

Bathing the Cat

By Daryl Wingerd

Have you ever given a cat a bath? Being much wiser than the cat, you know that he needs a bath because he is dirty and smells awful. The cat, on the other hand, has a decidedly different opinion. He hates water, does not believe he needs a bath, and does not appreciate being put in the tub. His muscles become tense, his ears lay back, the fur along His spine stands erect, and his claws emerge from their sheaths. He hisses and growls menacingly. As careful as you might try to be, it is likely that you will end up being scratched—all because the cat does not recognize the benefit of being scrubbed clean.



Believers are often much more like that cat than we care to admit. What I mean is this: God, being much wiser than us, knows that even though we are completely forgiven, we need a lot of cleaning up. God has not only saved His children from eternal punishment, He has also predestined every one of them to be conformed to the image of Christ. The Bible calls this “sanctification,” or sometimes, “refining.” We have been preserved from the fires of hell, but in carrying out His purpose, God exposes every believer to the heat of a different fire—the refiner’s fire. Though we should appreciate God’s purifying work, we often hiss and scratch. But consider Psalm 66:8-12:

Oh, bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved.

Why such praise for God? The psalmist continues:

For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; but you brought us out to rich fulfillment.

Amazingly, the psalmist expressed praise for God and thankfulness for the refining trials and fires of affliction which, in this case, involved being overrun by a foreign army. But why was he thankful for such things?

- First, he knew the trials were sent (not merely allowed) by God.
- Second, he recognized the need for the refining of God’s people (in this case, the Jewish nation).

- Third, he saw the resulting fruit—“rich fulfillment.” He was glad to see the repentance, true worship of God, and blessing that was restored (at least temporarily) as a result. So he gave thanks.

Paul told Christians to give thanks to God the Father “*always for all things*” (Ephesians 5:20, emphasis added). This includes thanking Him for the seemingly unbearable trials that He uses to discipline and purify us. Just as a good earthly father uses the “rod of correction” when necessary to correct a wayward son or daughter, God uses trials to correct and purify His children. The experience itself is not pleasant, to be sure. But the result is that which every true Christian “hungers and thirsts after”—righteousness (see Matthew 5:6):

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

James also wrote about the great benefit of the trials God sends:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4).

Should we not all seek to be more like the many faithful Christians who have patiently suffered and endured as they entrusted themselves to their faithful Creator? (see 1 Peter 4:19). When the news of Jonathan Edwards’ untimely death reached his wife Sarah, she was suffering from such severe rheumatism in her neck that she could barely hold a pen. Nevertheless, even in her grief, she recognized and acknowledged God’s goodness in sending these trials, composing a letter to her daughter Esther that contained the following lines:

What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had [Mr. Edwards] so long. But my God lives; and He has my heart. O what a legacy my husband, and your father, has left us! We are all given to God; and there I am, and love to be.

Rather than hissing and scratching like an angry cat in a bathtub, let’s all learn to “kiss the rod” of God’s providential shaping, refining, and correcting of His people. May we all learn what it means to lay our hands on our mouths in humble and quiet submission to His providence.

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