

Faith and Action in Partnership

James 1:1-18 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. 9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. 12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.*

1. Introduction

Today, we are going to concentrate on three verses from James' first chapter. This will help feed in something of the direction and strategy that has been agreed at the recent Church of God World Assembly.

2. The Believer's Character

James 1:2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

The Believer in Christ is foreseen by the Lord to have important characteristics. Those described here are those that allowed the church to explode into the first century, Roman dominated, world. They are also far removed from today's cosy, Western form of Christianity. Consider 2 Tim 3:5, which shows the signs of the end times - the opposite of James' call in his letter.

2 Tim 3:1-5 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather*

than lovers of God-- [5 *having a form of godliness but denying its power*](#). Have nothing to do with them.

We have, throughout this world, Christians dying on a daily basis for their faith, because in obedience to Christ's call they want everyone to know the saving truth about Jesus. They suffer; they die, so that others can hear the Gospel of salvation.

In the last few months, the authorities murdered three of our Church of God Pastors, who were running underground churches in China. Each one received a bullet in the back of his head for doing no more than we are doing today. It wasn't enough that did these men give up their lives, but the government then bulldozed their families' homes. These women and their children were thrown on the street, yes in 2004 by a country that the Western world welcomes as an 'important trading partner' - what hypocrisy.

Let us commit these families and all the other Christians in dangerous places to a blanket of prayer. There is much I need to share with you from the World Assembly, concerning the CoG's prayer strategy over the next two years, but I need to take a complete session to do it justice.

3. Our Response to the Word of God

To be effective witnesses for Jesus, in other words to be normal Christians, we are to follow verse 4b:

James 1:4 ... *so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

- Mature/perfect (NKJV): '*perfect*' - τέλειος *complete, perfect, whole, full effect, successful results; full-grown, mature (of persons); τελειότερος more perfect (Heb 9:11)*
- Complete: '*complete*' - ὀλόκληρος *sound, whole, complete; status of being sanctified by Jesus at His coming (1 Thess 5:23)*
- Not lacking anything: '*lacking*' – λείπω *lack, fall short, have leftovers, be in need of (James 2:15)*

a. Three Steps to Change

So how is this possible? Most Christians would say you cannot do this, but this would tend to be Christians living in the Western world. In my last message on Jehovah Jireh, I mentioned that we hear of miracles happening all over the so-called 'Third World', but we do not see it in the West. I will repeat what I said then; there is a level a faith that flows in these places that does not flow here. They wake up every day and need to seek God for: (i) food for just that day; (ii) healing; (iii) protection from attack etc. For us, this is an alien need; we have our daily needs provided for us.

Change must be possible because the Word of God says it is possible. Fortunately, the Word lays out how these characteristics become evident in our lives. Look closely at the start of verse 4.

James 1:4 *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

b. Perseverance Brings Change

This thing called ‘perseverance’ apparently has to complete its work, which will bring about these characteristics. The word used here comes from ‘ὑπομονή’ [*hu-po-monay*] patient endurance, steadfastness, perseverance.

Indeed, Jesus says in Luke 21:19, “By *standing firm* (‘ὑπομονή’) *you will gain life.*” (NIV). The NKJV puts it this way, “By your *patience possess your souls.*” (NKJV) ... which means **to gain life.**

c. Tested Faith Builds Perseverance

So, from where does we gain this perseverance, which is so important? Back up one more verse, to verse 2, and we see its source.

James 1:3 *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

We are now looking a little uncomfortable. Perseverance comes only when our faith is put to the test. Faith that is untested is just like gold that has not been refined in the fire. It may be gold, but with the impurities still present, it can never be used by the master craftsman to make useful and beautiful articles.

Did you notice the word ‘*know*’ in verse 3? This first church knew, understood and was certain that their faith was tested in order to create perseverance. A church that lived through persecution had a Holy Spirit awareness of the character that God had to create in them to withstand the attacks and glorify Jesus Christ by His church multiplying.

d. Our Attitude Must Be That of Jesus

1 Pet 1:7 *These [trials] have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

This testing of our faith can come in many ways; the Scripture shows us it will be through trials. Key to glorifying Jesus is our response to these trials or situations. This will determine the outcome of our walk with God and our effectiveness within the Church to supporting the Great Commission. ‘Joy’ does not mean we love every miserable thing that comes our way. It is about an inner response that sees the trial as a means to grow stronger, be a visible witness and - through our faith in Christ - know we can come through victorious. Remember, as Jesus faced the Cross, he did so with determination and the knowledge that He was doing the Father’s will.

James 1:2 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

I guess this is not the way we would view our attitude to trials - of many kinds. “*Consider it pure joy...*” But, look on the bright side, the word for ‘many’ has as its main meaning ‘different’, not necessarily ‘numerous’ - ‘ποικίλοις’ [*poi-kee-lois*]). However, the trials are there not as ‘if’s or ‘maybe’s, but they are definites.

e. Summary

For human beings, even born-again ones, neither God nor we can ever know how far our faith can take us without it being 'proved', which is the same as 'testing', 'trial', 'temptation'. These trials can be caused by our own failure to walk close to Jesus and His word; they can come from an attack from the devil; they can also be sent or allowed to happen by the Lord Himself. One thing we have to know and put our faith in is that nothing is intended for our destruction, but for our strengthening. Look at the sequence:

- Know the trial you enter is intended to strengthen you
- Meet the trial head on, confident that the Lord will be with you through it (Ps 23)
- Believe that your faith will grow stronger and will glorify Jesus
- This tested, stronger faith will build perseverance
- Perseverance, when it completes its work, changes you
- Your maturity increases and you become more sound in knowledge of the Lord and His Word
- And, then, we will lack nothing