

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

INTRODUCTION

- A. The purpose of James is to give practical steps to enrich your faith - to live what you believe.
- B. James establishes four rules for understanding trials (1:2-12)
- C. He addresses the issue of temptation (1:13-18)
- D. The rest of Hebrews deals with faith tests

JAMES 1:2-18, *THE TEST OF FAITH*

- A. Guidelines on Trials (2-12)
 - 1. Praise - Attitude of Joy (2-4)
 - a. Believers are to be joyful in the midst of trials (2), ***Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,***
 - 1) *count*
 - a) Romans 8:18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*
 - b) Regard trials in light of eternity.
 - 2) *all joy*, Hughes, *to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble."*
 - 3) *meet*
 - a) It may be better rendered *face* or *encounter*.
 - b) The emphasis here is not on one's fault but on the certainty of trials.
 - 4) *trials of various kinds*
 - a) There is no necessary distinction between external and internal pressures at this point.
 - b) A. T. Robertson, *Trials rightly faced are harmless, but wrongly met become temptations to evil.*
 - b. The testing of faith has a two-fold purpose (3-4), *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*
 - 1) It develops steadfastness (3), ***for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.***
 - a) Joy in trials is based on the development of steadfastness.
 - b) Discussion of steadfastness
 - 1] Ropes describes it as *staying power* and Dibelius, *heroic endurance*.
 - 2] Philip Hughes, *...we develop toughness or fortitude by repeatedly being tested and prevailing. The more tests we pass, the tougher we become. As a boxer engages in bout after bout, he toughens and becomes wiser and stronger.*
 - 3] Romans 5:3-4, *...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*
 - 4] Thomas Manton notes why we should confidently seek to be steadfast, *...we owe nothing but reverence and submission; he is too strong to be resisted, too just to be questioned, and too good to be suspected.*
 - 2) It produces maturity (4), ***And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***
 - a) *perfect and complete*
 - 1] A. T. Robertson, *Perfected at the end of the task and complete in all parts.*
 - 2] The purpose of every believer is to glorify God by being *conformed to the image of Christ*.
 - b) This is put into beautiful perspective by Dr. Richard Seume who was Chaplain at Dallas Seminary, *Life on earth would not be worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain. We are told that the oyster is wiser; that when an irritating object, like a bit of sand, gets under the "mantle" of his shell, he simply covers it with the most precious part of his being and makes of it a pearl. The irritation that*

it was causing is stopped by encrusting it with the pearly formation. A true pearl is therefore simply a victory over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture. The more irritations the devil flings at us, the more pearls we may have. We need only to welcome them and cover them completely with love, that most precious part of us, and the irritation will be smothered out as the pearl comes into being. What a store of pearls we may have, if we will!

2. Prayer - Wisdom from God (5-8)

a. Wisdom is required to joyfully persevere through trials (5), ***If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.***

1) *If any of you lacks wisdom*

a) First class conditional clause, statement of fact; may be translated, *since*.

b) We personally lack the wisdom it takes to get through trials.

1] It is knowledge properly applied to life.

2] The context demands restriction of this passage to wisdom in steadfastness through trials.

2) God wants to give us wisdom.

a) He is generous.

1] The literal translation describes God's nature, *the giving God*.

2] *generously*

a] Only here in New Testament, means *simply*.

b] It comes from God's open hand.

b) He does not reproach those who seek wisdom.

1] God wants us to come to Him.

2] He never upbraids us for asking, only for not asking.

c) He gives wisdom to those who ask.

1] William Cowper, *God never meant that man should scale the heavens by strides of human wisdom*.

2] Billy Graham, *Knowledge is horizontal. Wisdom is vertical—it comes down from above*.

b. Faith is the essential condition to receive wisdom (6-8), ***But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.***

1) Faith holds no room for doubt (6)

a) Doubt is *indecision*, lack of trust.

b) It is pictured by a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

1] The doubter is out of control.

2] Doubt keeps a man from making proper decisions.

c) Faith must be centered on trust in God, Hebrews 11:6, *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

1] God is: YHWH, I am Who I am.

2] He rewards those who seek Him.

2) The doubter receives nothing from God (7-8)

a) God is willing and able to give.

b) The problem is in the double-minded person.

1] He chooses not to receive because of doubt.

