

# *Tried by Fire*

Arthur W. Pink

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” –Job 23:10

Job here *corrects himself*. In the beginning of the chapter we find him saying: “Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning” (vv. 1,2). Poor Job felt that his lot was unbearable. But he recovers himself. He checks his hasty outburst and revises his impetuous decision. How often we all have to correct ourselves! Only One has ever walked this earth who never had occasion to do so.

Job here *comforts himself*. He could not fathom the mysteries of Providence but God knew the way he took. Job had diligently sought the calming presence of God, but, for a time, in vain. “Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him” (vv. 8,9). But he consoled himself with this blessed fact-though I cannot see God, what is a thousand times better, He can see me-“He knoweth.” One above is neither unmindful nor indifferent to our lot. If He notices the fall of a sparrow, if He counts the hairs of our heads, of course “He knows” the way that I take.

Job here enunciates a *noble view of life*. How splendidly optimistic he was! He did not allow his afflictions to turn him into a skeptic. He did not permit the sore trials and troubles through which he was passing to overwhelm him. He looked at the bright side of the dark cloud-God’s side, hidden from sense and reason. He took a long view of life. He looked beyond the immediate “fiery trials” and said that the outcome would be gold refined. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” Three great truths are expressed here: let us briefly consider each separately.

## **1. Divine Knowledge of My Life. “He knoweth the way that I take.”**

The omniscience of God is one of the wondrous attributes of Deity. “For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings” (Job 34:21). “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3). Spurgeon said, “One of the greatest tests of experimental religion is, What is my relationship to God’s omniscience?” What is your relationship to it, dear reader? How does it affect you? Does it distress or comfort you? Do you shrink from the thought of God knowing all about your way?-perhaps, a lying, selfish, hypocritical way! To the sinner this is a terrible thought. He denies it, or if not, he seeks to forget it. But to the Christian, here is real comfort. How cheering to remember that my Father knows all about my trials, my difficulties, my sorrows, my efforts to glorify Him. Precious truth for those in Christ, harrowing thought for all out of Christ, that the way I am taking is fully known to and observed by God.

“He knoweth the way that I take.” Men did not know the way that Job took. He was grievously misunderstood, and for one with a sensitive temperament to be misunderstood, is a sore trial. His very friends thought he was a hypocrite. They believed he was a great sinner and being punished by God. Job knew that he was an unworthy saint, but not a hypocrite. He appealed against their censorious verdict. “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” Here is instruction for us when like circumstanced. Fellow-believer, your fellow-men, yes, and your fellow-christians, may misunderstand you, and misinterpret God’s dealing with you: but console yourself with the blessed fact that the omniscient One knoweth.

“He knoweth the way that I take.” In the fullest sense of the word Job himself did not know the way that he took, nor do any of us. Life is profoundly mysterious, and the passing of the years offers no solution. Nor does philosophizing help us. Human volition is a strange enigma. Consciousness bears witness that we are more than automatons. The power of choice is exercised by us in every move we make. And yet it is plain that our freedom is not absolute. There are forces brought to bear upon us, both good and evil, which are beyond our power to resist. Both heredity and environment exercise powerful influences upon us. Our surroundings and circumstances are factors which cannot be ignored. And what of providence which “shapes our destinies”? Ah, how little do we know the way which we “take.” Said the prophet, “O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” (Jer 10:23). Here we enter the realm of mystery, and it is idle to deny it. Better far to acknowledge with the wise man, “Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov 20:24).

In the narrower sense of the term Job *did know* the way which he took. What that "way" was he tells us in the next two verses. "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:11,12). The way Job chose was the best way, the scriptural way, God's way—"His way." What do you think of that way, dear reader? Was it not a grand selection? Ah, not only "patient," but wise Job! Have you made a similar choice? Can you say, "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined"? (v. 11). If you can, praise Him for His enabling grace. If you cannot, confess with shame your failure to appropriate His all-sufficient grace. Get down on your knees at once, and unbosom yourself to God. Hide and keep back nothing. Remember it is written "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Does not v. 12 explain your failure, my failure, dear reader? Is it not because we have not trembled before God's commandments, and because we have so lightly esteemed His Word, that we have "declined" from His way! Then let us, even now, and daily, seek grace from on high to heed His commandments and hide His Word in our hearts.

"He knoweth that way that I take." Which way are you taking?-the Narrow Way which leadeth unto life, or the Broad Road that leadeth to destruction? Make certain on this point, dear friend. Scripture declares, "So every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). But you need not be deceived or uncertain. The Lord declared, "I am The Way" (John 14:6).

## **2. Divine Testing.** "When he hath tried me."

"The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov 17:3). This was God's way with Israel of old, and it is His way with Christians now. Just before Israel entered Canaan, as Moses reviewed their history since leaving Egypt, he said, "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no" (Deut 8:2). In the same way God tries, tests, proves, humbles us.

"When he hath tried me." If we realized this more, we should bear up better in the hour of affliction and be more patient under suffering. The daily irritations of life, the things which annoy so much-what is their meaning? why are they permitted? Here is the answer: God is "trying" you! That is the explanation (in part, at least) of that disappointment, that crushing of your earthly hopes, that great loss.-God was, is, *testing you*. God is trying your temper, your courage, your faith, your patience, your love, your fidelity.

