

Faith Must Be Tested



Faith (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today. Our theme through this week is faith. I've been speaking to you about the three great must's of faith, three things that must go together with faith. First, faith must be confessed; second, faith must act; third, faith must be tested.

Yesterday I dealt with the second must, faith must act. Today I'm going to move on to the third must, faith must be tested. This is the must that people usually don't like to hear about. Nevertheless, it's clearly stated in Scripture and also confirmed by personal experience.

Interestingly, three of the main writers of the New Testament all agree in stressing the necessity of our faith being tested. The three writers are Paul, James, and Peter. We'll look first of all at what Paul has to say about the testing of faith in Romans chapter 5. At the beginning of Romans 5, Paul establishes our position in our relationship with God. He says:

> "...being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (KJV)

Then he goes on in a passage that describes a process that results, after we have achieved this relationship with God and he uses the word "exult" three times. "To exult" means to be extremely happy and to express your happiness in speech. The first "exult" is in Romans 5:2. He says:

> "...we exult in hope of the glory of God." (NAS)

Now that's easy to understand. We believe that one day we're going to share eternity with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ and all the angels with all the glory and all the blessings; that's our hope that's set before us. It's easy to exult in that hope. But the next time Paul uses the word "exult," it's in a very different and rather surprising context. In verse 3 and following, he says this:

> "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character; hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts

through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (NAS)

Well, that's a surprising statement at first sight. We exult in our tribulations. I wonder if that's true of you, do you exult in your tribulations? I know a lot of believers who haven't learned that lesson yet. And yet, as a matter of fact, Paul, James and Peter all agree that tribulation should be a source of exulting and joy.

Why does Paul say that we exult in our tribulations? Because tribulation is essential as a part of a process to accomplish what God wants in our lives. Listen to the order of the process: tribulation produces perseverance, and there's no other way to produce perseverance or steadfastness or endurance (whatever you like to call it) but going through the test of faith. Perseverance in turn produces proven character. Not just verbal confession, not just religious acts, but a character that has stood the test. Proven character is the basis of hope, a steadfast continuing expectation of God's goodness. And hope leads us to the outpouring of God's love in our hearts. We see that the ultimate objective is God's love in our hearts but that it takes a process to prepare our hearts to receive and contain all the love that God wants to put in our hear.

And then, in the same fifth chapter of Romans, verse 11, Paul uses the word "exult" the third time. He says:

> "...not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (NAS)

This is the climax of the Christian life, it's exulting in God Himself. It's finding your chief joy and delight not in experiences or blessings or gifts, but in God Himself. That's where God has us headed. He's going to do it through tribulation, through testings. These testings are going to build in us a character that can receive the fullness of God's love and that can relate to God Himself as our chief joy, the center of all our faith, the center around which our whole spiritual life revolves. That's the objective of God and He works that out in our lives through the tests of our faith.

Now let's listen to what James has to say. It's right along the same line, in James 1:2–4:

> "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials..."

Notice the same theme. When you encounter various trials, what do you do, complain? Give up? Wonder what's gone wrong? No, James says, "count it all joy," just like Paul said, "we exult." Why does James say we should count it all joy? Well, he goes on to say this:

> "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [That's the same word that's translated perseverance in Romans 5: The testing of your faith produces endurance.] And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (NAS)

Well, that's the objective. That's what God is working at, that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. And so, when we realize that that's what God is working for, to bring us to a state of completion and perfection, where every area of our character is in order, where every area of our is enjoying His provision. If it means going through testings and trials, then we can understand why we should count it joy. Not that we enjoyed the testings, but we enjoy what God is achieving in us through the testings. And let's look again there at the final objective that James says is to be the outcome of these testings, "that we may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." If that's the way to perfection and completeness and lacking nothing then I, for one, am willing to bow before God and say, "Lord, whatever tests or trials are necessary, I'll trust you. I'll trust you not to test me above what I can endure or above what is necessary. And in the testing I will exult, I will count it joy because I trust you. I believe you have my best interests at heart and you know how to produce the best in me that I am capable of."

