

## JAMES 1:12–18

## “THE UNCHANGEABLE FATHER OF LIGHTS”

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<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. <sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The beatitude in verse 12 teaches us that endurance under testing brings the crown of life. The crown of life refers to eternal life in the realm of glory. It’s the reward of glorified, eternal life in heaven. The crown of life is the reward that lies ahead for those who endure under testing.

The first man to whom God promised the crown of life if he stood the test was Adam; it was the promise of the covenant that God made with Adam. God promised to reward Adam with the crown of life if he remained steadfast under testing. God purposed to test Adam’s obedience in a probation event tied to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Satan also played a role in that event. Through the serpent, Satan tempted Adam to sin. He lured and enticed him to eat the forbidden fruit. The probation event included both a test and a temptation. God tested Adam, but Satan tempted him. Both the divine testing and the satanic temptation occurred in the same event.

The link between testing and temptation comes into view again in James 1. James moves from the theme of testing in v. 12 to the theme of temptation in v. 13. Those two themes are closely related to each other. The verb “to test” sometimes means to test with a good motive, as when God tests our faith by sending to us trials of various kinds. But it could also mean to test with an evil motive, as when we are lured into sin by temptation.

We can be tested in both senses of the word in the same event. When God tested Adam’s obedience, that test was designed to bring him into a state of glory. God promised that if he passed the test, he would reward him with the crown of life. But in the same event Adam was tempted to sin by the devil. God tested Adam for a good purpose, but Satan tested (or tempted)

him for an evil and sinister purpose. God's purpose was to reward Adam with eternal life. Satan's purpose was to bring Adam into a state of enmity with God.

The probation event provides the historical-theological background of James 1:12–18. James does not refer specifically to the probation event but to trials of various kinds that God uses to test our faith. But the two are related to each other. Just as Adam was tested in the probation event in both senses of the term, we are tested in both senses of the term whenever we face trials of various kinds. In those trials, God is testing our faith for a good purpose: to bring us into a state of glory in heaven. But we are also, in the same trials, often tempted to sin against God.

That temptation, however, to sin does not come from God. God tests our faith, but he does not tempt us to sin. God does not test us with a sinister motive to lure us into sin. God's purpose in testing our faith is to reward us with the crown of life. His test is never designed to entrap us and destroy us.

The temptation to sin that we often face whenever we fall into trials does not come from God but from another source. Before Adam and Eve fell, it came from Satan. After the fall, it may come from within. That's specifically what James points to in this text as the source of temptations to sin.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

James is concerned to bring clarity to the issue of the source and origin of temptations to sin. Temptations to sin do not originate with God. If whenever we fall into trials, we are tempted to sin, we dare not blame God for that temptation because that temptation does not come from him. The trials by which God tests our faith come from God, but if we are tempted to sin when we face those trials, those temptations do not come from God.

We must never think that we're being tempted by God to do evil because God is incapable of being tempted with evil and he himself never tempts anyone to do evil.<sup>13</sup> 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.

James warns us not to do this when we face trials because he knows that's what we sometimes do. Whenever we're surrounded by trials of various kinds, we sometimes challenge God and accuse him of having a sinister purpose for testing us. That's what the Israelites did in the wilderness. They accused God of having an evil purpose for bringing them into the wilderness and testing them. They murmured that God brought them there only because he wanted to kill them (Ex 14:11–12; 16:3). The people of Israel spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food" (Num 21:5).

We must not be like the Israelites and reproach God when we face trials. God was testing them, to know whether they loved him with all their heart and soul (Deut 13:3; cf. 8:2), and they failed that test; they rebelled against God. We must not follow their example.

Likewise, we must not follow the counsel of Job's wife. "Do you still hold fast your integrity?" she said. "Why don't you just Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Because of our corrupt nature, whenever we face trials, our tendency is to murmur and complain and even curse God as if he had not ordained those trials for our good.

We don't naturally count it all joy when we meet trials of various kinds (James 1:2). Why? We fail to see that God has ordained those trials for a good purpose: to give us the crown of life if we endure the test. God has purposed to test our faith not from an evil motive, because God has nothing to do with evil, but to produce in us patient-steadfast-endurance and, thereby, enable us to persevere to the end and receive the crown of life.