"When he hath tried me." How frequently God's saints see only Satan as the cause of their troubles. They regard the great enemy as responsible for much of their sufferings. But there is no comfort for the heart in this. We do not deny that the Devil does bring about much that harasses us. But above Satan is the Lord Almighty! The Devil cannot touch a hair of our heads without God's permission, and when he is allowed to disturb and distract us, even then it is only God using him to "try" us. Let us learn then, to look beyond all secondary causes and instruments to that One who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). This is what Job did.

In the opening chapter of the book which bears his name we find Satan obtaining permission to afflict God's servant. He used the Sabeans to destroy Job's herds (v. 15): he sent the Chaldeans to slay his servants (v. 17): he caused a great wind to kill his children (v. 19). And what was Job's response? This: he exclaimed "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Job looked beyond the human agents, beyond Satan who employed them, to the Lord who controlleth all. He realized that it was the Lord trying him. We get the same thing in the New Testament. To the suffering saints at Smyrna John wrote, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried" (Rev 2:10). Their being cast into prison was simply God "trying" them.

How much we lose by forgetting this! What a stay for the trouble-tossed heart to know that no matter what form the testing may take, no matter what the agent which annoys, it is God who is "trying" His children. What a perfect example the Saviour sets us. When He was approached in the garden and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the Saviour said, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Men were about to vent their awful rage upon Him, the Serpent would bruise His heel, but He looks above and beyond them. Dear reader, no matter how bitter its contents, (infinitely less than that which the Saviour drained) let us accept the cup as from the Father's hand.

In some moods we are apt to question the wisdom and right of God to try us. So often we murmur at His dispensations. Why should God lay such an intolerable burden upon me? Why should others be spared their loved ones, and mine taken? Why should health and strength, perhaps the gift of sight, be denied me? The first answer to

all such questions is, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"! It is wicked insubordination for any creature to call into question the dealings of the great Creator. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom 9:20). How earnestly each of us need to cry unto God, that His grace may silence our rebellious lips and still the tempest within our desperately wicked hearts!

Again, in 1 Peter 4:12,13 we are told: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings: that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The same thoughts are expressed here as in the previous passage. There is a needs-be for our "trials" and therefore we are to think them not strange-we should expect them. And, too, there is again the blessed outlook of being richly recompensed at Christ's return. Then there is the added word that not only should we meet these trials with faith's fortitude, but we should rejoice in them, inasmuch as we are permitted to have fellowship in "the sufferings of Christ." He, too, suffered: sufficient then, for the disciple to be as his Master.

"When he hath tried me." Dear Christian reader, there are no exceptions. God had only one Son without sin, but never one without sorrow. Sooner or later, in one form or another, trial-sore and heavy-will be our lot. "And sent Timotheus our brother-to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith. That no man should be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess 3:2,3). And again it is written, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It has been so in every age. Abram was "tried," tried severely. So, too, were Joseph, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, the Apostles, etc.

### **3. The Ultimate Issue. "I shall come forth as gold."**

Observe the tense here. Job did not imagine that he was pure gold already. "I shall come forth as gold," he declared. He knew full well that there was yet much dross in him. He did not boast that he was already perfect. Far from it. In the final chapter of his book we find him saying, "I abhor myself" (42:6). And well he might: and well may we. As we discover that in our flesh there dwelleth "no good thing," as we examine ourselves and our ways in the light of God's Word and behold our innumerable failures, as we think of our countless sins, both of omission and commission, good reason have we for abhorring ourselves. Ah, Christian reader, there is much dross about us. But it will not ever be thus.

"I shall come forth as gold." Job did not say, "When he hath tried me I may come forth as gold," or "I hope to come forth as gold," but with full confidence and positive assurance he declared, "I shall come forth as gold." But how did he know this? How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine purpose cannot fail. He which hath begun a good work in us "will finish it" (Phil 1:6). How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine promise is sure: "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Psa 138:8). Then be of good cheer, tried and troubled one. The process may be unpleasant and painful, but the issue is charming and sure.

"I shall come forth as gold." This was said by one who knew affliction and sorrow as few among the sons of men have known them. Yet despite his fiery trials he was optimistic. Let then this triumphant language be ours. "I shall come forth as gold" is not the language of carnal boasting, but the confidence of one whose mind was stayed upon God. There will be no credit to our account-the glory will all belong to the Divine Refiner. James 1:12.

For the present there remain two things: first, Love is the Divine thermometer while we are in the crucible of testing-"And he shall sit (the patience of Divine grace) as a Refiner and Purifier of silver," etc. (Mal 3:3). Second, the Lord Himself is with us in the fiery furnace, as He was with the three young Hebrews (Dan 3:25). For the future this is sure: the most wonderful thing in heaven will not be the golden street or the golden harps, but golden souls on which is stamped the image of God-"predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son"! Praise God for such a glorious prospect, such a victorious issue, such a marvelous goal.