

# The Testing of Our Faith

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In the Apostle Peter’s first letter, he addressed God’s elect, “...who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...” (1 Peter 1:1-2). Peter then praised God for the great mercy He showed to us when He gave us new birth through Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and with this new birth, an inheritance in Heaven “which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away”. Peter continued saying: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Through whatever trials God has ordained for us during the course of our lives, we will ultimately be made to stand by God’s power, and not our own. Our preservation in the faith will not come about through our own determination or our own perceived personal loyalty and dedication to the cause of Christ. Even if we fail during some time of great trial in our life, as happened in the life of Peter, Jesus is coming back for us, just as He did for Peter. What we fail to do in our own power, God will bring about in our lives by His power at work in us.

This preservation in our faith, or what is sometimes referred to as the “perseverance of the saints”, is something that we will begin to discuss here, and we will discuss this subject in much greater detail later in this book. As Peter said, we have received an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled; it will not fade away. Those of us who have come to faith in Christ will all be kept safe and made to persevere in our faith by the power of God, and this perseverance will demonstrate and prove that the faith we profess to have is genuine.

### *The Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness*

In Matthew 4:1-11 we find the account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. The Scripture tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After He had fasted forty days and nights, He was hungry, and this is when the tempter came to Him with his deceptions, which included twisting the meaning of Scriptures in an attempt to coerce Him into transgressing the word of God.

The devil’s first two temptations are a type of brazen and arrogant challenge in which he is essentially saying to Jesus that if He really is the Son of God, then He should prove it. First, he said to Jesus that if He really is the Son of God, then He should command the stones before Him to become bread. Jesus responded to this first temptation with a Scripture from Deuteronomy 8:3, when He said: “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4).

In his second temptation, the devil cleverly tried to use Scripture himself in an attempt to justify his challenge to Jesus. He taunted Jesus by saying that if He really is the Son of God, then He should throw Himself down off of the high place where they were, because the Scripture says: “He will command his angels concerning You, and On their hands they will bear You up, So that you will not strike Your foot against a stone.” (Psalm 91:11-12). Jesus answered this second temptation of the devil, this time quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:7).

Finally, in his third temptation, the devil used a false promise, an outright lie, to tempt Jesus when he promised to give Him all of the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down to worship him. Again, Jesus met the devil’s temptation with Scripture, this time from Deuteronomy 6:13 when He said: “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” (Matthew

4:10). Though the devil promised Jesus the kingdoms of the world in this third temptation, they were not his to give, and it was not in his power to give them, because as God's word tells us in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it."

As believers, there will be times in our lives when we will be led, as Jesus was, by the Spirit of the Lord into a "wilderness" of our own difficult and trying circumstances, where we also will be tempted to transgress God's word. Our "wildernesses", or the places and circumstances in which our faith is tested, will take different forms and manifest themselves in different ways. They will be harsh and barren places in life where we will be tempted to transgress God's word as a way out of our painful and trying conditions, just as Jesus also was tempted.

The devil will often bring temptation to us in times like these, when we are more vulnerable. We may be hungering for some gratification that God has withheld from us, according to His sovereign plan and purpose for our lives. At such times the devil may come to us with all kinds of reasons why we, under the circumstances, are entitled to obtain what we want for ourselves, even if it means transgressing the word of God.

During these times, our response to temptation should be the same as Jesus' response to His temptations: we are to stand fast upon the truth of the word of God, being obedient to His commands, and using the instruction we have from the Scriptures to meet every argument and enticement of the devil. Sometimes these enticements may even come by the twisting of a passage of Scripture in an attempt to justify some sinful course of action, just as the devil tried with Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness.

In the same way that the devil twisted the Scriptures in his attempt to deceive Jesus, false teachers will also twist the Scriptures, isolating them from the context of the passage in which they are found, or isolating them from the rest of the Scriptures as a whole, in an attempt to make them say something that they want them to say. These messages are usually very appealing, and people want to believe they are true, but these false teachings are in fact inconsistent with and even contradicted by other Scriptures.

The motive of the false teacher in bringing such messages is usually financial gain, as Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:3-5), and as Peter instructed us in his second epistle (2 Peter 2:1-3, 13-14). The origin of these false teachings is the devil, whose servants masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians

11:14-15), but in reality they have been taken captive by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

Knowing that temptations may come our way through false teachings, let us understand that we are to hold firmly to the truth of the word of God during our time of trial and testing. Let us be wary of the false teacher who twists or isolates Scripture passages in order to formulate his own doctrines, by which he claims to have insights from the Scriptures as to how we can obtain the things we desire for ourselves in life. Let us also be wary of the devil's deceptions and the twisted reasoning that he may present to us during a time of hardship in our lives, in an attempt to get us to transgress God's word.

Our sovereign and loving God directs our steps, and we should understand that sometimes we may be led by the Spirit, as Jesus was, into a barren "wilderness" of our own troubling circumstances, where we too will be tempted, and our faith will be tested. In such times we share in this aspect of the sufferings of Christ. And as we have seen from the Scriptures before, God has ordained that our share in the sufferings of His Son will achieve for us a share in His eternal glory.

