

The Refiner's Fire

The Crucibles That Come

Lesson #2 for October 13, 2007

Scriptures: Jeremiah 9:7-16; Romans 1:21-32; 2 Corinthians 12:7-12; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:8-11.

1. In this series of lessons, we will be focusing to a considerable extent on crucibles. What is a crucible?

A crucible is defined in the dictionary as 1) A vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, 2) A severe test, 3) A place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development. (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 17)

2. What is the cause of the troubles that we face?
 - 1) We cause our own troubles by our sinful behavior or our negligence, stupidity, or bad habits. A prime example might be drug addiction.
 - 2) Trouble is caused by the mere fact that we live in a sinful world. For example, a drunk driver smashes into someone who is on his way to church.
 - 3) God causes our troubles as a means of testing and purifying us. Consider Moses herding sheep for 40 years. Consider the children of Israel "wandering" in the wilderness for 40 years.
 - 4) Satan causes our troubles and God allows it. For example, the story of Job.
3. Do you think we can always tell which of these categories our troubles belong to? Are our troubles sometimes due to factors in more than one of these categories?
4. The apostle Peter clearly suggested that we should not be surprised when troubles come on us. (1 Peter 4:12-19) What are the possible responses that a Christian might have to "fiery trials"? Perhaps the best response is to hold more firmly to our God and Savior. This is an opportunity to trust Him even more. But far too frequently, we allow our troubles to distract us, even to discourage us. Some even reject God when they face troubles. Others suggest that all good things must come from God and anything evil must come from Satan. Life is not that simple! We cannot just automatically blame Satan for everything bad that happens to us, nor credit God for everything good which happens. What if we are personally responsible for bringing on the problem ourselves?
5. But no matter what the source of the problem, the best possible response is to turn to God.
6. To many people in our world today, "reality" is based on their current feelings in response to their current surroundings. How do you feel? What do you think? Is that a greater reflection of reality than God's Word? If you think that you are really being rejected by a friend or even by your entire world but you know, based on God's Word, that you are accepted as a child of God, which is the greater reality?
7. Can we know with certainty what the source is for each of our trials? Can we know

for sure if the “test” is coming from God or Satan? Can we know for sure if the trial is a result of our own behavior? Or our own sinful past? If we have more or less brought this difficulty upon ourselves, does God punish us for it, or does He simply allow us to suffer the consequences of our own behavior? (James 1:13-15) What do you think James meant when he said that God tempts no one?

8. When you personally are suffering trials, do you tend to turn to God, or do you try to solve the problem yourself?
9. What percentage of our trials do we bring upon ourselves? Do we bring trials upon ourselves by our past sins or by our sinful thoughts?
10. Can you think of a personal friend or acquaintance who you believe has really suffered a trial brought on by Satan? How do you understand 1 Peter 5:8? Do you see evidence that the devil is walking around “like a roaring lion”? Peter suggests that under these circumstances, we should resist the devil. How do you resist a hungry lion? Furthermore, God seems to promise that He will perfect us through those trials. What is your understanding of that process? How does that actually happen?
11. When you are being tried, does it help to remember that Christ has already won the great controversy? Can we honestly claim to be on the Victor’s side?
12. Looking back at the history of the early Christian church, we see that they went through terrible trials and persecutions. Paul was beheaded. Peter was hanged upside down! There is fair evidence that every one of the disciples—as well as Paul—died a martyr’s death with the exception of the apostle John who lived the longest. (Because he wouldn’t fry!) What should we learn from their experiences? If we were as committed to the gospel as they were, would we suffer the same kind of persecution today? Explain your answer.
13. Sin always has consequences. One of the devil’s most successful lies has been that we can sin, and yet avoid the consequences. Romans 1 talks about the consequences of sin. Paul calls those consequences God’s “wrath”! Is it clear to you from that passage how God’s “wrath” actually works? Is it important for us to recognize that sin has serious consequences? Is that an easy lesson to learn?
14. If we call on God to protect us from the consequences of our sin, will He do so? Why, or why not?
15. How many of God’s laws do we break on a regular basis? What about God’s moral laws? His health laws? Do we make it a regular habit to eat healthfully and exercise regularly? Do we ever destroy our health by overworking? Are those “sins” in God’s eyes? Have you yourself experienced the consequences of any of those behaviors?
16. Christian preachers and evangelists love to tell people that God’s grace is free. Do you agree with that? Is the Christian’s life simply a matter of agreeing with God that we need salvation? If salvation is so easy, why do we need to talk about crucibles and testing? Ellen White has some interesting things to say about testing:

God will bring you over the ground again and again until with humble heart and subdued mind you bear the test that He inflicts and are wholly sanctified to His service and work. Then you may win immortal life. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 214.

Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. *The Acts of the Apostles* p. 560.

Your trials and temptations borne in God will purify and humble, but will not destroy or endanger you. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 93.

17. Does God grade on the curve? Does He grade us on the basis of how we respond to testing and trial? What would be accomplished by that? Or is God simply trying to purify us?
18. "If the spirit of God brings to your mind a word of the Lord that hurts you, you may be sure that there is something He wants to hurt to death."—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Co., Inc., 1963), Sept. 27.
19. Jeremiah wrote a lot about trials, difficulties, and temptations. Think of the context in which Jeremiah was writing. Was God trying to purify His people? Was He trying to prevent them from suffering the terrible consequences that were coming?
20. Such experiences are never comfortable. Should they be? Think of the reasons why they are not comfortable? 1) God may find it necessary to "bring on" trials to expose our sin to us. That is never comfortable. 2) When confronted with our sins, we may feel sorry. 3) We may even experience frustration as we realize how difficult it is to change.
21. Are you experiencing any "crucible" situations in your life at the present time? Is God trying to teach you something? What does He want to teach you? Are you having a hard time learning the lesson?
22. If we are praying on a daily basis to get to know God better and to be more like His Son, are we praying for trials and temptations to come on us? Paul described a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) which was apparently brought on by God. Some have suggested that this "thorn" was the fact that Paul's eyesight was always poor after his experience on the Damascus Road. For whatever reason, God refused to help Paul correct that problem. Why do you think God would refuse to remove a "thorn" from the flesh of His most faithful servant? Did that "thorn" in any way slow Paul? Was his witnessing inhibited in any way?
23. What would God like us to do when faced with "crucible" situations? It is often useful to speak to a trusted friend. Is God a "trusted friend"? We can always speak to God about it in prayer. It should be a challenge that will lead us to study God's Word more carefully.
24. When God points out your sins to you, does it upset you? Are you mature enough to be thankful? Do you see evidence in your life that God is working to purify you? Are you truly getting prepared for the time of trouble to come?

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Info@theox.org

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