

THE CHRISTIAN BATTLE: ENDURANCE

By Bill Watson

There is a warning for Christians in the latter days that, if ignored, could cause them to fail. It's simply known as "burnout." Christians are admonished to beware, "the love of many will wax cold." We are also advised that some will allow themselves to grow "lukewarm." The alarm has sounded; Christians must be cautious not to abandon God's ways and "become weary in well doing." But how can we be sure we will "stay the course" and not be affected by today's social pressures, changes, and deceptions, and forfeit our eternal life?

In Matthew 10:22 we are told, "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." This is repeated again in Matthew 24:13 and Mark 13:13. In Revelation 2:10, Christians in Smyrna were encouraged to be faithful unto death. This first-century exhortation is appropriate for present-day Christians as well: *"...be thou faithful unto death [natural or not], and I will give thee a crown of life."*

Unquestionably, Christ is clear on what He expects from all of us. The level of commitment is total and complete, including, if necessary, your life. Anything else is not good enough. We are instructed to be living sacrifices for God (Romans 12:1–2), dying daily on His behalf (1 Corinthians 15:31), and mortifying (subduing) the flesh (Romans 6:13), because of the sacrificial death He experienced which allows us to live for Him (1 Peter 2:5). Living the life of a Christian requires and demands a personal renewal and change of one's lifestyle. It's all about the renewing of our minds, which ultimately changes the way we feel, think, and act (Romans 6:3–19). This is an important concept to grasp and accept as part of the required cost of being a Christian. When considering the Christian way, be assured: it is a challenge!

The challenge starts when the conversion process begins. The reason is that as soon as an individual begins to make drastic changes in their lives, they find themselves confronted with new, sometimes unexpected, social and personal pressures. Notice what Peter explains concerning what one can expect upon allowing God to change the direction of one's life: *"...for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God [your life is taking on a noticeable change]. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, reveling, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they [perhaps your friends and relatives] think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot [anymore], speaking evil of you"* (1 Peter 4:1–4).

We must remember that those who cease from sin *will suffer possible abandonment, mocking, accusations, disbelief, and suspicion, personal loss, physical harm, mental and emotional anguish, etc.*, but this should not be a surprise, since Jesus also suffered in the flesh (1 Peter 4:1).

We are admonished *not to think it strange* to be confronted with trials once becoming a Christian. Undeniably, it should be expected, and Peter reminds us of this (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Christ also explains through the Apostle Peter that trials will make us stronger, more resolute, more resilient, and more dedicated to fulfilling the commitment that will result in the salvation of our souls. Notice what Peter says: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season [temporarily], if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: [why?] That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6–9).

Comparing Today’s Church With the Bible

Christians today are no different than Christians of the past. Their objectives and goals are the same. In summary, they want to obey God and be good people, *but with a particular distinction*—to be good people as *God defines goodness*, not as the government, culture, or manmade traditions define goodness. This distinction, throughout the centuries, has caused conflict to varying degrees, depending on the times, locations, and cultures Christians have found themselves in. The result— countless numbers of the faithful died through the ages, *committed to the faith* God called them to.

Unfortunately, the historical record confirms many Christians contending for the “faith once delivered” have been hurt, disenfranchised by government, ostracized by family and friends, and even killed as entertainment. It’s quite a disturbing legacy, especially when one considers these to be God’s chosen, called-out ones—those He considered His sheep. Today’s “health-and-wealth” gospel stands in direct opposition to Christian experience in early church history. In fact, much of traditional Christianity stands in stark contrast to the biblical description and record of God’s true called-out ones who define His true church (Luke 6:26, 12:51–53; John 15:19, 17:14; Hebrews 11; 1 John 3:13).



“For we are His workmanship...” Eph. 2:10

Many of today’s traditional Christian denominations and megachurches have ingratiated themselves with the hearts of teeming multitudes by tolerating and legitimizing lifestyles, liturgies, traditions, and doctrines that would surprise and disappoint even Jesus Christ Himself. Today’s traditional Christian community is an aberration of today’s pop culture, controlled by the politically correct environment that has emerged in our present secular humanistic society, which, in general, is led by a compromised moderate ministry committed to teaching a *non-offensive gospel*. By contrast, notice what the Apostle Paul advised the young evangelist Timothy to do: “I solemnly implore you, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is about to judge the living and the dead, and by His Appearing and His Kingship: proclaim God’s message, be zealous in season and out of season: convince, rebuke,

encourage, with the utmost patience as a teacher. For a time is coming when they [lay members and society in general] will not tolerate wholesome instruction, but, wanting to have their ears tickled, they will find a multitude of teachers to satisfy their own fancies; and will turn away from listening to the truth and will turn aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:1–4, Weymouth New Testament). Unfortunately, this is a sad commentary on exactly what has been and is currently happening within the general Christian community at large.

