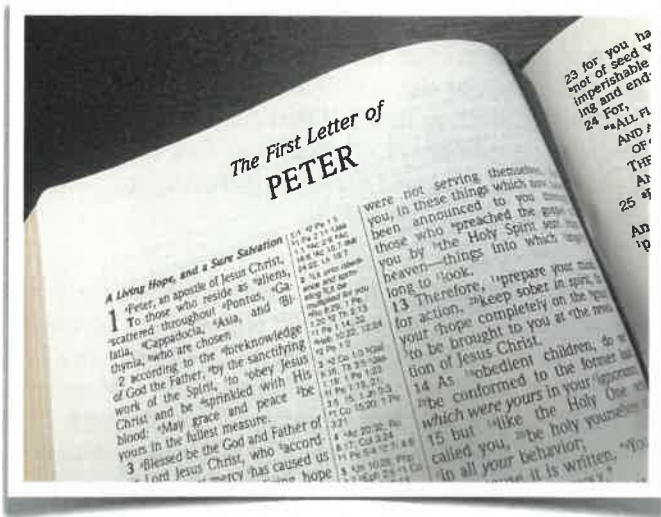


# The First Letter of Peter 1:7-9

## The Epistle of Living Hope



### Faith through the Fire

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval” (Hebrews 11:1-2). Everything God does has a divine purpose. Faith through the trials of fire are no exception. Like the “men of old” who were assured of their hopes and held convictions of things not seen, the purpose of a believer’s faith ultimately is approval. Not approval by their human peers but approval by their divine Creator and Savior. Maintaining joy in the midst of trials (1:6) is directly connected to maintaining faith in the midst of trials (1:7-9). Like the “men of old”, the Christian’s faith is based on the Word of God which promises eternal and glorious rewards for those who persevere. As Peter continues his blessing to God and his exhortation to his brethren, he turns his attention to the purpose behind the trials that come with the Christian faith. In verses 7-9 we see

four aspects of faith that are essential to understanding the fiery trials that disciple of Jesus Christ encounter: The Testing, Reward, Object, and Culmination of Our Faith.

**The Testing of Our Faith (7a)** - Everything that happens has a purpose, including trials. Peter explains that the trials his brethren were experiencing would ultimately validate their faith (“proof of your faith” - *dokimion*). He seems to have in mind what James said in his epistle about the testing of faith (James 1:30). Gold is a precious metal which must go through a refining process in order to remove impurities and bring out the brilliant color and radiance of the metal. Gold cannot refine itself so the refiner uses intense heat (fire) to break down and purify the gold. It is only after the metal has been subjected to such an intense process that its true brilliance and worth is realized. In this comparison between trials of the Christian faith and gold’s refining fire, Peter’s focus is not the means of testing (fire) as much as it is the result of testing



(proof of genuine faith). In comparing the trials of faith to the value of refined gold, Peter states that tested faith exceeds the value of the refined precious metal. As valuable as refined gold is, it is also perishable. However, genuine (tested) faith has greater value than gold because “Perishing things belong to the temporal realm. Genuine faith, by contrast, belongs to the things that are imperishable (1 Cor. 13:13)” (Heibert). An Old Testament example of faith being approved through the trials of fire is found in Daniel 3 when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to bow the knee to King Nebuchadnezzar.

#### Wayne Grudem

“God sends trials to strengthen our trust in him so that our faith will not fail. Our trials keep us trusting; they burn away our self-confidence and drive us to our Saviour. The fires of affliction or persecution will not reduce our faith to ashes. Fire does not destroy gold; it only removes combustible impurities...Like a jeweler putting his most precious metal in the crucible, so God proves us in the furnace of trial and affliction. The genuineness of our faith shines from the fire to his praise.”

