

FAITH AND THE ANGELIC CONFLICT

God allows us to be treated badly, like Job—to experience pain, deprivation, despair, deep depression, and struggles from self-induced misery, the curse on the earth, divine discipline, and persecution—to see if any will still desire a relationship with God. Will any choose to serve and worship Him? This is the exact opposite of Satan's situation before his fall: he was treated wonderfully with many blessings. Sad to say that many believers do walk away from God; yet some remain faithful, and their faithfulness condemns Satan and his angels. That's why endurance (2 Tim 2:12), faithfulness (Rev 2:10; James 1:12), and proven faith (1 Peter 1:6–7) are rewarded so richly—with praise, glory, honor, the crown of life, and kingship. They help resolve the Angelic Conflict. Endurance and faithfulness are necessary to achieve proven faith.

Walking by faith is hard. We can't see God. Nor can we see the invisible spiritual world around us. We pray and hope someone is listening. We claim promises, wait, and hope for deliverance. We're confused by the many conflicting interpretations of Scripture. Who's right? What should I believe? How do I know it's true? The Christian life would be a whole lot easier if there were but one indisputable interpretation of Scripture, as in the Millennium (Isa 2:3; 11:9). We're not in total darkness—but the fog is thick!

Let's pose a no-brainer. Would you rather walk by faith or walk by sight? Most prefer walking by sight; it's a whole lot easier. But we usually don't have that option. Let's look at a little history and then a little prophecy. Let's compare walking by faith with walking by sight. For most of eternity, both eternity past and eternity future, angels and humans walk by sight and knowledge. They see God. They talk with God. And they know what pleases Him. Angels have always walked by sight and knowledge. Before the fall, Adam and Eve walked with God in Eden (Gen 3:8). Like angels, the first man and woman walked by sight and knowledge in the age of innocence. They saw God. They talked with God. And they knew exactly what pleased Him. In the future, in the millennial Kingdom, men and women will also walk by sight and knowledge: "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). Jesus and his Father will be visible and accessible in the millennial Temple—living with men. And there will be no need to

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live by faith in the Eternal Kingdom: "and they shall see His face" (Rev 22:4a). It's only during this short six thousand year period of human history, from the fall of man to the beginning of the millennial Kingdom, that God demands walking by faith. The big question is: Why?

First, we must understand this: The difficulty of walking by faith is *intentional*. God wants it to be hard. And, second, we must understand that walking by faith helps God resolve the Angelic Conflict. Satan and his angels rejected God with perfect sight and knowledge; so God created a diametrically opposite situation for us—little sight and little knowledge. Yet in the course of human history many fallen humans have accepted, obeyed, and faithfully served God solely on the basis of faith—without sight or certain knowledge. The little knowledge they have is based totally on their faith that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. These men and women, who obey God's commandments, have faith in his promises, and remain faithful servants, seal the doom of Satan and his angels. They were disobedient, unfaithful servants in a much easier environment—in heaven. In contrast, our lives of obedience, faith, and service leave them without excuse. It's the only way to construct an airtight, legal case against Satan. God had to make life much, much harder for us in order to condemn their disobedience and unfaithfulness.

So why are blessings promised for putting faith in God's promises? Because it's very hard to have faith, wait, and hope for help or deliverance. Because our faith glorifies God in the sight of men and angels. Because Satan is condemned by our faith without sight. And because God is appreciative: He blesses our loss, sacrifice, pain, suffering, and martyrdom. Walking by faith is well worth the frustration and pain. The price we pay to glorify God in this life is rewarded with blessings that will glorify us in the next life. . . forever.



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The Value of Faith



In this you rejoice greatly, (although) for a little while now, if (it is) necessary, you have been saddened by various (kinds of trials), in order that the proof of your faith, which is more valuable than gold that is passing away but tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6–7 RCL).

COST OF FAITH

The cost of faith is high. It includes sadness, depression, pain, suffering, and death. The Greek word for 'saddened' is *lupeomai* "to be sad as the result of what has happened" (Louw & Nida). It's used of Ahab's *sadness and resulting depression* when Naboth refused to sell his vineyard: "Then the king, who was aggrieved (*lupetheis*), as if at an insult, at not getting the other's property, would neither bathe nor take food; and, when his wife Jezebel inquired why he grieved (*lupeita*) and would neither bathe nor have his midday meal or supper served to him, he told her of Naboth's contrariness. . ." (Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.356). The word group of which *peirasmos* is a part means "to try to learn the nature

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or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing — “to test, to examine, to put to the test, examination, testing” (Louw & Nida). Two examples will suffice: “Don’t be surprised at the painful testing you are experiencing” (1 Peter 4:12) and “when you undergo all kinds of testing” (James 1:2). It can also mean “to endeavor or attempt to cause someone to sin — to tempt, to trap, to lead into temptation, temptation” (Louw & Nida). A good example is “when the Devil completely finished tempting (Jesus), he left him for a while” (Luke 4:13). Temptation and testing are two sides of the same coin: temptations create tests of love, faith, and obedience. Peter says various tests *are* necessary (the first class condition assumes the truth of the protasis). Such temptations or tests, however, normally only last for a little while: *oligos* means “pertaining to a relatively brief extent of time” (Louw & Nida). A thin fog, for instance, “appears for a little while” (James 4:14).

