

Every Good and Perfect Gift – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – steadfastness of faith, even within our own sin, is a good and perfect gift of God
2. aim – to cause us to recognize the sovereign hand of God over us in his consistent dealings with us
3. passage – James 1:12-18

b. outline

1. The Need for Perseverance (James 1:12)
2. The Need for Honesty (James 1:13-15)
3. The Need for Perfect Gifts (James 1:16-18)

c. opening

1. the **outline** of the book
 - a. the letter of James can be outlined along this line of thought: James was absolutely convinced that *saving* faith is **consistent** between what we *believe* and what we *do*
 - b. the letter of James has a clear sub-thesis to begin: James was absolutely convinced that a *saving* faith will be **tested**, and only those who *stand* the test will receive the “*crown of life*”
 1. a sub-thesis repeated in **v. 12** after being explicated in **vv. 1-11**
 - c. **(now)** it is tempting **(pun!)** to see **vv. 13-15** as a *completely different thought*, as though James “moves away” to another topic (**i.e.** back to “the-letter-as-a-set-of-random-proverbs” view)
 1. **IMO:** James is *continuing* the main thought (**i.e.** the inevitable and necessary testing that faith requires) by moving quickly to address a theological reality ...
 2. specifically, to address the nature and reality of ***sin and temptation*** within the realm of testing
 - a. **i.e.** how do we understand sin in relation to what God has purposed to accomplish?
 3. **thesis: James will use two (2) deep theological truths in these verses to identify the source of all sin, even as sin is an integral part of our testings of faith**

II. The Need for Honesty (James 1:13-15)

Content

a. the categories of testing (wider lens)

1. **direct** (or positive) attacks upon our faith by others
 - a. **(in fact)** the primary kind of attack that caused James to write this letter
 - b. direct opposition to our trust in the promises of God, the work of Christ, and the *implications* of these *by others*, who see our beliefs as “foolish” and attempt to “extricate” such them from us
 - c. such direct oppositions can “ping” at the foundations of our belief (**e.g.** the resurrection) causing us “shake” in our faith, or to fall away
2. **common** (or neutral) attacks upon our faith by forces to which all men are subject
 - a. the effects of living in a fallen world, effects experienced by *all men*, that will (at times!) call into question the veracity of God’s word, the comfort of his promises
 1. **i.e.** sickness, disease, depression, accidents, financial ruin, broken relationships, natural disasters, shattered dreams, death, etc., etc.
 - b. common effects of living in a sin-filled world that may break our “preconceived” ideas of faith
 1. **e.g.** the subconscious belief that we should have a “better” life in coming to Christ
 - c. such common realities can “shake” our preconceived ideas of what we “think” life ought to be like as a believer, and connect such things *unnecessarily* to our eternal condition
3. **internal** (or negative) attacks upon our faith by our own sinfulness
 - a. both our *sin* and our *sinful desires*, which call into question our commitment to Christ
 1. **i.e.** if Christians are born again by the Spirit of God, and given a heart that loves the law of God, yet *I* continue to sin (or keep sinning in a certain way), then am I truly a believer?
 - b. such internal realities can cause us to improperly assume that our day-to-day behavior is the “measure” of our place before God, as though our justification is by deeds rather than faith
 - c. **IMO:** James responds to a “possible” question involving *this kind of trial*: does God use sin to further his purposes – is our sin “from” God as a part of his plan to grow our faith?
 1. James simply puts the theological truth next, and leaves it to us to understand it **in context**

b. the compatibility of will (v. 13)

1. **question:** if God possesses a *sovereign* will (i.e. a will that is *always* accomplished), and has given to us the nature of volition (i.e. the ability to make choices, particularly *moral* choices), how can these two realities coexist – how can God choose all that will be, and yet give us freedom to choose?
2. **answer (along the spectrum):**
 - a. the *freewill* answer = that God *makes no choices*; he “delegates” all choices to his free creatures and simply “responds” to how *they* will choose (leading to “open theism”)
 - b. the *fatalistic* answer = that God *makes all choices*; we are not actually free in any way to choose because all things are determined by God, thus we are simply puppets (the “straw man” argument)
 1. no – our choices are always free – we are never coerced by God (**1689; chap. 9, para. 1**)
“God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil” (see v. 14)
 - c. **compatibilism** = the doctrine that God, in his infinite wisdom, has granted his free creatures the true ability to make free choices (without coercion), yet God’s sovereign will is always accomplished *through* (and often *in spite of*) the free choices of his creatures – God’s will and man’s will are utterly compatible – none are coerced, yet God’s will is always accomplished
 2. **e.g.** the compatibilism inherent in Peter’s statement of **Acts 2:23**
“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”
 - a. it was the *preordained plan* of God for Jesus to be crucified by lawless men
 - b. yet, Pilate was given the *utterly free* choice to do so (even Jesus says so: **John 19:11**)
“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”
3. **axiom: although the choices of volitional creatures are free, our choices are aligned with our nature – we will choose in accordance with what we are by nature**
 - a. **e.g.** the lion kills and eats the wildebeest because he is a carnivore; fallen humans will choose to act immorally because their nature is rebellious against the law of God (**Bondage of the Will**)
 1. true, sometimes unregenerate humans will act morally as fallen creatures, but a) only because of the restraining work of the Spirit, and b) only when it has a *pragmatic interest* for them
 2. **we sin because we are sinners ...**
 - b. thus (see v. 13), God, as perfectly holy, *can only act according his nature as holy* – he cannot be tempted by what is evil, *nor can he tempt any human being to sin* (i.e. it is not in his nature)
4. **principle: the genesis of all sin is found in the sinner, never in God – we can never blame God for our sin, nor attribute to God the direct use of sin as a means to further his purpose**
 - a. so, what is the true genesis of our sin ...