**The Reward of Our Faith (7b)** - In our lives on earth, genuine faith often goes unnoticed. However, in God’s perfect plan and time, the genuine faith of His people will never be overlooked. Testing proves faith and a proven faith is rewarded by God. Peter tells his scattered and distressed brethren that there are three results or rewards that God has ordained for those who have genuine faith: praise, glory, and honor. As Christians we are to live

our lives for the glory of God and to bring honor to His name. But this is not what Peter has in mind when he speaks of the rewards of genuine faith. Peter's point here is that "True saving faith and its resultant good works always receive divine commendation" (MacArthur). Praise is for "fidelity of faith" (Matt. 25:21; 2 Thess. 1:5), honor "is what Christ promises to His faithful servants and what he shows to them by the honorable position to which He promotes them" (John 12:6), and glory "is what the Father has given to Christ and this He will communicate to all that are His" (1 Pet. 4:13; 5:1) (Thomas). There is no question that faith under fire will be rewarded. Therefore, when in the midst of trials the Christian is to remember, "It is in times when the reason for hardship cannot be seen that trust in God alone seems to become most pure and precious in his sight. Such faith he will not forget..." (Grudem). But when will this reward be received by the faithful? The temporal trials and distresses of the faithful will receive the God-ordained rewards in eternity; specifically, at the "revelation of Jesus Christ". This revelation of Jesus is most likely a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7-8; 2 Thess. 1:7-8). Because the passages that speak of the revelation of Jesus also speak of judgment upon unbelievers, it is not likely that Peter has the rapture of the church in mind. When Jesus returns in glory with His saints accompanying Him, all those who are His will experience the fullness of rewards that God has set aside for His faithful saints. When we find ourselves in fiery trials, let us fortify ourselves and remember that temporal trials experienced and endured through genuine faith will receive eschatological rewards (1 Pet. 1:13).

**The Object of Our Faith (8)** - Before His ascension, Jesus taught His disciples a valuable lesson (one that Peter likely has in mind). That is, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). Peter presents a contrast between himself, an eyewitness and disciple of Christ, and his brethren, who had no personal contact with Jesus. Despite the fact that they had never seen Jesus, they loved, believed in, and greatly rejoiced about and in the object of their faith. All those who have faith in Jesus but have had no personal contact with Him accept the testimonies of eyewitnesses who had. Their love (*agapate*) was a result of their genuine faith (the source of their love). And their faith (*pisteuontes*) was a "continual, habitual, typical activity" (Thomas). True faith is a consistent faith even when the object of that faith is not tangible or visible. "And though you do not see Him now..." includes not only Peter's brethren, but Peter himself. After Jesus' ascension, Peter's belief was based on his past experiences but also on his present faith that Jesus was alive, seated at the right hand of the Father, and coming again for His saints. Faith in Jesus produces an expression of joy that is beyond human expression and comprehension. Peter says that the joy Christians possess is "inexpressible" (*aneklaletoi*). In classical Greek it is translated "unutterable" and a variant of the same word is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:15 when he speaks of an "incredible gift" (Robertson). Not only is their joy "inexpressible", it is "full of glory" (*dedoksasmeni* - "glorified joy") (Robertson). The believers "inexpressible, glorified joy" is reminiscent of Moses' shining face as a result of being in the presence of the glory of God (Ex. 34:29). Christians who love and believe in a Jesus whom they have not seen, experience "glorified joy" as a result of the Holy Spirit abiding in them and the promise of the glorious return of Christ in days to come.

**The Culmination of Our Faith (9)** - The trials Christians encounter during their time on earth serve as a refining process. This process has a purpose and an end. Faithful Christians will obtain (*komizomenoi* - "receive back, get what is promised") (Robertson) the "outcome" (*telos* - goal or logical end of a process or action) of their tested faith (Thomas). Salvation is understood as both blessings that have been received and are experienced here and now and blessings which are promised and expected to be revealed and applied at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The salvation of Christians is experienced in many ways here and now: redemption and forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14), they are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), they have been sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), they have been freed from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:18), they have been called out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9), and they are no longer under God's condemnation and wrath (Rom. 8:1; Rom. 5:9). However, there are more promises of salvation blessing that will be experienced once this temporal existence is over. Future aspects of salvation include: resurrection and imperishable bodies (1 Cor. 15:50-58), absence of the curses and penalties of sin (Rev. 21:4), and an abode in the presence of God (John 14:2-3 ; Rev. 21:3). Peter's mention of the "salvation of your souls" is likely used "in a Semitic sense to denote the self or man as a living being...and denotes the entire saving activity of God" (Heibert). Faith which undergoes temporal testing and is proven to be genuine is guaranteed to receive the fullness of salvation when Christ is revealed in all His glory.

John MacArthur

"Those who live in personal communion with Christ experience a joy so divine that they cannot communicate it; humanly speaking, such a joy is beyond the reach of speech and expression"