COMPARISON WITH ASSAYING

Peter next compares testing faith with testing gold. The purpose of such testing is to see if they’re genuine or valuable (comparison is made to assaying, not refining). Talk is cheap. It’s easy to say “I have a strong faith!” or “This is pure gold!” But proof is in the testing. The word translated ‘proof’ in the phrase ‘the proof of your faith’ is *dokimion*, and the word group of which *dokimion* is a part means first “to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing” and then “genuineness on the basis of having been tested” (Louw & Nida). In other words, it may refer to the process or to the result of assaying. I believe it refers to the result in this context. “There is no intrinsic value in the test itself, but in the successful passing of the test. . . . It refers not so much to the test, but to the successful passing of that test. . . . The whole point of the test was genuineness or approval of the results of the test” (Robert L. Thomas, *Exegetical Digest of the Epistle of 1 Peter*, P9). To sum up, genuine faith is faith that is tested, proven to be reliable (Lampe), and approved by God (LSJ). It’s analogous to gold that is tested, proven to be genuine or pure, and approved by the assayer. The fact that their faith is rewarded assumes two things: it was strong and they passed the test.

PROCESS OF ASSAYING

The testing they endured was severe: like gold, their faith was tested by fire. The trial is compared to the blazing hot

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fire of an assayer. The figure is assaying, not refining.

The separating and purifying of precious metals from other metals is called refining. Smelting is the separation of precious metal from non-metallic impurities. Midwest Refineries is committed in using correct and accurate evaluation methods of all precious metal shipments from our valued customers. Our modern assay laboratory guarantees that all precious metals are tested using the most suitable methods of evaluation. Gold, silver, platinum, palladium and rhodium are assayed (determination of precious metal purity) in various ways to accurately and precisely evaluate each metal’s percentage of purity. The method known as “fire assay” is the oldest known method of assaying gold and continues to be one of the most accurate. When gold is melted, a sample of the gold is taken, either by drilling through the poured bar or by capillary tube sampling while the gold is in a molten state. The sample is weighed very precisely and the amount recorded. The sample is wrapped in assay lead foil along with a quantity of pure silver. This wrapped ball is placed in the furnace in a cupel (a special kind of disposable crucible). All the non-precious metals are absorbed by the hot cupel. The precious metal forms a button within the cupel. The cupel is removed from the furnace and the button is brushed to remove any remaining bits of the cupel. It is hammered flat, rolled thin and then heated in a porcelain crucible containing a weak nitric acid solution. The acid removes the silver, which is poured off and the silver recovered from solution. The gold is then rinsed in distilled water to remove any residual acid and then dried. The sample of gold is now at least 99.999% pure! The sample is then weighed again. The original weight of the impure sample is divided into the weight of the now pure sample. The result is the assay. In the analysis of platinum group metals, roughly the same procedure is followed, but the final element readings are normally done using ICP (from the web site of Midwest Refineries, LLC, Waterford, MI).

MORE VALUABLE THAN GOLD

Faith that is tested, proven to be genuine (as opposed to faked or pretentious faith), and approved by God is worth more than all of the gold in the world. Why? Because, first, the gold of this world is temporary, not eternal. It will pass

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away when the present heavens and earth pass away (Matt 24:35; 2 Peter 3:10; Heb 1:10–11; Rev 21:1). And, second, because proven faith will be rewarded with praise, glory, and honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Praise is a verbal “Well done, good and faithful slave!” (Matt 25:21). Glory is to receive rewards that bring you future esteem—a high opinion among men. The glory of the next life is eternal (“eternal weight of glory” 2 Cor 4:17; “eternal glory” 2 Tim 2:10). Honor is to be given high status or social position in the millennial and eternal Kingdoms (“great in the kingdom” Matt 5:19; “greatest in the kingdom of heaven” 18:4). In other words, rewards are given for faith that is proved by testing. Now, to drive the point home, since nothing on this earth is more valuable than gold, proven faith is more valuable than anything you can work for, anything that can be given to you, or anything you can accumulate. The word translated ‘more valuable’ in the phrase ‘more valuable than gold’ is *polutimios*; it means “being of great value or worth” (Louw & Nida). It’s used of a large pearl in the Parable of the Great Pearl (Matt 13:46). Eternal rewards, then, are much more valuable than temporal gold.

GRADES IN TESTING

I believe there are passing and failing grades on tests, much like grades on tests in school: fail (F), poor (D), average (C), good (B), and great (A). The story of Job supports this proposition. Job passed two tests: he never cursed God (1:11 with 1:21–22 and 2:5 with 2:9–10). But he didn’t pass with flying colors: at the end of the test God rebukes him for complaining (38:1–42:6) and then blesses him twofold (42:10–17). He passed, but not with an A. He never cursed or walked away from God. His complaining didn’t cause him to flunk the tests. But he could have done better. Since most of us could do better in testing, there must be a grading scale. There are a number of ways to flunk a test: (1) refuse to take it, (2) have no faith in a test of faith, (3) disobey in a test of obedience, (4) have no love in a test of love, and (5) walk away from God. An example of the first is Abraham. Had he refused to sacrifice his son Isaac, he would have flunked. An example of the second is Israel’s lack of faith at the Red Sea (Exod 14:11–12). An example of the third is gathering manna on the Sabbath (16:27). An example of the fourth is being enticed to serve idols (Deut 13:1–3). And an example of the fifth is a believer whose Christian life is choked out by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life (Matt 13:22; Luke 8:14).

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