

# The Testing of Saving Faith – Part 2

## 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 **greeting** of the letter
  - a. James introduces himself (**i.e.** the half-brother of Jesus), indicates his status (**i.e.** a bondservant of Christ), and names his audience (**i.e.** dispersed Jewish believers)
2. the **beginning** of the letter
  - a. 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
    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

## II. The Response to Trials of Faith (James 1:2)

### Content

#### a. the response to trials of faith (v. 2; continued)

1. the first **imperative** of the letter (**read v. 2**)
  - a. **remember**: there are more than 50 imperative-like statements in the letter, some as **direct** imperatives (**i.e.** you must do this; **e.g.** **2:22**, “*be doers of the word*”), and some in the imperative **mood** (**i.e.** having the *authoritative sense* of being something you *ought to do*; an exhortation)
  - b. the command: “*count it all joy when ...*” = here is how you **ought** to respond to these things ...
    1. “*count it*” = consider it; regard it; be of an opinion of; think of it as – **i.e.** have a *reaction to* or *opinion of* these things – respond with a certain way of *thinking*; understand trials as ...
    2. **IOW**: don’t simply *dismiss* these trials, **but see them for what they can be ...**
2. the response of this first imperative: **joy**
  - a. **note**: a word which connects this sermon (systematically) to the **Christmas** season
    1. **e.g.** Joy to the World, the message of the angels (“*good news of great joy*”; **Luke 2:10**), etc.
  - b. **note**: the **skipped** word “*greetings*” in **v. 1** is actually the *verbal form* of “*joy*”: to rejoice or be glad
    1. James uses a word that connotes “rejoice, my brothers” or “it is my joy to write to you, brothers”
    2. so, because it is clearly a part of the opening words, it is translated “greetings”
    3. **IOW**: James’ combination of “rejoicing” in writing a letter to a “dispersed” people leads to his first imperative: you who are struggling with trials should rejoice in those trials ...
  - c. “*joy*” (*chara*) = lex: gladness; happiness (**n. x59**) – in usage: a word *assumed* to be a synonym of happiness, but very difficult to “pin down” – biblically: more than simple emotional “happiness”
    1. **consider**: **joy** is one of the “*fruit of the Spirit*” (**Gal. 5:22f**) – **i.e.** as one of the *results* of the work of the Spirit of God *flowing out of the believer*, it must be *more* than just a simple emotion
      - a. **e.g.** like peace = more than the “cessation of hostilities” (**i.e.** feeling “at ease”) – rather, a profoundly *new relationship* with the Creator where the very *reasons* for hostility have been done away with, and the connection to God is *perfected in both directions*
    2. **compare**: **love** is (another) fruit of the Spirit, which we all *inherently* understand (or should!) to be more than just an emotional connection to another person