### ***The Apostle Peter is Tested***

Peter knew first-hand about the trials that would come our way as believers. God allowed Peter's trial and failure, and He saw to it that they were recorded in the Scriptures so that all believers who would later read of them would take heart and know that He will never abandon us.

Just as Satan was given power to wreak havoc in Job's life for a time, so also Satan wanted to try Peter to see if he could make him deny the Lord. Jesus said to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus knew that such trials are a part of God's will for the lives of His people. Therefore He encouraged Peter by telling him that He had already prayed for him, that his faith would not fail. Peter replied to Jesus saying that he was ready to go to prison and even to death with Him. Jesus then answered Peter: "...I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:34).

At this point in the Gospel account, Jesus knew that He would soon face death by crucifixion, and He went up to the Mount of Olives where He prayed to His Father. He knew that all things were possible for God, and He asked that the cup He was about to drink might be taken away from Him. Nevertheless, He prayed that His Father's will would be done and not His own.

Soon afterward, Judas appeared with a crowd that included the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, and he betrayed Jesus to the soldiers with a kiss. Knowing which one Jesus was, the guards proceeded to arrest Him. Peter then drew his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant.

Jesus put a stop to this violent response; He touched the servant's ear and healed him. Jesus then said to the crowd that every day He was with them in the temple courts, and no one laid a hand on him. Then He told them that this was their hour, the hour when darkness would reign.

The answer to Jesus' prayer that His cup of suffering might be taken away from Him was now moving forward rapidly with events. It was indeed God's will that He die on Calvary's cross to become the propitiation for the sins of His people, obtaining forgiveness and reconciliation to God for all of those who believe on His Name.

One account of Peter's denial of Jesus is given in Luke 22:54-62. After the guards arrested Jesus, they took Him to the house of the high priest. Peter followed them at a distance. Those in the crowd who were there when Jesus was arrested sat down in front of a fire in the courtyard to warm themselves, and Peter also sat down with them. A servant girl noticed Peter by the light of the fire, and she said that he was with Jesus at the time of His arrest. Peter denied this charge and claimed that he did not know Jesus.

A short time later someone else recognized Peter and said that he was one of Jesus' disciples, and again Peter denied it. And then an hour or so later another man also noticed Peter and said to him that surely he was with Jesus, because he recognized Peter's speech as being Galilean. Peter emphatically denied this charge also, and as he was voicing his third denial of Jesus, he heard the rooster crow. At this point Peter remembered that Jesus had told him before the rooster crowed that day, he would deny Him three times, and he "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

It comes as no surprise that Peter's denial happened exactly as Jesus had predicted. When Peter realized what he had done, he wept bitterly over his denial and abandonment of his Lord and Savior. This failure must have shaken his faith severely, because he was with Jesus when He said: "everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8-9).

Peter had his chance to stand with Jesus in His time of trial, and to do exactly as he said he would do, which was to go with Jesus to prison and to death if need be (Luke 22:33). But when his testing came, and it was time for him to do just that, he failed miserably.

Not only did Peter flee when the guards arrested Jesus (Mark 14:50), but he later denied that he even knew Jesus at all. Not only did he deny that he knew Jesus once, but he denied Him three times. Any illusions that Peter had of his own great love, loyalty, and devotion to the Lord, which he had so confidently expressed just a short time earlier, had now been completely shattered.

### *Jesus Reaffirms His Love for Peter*

Soon after Peter abandoned Jesus and denied that he knew Him, Jesus was crucified according to the sovereign plan and purpose of God, by which He became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21). And then His disciples went into hiding for fear that the Jews would come for them as well.

Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after He was crucified. Soon afterward He appeared to Mary Magdalene, and later He also appeared to the disciples as they were meeting inside a locked room.

After these events, Jesus again appeared to several of His disciples by the sea. Peter and some of the others had decided to go fishing. They fished all night but had caught nothing. It was early in the morning when Jesus appeared to them standing on the shore, but the disciples did not at first realize that it was Jesus. This event is recorded in John 21:5-9.

Jesus called out to them, asking them if they had caught any fish. They answered that they had not. Then Jesus told them to throw their net over the right

side of the boat, and they would find a catch there. They did as they were told and caught so many fish that they were not able to haul in the net.

At this point, John recognized that it was Jesus who had called to them, and he told Peter. Peter then immediately wrapped an outer garment around himself, and he jumped into the water to swim to Jesus ahead of the others, who followed in the boat towing the net full of fish. When they all got to shore, they saw a fire of glowing coals with fish cooking over it, and bread also.

We can imagine that Peter's awareness of his abandonment and denial of Jesus was still painfully present in his mind at the time they were eating breakfast together on the shore. After they had eaten, Jesus reaffirmed His love for Peter in the presence of them all. Jesus knew that Peter needed to be reassured, and He came back for him and made sure Peter knew, that despite his failings, he was still loved and accepted by Him. The account of Jesus' reaffirmation of Peter is given a few verses later in the Gospel of John:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. (John 21:15-17).