How Do We Maintain The Faith Once Delivered?

Some years ago, my wife and I went on a Caribbean cruise. For the first six days of this eight-day trip, the weather was just outstanding. However, the last 36 hours, a tropical storm developed, causing the waves to swell dramatically, worsening the “rocking of the ship.” Many of the passengers and crew, including my wife, became extremely seasick. As the hours dragged on, she appealed to me repeatedly that it would be better if I just threw her overboard and put her out of her misery. Amused by her request, I responded with a smile that this wasn’t a good solution. She obliged and conceded to “soldiering on.” In other words, she *endured* the storm!

This example may appear insignificant compared to the variety and magnitude of life’s potential problems and confrontations, but it illustrates a point: sometimes there is no choice but to “*endure the storm.*” Occasionally, *enduring is our only alternative.* Sometimes, there’s nothing more we can do. We have reached the end of our ability to do anything— the proverbial “end of our rope.” We must deal with conditions and, emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually, handle the circumstances we’ve been dealt and go through them, as best we can. Some may view this as passive behavior, but I can assure you, depending on what we are enduring—accident, marital issues, health concerns, addictions, misbehaving children, relationships, vocational or career problems, etc.—it can require enormous and painful “proactive” efforts.

Jesus said we must endure to the end. He also mentioned, “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and raised the third day [Jesus also willingly endured much!]. And He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up His cross daily [enduring the Christian requirements and demands], and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake [endures the pain, the suffering, and consequential costs], the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away” (Luke 9:22–25)?

Also, when addressing Timothy, the Apostle Paul chooses an interesting characterization. He told Timothy to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). This is a curious request, unless, of course, you realize the life of a Christian is much like that of a soldier at war. This admonishment is very cogent when one comes to embrace the life of a Christian. The similarities between a soldier’s life and a Christian’s are quite metaphoric. Both are aware, or at least should be, that circumstances can be difficult. Life can get uncomfortable at any time. Unimaginable inconveniences may be experienced, and tests, trials, or temptations can be enormous occasionally. But for the Christian soldier, when considering the reward promised and defined by the *true Gospel*, we are assured the challenges of this life are *not worthy to be compared* to the gift of immortality God has

prepared for us (Romans 8:18)! Therefore, *enduring occasionally*, though it may be uncomfortable for the time, is a small price to pay for such a stunning benefit from God.

Clearly, we must embrace the fact that enduring will be part of our Christian experience. Consequently, it becomes obvious that endurance must be part of our character, our “frame of mind.” Developing this frame of mind is not necessarily easy, but it is achievable when considering Paul’s instruction to Timothy. Notice what he says: “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). And further down in the text he says, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10). And James mentions, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11).

A firm resolution to “willingly endure” is a *type of spiritual inoculation* that has a long-term benefit: eternal life! It is the evidence of faith that is pleasing to God, because it is reassuring to Him that, regardless of what “shakes,” you will not be *shaken*. Notice, “And this word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:27). When you decide to be a Christian, you are asking God to become intimately involved with your life. This is a wonderful thing, but it is also very challenging, because you are no longer your own. He is now in charge of your life.

In making this point more poignant, let me suggest reviewing the first two chapters of Job. As you read this narrative, three things become obvious. *First*, Job was a very blessed and affluent man. *Second*, God was steering Job’s life, and He, God, chose to *allow Satan* to have his way with Job and his family. *And finally*, the circumstances that erupted left Job in a condition he could not control. Job had only one option: *to endure* the pain and suffering due to the loss of his family and health.

Those of us familiar with the story know that the circumstances defining Job’s journey to the “self-actualization” God had in mind were merely a “means to an end.” Furthermore, the fact that God is in control of His servants’ lives is evident. This should resonate with those of us who are baptized and/or considering baptism. Paul explains, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should *walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:3–6). This illustrates that we are expected to live a renewed life fashioned after Christ’s example by allowing God to have His way with us.

Upon being baptized, we have invited God into our lives, conceding to His intervention in directing our lives as He sees fit for His purposes. Notice: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor” (Romans 9:20–21)?

Giving our lives over to God can be a fearful thing, because we don’t know what He may have in mind for us. But one thing is sure: *He has our best interests at heart* at all times.

We should realize that although anyone can walk with God when times are good, guaranteed, our character will be tested and tried to ensure that God knows we are indeed sincerely with Him, for better or worse (1 Peter 4:12–13). God knows us better than ourselves. He knows what we are capable of doing, even when we think otherwise. Like a good coach, He is looking for ways to maximize our God-given skills by giving us opportunities to multiply our talents for the benefit of others, and that may require some occasional intervention on His part to motivate us beyond what even we thought ourselves capable of.