2] John Bunyan called such a person *Mr. Facing-both-ways*.

3] Such instability hinders the reception of wisdom.

c) What about my doubt?

1] Doubt comes upon everyone but we must not make doubt the pattern of our lives.

2] Jesus doubted but never sinned, *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*

3] Doubt is neutral but becomes sin when one allows it to take control.

4] Mark 9:24, *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

3. Paradox (Contradiction) - An Eternal View (9-11)
 - a. Notes on paradox
 - 1) Webster states that paradox is *a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.*
 - 2) G. K. Chesterton, *a paradox is truth standing on its head shouting for attention.*
 - 3) Philip Hughes clearly depicts this section by using the terms, *the rich poor* and *the poor rich.*
 - b. The poor are to glory in their eternal riches (9), ***Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,***
 - 1) They are the rich poor.
 - 2) *exaltation* means *to glory in high position.*
 - 3) This is the exalted position in Christ, Jeremiah 9:23-24, *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."*
 - c. The rich are to glory in their human frailty (10-11), ***and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.***
 - 1) They are the poor rich.
 - 2) Humiliation comes from trust in physical possessions rather than faith in Christ. Calvin noted, *He tells them to glory in their lowliness, their smallness, to restrain those lofty motives that swell out of prosperity.*
 - 3) Transitory nature of all things physical
 - a) The rich man is compared to a wild-flower that will pass away.
 - b) As the scorching wind destroys the flower, so death separates man from his riches.
 - c) The emphasis is on the finality of the temporal.
 - d. A. T. Robertson, summarizes this paradox, *The Cross of Christ lifts up the poor and brings down the high. It is the great leveler of men.*
4. Promise - Reward for Steadfastness (12), ***Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.***
 - a. Assurance grows as one remain steadfast.
 - 1) The trials of life are tests of faith, 1 Peter 3:14, *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.*
 - 2) God's grace is evident, James 5:11, *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*
 - 3) John Calvin, *Seeing that a Pilot steers the ship in which we sail, who will never allow us to perish even in the midst of shipwrecks, there is no reason why our minds should be overwhelmed with fear and overcome with weariness.*
 - b. The crown of life awaits those who are steadfast.
 - 1) Literally, the crown *which is life.*
 - 2) Glorification is the culmination of the race which began at justification and continued through sanctification.
 - 3) Steadfastness demonstrates one's love for God. John 14:23, *Jesus answered him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*
 - 4) Samuel Johnson, *Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed, not by strength, but perseverance.*

B. Discussion on Temptation (13-18)

1. Examination of the sources of temptation (13-15), *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*
 - a. A classic case of blame shifting.
 - 1) Mankind accuses God, Isaiah 63:17, *O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?*
 - 2) Ways we blame God
 - a) When we blame circumstances, times, and the people around us. Genesis 3:12, *The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."*
 - b) When we say God did not give us enough grace, Proverbs 19:3, *When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD.*
 - c) When we think God entices us to do evil.
 - b. Temptation is not from God.
 - 1) God can't be tempted by evil based on His holiness.
 - a) 1 John 1:5, *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*
 - b) Thomas Manton, *...temptations to sin are altogether inconsistent with the purity and holiness of God's nature.*
 - 2) God tempts no one.
 - a) God is not the source of seduction.
 - b) Verses which appear to teach that God does tempt:
 - 1] Genesis 22:1, *It was a test of his faith, not an inducement to sin. Manton, God tries our obedience but does not rouse us to sin.*
 - 2] 1 Chronicles 5:26, *God used others to bring corrective discipline upon His people.*
 - 3] Romans 1:24, *God hardens and blinds hearts as punishment for wickedness.*
 - 3) Don't overlook the role of Satan
 - a) 1 Peter 5:8, *Be sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*
 - b) Saint Ambrose, *The devil tempts that he may ruin; God tests that he may crown.*
 - c) Erwin Lutzer, *No matter how many pleasures Satan offers you, his ultimate intention is to ruin you. Your destruction is his highest priority.*
 - c. Temptation is a personal choice (14)
 - 1) Man responds to internal pressures.
 - a) *lured and enticed*, one's heart cooperates with one's desires.
 - b) Philip Hughes, *James could not be more explicit-the source of temptation is not God, or even the Devil, but man's own sinful heart.*
 - c) Author unknown, *Temptation usually comes in through a door that has deliberately been left open.*
 - 2) Mankind is consumed by lust.
 - a) James 4:1, *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*
 - b) Rabbis wrote in the Midrash: *As man throws out a net whereby he catches the fish of the sea, so the sins of man become the means of entangling and catching the sinner.*
 - c) Thomas Manton, *We easily fall because we have more of man in us than God.*
 - 3) Make the right choices.
 - a) Don't accept the temptation, John Bunyan, *There is no way to kill a man's righteousness but by his own consent.*
 - b) Reject the temptation
 - 1] James 4:7, *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
 - 2] Martin Luther, *I cannot keep birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from building under my hat.*

