

No one likes having to endure trials, but, as James teaches us in the first chapter of his epistle, God allows them in our lives for a reason. One reason that James gives us is that these trials exercise our faith, causing it to grow stronger and more mature. James also identifies the source of sinful temptations and teaches us that they are a path to sin and death if we allow our flesh to yield to them.

Most commentators accept that the author of this epistle was the Jesus' oldest half-brother James, who only believed in Jesus after seeing Him alive after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). James became a leader of the Jerusalem church and is mentioned several times in Acts acting in a leadership role. James opens the epistle in v. 1 with a greeting where he describes himself as a slave of both God and the Lord Jesus Christ and then specifying that he is writing to the believing Jews who had been scattered abroad, possibly due to the persecution led by Saul (Acts 8:1). James' purpose in this epistle seems to be to encourage these believers to remain faithful to Christ in spite of the persecution that they are experiencing.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall [to fall so as to be surrounded] into divers [various; different kinds] temptations [trials; to put to the test]” – James begins with a strange statement: they should consider it a source of joy when they become surrounded by various tests to their faith. These tests were severe enough to tempt them to turn from their faith in Christ in order to avoid persecution. However, James tells them to rejoice in the fact that these trials were giving them the opportunity to prove and strengthen their faith.

“Knowing this, that the trying [proving through a test] of your faith worketh [to accomplish; to generate] patience [endurance]” – The trials that these believers were enduring accomplished two things: 1) they proved that the faith of these believers was genuine; 2) like exercising a muscle, these trials caused the faith of these believers to become stronger so that they could endure even greater trials.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

“But let patience [endurance] have her perfect [complete; brought to a conclusion] work [purpose; intended result]” – Instead of escaping these trials by recanting their faith, James instructs these believers to endure the trials, allowing God's purpose in their lives to be accomplished. To prematurely escape the trial would be like taking a cake out of the oven before the time stated by the recipe. In both cases, the process must be allowed to finish in order to get the desired result.

“that ye may be perfect [complete; brought to a conclusion] and entire [whole; complete], wanting [lacking] nothing” – When going to school, lessons are often taught that build on the foundation of things learned in earlier grades. If those foundational things were not properly learned in the earlier grades, the later lessons will be more difficult, if not impossible, to learn. The same is true with faith. If we do not allow endurance in trials to grow our faith, then we will not be ready when the more difficult trials come and we will be perpetually immature in our faith.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

“If any of you lack wisdom” – This is not worldly wisdom, but spiritual wisdom that can only come from God. This is the wisdom that recognizes God's purpose in allowing us to undergo the trials and trusts that God will use them to help us grow in faith and maturity.

“let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally [with simplicity; generously]” – If we are lacking in spiritual wisdom, we are to ask God to give us the wisdom we need. James says that God will give wisdom to us “liberally.” Commentators disagree on the meaning of the Greek word behind “liberally” because it can mean “with simplicity” or “generously.” God will give us wisdom “with simplicity” (with no conditions or strings attached) and He will also give it generously for He is a limitless supply of wisdom.

“and upbraideth [to reproach] not” – He will also not upbraid, scold or criticize us for asking Him for the wisdom we lack. Rather, it pleases Him when we seek our wisdom from Him instead of following the wisdom of the world or our own faulty human reasoning.

“and it shall be given him” – God promises to give us wisdom, as long as we meet the one requirement mentioned in the next verse.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering [to make a distinction; to separate]” – When we ask for wisdom from God, we are to do it in faith, “nothing wavering.” The Greek word for “wavering” is translated in other places in the NT as “discern” and to “judge.” The idea seems to be that if someone is “wavering” then they are unable to decide whether or not God will answer their prayer. James expands on the idea of such double-mindedness in v. 8, but here he is saying that when we ask God for wisdom, we should ask in faith, with only one thought in our minds: that God will answer our prayer for wisdom. Asking for wisdom is in accordance with God's will, and we have the promise that God will answer all prayers that are according to God's will: **1 John 5:14-15** “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*”

“For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” – The person who cannot decide if he/she believes that the LORD will answer his/her prayer will never be anchored by faith in God, but will be tossed about on the waves of their changing circumstances. Such a person will never have the confidence that God can and will answer their prayer.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

“For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” – God only responds to faith and a man who is unable to decide if he believes that God can/will answer his prayer will never get his prayer answered since it is not prayed in faith. Jesus was not able to do many miracles in His home town because of their unbelief (**Matt 13:58** “*And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief*”).

