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Practical Faith, Part 4

Unintended consequences; the world is full of them. We all have experience outcomes that are not the ones foreseen or intended by an act or a decision. For example, in the 1920's the US outlawed alcohol by amending the Constitution in the era of Prohibition. Little did all the legislators or advocates envision or know that by prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages that all the small-time, little producers of alcohol would go out of business leaving the larger, more powerful operations to consolidate in order to avoid detection from the authorities. In time, these groups (most of which were comprised of a key family or two) expanded into

different markets such that by the end of Prohibition, the US now had to deal with the serious threat of Organized Crime and Crime Families.

Unintended Consequences! However, sometimes unintended consequences are positive, as 1 Peter 1 describes. Recall, on July 18, 64 AD Rome caught fire and burned for 6 days and 7 nights consuming 70% of the city. In the weeks that followed, public opinion turned against Nero such that a growing majority blamed him for the fire. Needing a scapegoat, Nero blamed the fire on the Christians, making them public enemy number one! This began a persecution that would last for four years and encompass the entire Roman Empire!

Yet this persecution had the unintended consequence of blessing the people of God beyond imagination. Charles Spurgeon describes it this way:

Love letters from Heaven are often sent in black-edged envelopes!... I bear my witness that the worst days I have ever had, have turned out to be my best days. And when God has seemed most cruel to me, He has then been most kind. If there is anything in this world for which I would bless Him more than for anything else, it is for pain and affliction. I am sure that in these things, the richest tenderest love has been manifested to me. Our Father's wagons rumble most heavily when they are bringing us the richest freight of the bullion of His grace. (Spurgeon 2014, 1 Peter 1)

This is so biblical.

James 1:2-3, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

Psalms 119:71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes."

This is the benefit of affliction in the life of God's people! Little did Nero know when he issued the decree that the people of God would be blessed beyond measure and that this blessing would bless even us today!

Think of it! We would NOT have the epistle that is before us (at least in its current form) if it wasn't for the persecution that broke out under Nero! As you know, 1 & 2 Peter were forged in the flames of affliction, a persecution which would eventually claim the life of its author, Peter.

1 Peter 1:6-9 was written to bolster the faith of God's people whose fleshly impulse at this time was to shrink back in their faith. Knowing this, Peter gave, what I have titled, A Seminar on "Practical Faith, essentially encouraging God's people NOT to shrink back, BUT to endure!

Peter's final point in this passage is the temporal results of faith, of which Peter here mentions three! Consider the first one; that practical faith results in a deeper love for God.

1 Peter 1:8a, "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him..."

Such beautiful and majestic words which at one and the same time convict, comfort, and inspire! “Faith” is behind each of the three Consequences referenced here. In this regard, notice the primacy of faith.

Linguistically there is no question that “practical” faith or a “proven” faith, is the focus of vv. 6-9. The central expression around which this entire section revolves is found in verse 7.

1 Peter 1:7a, “...the proof/proving of your faith...”

1 Peter 1:6 leads up to this statement and everything after flows from it. Thus, in Peter’s final treatment here on “Practical” Faith, he references “faith” multiple times...

1 Peter 1:8b, “...though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice...”

1 Peter 1:9, “...obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

Accordingly, though “faith” is not referenced in v. 8a, it clearly is assumed.

1 Peter 1:8a, “And though you have not seen Him, you love Him [*on account of your faith*]...”-

Why this is important is that the fruit referenced here does NOT come on account of our birth, the will of the flesh, the will of man, BUT God! And so, if you want to grow in your walk with Christ, start NOT by doing more, BUT by cultivating your trust in and dependence upon God!

With that, consider the advantage of faith (as opposed to sight).

1 Peter 1:8a, “And though you have not seen Him...”

It is easy to view the past with rose-colored glasses. *If only I could have lived in Christ’s day where I could behold my Savior, listen to His teaching, and watch His miracles. I’d be such a devoted Christian! I most certainly wouldn’t struggle like I do today!*

Family of God, that is nonsense! For consider that the one writing the text before us NOT only saw Christ BUT walked with Him for three glorious years. He was in the inner circle and so enjoyed rich fellowship with the Lord! How did it all end? In Peter’s case, it ended with his bitter denial of Christ! Speaking of the guards and Christ Luke records this:

Luke 22:54-62, “And having arrested Him, they led Him *away*, and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. And after they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them [the high priest’s slaves and officers of the temple guard]. And a

certain servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight, and looking intently at him, said, 'This man was with Him too.' But he denied *it*, saying, 'Woman, I do not know Him.' And a little later, another saw him and said, 'You are *one* of them too!' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' And after about an hour had passed, another man *began* to insist, saying, 'Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.' [Matthew 26:74 says that Peter at this point pronounced a malediction upon himself, essentially saying that if he was lying, God could damn him] And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