- c) Positive responses to temptations
 - 1] Learn from them, John Bunyan, *Temptations, when we first meet them, are as the lion that roared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of honey within them.*
 - 2] Develop compassion for others, Thomas à Kempis, *Do not be harsh with others who are tempted, but console them as you yourself would wish to be consoled.*
- d. Guaranteed result of unchecked temptation (15)
 - 1) Temptation caused by personal desire causes sin
 - a) *Then, when lust takes control, 2 Sam. 11:2, It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.*
 - b) *desire, we must each recognize what desires seek to control us.*
 - c) Thomas Brooks, *He that will play with Satan's bait, will quickly be taken with Satan's hook.*
 - 2) Sin produces death.
 - a) The course of sin defined, Rom. 6:20-23, *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
 - b) Hughes declared that the glory of the Gospel *breaks the power of sin and halts its inevitable train.*
- 2. The role of God in the lives of believers (16-17), ***Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.***
 - a. The work of God on behalf of believers.
 - 1) Man deceives himself when he accuses God of temptation.
 - 2) God's work is contrasted to the evil in the heart of man.
 - a) He gives only the good and perfect, Mt. 7:11, *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*
 - b) They are unearned heavenly gifts, *from above*, all grace, John 3:27, *...A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.*
 - 3) God's work is based on His nature.
 - a) *Father of lights*
 - 1] Light and purity are related to His nature.
 - a] 1 John 1:5, *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*
 - b] Isaiah 60:19, *The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.*
 - 2] We have no light of ourselves, 2 Corinthians 4:6, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
 - 3] We have a glorious future hope, Revelation 21:22-23, *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*
 - b) *is no variation or shadow due to change*
 - 1] The verb used for *is* emphasizes constancy.
 - 2] His light is not even dimmed for a moment like the sun when it turns and creates shadows.
 - 3] Robertson, *This is a sun that does not set or rise and cannot be overcast or eclipsed.*
 - b. The purpose of God for believers (18), ***Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.***
 - 1) Now, James describes the best of God's good gifts.
 - 2) God calls individuals to repentance
 - a) *brought us forth*
 - 1] The work of God is contrasted to the work of sin in verse 15.
 - 2] Sin brings forth death but God brings forth life.

- b) *of His own will*
 - 1] God did not have to save anyone.
 - 2] It is not done in response to our merit.
 - 3] He chose to give us life because He gives good and perfect gifts.

 - c) *word of truth*
 - 1] The means of regeneration is the Word of God.
 - 2] 1 Peter 1:23, ...*you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.*
- 3) Christians are a type of *first-fruits* of God's creation.
- a) Liddell and Scott say that *firstfruits was used not merely of that which was first in order but of that which was first in honor.*
 - b) It notes dignity as the "purified" people of God, Titus 2:14, *who (Jesus) gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*
 - c) It denotes priority of purpose, 2 Corinthians 5:15, *and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*
- c. Summary of God's goodness
- 1) He never tempts man to do evil.
 - 2) He gives only good gifts.
 - 3) His crowning good gift is redemption.

CONCLUSION

- A. Trials bring joy when we focus on the purpose for the testing of faith - do I desire comfort more than maturity?
- B. Wisdom from God is necessary to persevere through trials - do I believe God rewards those who seek Him?
- C. Perseverance confirms one's faith - do you look with anticipation for the crown of life?
- D. Temptation is a problem for each of us - who do we blame?
- E. God's goodness is evident in His good gifts - are you nurturing a spirit of gratitude?
- F. Main idea: Trials and temptations strengthen the faith of those who trust the goodness of God.