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” – A man who is double-minded is constantly wavering between belief in God and a belief in his circumstances as being the governing factor in his life. He will be constantly seeking his answers from various conflicting sources (God, the world, other people, etc.) instead of settling on God as his one and only answer to his needs.

Verses 9-11: James urges both the rich and the poor to not put their trust in riches, which are temporary and will pass away. God will exalt the poor and he will bring the rich down to the same level, which is trusting in God rather than the riches of the world.

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

“Blessed [happy] is the man that endureth [to remain] temptation [trial; test]” – When people face a trial or testing of their faith (being persecuted for the sake of Christ), they have the option of avoiding the trial by not being faithful to Christ. However, James tells us that this person will be “blessed” (happy) if he willingly remains in the trial because he refuses to be disloyal to Jesus Christ.

“for when he is tried [passed the test], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” – The Greek word for “tried” refers to ancient coins that had been proven to not be counterfeit. A man is blessed by enduring the temptations he may face and thus proving the genuineness of his faith. God will reward such a man with the “crown of life” (eternal life). The man has not earned his salvation but his endurance in the face of temptations has demonstrated what was already true: that he belongs to God.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

“Let no man say when he is tempted [put to the test], I am tempted of God” – Since trials prove the genuineness of our faith (v. 12), one might be tempted to think that God would be the One Who is putting us through the trial, tempting us to sin. James wants to squash that idea immediately.

“for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” – God’s holy nature means that temptations to do evil have no effect on Him. Thus He is never tempted to sin. On the other hand, we human beings are easily tempted to sin. However, God never tries to tempt us to sin. All temptations to commit sin come from another source.

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust [desires], and enticed [to catch with bait]” – James specifies that the source of temptation in our lives is our own sinful desires. Satan and the world may attempt to capitalize on this and entice us to satisfy our desires, but these attempts would always fail if we were as impervious to temptations as God (v. 13). Temptation comes because we have sinful desires that our flesh wants to satisfy when the “bait” is dangled in front of us.

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin” – When our sinful desires follow the enticement, the result is always sin. We may try to justify or excuse it, but it is still sin.

“and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” – The end result of sin is death. **Rom. 6:23a** “*For the wages of sin is death...*”

“Do not err, my beloved brethren” – James does not want us to make the mistake of thinking that we can yield to sinful temptations without consequences. Yielding to temptations begins a sequence of events that only the grace of God can help us escape.

Verses 17-21: Enforcing the idea that God is not the source of sinful temptations, James reminds us that God is and always will be the source of all good and perfect gifts. It is God Who redeemed us to be the “first fruits” (the best of His creation), therefore we should behave accordingly, not exercising the wrath of man and other sinful behaviors.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Hearing the word of God without responding in obedience has no value and we deceive ourselves to think otherwise.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass” – James uses the illustration of a man looking at himself in the mirror. The word of God is like a mirror, pointing out our sin and what we need to improve.

“For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” – Like a man looking at himself in the mirror, if we do not respond with repentance and obedience when the word of God convicts of our sin then we will likely walk away and soon forget about the sin that the Holy Spirit was convicting us about.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

“But whoso looketh [to stoop and look into] into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth [remains] therein” – In contrast to the man who looks in the mirror and then walks away without any corrective action, James describes a second man who looks into this mirror (“the perfect law of liberty”) and does not walk away. The Greek word for “looketh” involves more than merely a glance or looking superficially. The word means “to stoop and look,” indicating that the man is exerting effort to examine the word in order to understand it better. Not only that, but he “continueth” (Greek: “remains”) by incorporating it into his life. He looks, comprehends what God wants, and then obeys.

“he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” – Since this man does not forget what he has heard (as the first man did) but has obeyed it, then God will bless Him for his obedience.

Verses 26-27: James then addresses those who want to act “religious” but their behavior says otherwise. If someone wants you to think that they are a Godly and spiritual person but is unable to control their tongue, then they have betrayed themselves and shown that they are not as close to God as they pretend to be. James says if a person is truly religious (in the good sense), then they will demonstrate it with acts such as helping the widows and orphans and living a pure and Godly life that is separated from the world.