

Dear Friends,

Much as I like what I sense of his personality and many of his writings, I cannot agree with Martin Luther's description of the Book of James as the "Epistle of straw." When believers obsess over salvation and wrest every passage to teach eternal salvation, they unavoidably must wrestle with contradictions and inconsistencies. However, when we accept Paul's inspired description of "**All scripture**" as divinely directed to and for "**the man of God**," (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV) those problems are resolved.

A study of the first chapter of James provides a clear and convincing example. Most contemporary Bible teachers disregard Paul's description of Scripture and leap to the idea that every appearance of "Crown" in the New Testament must refer only to eternity, reinforcing their human-centric ideas of salvation either all of their works or partly of their works and partly of Jesus. However, in James 1:12, James grammatically locates the "Crown" as being given to the enduring faithful

believer ***simultaneously*** with his faithful endurance.

*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for **when he is tried**, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

We could not find a passage anywhere in the Bible that more convincingly encourages us to endure the pressures and enticements of this broken world, for, in the very moment of faithful endurance, we also experience the Lord's "***crown of life***," His powerful and tender reinforcement of our faithfulness.

James and Paul wrote to different audiences with different needs, so they wrote of the Christian life, the way of faith, with different emphasis. However, in no way do they contradict each other. Faith doesn't save a person eternally from the guilt and judgment of sin, a major theme in Paul's teaching. But the slothful believer cannot claim that he is living by faith, a major teaching in James. Further, in

the context of faithful Christian living, Paul wrote on faith with this same emphasis as James, "*Remembering without ceasing **your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.***" (1 Thessalonians 1:3 KJV)

In the trenches of a pressure cooker world that is increasingly hostile to Biblical faith, we need the message of James. We need his reminder that the Lord's approving and blessing "**Crown**" comes in the moment of the trial, not later in eternity, as an encouragement to hold steadfastly to our faith--and our faithfulness. Sadly, believers who stumble and slip back under pressure never experience this "**Crown of life**," so they are more liable to believe the wresting idea that Bible "Crowns" are all about the after-life, not in the here and now. ***Be faithful. Experience that wondrous "Crown" today!***

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

James

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.
(James 1:1-4 KJV)

James was a common name in the culture of first century Judah. It is likely that the name as it appears in the New Testament referred to more than one man. At times, Bible students work to see how many different men they can single out in the New Testament who bore this name. Rather than multiply the number, I prefer to look for unifying information to reduce the number based on the context, and occasionally on information from extra-Biblical sources near the time. In the two lists of Jesus' half-brothers, (Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 KJV) both James and Jude (Or Judas) appear. While

at least two men named James are likely mentioned in the New Testament, it is my belief that both Jude, human author of the Book of Jude, and James, human author of the Book of James, were these men. However, rather than identify themselves as Jesus' human family members, both men identify themselves as His servants. If this relationship is valid, it exhibits quite a spiritual growth from the occasion when they didn't believe in Him. (John 7:5 KJV) I am also inclined to think that the man named James who appears as a leader in Jerusalem Church may well have been the Lord's brother. (Galatians 2:9 KJV) James, brother of John and son of Zebedee, also a leader in Jerusalem Church, was murdered by Herod Agrippa in Acts 12:2, removing him as a likely link to the James in Galatians 2:9. If this link to Jesus and James is correct, think of the significance of James referring to himself as Jesus' servant. How easily he might have played the family card and reminded his readers of his human connection with Jesus, but he rather claimed a higher spiritual connection; ***he was Jesus servant.***

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. In *A Handbook on the Letter of James*, Eugene Nida explains two significant meanings for the word translated “temptations” in this verse.

...referring basically to inward impulses and experiences that may entice a person to sin. This is obviously the sense intended in verse 13. The word, however, also means “testing,” referring to outward troubles and difficulties.

In Verse 2, James strives to reinforce believers against the two strongest adversaries to a godly, Christ-centered, and selfless life. First, he will exploit those seasons of trial that test us, accusing the Lord Himself of abandoning us, often convincing us that He has, “Where is God when I need Him?” Second, he warns us to be aware of our own “inward impulses and experiences” which our adversary may twist and use against us to neutralize our faith—and faithfulness. John fully describes our chief adversary’s leading strategy to take us out of effective Christian warfare.

*And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: **for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*** (Revelation 12:10 KJV, emphasis added)

John wisely puts us on notice. Our adversary is unrelenting. He accuses us before God day and night. He is dishonest. He will use our failures and weaknesses to belittle our allegiance to Jesus, the idea of accusing us “...*before our God.*” Satan and his evil forces are ready with these two weapons to play the part of prosecuting attorney. As if he is even allowed in the presence of the Lord, but he works to convince us of our guilt and unworthiness. If he can make us feel so full of failure as to be unworthy—and even more to his strategy, unfit—to serve the Lord, he can take us out of the battle of faith.