We've seen what Paul and James had to say about the benefits of our faith being tested. Now let's turn to what Peter has to say. In 1 Peter 1:5–7, Peter here describes Christians as those:

> "who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Notice how important faith is because it's through our faith that God's power works in our lives to protect us and to keep us for that which God has ahead. Without faith there is no channel through which God's power can work in our lives to protect us and keep us and prepare us for what lies ahead. Then, speaking about this salvation that lies ahead, Peter goes on to say:

> "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and honor and

> glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (NAS)

Again, Peter indicates we may have to go through various trials and they may distress us, but nevertheless, deep in our hearts, there's still this joy in our eternal, unshakable salvation. The purpose of the testing is to prove our faith. Peters uses the word "prove" in the same way that it's used in terms of refining metals. And we need to bear in mind that in Bible times precious metals, particularly gold and silver, were refined by fire. The way that it worked was this: the metal to be refined was placed in some kind of a container and the container was placed over a fire and the fire was raised to the greatest heat that could be achieved. And then, in the container over that tremendously hot fire, the metal (whether it was gold or silver) melted. And as it melted and became liquid, the impurities in it, the dross, came up to the surface and the refiner leaned over the vessel and skimmed off the impurities. And he went on with that skimming process until no more impurities came to the surface and then the metal was refined, it had been proved, and it was gold or silver of real recognized value. Untried gold and untried silver had no recognized value.

Well, Scripture says that's how the Lord deals with us. Here's a beautiful picture in Malachi 3:2–3, speaking about the coming of the Messiah:

> "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 fuller's soap. 'And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.'" (NAS)

So, the Lord is going to deal with His people like the refiner of silver deals with the silver in that vessel. And it's essential for the refining of the silver that it be exposed to that tremendous heat. The heat causes the metal to melt and the impurities to come to the surface and when they come to the surface then the refiner is able to skim them off and to purify the metal. And it's been said by somebody that the refiner knew when the metal was completely pure because as he looked into the surface of the metal it accurately reflected his own features. And when the reflection was accurate, then he knew that there were no more impurities in the metal.

And, of course, that's how the Lord is dealing with us. We're in the refining vessel, we're over the fire; but He's bending over us in love and compassion and He's waiting until He sees His image reflected from us without any kind of distortion or impurity.

In closing, let me give you a beautiful verse in Isaiah 48:10, where the Lord says to His people:

> "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." (NAS)

Beloved friends, remember that it's in the furnace of affliction that God tests us, purifies us and brings forth His likeness. So if you're in the furnace, don't complain. Rejoice and trust the Lord that He's doing what's best for you.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. In my closing talk on faith tomorrow, I'm going to return once more to the opposite of faith; that is, unbelief. I'm going to show you how unbelief was the root of man's fall.

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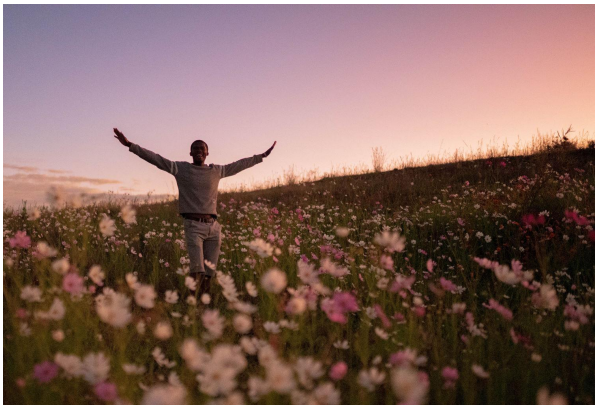

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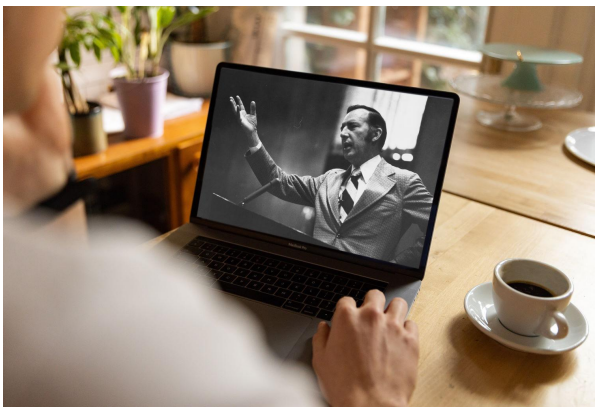

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