

The Testing of Saving Faith – Part 3

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – true faith will inevitably face trials, but believers must count them as all joy
2. aim – to cause us to count it all joy when we face various trials, for they strengthen our faith
3. passage – James 1:1-4

b. outline

1. The Reality of Trials of Faith (James 1:1)
2. The Response to Trials of Faith (James 1:2)
3. The Result of Trials of Faith (James 1:3-4)

c. opening

1. the **beginning** of a new year (**i.e.** the last Sunday of a year and a decade)
 - a. **question:** how would you assess your spiritual condition *today*, comparing it to 10 years ago?
 1. are you more *theologically sound*, are you more *concerned* about your spiritual condition, are you more successful at overcoming *temptation*, are you more *obedient* to Christ, etc.?
 2. **IOW:** would you say that you are more **mature in Christ** than you were a (or 10) year(s) ago?
 - b. **principle: a common assertion of the N.T. is that those who claim to follow Christ as his disciples will grow in their faith – they will mature in their understanding of him as Lord – they will “change” spiritually (for the better), this growth will be accomplished by the Spirit of God slowly over time and will be visible to us as we seek to see it in ourselves**
2. the **beginning** of the letter
 - a. James introduces himself, indicates his status, names his audience, and greets them
 - b. James opens the letter by addressing the **reality** of difficulty, opposition, and persecution (**i.e.** trials) in the lives of those to whom he is writing (**v. 2b**)
 1. their reality prompts him to write – their struggles are the **occasion** of the letter
 - a. in fact, even the word “*greetings*” is designed to help make the point (**i.e.** rejoice)
 2. he clarifies these trials as “*the testing of your faith*” in the next verse:
 - a. the ordinary “problems” of living in a sinful, fallen, corrupted, evil world that sometimes make us question our relationship to Christ and his ways, including our own *sinfulness* at times
 - b. **i.e.** not *every problem* of life, but those specific things that make us “wonder” if God still loves us, if we are still under his watch-care, if we still belong to Christ and are saved, etc.
 3. and, that these kinds of trials are *universal in nature* – **i.e.** “*when*” (not *if*) they come – they are “common” to all of us as we struggle along in a sinful world
 - a. **i.e. even the Son of God had to endure many “trials” in his Incarnation**
 - c. James commands us to “*count it all joy*” when we meet such trials – **i.e.** it is imperative that we seek a sense of deep assurance and comfort in knowing their *long-term value to us*
 - d. (**now**) James suggests that these tests are **essential**, and that the follower of Jesus *inherently knows* that they are designed to produce a **divine result** in their physical and spiritual life (**why?**)

III. The Result of Trials of Faith (James 1:3-4)

Content

a. the intention of trials of faith (v. 3)

1. “*for*” = a reason now given to the question: *why* do we experience such trials of faith?
 - a. **i.e.** why does faith *need* to be tested; can’t we just “say” we have faith and *that* be good enough?
 - b. (**modern**) isn’t faith just a “profession” of something we believe to be true?
 - c. the question *assumes* (begs) its own answer: by definition, **faith is a verb** – it is a set of *actions* based upon a set of *truths* – it is a **radical trust** in something we believe to be true, a belief in something *so profound* that it causes us to *act accordingly* (radical = different)
 - d. (**biblical**) faith is not a “noun” (something I *have*), faith is a *verb* (something I *do*)
 1. **i.e.** I so believe the promises of God (and the nature of Christ) that I base my entire life on him
2. so ... James asserts that the trials of **v. 2** are **intentional** – they are *designed to accomplish a goal*
 - a. they are “*for*” a purpose = to produce a “*steadfastness*” of faith in the believer
 - b. “*steadfastness*” (*hypomenē*) = from a root (**x208 in N.T.**) meaning to remain, stay, reside – the “*hypo*” prefix makes the term mean to **really** stay; to **really** endure; to remain *steadfast* in a place