This was the culmination of Peter's three-year ministry with Christ! Christian, do you understand that in the Kingdom of God there is absolutely NO ADVANTAGE when it comes to your walk with Christ in seeing the Lord?! In fact, we could argue just the opposite. Seeing doesn't establish or even encourage faith, it only increases one's culpability! C. H. Spurgeon commented this way:

Mark the fact that out of the mass who did see Jesus and who did hear Him, few, very few believed. The crowd that gathered round the crucifixion, which might seem to be the most moving scene in the story, were not bettered by what they saw. As the multitude gazed, instead of tears they yielded laughter. Instead of penitence they exhibited blasphemy. There they gathered, thousands of them of all sorts, the highest and the lowest, the intelligent and the uneducated, and all alike they spat the venom of their hatred upon the Crucified One. (Spurgeon 2014, 1 Peter 1:8)

Truly seeing is NOT believing; it in fact puts us at a disadvantage! For the one who sees will be more apt to place his focus and confidence in the fact of HIS seeing, rather than God Himself! That no doubt is why we do NOT read of Christ blessing Thomas for arriving at the conclusion, based on what he saw, that Jesus is God. No! Christ reserves that blessing for a different group.

John 20:29b, "Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

We are talking here about the primacy or advantage of faith! Seeing is NOT believing, BUT apprehending God's character (living in light of it) most certainly is — which brings us to the cultivation of faith.

This was Peter's first point which we've already addressed. Accordingly, let me here simply review what we saw. Recall, faith is cultivated as we "rejoice" in God! What does this mean? The word Paul used for "rejoice" in v. 6a is ἀγαλλιάω (*agalliaō*) which is an activity of delighting in WHO God is and WHAT He has and is going to do! Recall Mary's words in the *Magnificat*:

Luke 1:46-47, "My soul exalts [magnifies] the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my

Savior.”

The word for “rejoice” is parallel with and so synonymous to “magnifying the Lord”. That is the essence of ἀγαλλιάω (*agalliaō*)! It speaks of exulting in and so magnifying the Person, Work, and Plan of the Lord! That is how faith is nurtured — which is why trial brings so much blessing for the child of God! Through it God brings us to the wilderness where at one and the same time He demonstrates at least two things:

- The vanity of the things of this earth, as well as...
- The glory, beauty, and blessing that is ours in the Lord.

Speaking of God’s plan for His rebellious people, Hosea records the following:

Hosea 2:14-15a, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness [which in the context is a metaphor for suffering and trial], and speak kindly to her [there God and His people once again will enjoy deep and abiding communion]. Then I will give her her vineyards from there [there they’d reap much fruit], and the valley of Achor [weeping] as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth...”

Spurgeon hit it on the head when it comes to what ought to be our passion in affliction:

The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is to see his Father’s face once more. His first prayer is not ‘Oh, that I might be healed of the disease that now spreads through my body!’ nor even ‘Oh, that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property returned to me from the hand of the thief!’ The first and foremost cry is, ‘Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, who is my God, that I might come even to His seat!’ [Job 23:2] God’s children run home when the storm comes... A hypocrite, when afflicted by God, resents the infliction and, like a slave, would run from the Master who has scourged him... Nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the Creator as much as when we learn the emptiness of everything else. (C. H. Spurgeon 1991, Evening, November 19)

Practical faith, the faith that endures through trial, is a faith set on the Person, Work, and Will of the Lord! It is a faith that seeks to know Christ and so bask in light of His greatness!

When this is our passion *BEFORE* the trial, when we enter a season of tempering, the trial is marginalized and our passion for the Lord is increased! Consider the fruit of faith: Love.

1 Peter 1:8a, “though you have not seen Him, YOU LOVE HIM.”

Christian, I hope you see it. Love is a glorious, practical result of trusting God.

Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means

anything, but faith working through love.”

Faith is the soil out of which deep and abiding love for God emerges and flows! The more we gaze upon Christ and see His beauty, the more we will love Him! Observe the following progressive list which builds upon another:

2 Corinthians 8:7, “But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you...”

Don’t miss it, the beginning of this progression is faith. The more we trust God the more our love will abound!

1 Peter 1:8, “Though you have not seen HIM, you love Him [*on account of faith*]...”

This is the overflow of a heart inflamed for the Lord: Love. Yet what is this love?

The word used for “love” here is ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*) whose noun form is ἀγάπη (*agapē*). What do we know about ἀγάπη (*agapē*)? Ἀγάπη (*agapē*) is that quality of love demonstrated at the cross.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

There are three elements to God’s love here which define what is meant by ἀγάπη (*agapē*). It is NOT a feeling, BUT a determined act of the will. When God looked out over the sinful world, He did NOT feel a warm fuzzy. That which moved Him was NOT an irresistible compulsion which He could NOT control. RATHER, God’s love was a choice! Speaking of Jacob and Esau, Paul said this:

Romans 9:11-13, “Though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to *His* choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”

God’s love is NOT an emotional response to what is seen. RATHER, God’s love — Biblical love — is a determined act of the will! It is a choice which sometimes is accompanied by feelings. But love is no less real or authentic when the feelings are NOT there! It is exercised on behalf of the utterly unworthy.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...”

