

Every Good and Perfect Gift – Part 1

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*
 1. **The Testing of Saving Faith (1:1-18)** – the recognition that trials are an *essential* part of genuine faith – faith must be *tested* in order for it to be “real” faith in Christ
 - a. James addresses the *reality* which causes him to write the letter (**i.e.** opposition)
 - b. James commands his readers to count such realities as “*all joy*” – to recognize their value
 - c. James insists that such realities are *designed* to produce perfection in them, over time
 1. the persecutions experienced were designed (by God) as trials of faith designed to produce a **consistency** between belief and action
 - d. James commands his readers to seek wisdom from God, in all humility before the answer
 - e. (**now**) James *repeats* his thesis, addresses a particular *response* (to these trials) that must be avoided, and then *finalizes* his point in the section
 - b. to *properly* exposit these verses will require me to **repeat myself severely** at the outset (**v. 12**)

I. The Need for Perseverance (James 1:12)

Content

a. the man who remains steadfast under trial

1. **imagine: as a pastor**, having the opportunity to address every person in the world who *claims* to be a Christian, and to *know* that whatever I say *will* be heeded by those who are listening
 - a. **i.e.** the very sense of this letter: an *encyclical* to all Christians everywhere
 - b. **question:** what bit of wisdom, what bit of *life-altering* advice, what bit of *truth* would I want to impart to them?
 - c. **over against:** the modern view of “pastoral” ministry as primarily comfort-giving (**e.g.** hospital visitation, counseling, encouragement, uplifting preaching, relationship building, etc.)
 - d. **over against:** the profound *warnings* about claiming to be a Christian (**e.g. Matt. 7:21-23**)
 - e. **answer:** this verse (**v. 12**), which is presented as a *summation* of all that James has already written, but which contains **a significant assumption that acts as a warning**
2. there is a *clear distinction* in this verse between the “once-saved-always-saved” idea of eternal security and the *biblical concept* of perseverance in faith
 - a. once-saved-always-saved = although rooted in good motives (**i.e.** those who are born again will not be lost), the *common* approach to this subject is actually a “disconnect” between the moment of “profession” and the moment of death (**i.e.** an “arc” between two points in life that goes “over” the moments in between)
 1. **i.e.** as long as one has “prayed the prayer,” he/she is guaranteed heaven upon death *regardless* of the life lived in-between – faith is seen more as a singular “profession”
 2. **i.e.** this is often defended by insisting that salvation is by faith *alone* – to assume that the actions of life “in between” are somehow connected to salvation is to add “works” to the equation
 3. but, this is a *deeply truncated* definition of faith – it is to make faith nothing more than a simple profession of facts *without assuming those facts will have any affect upon one’s life*
 4. resulting in many who “think” they are a Christian because they “possess the facts,” but are very much in danger of being those who are cast away by Jesus at the judgment (**in Matt. 7**)