- c. **i.e. (here)** to remain steadfast *in faith* (accusative; related to the verb “faith”) – to maintain a consistently radical faith – to continue to believe that God’s promises towards you are true
3. and ... James asserts that “*you know*” this to be true – that you *inherently know* (as a regenerated person) that your “faith” must be tested in order to assure that it is *true and genuine faith*
- a. **principle: by its very definition, faith is something that is tested in order to assure that it is real – real faith is demonstrated to be such only in situations where it is put to the test**
1. this is biblical – **e.g. 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 13:5**
“In this you rejoice [that God is guarding you to salvation], though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness [see “steadfastness” above] of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ ... Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”
 2. this is the point of the letter – **e.g. read James 1:12 – what is genuine faith?**
4. **principle: true followers of Christ know that trials of faith are essential to building up more faith in them – the more we are forced to trust God’s word, the more we will**
- a. **true:** we would prefer the “easy” life, but following Jesus was never a promise to “ease”
 - b. **e.g.** taking up a cross is *not* an easy path to take (**Matt. 16:24**)
- b. the source of trials of faith (an excursus)**
1. **question:** are these trials of faith simply “random” in our lives and “used” by God to further his plans, or are these trials *purposed specifically* by God and ordered by his sovereign will?
 - a. James does *not explicitly say here* that such trials are ordained by God, *but he does in vv. 16-17*
 1. the “good gift” and “perfect gift” (**in context**) is referring *back* to the trials of **vv. 3, 12**
 2. the entire section, from **v. 3** to **v. 12** to **vv. 16-17**, is all about trials of faith in the believer
 3. thus, they are “*from above, coming down from the Father of lights*” – from God himself
 - b. **IOW:** all such trials are *purposed by God himself* to accomplish his goal – they are not *specifically actuated by the hand of God* (**i.e.** he does not *directly* cause suffering or temptation; see **v. 13**), but he *ordains them* into the lives of his own to accomplish his divine purpose (**e.g.** see **Job 1-2**)
 2. **question:** why would God cause trials of faith to come upon those he *already knows* to be his own?
 - a. or, if God already knows the elect *and has given them faith to follow Christ*, why would he test that faith – doesn’t he *already know*, by virtue of his grace (radical choice) *to whom he has given faith?*
 - b. **IOW:** does God need to “learn” who trusts him by putting us under test? – **no ... so why ...?**
 1. **answer #1:** to show us that we are his own (**i.e.** to give us joy) – to reveal *in us* the fact that he loves us and that his promises to us are real – so that *we see their long-term value*
 - a. **i.e.** how would *we know* that we are trusting in God if we are never put in a situation where that trust is put to the test? – **faith is grown under pressure**
 2. **answer #2:** to *finish* the purpose of faith within us (**i.e.** to sanctify us) – to grow our faith until it encompasses *every aspect of our existence*, such that we are fully conformed to the image of Christ – so that “*the righteous will live by faith*” (**see Romans 1:16-17**)
 - a. **i.e.** the Spirit only gives us *initially* a “mustard seed” of faith to be saved – but, the goal isn’t just to be saved; it is to be fully conformed to the image of Christ, to be glorified
 3. **principle: true followers of Christ know that the Spirit of God builds up our faith by putting us in situations where our trust in him is put to the test – as we are forced to trust him in the trials of life, we find ourselves with greater and greater faith, and greater and greater conformity to the image of Christ, which is his goal (see below) in us (Hebrews 10:35-39)**
“Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”
- c. the result of trials of faith (v. 4)**
1. “*let ... have*” = hold on to; bring about – a *verb* translated “let” to imply that this steadfastness is something that we *do* – like faith, steadfastness (**i.e.** remaining in faith) is something we *pursue*
 - a. in this case, we *pursue* a consistent trust in Christ and submission to his will to produce a result:
 2. **principle: the desired result (of God) in faith is our perfection and completeness**
 - a. **i.e.** the goal of faith is *perfection* – spiritual, physical, volitional, emotional, intellectual, etc. – every aspect of the *Imago Dei* in us being conformed to its *original impression* – being (re)made into the Image of God in every sense; thinking, feeling, choosing, desiring, and living in ways that are *utterly consistent* with the very nature of God himself (**i.e.** as expressed visibly in the Incarnate Christ; **Romans 8:29**)
 - b. why is *perfection* the goal? – doesn’t God love us “just the way we are?”
 1. (**modern**) isn’t Christianity just about enjoying “our best life now” and then going to heaven?
 2. **truth: perfection of the believer is the goal because God is perfect (holy), and only that which is perfect (holy) has a part in his eternal plan**
 - a. God calls “good” only that which is *perfect* – only that which meets his *infinite standards of perfection* are considered good – all else must be destroyed

- b. **e.g.** we must be fully *justified* by faith – anything less than *the full righteousness of God* in us (**see Hebrews 10 above**) is unacceptable to him – thus, the perfect righteousness of Christ must be applied to us for salvation – any attempt at “self-righteousness” (**i.e.** religiosity) will not produce perfection, and will be rejected
 - 1. contra the modern lack of justification in discussions of salvation itself
 - 3. **truth: perfection in this life is unattainable, but that does not imply that we should not strive for it, nor expect ourselves to grow more and more in holiness over time**
 - a. **principle: the trials of faith that we encounter are designed to mold us, little by little over time, to trust in this Christ more and more and be conformed more and more to his image**
 - b. **IOW:** we are not to **resist** such trials by asking God to remove them – rather, we are to *trust God through them* (**i.e.** see their long-term value) and pray for strength to endure them and remain fixed upon his promises to hold fast those who are his own
 - 4. **note:** the remainder of the chapter (letter) is an application of this thesis ...
- c. **application: can I offer you a biblical resolution for the New Year (or decade)?**
 - 1. I will strive to “*count it all joy*” in every situation the Lord ordains over me that causes me to suffer, even to the point of doubting his promises – in every temptation, pain, grief, disappointment, failure, sin ... I will look *first* to this Christ (in his Word) for strength, and then seek to persevere (by his Spirit) trusting in his promise to never leave me nor forsake me
 - 2. **IOW:** I will strive for greater holiness ...