It's part of his plan to conform us to the image of Christ in his suffering and glory. Christ is the blessed man who remained steadfast under testing and, having stood the test, has received the crown of life. Like Adam in the beginning, Christ was under probation in a covenant works, and only by personal, perfect, exact, and entire obedience could he obtain the crown of life. His obedience was tested by coming into conflict with the serpent. "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1).

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, just as the Israelites were led by the Spirit into wilderness, and he was led there for the same purpose. The wilderness was the realm of testing. Jesus' obedience was to be tested in the wilderness. Satan played a role in that event. Satan came as the tempter. He came to lure and entice Jesus to sin. But unlike Adam in the garden and Israel in the wilderness, Christ overcame the evil one; he remained steadfast under testing. Having stood the test, he received the crown of life.

The ultimate test of his obedience was not in the wilderness but at Calvary. Again, Christ remained steadfast under testing. He was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Christ made successful probation; he passed the probationary test. Consequently, God rewarded him with the crown of life. God raised him from the dead and translated him from earth to heaven, the realm of glory.

When Christ was tempted to sin, he was tempted from without not from within because he had no corrupt desires. His nature was entirely righteous and holy and good. There was no inward impulse in him that tempted him to sin. The temptations he faced were completely external to him. That's not true of us. We inherit Adam's fallen nature. Our desires are corrupt from birth. We are tempted to sin when we are lured and enticed by those inward desires.<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Within each of us, there is an evil impulse to sin, and that desire to sin lures and entices us to rebel against God. Then that desire, James adds, when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (v. 15). James personifies our desire as a seductress who, having enticed us to her bed, conceives and gives birth to a child, sin. In turn, sin is personified as the child of desire that matures and brings forth its own offspring, death.

The kind of death in view here is in direct contrast to the life mentioned in verse 12. The crown of life in verse 12 refers to life in the ultimate sense of the term, glorified, eternal life in heaven. Death in verse 15 refers to death in the ultimate sense, the second death, the lake of fire. Sin produces death; it brings condemnation and damnation. But endurance under testing brings life; eternal life and glory in heaven.

These are the two destinies of man: eternal life or eternal death—life for those who love God, but death for those who do not. Those were the two ways that appeared to Job. He could curse God and die or endure the test and live. Job persevered; he endured under testing because he loved God and had a true and living faith.

If through faith in Jesus Christ, we are part of God’s new creation, we too will persevere because faith perseveres; faith endures; faith remains steadfast under trial. Faith in Christ perseveres because it unites us to Christ who endured the test and received the crown of life. Spirit-produced faith unites us to him and conforms us to his image.

The gifts of faith and perseverance, indeed, 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., says James (v. 17). God is not the origin and source of evil but the origin and source of every good and perfect gift. The ultimate gift is the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James teaches that God’s nature is good and perfect, since he is the source and giver of every good and perfect gift and has nothing to do with evil. He also teaches that God’s nature is unchanging and unchangeable. “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.” God is the unchanging and unchangeable Father of lights—referring to his creation of the sun and moon.

James makes a sharp contrast between the unchanging Creator and his changing creation. Everything in all of creation changes and is constantly changing. Nothing in creation is constant. The sun and the moon constantly move and change, and their unceasing change is seen in the shifting shadows that move across the earth. James uses the phrase, “shadow due to change”; the notion is that of a shadow projected from one heavenly body to another because of their movements.

Unlike the heavenly bodies, there is no variation in God or shadow caused by change. God is absolutely unchanging and unchangeable. We ourselves are in a constant state of change, and so is everything around us. That unsettled and unstable nature of life is especially evident whenever we face trials of various kinds. In the midst of those trials, however, we have a firm and settled and stable rock that cannot be moved, and that's where we fix our hope—the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (v. 17).

He's the one who has purposed and ordained the trials we face in this life not for an evil purpose but for a good one, namely, to give us the consummate good and perfect gift, the crown of life, which he promised to all who love him. Whenever our faith is put to the test by means of trials, we must not think that God is tempting us to do evil—that's impossible—but realize that God has ordained this, so that he might give those who endure the test the consummate good and perfect gift of glorified, eternal life when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. Amen.