What was the state of the “world” when God loved it? Speaking of the people God, using the metaphor of a newborn child whose parents threw it away like garbage, God said:

Ezekiel 16:6, “When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you *while you were* in your blood, ‘Live!’”

When God set His love upon His people, they were in no way loveable. They were as the rejected child left out in the woods to be eaten by animals!

Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

That is *ἀγάπη* (*agapē*) love! Clearly, the “world” of John 3:16 was in no way savable; it in fact was in rebellion against God! That God loved it tells us that Biblical love is NOT given to ones who are deserving, BUT ones deemed to be undeserving! It always results in acts of self-giving and so self-sacrifice. Because of God’s love for the world, what happened? “He gave His only-begotten Son!”- talk about self-sacrifice! The emphasis here is the fact that Christ was God’s “only-begotten Son” — which is incredibly significant!

Did you know that in a Roman household, every adult son was adopted! It is true. In Rome, for a child to be legally recognized as an heir, he went through a ceremony in which his father adopted him. It was then the child legally became a son! Which means every legal son was adopted! In this context, it was possible for a man to choose to adopt a slave or another child unrelated to him. In this case, the slave or unrelated individual became a son and so a brother to the other adopted sons.

Because of this, in Rome there were two types of sons:

- Adopted sons (~ slaves).
- Adopted begotten sons (true-born sons).

With this in mind, what God did in order to adopt you into His family was that He killed “His Only-Begotten Son” that you and I might become His son! Talk about self-giving! Yet that is the nature of biblical love... it always results in acts of self-giving and so self-sacrifice!¹

That is biblical Love. It is a determined act of the will that always results in determined acts of self-giving for the utterly unworthy. Yet here the focus is on loving God. So, does the definition still apply?

With this, we begin by noting that the temptation during trial is to blame God.² Recall Habakkuk’s words:

Habakkuk 1:13b: “...Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?”

At a low time in Asaph’s life, this is what he wrote:

Psalms 73:3-5, 13-14, "...I was envious of the arrogant, *as* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble *as other* men; nor are they plagued like mankind... Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning."

In light of this, the believers to whom Peter is addressing this epistle were at risk, for they were "distressed by various trials" (v. 6)! If you were living at this time, how long would it have taken before you began complaining against God?

In this regard, the definition we just saw for biblical love is so important! It is that which God would cultivate in our lives when it comes to the Lord! As it is a determined act of the will, trial wakes us up and so makes us deliberate when it comes to our service. In easy times, we serve the Lord out of our abundance. In trial and difficulty, our service becomes reasoned and so calculated.

- How important really is worship?
- How important really is evangelism?
- How important is Bible study?

Are you willing to be persecuted for any of these? Are you willing to die for any of these? Look to any persecuted people of God and the answer they have given a thousand times over is, "Yes!"

As biblical love always results in determinate acts of self-giving, trial forces us to make a decision regarding who we are going to serve! When things are easy, anyone can say, "I love God!" Especially if you play the right song. But when the winds are contrary, we are forced to make a decision.

As biblical love is given to the utterly unworthy, trial forces us to make a decision regarding why we are going to serve. The world is watching, Satan and his demons are watching, and they want to know, "Do you and I serve the Lord because He bribes us with easy days? Or do you serve the Lord because He is altogether lovely?" Christian, when the world says, "Curse God and die!" what will be your response?

This is what trial does in the life of the genuine servant of God. It tempers our faith and so makes us live deliberately and therefore intentionally for the Lord! And that, family of God, is the core of biblical Love!

This is the first result of practical faith!

Works Cited

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End Note(s)

¹ We see it most clearly in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This is the love chapter, one of the most well-known Bible passages in the world. Yet notice how it defines love, “Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Love here is defined not by how it feels, but by what it does! That is the essence of Biblical love.

And so when the Bible says, “Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church” (Eph. 5:25)- and when the Bible calls wives to love their husbands in return- it is not calling upon either to feel romantic toward their spouse. It is calling them to sacrifice themselves unto the growth and maturation of each other!

² Consider Psalms 44:9-15. In contrast to the past victories which God gave to his people, the Psalmist life was anything but victorious, and so he blames God! Playing the role of the victim, he complains bitterly against God, “Yet Thou hast rejected *us* and brought us to dishonor, and dost not go out with our armies. Thou dost cause us to turn back from the adversary; and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. Thou dost give us as sheep to be eaten, and hast scattered us among the nations. Thou dost sell Thy people cheaply, and hast not profited by their sale. Thou dost make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scoffing and a derision to those around us. Thou dost make us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples. All day long my dishonor is before me, and my humiliation has overwhelmed me.”