

James 1 12-15

I. Bearing up under temptation will bring the blessing of life (12)

A. Blessed is the man who resists temptation/bears up under testing (12a)

“Blessed” means more than just happy, it means privileged from a transcendent perspective – happy by God’s standards, and because of conformity with God’s standards

This one stands firm, keeping the same standard and action even when it becomes difficult

The word translated “temptation” can either mean “testing” in the sense of finding out what something is really made of, or it could mean “temptation” in the sense of deliberately trying to draw someone into sin and compromise. Temptation also results in testing, in that it shows what someone is, by the way they respond. The character of someone is shown more clearly when they meet opposition.

B. Reason: Because as a result of being tested, he will receive the promised crown of life (12b-d)

1. Being tested (12b)

This is a different word than above, and it specifically means to put something to the test to see if it is genuine, and it often (as in this case) has the connotation of proving genuine because it passes the test.

2. Result: He will receive God’s promised crown of life (12c-d)

a He will receive the crown of life (12c)

“crown of life” is a metaphor for the totality of reward given to God’s children, partially in this life, but primarily in the life to come, cf. Rev. 2:10

James is likely referring to the Jewish apocryphal book of Wisdom, which says, “But the righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them.” Wisdom 5:15-16

The blessed man will receive this as the result of him being tested and found genuine.

This does not contradict the Biblical teaching that salvation is all of grace, and not by works. Because the fact that this person is found genuine in testing is the direct result of the gracious work of God in their life.

b Which He [God] promised to those who love Him (12d)

This phrase describes the crown of life. One of the effective motivations God gives in order to change His children is the promise of reward. And God’s proven character shows that He will always keep these promises. But James’s mention of this is actually a further proclamation of the promise as an incentive for his readers to bear up under testing/temptation.

II. Let no one blame God for sin, which is rather a consequence of our own desires (13-15)

A. Let no one blame God if they are tempted (13a-c)

1. Condition: being tested/tempted (13a)

“being tested/tempted” is the verb form of the word “temptation/testing” used in 12a above.

It has a conditional idea, “when they are tested,” “if they are tested,” “whenever they are tested”

2. Effect: Let no one blame God for the temptation. (13b-c)

a Let no one say: (13b)

“say” may refer to being spoken out loud, but more likely refers to one’s inward thoughts. No one should entertain such a thought.

The reason such a thought is forbidden is not only because it is false (as shown in the next few propositions), but also because, at heart, it is an attempt to shift the blame for our sin onto God. And James will emphasize that our own sinfulness is the cause of our sin, and not God (or any temptation outside of ourselves).

b That “I am tempted by God” (13c)

The emphasis in this clause is the source of the temptation/testing. There is no problem acknowledging that one is tempted. The problem is claiming that God is the cause of the temptation. And in this context, it is almost certain that this work has the negative connotation of “temptation” as opposed to merely “testing”

B. Reason: For temptation does not come from God, but from our own desires (13d-15)

1. Neg: For God neither is tempted nor tempts others (13d-e)

a God cannot be tempted by evil (13d)

This phrase cannot be taken to imply any inability in God. Rather, the emphasis is on the inability of evil to tempt God. There is no weakness in God that would leave Him open to the possibility of evil. So, God cannot be enticed into enticing us toward any evil.

b And He tempts no one (13e)

Neither is God susceptible to being tempted toward tempting us toward evil. Nor will he do so on His own initiative. He is too pure even to look on evil (Hab. 1:13), and there is no darkness in Him at all (1 Jn. 1:5).

2. Pos: But sin comes from our own illegitimate desires and leads to death (14-15)

a But each one is dragged away and enticed by his own strong desires (14)

1) Each one is tempted by his own strong desires (14a)

“tempted” is the same word used above in v. 13

“strong desires” is often translated “lusts,” but “lust” often has the connotation of sexual desire in English, whereas the term James uses is not primarily concerned with sex. This word refers to all of our sinful desires, which stem from our desire to be sovereign over all that we encounter. In other words, we want to be God, and therefore resent God and any limitation to our desires that His existence causes.

We are tempted whenever we think of a world different than the world we experience, and resent God for not making it so, and desire a situation where we can overrule God and make the kind of world that would fulfill our selfish desires.

So “strong desires” has the connotation of a desire for something forbidden or morally wrong. But it can also be a desire for a lawful thing, just desired in an illegitimate, selfish manner.

And in all this, notice that the inordinate desire does not come from outside, but it comes from within us. So, we ourselves are the source of the temptation, not God. Even if,

there are occasions and desirable things outside us that we experience, these are not the temptations, but only the occasion of the temptations, which come from within us. If there were no inappropriate desires within ourselves, these things outside ourselves would not be a temptation, no matter how prevalent or common our experience of them would be

2) **By being dragged away and enticed (14b-c)**

This further describes how a person is tempted by his own sinful desires. There is a part of the temptation that comes from outside and lures a person away from God and into sin

a) **Being dragged away (14b)**

“being dragged away” has a connotation of initial reluctance. This speaks of two different attitudes and loyalties conflicting within each person, cf. Rom. 7:7-25. The temptation finds a hook in a person’s sinful desires, and is then dragged toward sin

b) **And enticed (14c)**

“enticed” is to be lured by implied promises of benefit. The connotation is of a skillful application of that which is desirable to bring one over to the intended compromise. The world and the devil are skillful and experienced tempters, and they are aided by a traitor in our own sinful desires

b) **The result of [giving in to] strong desire is sin (15a-b)**

1) **After conceiving (15a)**

This is the word for getting pregnant used metaphorically. It signifies a cause/effect relationship between the strong (sinful) desires and the sin, which is the outcome. Once the strong desire begins its influence, it has a natural outcome, which is described in the next proposition.

2) **The strong desire gives birth to sin (15b)**

This is the continuation of the pregnancy metaphor. It shows that the inevitable outcome of strong desire is sin. God is not the cause of temptation and sin. Our sinful desires are the cause of temptation and sin.

c) **The result of sin is death (15c-d)**

1) **When it is finished/fully formed (15c)**

Continuing the birth metaphor, this proposition talks about what sin does after it is born. Just as a child grows up into the person they will be, and possibly has children of their own, sin grows to its full potential and impact. Sin cannot be contained (without divine help) and will run its course and have consequences.

2) **Sin gives birth to death (15d)**

This is the ultimate conclusion of the birth metaphor. It uses a different word for “give birth” than 15b. It also emphasizes the cause effect relationship – sin causes death. This verse does not explain the exact connection between sin and death. But from other Scripture, we learn that sin causes the death of the sinner (Rom. 6:23) by placing the sinner under the righteous judgment of God. And sin can also cause the death of others, either by enticing them to sin for themselves or by victimizing them.