It is interesting to note the two Greek words from the original text that are translated as the English word "love" in this passage of John 21. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. The first two times Jesus asked Peter if he truly loved Him (verses 15 and 16). The Greek word that was used in Jesus' first two questions to Peter was the word "agapao", which is a supreme, unconditional type of love.

Peter answered Jesus these two times saying, "Yes, Lord...you know that I love you." However, the Greek word for "love" that was used in Peter's answer to Jesus was not "agapao", but it was "phileo", which is a lesser type of love, not an unconditional, supreme love, but only a type of brotherly love or fondness. Peter knew that his earlier failure had plainly demonstrated that the love he had for Jesus did not rise to the level of a supreme, unconditional love, and he had to admit this in his answer to the Lord.

The third time that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him (verse 17), the word “phileo” is now used in His question to Peter, according to the original Greek text. And again, “phileo” means a brotherly love or fondness for someone. Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him this third time, as if Jesus were asking if he even loved Him as a brother.

Peter replied to Jesus again saying that he did love Him, and that He as Lord knew all things. Peter knew that the love he had shown for Jesus in his recent abandonment and denial of Him made it clear that his love for Him did not rise to the standard of an unconditional love, but something less, a love which was only a brotherly love or fondness.

It is also interesting to note Jesus’ words to Peter in John 21:18-19. Before Peter abandoned Jesus and then denied that he even knew Him, he boasted that he was ready to lay down his life for Him (John 13:37). As we know, just a short time later Peter had his chance to do that, but he forsook Jesus and fled along with the other disciples. However, as Jesus came back to reaffirm His love for Peter, He told him that indeed the time was coming when he *would* lay down his life for Him.

The devotion unto death that Peter had failed to demonstrate in his own strength, his God would work to bring about in his life, in His time. Jesus said to Peter: “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; *but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.*” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!” (John 21:18-19, emphasis added). As we see from verse 19, these words were understood to mean that Peter also would be crucified, laying down his life for the cause of Christ.

Even though when tested, Peter had failed in his devotion to Jesus so miserably, his failure demonstrates the supreme and unconditional love that our Lord has for all who come to Him, a love which never lets go regardless of our failings. Peter was not banished from the Lord because of his failings, as grievous as they were; rather Jesus came back to Peter in order to reassure him of His love for him.

Despite his failings, Jesus commanded Peter three times to feed His sheep. And just as He had done at the Sea of Galilee when He first called Peter and his brother Andrew to follow Him (Matthew 4:19), so at this time as He came back to



reaffirm His love for Peter, Jesus once again commanded him, this time with emphasis, saying: “Follow me!” (John 21:19).

This supreme and unconditional love that Jesus showed for Peter demonstrates the love that God has for all of us who come to faith in Christ. It is a love by which God, through no merit or worthiness of our own, chose us before the creation of the world to believe on His Son Jesus Christ and to obtain the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus’ shed blood (Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 Peter 1:1-2).

When Jesus predicted Peter’s denial of Him, He told Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, *when* once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus did not say to Peter “if” you return to Me, or “if” you persevere in your faith, but He said to Peter: “*when* once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (emphasis added). Peter’s perseverance in his faith and ultimate victory were assured, just as ours is also as believers when we face our times of trial. It is God who saves us, and it is God who preserves us (John 6:37-40, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Romans 8:38, 1 Peter 1:4-5).

### ***We Will Be Made to Stand by God’s Power***

Jesus faced his time of testing in the desert, and He did not fail. Peter faced his time of testing and almost immediately he failed, and he failed abysmally. Let us think about whom this is who failed so quickly and so miserably. This is one of only twelve apostles, one who was privileged to author two books in the Bible, and one who was martyred for the cause of Christ. Surely the Apostle Peter is one of the greatest saints in all of history.

Peter’s failure and restoration are recorded in the Bible to encourage us and to demonstrate the unconditional love that God has for us as believers. God’s love for His people never fails and never changes. Just as Jesus restored Peter, and with that restoration He bestowed upon Peter the privilege of serving Him in such a great way, so also will our loving God continue the good work that He has begun in us, regardless of our failures. The Apostle Paul assured us when he wrote: “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6).

Jesus is not only the “Author” of our faith, but He also “perfects” or “finishes” our faith, carrying it through to its completion (Hebrews 12:2). Our salvation depends upon Him from beginning to end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Revelation 1:8, 17).

Though our love and devotion for Him are found lacking, and though we fail Him miserably during some time of trial in our lives, He will not fail. Jesus is coming for His sheep, every one of them, and none of them will be lost (Matthew 18:10-14, John 6:39).

If we should find ourselves in the company of the Apostle Peter, who failed the Lord so miserably during a time of trial and testing in his life, then let us take comfort in knowing that our Lord and Savior is coming back for us as well, just as He came back for Peter. We also will be restored to fellowship with Him and service for Him. This is the heritage and the blessing that we have been given through the incomprehensible grace, forgiveness and love that our God has for all of us who believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.