we will persevere.

And when I get in a fog of self-pity, or a murmuring spirit, or lack understanding with the “why me?” attitude; I pray I will remind myself that God is always good, that his ways are perfect; and that I need faith, love, and patience; that I must be thankful for all things.

So, what does it take to make *you* murmur and complain? What does it take to make you angry? What does it take to make you fear? What does it take to make you pout? The easier you are provoked the weaker you are. The less faith you have. The less understanding you have.

Allow me to give one last verse showing the character of Paul and Silas when they found themselves in a Philippian jail. Although in a painful and hard situation, both prayed and sang praises to God. I like the last part: and the prisoners heard them. Your joyful testimony will not go unnoticed or unrewarded. People will get saved.

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

Acts 16:23-25

The End.