When our adversary fails to neutralize our faith by these internal accusations, he immediately floods our lives with external

pressures and difficulties. If the “Pressure cooker” of internal doubt and accusation fails, he will apply the “Pressure cooker” of external trials and difficulties to take us down.

Beware this dishonest and deceitful adversary. Jesus described him as ever and only speaking lies. (John 8:44b KJV; “*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*”) How do you know when Satan or his minions are lying? If they speak a word, they speak only lies. Even when they throw your real failures in your face, they impose a false significance onto them. They will depict God as your offended and stern Judge, not as your—admittedly—chastening but loving Father. When we focus too much on our unworthiness, we make ourselves vulnerable to his deceit. Does your admitted unworthiness interrupt or terminate the Lord’s love for you as His child? No? He knows everything about you, thought, word, and deed, past, present, and future. Does your being His child in any way depend on your worthiness in and of yourself? No? Then rather than focusing on your unworthiness, why not focus your life on Him and

His worthiness? In my childhood, I was present when a preacher spent too much time in the pulpit talking about his unworthiness instead of the Lord and His worth. A member of the church sitting near the rear of the building overheard a visitor whisper to his friend seated next to him, "If that man is half as guilty as he claims to be, he should be in jail, not in the pulpit." Whatever he said after devoting so much time to himself and his lack of worth was lost to the people in the pew. When Paul wrote, "*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake,*" (2 Corinthians 4:5 KJV) he covered both sides of the "Self-coin," our worth **and** our unworthiness. The more the man in the pulpit can hide self and hold forth the Lord Jesus, the more Biblical his message. And should he mention self, as Paul occasionally did, he should hold himself forth as the servant of the Lord and His people "*for Jesus' sake.*"

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. How can we find joy in the pressures and trials, the tests of life? The answer depends on our life focus. If we are

focused on self and personal comforts, the idea is alien to us. However, we find the answer in another passage.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. (Acts 5:41 KJV)

What motivates—drives—the engine of our life? If self-pleasure is our reason for living, this whole idea will be so foreign to us that we can't imagine it. However, if honoring the Lord Jesus is our driving motive, anything we may suffer that honors His name, His Person, we gladly endure for Him. James shows us the right reason for godly living, even when that lifestyle brings the scorns of this world against us.

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. This further explains the right motive for Christian living, for selfless, Christ-centered living. When we patiently endure life's trials and pains, keeping our heart and faith fixed on Jesus and trusting Him more than we react to

the trials, we discover the key to life-transforming contentment, because we see in Jesus all that we need.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19 KJV)

Godly, Biblical contentment grows, not out of curbed appetites (Though we may need to curb our carnality), but from an over-arching conviction that, whatever we truly need in life, the Lord shall supply.

When James referred to “*divers temptations*,” we have good contextual reason to view the meaning of the term as tests, not enticements to sin. Consider James’ teaching a few verses later in the chapter.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. (James 1:13-14 KJV)

When we discover the siren song of enticement appealing to our minds, we cannot Biblically—so we should not—ever attribute that enticement to God. That song is teasing our carnality, not a tune that the Lord ever sings to us. Never! Further, James introduces this thought with strong encouragement.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (James 1:12 KJV)

The godly “Faith” response to enticements to sin is not to surrender and blame the Lord. It is to “endure,” a word defined by Eugene Nida as to continue in our faith despite resistance and opposition. Our accusing adversary is diabolical. He and his minions will work to deceive and to entice us to sin, and then they will accuse us of the sin, hoping to bring our faith down in failure and defeat.

What is the “*crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*”? Contextually

James is teaching us about enduring the trials and pains of life, along with the ever-present enticing wiles of our adversary, not about going to heaven when we die. All crowns in Scripture are not about something we gain when we die and go to heaven. In fact, when we read Scripture contextually and remember God's stated purpose for giving us the Scriptures, (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV, to "***the man of God***") we shall learn that most, if not all the "Crowns" in Biblical teaching occur in this life, not in heaven. The godly faithful believer is blessed supremely in this life with the Lord's approval and added blessings that affirm and reinforce that approval. If we compromise our faith—and our faithfulness—we shall live our lives unaware of the potential blessings we've lost because of our own unfaithfulness. James holds this "Crown" before us to remind us, even as we face both internal enticements and external pressures, that the Lord always rewards and blesses faithfulness with His regal "Crown" of approval and blessings right here while we live. Continue your study through this chapter. Pause and ponder Verse 25. The believer who faithfully

does "...the work" of faithfulness "***shall be blessed in his deed.***" "In his deed" necessarily associates the blessing to the same time frame as the deed; blessed in his deed, not afterwards. The same present tense appears in James description of the crown of life. "...for ***when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.***" The crown is given simultaneously with faithfulness, not afterwards.

James has so much to teach us. We need this message in our present season of test and stress.

Elder Joe Holder