- a. the *modern* view of love: a “set of feelings” for another, often characterized *primarily* by *physical* and *emotional* “attraction” – **e.g.** “you’ve lost that loving *feeling*”
  1. **e.g.** millennials would consider an “arranged” marriage to be repugnant (no love!)
- b. **i.e.** *biblical* love is a **commitment**; a willful (volitional) *choice* to be committed to another *regardless of the fluctuating emotional sense present in the relationship* (**1 John 4:10**)  
*“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*
  1. God does *not* love us because he “feels” something towards us that makes him respond to us; in fact, what God *truly* sees in us (emotionally) is our hatred towards him in sin
  2. God loves us by making a *commitment* to us in sending his Son to turn away *his* wrath
  3. God *continues* to love us *in that commitment* by keeping his promise to never reject any who he has purposed to draw to himself *even when they continue in their sin*
- c. pre-marital counseling: marriage is a commitment, an oath, a *covenant* that is designed to last beyond the emotional “ups-and-downs” inherent in the relationship (a promise)
  1. the *emotional components* of love come as a result of that commitment – **i.e.** the commitment is not “secured” by the emotional feelings; the emotional feelings flow out of the commitment and the sense of security that comes in it (**e.g.** no-fault divorce)
3. **compare: joy** is also a fruit of the Spirit, which we *need* to understand as more than just a simple sense of happiness “in the moment”
  - a. whereas love is *volitional*, joy is **ontological** – love is a choice to commit; joy is a recognition that something has a nature such that it is inherently valuable to us
  - b. **i.e.** *biblical* joy is the **recognition of value** in a situation, circumstance or experience; seeing an event (or person) as *purposeful* and of *value* to us *in the long term* (**Luke 2:9-11**)  
*“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*
    1. the immediate fear of the shepherds is to be *replaced* by the long-term value of a Savior being born – their joy is in knowing that the long-promised One has finally come – it has not changed their *immediate circumstances* (or made them permanently “happy”)
    2. **question:** when people sing “Joy to the world, the Lord is come” (or “tidings of comfort and joy”), does it make them inherently “happy” that the Christ has come into the world?
      - a. the answer is based *entirely* on how one interprets the *value of the event*.
      - b. for the *reprobate*, the answer is **No!** – the coming of the Creator into his own world has the effect of reminding them of the judgment that is (yet!) to come
      - c. for the *elect*, the answer is **Yes!** – the coming of the Creator means that a Savior has arrived to rescue them from their sinfulness – the value of the birth of the Savior is not in the *immediate change of circumstances*, but in the *long-term* promise of his arrival
      - d. is it possible that the amount of **depression** that comes this time of year is due to an inability to see the long-term value in the coming of the Christ?
    3. **definition: joy is the long-term recognition of true value in any given situation that gives us a strong sense of assurance, even when our emotional state runs contrary to that assurance due to the inherent difficulties in the circumstances**
      - a. (**again**) the emotional components of joy (happiness, gladness, delight) *may* come as a result of that sense of value – **i.e.** we *may* experience an emotional sense of happiness in whatever situation we face, *but we also may not*
      - b. **IOW:** joy is to see *value* in whatever we are facing *no matter how we feel about it now*
  - d. “*count it all joy ...*” = to regard the trials of life as valuable in the long-term; to experience the sense of assurance that comes from knowing that everything has purpose, and not just random; trials have value to us, and it is that value that becomes for us a sense of assurance and joy
    1. **note:** their *exact* purpose will be outlined beginning in **v. 3** (“*for you know ...*”; **see below**)
    2. **IOW:** to look upon the trials that you are experiencing **and see them in a whole new way**
      - a. it is **imperative** that we see our troubles as *more than just troubles ...*
  - e. **clarification:** James is *not* suggesting that trials *themselves* are necessarily “good”
    1. **i.e.** he is not claiming we should just “enjoy” our trials (or “gin up” some false sense of happiness whenever we encounter something that is painful or troubling)
    2. being biblically balanced, we must recognize that trials of various kinds (disease, decay, destruction, temptations, oppressions, persecutions, death) are *evil*
      - a. all such things are *contrary* to God’s intentions in creation – when he declared all things to be “good,” none of these things were present – they all appeared as *the result of sin*

- b. **e.g.** the modern pseudo-gnostic belief that death is “good” because it frees people from their suffering – the lack of a robust doctrine of bodily resurrection leaves people with the idea that “escaping” from our physical nature (and going to heaven) is the “goal”
- 3. **no:** the Bible recognizes that temptation, disease, decay, and death are all *evil*, thus Christians must speak of them in that way; we must not try to “embrace” what is evil by trying to create some false “happiness” within it
- 4. **although we recognize that evil is contrary to God’s permissive will in his world, the joy we are able to glean from it is in knowing that it has purpose *in the hands of God***
  - a. **e.g.** the cross as history’s greatest wickedness, yet was Christ’s joy (**Heb. 12:1-2**)  
*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising [looking beyond] the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
  - b. **the cross was never a source of “happiness” for Jesus – it was a source of assurance, for God had purpose in it, and this purpose produced great joy in Christ, even though he would have to suffer immensely through it**