Assuredly then, we must recognize that in the course of our lives, we may be confronted with challenges that will require a certain degree of endurance. None of us is immune to hardships. All of us, while in this flesh, are vulnerable. It's important that we are not fearful, terrified, or afraid to live our lives, knowing that at some point we may be dealt a test, trial, or temptation that may temporarily seem enormous in scope. Remember, God is watching how we react to conditions and circumstances, hoping we will respond in such a way as to either inspire, reprove, instruct, or correct our course He has us on, while at the same time expecting us to glorify Him with that response. Knowing we are committed to enduring—and, if necessary, persevering—the trial should help ensure we overcome it. Clearly, a commitment to endure makes that possible!

Understandably, this awareness can be daunting. Yet we are discouraged by fear because we know it can paralyze an individual's growth in love. And love is essential in the life of a Christian. This is why we are reminded that "love casts out [displaces, replaces, eliminates] fear" (1 John 4:18). Our enemy, Satan, wants us to be immobilized, dysfunctional, doubting, questioning, tentative, and hesitant, ultimately giving up and quitting. He does not want us to have faith in God to "stay the course." He knows that if we begin to fear and doubt, allowing these negative characteristics to encroach on our faith, we will not endure. That is why we must always remain steadfastly connected to God when confronting these stresses, knowing He has our best interests at heart, and if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:7–8).

The Apostle Paul unequivocally assures us that God will always be "measured" with what He allows to come our way. Notice what he says: "There hath not temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer [permit] you to be tempted above [beyond] that ye are able [capable]; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able [capable] to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Do you realize what you just read? This is undeniably one of the most reassuring scriptures in your Bible. It reveals that God will never allow a test, trial, or temptation to confront you that is beyond your abilities to handle. This means that whatever the trial, test, or temptation you're facing or contending with, the fact that you are in this confrontation is evidence that you can be victorious. However, endurance must underscore your commitment to the challenge you're facing.

In Summary

We understand that if we don't endure life's difficulties as a Christian until the end of our life or until Christ's return, we will not be rewarded with eternal life as an immortal son, born of God. As Jesus explained many times, only those Christians who endure to the end shall be saved (Matt. 24:13).

Admittedly, the conversion process is a difficult one. Why? Because it requires change! That's what conversion means. Therefore, the crucible of "fire" is an appropriate metaphor, since fire is used on so many physical materials for the purpose of converting different elements into something they were not (i.e., water into steam, iron ore into molten steel, liquid gold into bars or jewelry, etc.). Certainly, it would only seem appropriate that God would exercise His prerogative in our lives to assure Him of the "crucible development" we need to qualify for His Kingdom with the maximum reward.

God reserves the right to be God! Therefore, He is not our "copilot." Instead, He is our Pilot. It's His salvific program. He makes the rules and laws that define the course. It's His mission! We have only to accept the requirements and commit to "endure" what our particular *"Christian role development program"* demands to succeed in our calling. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says about this possibility in our lives: "...My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Hebrews 12:5–8). Paul encourages the Christians at Philippi, in the context of persecutions and being surrounded by adversaries, that they have been given a privilege, a gift: the gift of "sharing in the suffering" of Christ (Philippians 1:28–30).

Did you grasp what Paul said? Let me re-emphasize this very important point. Paul says we have been given a tremendous opportunity, a gift to share not only in our belief in Christ, but also to *suffer for His sake*. That's right!

The one least-appreciated gift in our Christian walk is the *gift of suffering for His (Christ's) sake*. And yet, is it right that we should think any differently, since He suffered so much for us? Anyone who commits to living a life dedicated to exemplifying the attributes, characteristics, and values of what Jesus Christ represents will suffer because it requires making decisions that cut across our carnal nature and heathen society like a two-edged sword. Remember, the nature of man is enmity toward God and not naturally subject to God's laws (Romans 8:7).

We should always recognize the example of our Lord's final success in His passion: He endured. He could have called a legion of angels to stop the whole event and rescue Him from this unjust execution, but instead, He willingly endured. His life was dedicated to paving a way that would result in redeeming us from the penalty of death that the law laid claim. Everything depended on our Lord's success and His willingness to endure. He had only one option. And He chose to accomplish it by enduring, "staying the course," and outlasting the humiliation, pain, and suffering. Yes, He surrendered Himself to the cause by simply enduring the circumstances that confronted Him so that we may have life.

We, too, must be prepared to endure anything. As Paul was committed not to allow anything to separate him, so we should commit to the same degree of love for Christ (Romans 8:35–39, 2 Corinthians 4:8–18; 11:23–33). Unquestionably, our Lord expects us to develop and have this "frame of mind."

To better assure yourself you won't become weary in well doing, wax cold in love, or become lukewarm, commit and *dedicate yourself to enduring* whatever life may throw at you. Surely, God will welcome you into His Kingdom with the words, "Well done, you good and faithful servant... enter you into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. 25:23).