c. the concupiscence of desire (vv. 14-15)

1. **concupiscence** = the strong *desire* inherent in fallen man to act in ways that are evil (to sin); the nature of the fallen man whereby he desires to do what is wrong; the sinful human nature
 - a. the word translates “*desire*” (*epithymia*; **38x**) in **KJV Rom. 7:8; Col. 3:5; and 1 Thess. 4:5**
 - b. the effect of the Fall whereby all who are descended from Adam possess his fallen nature (i.e. **Gen. 5:3**) and are, thereby, filled with every kind of desire to do evil (e.g. **Gen. 4**)
 - c. this desire permeates the *heart* (**Matt. 15:19**) and the *flesh* (**1 John 2:16**) of the fallen man
“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander ... For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”
 - d. temptation is any circumstance or idea that “fans into flame” the desires within us (e.g. **the carrot**)
2. **principle: all sin begins in our own concupiscence**
 - a. thus (see vv. 14-15), our sin is the result of *our own desire* – we allow temptations to fan our desires into action, and when those desires “get the best of us,” we birth sinful acts from them
3. further explanation of concupiscence:
 - a. there is no concupiscence in God (see above) – God has no fallen desire to do what is evil
 - b. and, there was no concupiscence in the human Jesus – the “second Adam” was born without original sin, thus he possessed no *innate desire* to do what was evil
 1. **e.g.** the “temptations” in **Matt. 4** attempted to “fan into flame” desires that Jesus did not possess
 - c. concupiscence itself is evil – the *desire* to sin is just as evil as the action of sin *itself*
 1. contra the modern (Catholic) idea that such desire is not evil as long as one does not act on it
 2. **e.g.** Jesus establishes this truth in **Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28** – the *desire* is evil because it comes out of the fallen heart – it is *inconsistent* with the holiness of God and the (original) *Imago Dei*
 - d. the concupiscence of the *heart* is replaced with a love of the law at regeneration
 1. the new heart desires the things of God; it hates sin, and strives to emulate Christ (**John 7:38**)
“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
- e. but, the regenerate man still struggles with concupiscence of the *flesh*
 1. **e.g.** it is the struggle spoken of by Paul in **Rom. 7:7-25** (see v. 24)
“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

- a. **comfort:** the unregenerate man *has no such struggle* – he *doesn't care* if he sins, because his heart loves sin and so he feels free to indulge his desires
- b. **IOW:** the *existence* of a such a struggle in you indicates the presence of the new heart
- 2. and, it is a struggle that the truly regenerate man can win (**Rom. 6:14**)
"For sin will have no dominion over you ..."
 - a. the "last Adam" has taken dominion over all things, *including the sinful desires of his people*
- f. so, the regenerate man is to *mortify* (i.e. put to death) the desires of the flesh *over time*
 - 1. i.e. the regenerate man, by the power of the Spirit and the Word, is to *crucify* these sinful desires (not just actions) still inherent in the flesh (**Col. 3:5-8**)
"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil [concupiscence], and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."
- g. **good news:** all concupiscence of the flesh is done away with at the resurrection
 - 1. our glorified state will be one where our justified soul (heart) is united with a glorified body, a body that possesses no innate desire to do what is evil – a body *like Christ's*
- d. **the conclusion of desire and will**
 - 1. **application:** although God himself does not tempt us to or cause us to sin, he has ordained that our personal struggle with sin should act as tests of faith, designed to force us to trust him all the more
 - a. i.e. God allows us to continue in this life struggling with our own sin so that when we are glorified we will truly appreciate the struggle and the results (**2 Peter 1:3-4**)
"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."