- a. **i.e.** they are accused of not “*doing the will of my Father*” – living in utter submission to his will in all things – pursuing a life of obedience, submission, sacrifice, holiness, worship, etc.
 - c. the biblical concept (expressed here) is **perseverance in faith** – a continuing trust in Christ that overwhelms every aspect of our existence from the moment of initial profession all the way to death – a faith that grows within the trials that come against it – a way of life (**Hab. 2:4**)
 - d. **principle: there is a significant difference between claiming to be something and proving to be something**
 - 1. **e.g.** claiming to be a doctor, or proving to be one with credentials, experiences, and skills
 - 2. the same is true when it comes to being a Christian: it’s one thing to *claim* to be a follower of Jesus, and another thing *entirely* to have the right *credentials* (being truly born again), *experiences* (a life of continuing submission and trust), and *skills* (perseverance)
 - 3. “blessed” = fortunate; happy; complete – having the sense of being what God would have you to be (**e.g.** as in the Beatitudes; **Matt. 5:3-11** – attitude that makes up those who belong to the kingdom)
 - a. **here:** the blessed man is the one who “*remains steadfast*” (**i.e.** endures, perseveres) under trial
 - b. the man who is *truly blessed* is the man **who is being tested in his trust of God’s word**
 - 1. **LOW:** the Christian life is not primarily a focus on “heaven” as the goal, but a focus moment-by-moment on the grace of God leading us to greater and greater trust in him
 - 2. **LOW:** the Christian life is a *perseverance in faith* through the myriad of issues that will arise, all attempting to *destroy* faith in us, but *ultimately* being the purpose of God to grow us up in him
 - 3. **principle: the only one who can truly call himself a Christian is the one who is willing to take on a life of testing, a life of trusting in Christ, a life of proving he belongs to Jesus**
 - c. the man who is *truly blessed* is the man **who remains steadfast under trial**
 - 1. the one who does not *apostatize* – the one who does not “fall away” by turning from or abandoning his trust in Christ *moment-by-moment*
 - a. **i.e.** the different kinds of apostasy: 1) literally abandoning the faith, 2) drifting away from the faith over time, or 3) embracing a life that is not true faith at all (in-place apostates)
 - b. **i.e.** my warning above would be to the many I have met in camp 3)
 - 2. to remain steadfast is to hold on to the truth *and* remain loyal to this Christ *regardless of the pressure* – it is to keep doing the will of God even when it is *hard* (**e.g. worship**)
 - 3. **principle: the only one who can truly call himself a Christian is the one who holds on to Christ, who remains loyal to him all the way to the end, proving he belongs to Jesus**
 - 4. the assumption: true Christians *must* pursue a life of trusting in God through their submission to Jesus
 - a. **the warning:** the true Christian *perseveres* in the face of testings – he does not simply “assume” he is guaranteed a place in “heaven” just because he *claims to be a Christian*
- b. the man who receives the crown of life**
 - 1. “crown” = **not:** a golden tiara fit for a ruler; **rather:** a reward; a trophy; a gift; **lit.** what is *earned* by those who pursue a goal, as in a race
 - a. **e.g.** the laurel wreath given to athletes who won a race (**1 Cor. 9:25**) – however, in this case, an “imperishable” wreath composed of something far more valuable than a plant-based “trophy”
 - 2. “of life” = the reward of *eternal life* – or, the reward of *God himself* (**i.e.** for God is life)
 - a. **principle: the pursuit of the Christian experience is life itself, as it is found in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is life in himself**
 - 1. **note:** this is over against the “sentimentalized” or “material” version of Christianity that sees the reward as “heaven” (**i.e.** streets of gold, mansions, seeing lost loved ones, etc.)
 - 2. **note:** this “sentimentalized” version of Christianity fits with the once-saved-always-saved view of eternal life above (**i.e.** the goal is to enjoy as much temporal blessing *here* as possible, while anticipating even “greater” reward in the life to come)
 - 3. **note:** this “sentimentalized” version of Christianity denies the resurrection of the body as our ultimate hope, substituting for it some *pseudo-gnostic* existence (**i.e.** the goal isn’t our *complete* redemption of both body and soul on a new earth, but a “spiritual” existence *unlike* us now)
 - b. so, the “crown of life” is the very presence of Christ himself (**John 11:25f; Gal. 2:20**)

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? ... I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

c. the man who loves God

1. **note:** James takes his “summation” one step further with this last phrase
 - a. God *certainly* has made promises, and faith is to believe those promises and live as though those promises affect every aspect of our existence ...
 - b. but, God makes this promise (gives the crown) only to “*those who love him*”
 1. “*love*” (*agapōsin*) = v. present, active, plural, dative form: a relationship of deep (or godly) affection; to love in an *unconditional* way; a form of *devotion* that *permeates* life, is *active* within all of life, *encompasses everything* in life; and is *specifically* directed towards God himself
 2. **IOW:** this love is one of **utter devotion to the Lord** – it is what **faith looks like**
 - a. faith isn’t just believing a promise, or trying to be “good”
2. **faith is seeing the Person of Christ as more important to you than anything or anyone else in all the world – it is to pursue him above all other things, to love him above (even) yourself**
3. **perseverance is to steadfastly love this Christ, above all other things, even when everything “pulls” at you to love *them* more – faith is to trust the Word of Christ that he will give you true life if you will love him all the way to the end, to *persevere in faith***