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The Testing of One's Faith

By Bryan Hodge

Make no mistake about it. One's faith will be tested, and tested again, in this life. James writes of "the testing of your faith" (James 1:3). These tests are common to man (1 Corinthians 10:13). We should not be surprised when tested for such is not strange or unusual (1 Peter 4:12).

Let's consider some ways that James indicates Christians are tested.

1. Attitude when life is difficult

James 1:2-3: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

"Godisnowhere" could be viewed as, "God is now here" or "God is no where" The same letters in each, even the same order, but different views.

Even so, the trials of life can be viewed differently. Some see such as an opportunity for spiritual growth (James 1:1-2; Romans 5:3-4). Others become discouraged and give-up.

One should not give up. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life" (James 1:12).

2. Attitude toward prayer

James 1:5-8, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally... let him ask in faith, with no doubting... for let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord."

When one has difficulty seeing how the difficulties of life can be used for spiritual growth, one should pray.

Prayer is important to a Christian's spiritual health. Prayer is mentioned six times in this book (James 1:5-8; 4:2-3; 5:13; 5:14-15; 5:16; 5:17). One's prayer life may be a great indicator (or barometer) of where one is in his spiritual walk.

"Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?
When you met with great temptation, did you think to pray?
When your heart was filled with anger, did you think to pray?
When sore trials come upon you, did you think to pray?
(Song: Ere You Left Your Room This Morning by M.A. Kidder)

3. Attitude toward God

James 1:13-14: "Let no one say when he is tempted 'I am tempted by God'... each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

The focus has changed. The earlier part of this chapter concerned external trials and difficulties (James 1:2-11). The focus now is upon internal trials or temptations (James 1:13-18).

Man often tries to mitigate or deny his responsibilities for sin by pointing the finger elsewhere. Some blame environment. Some blame parents or spouse. Some blame God. However, temptation itself starts with the desires one has within him. Examples: The desire to preserve one's life may produce a temptation when faced with persecution.

It is not sinful to be tempted. Even Jesus was tempted (Hebrews 4:15). The issue is how we respond to this temptation.

"Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin"
(Song: Yield Not To Temptation by H.R. Palmer)

4. Attitude Toward God's Word

James 1:19-22: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath... receive with meekness the implanted word... be doers of the word and not hearers only."

When life is difficult, instead of being filled with wrath toward God or man, and instead of rashly opening one's mouth and spouting angry words, one should be swift to hear God's word. When temptation comes one should meditate on the word of God.

Moreover, one should not hear only. One should hear and do God's word. The word is to be lived. Anything less is self-deception (James 1:22 cf. 1:26-27).

As with prayer, even so with Bible reading - such may be a great indicator (a barometer) of where one is in his spiritual walk. Remember, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

5. Attitudes toward others

James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble..."

James 2:1-ff: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality... Listen my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him."

James 3:9-10: "With it (the tongue - B.H.) we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessings and cursings. My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

James 5:4-5: "Indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in the day of slaughter."

James 5:19-20: "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways saves a soul from death and cover multitude of sins."

Some live their lives with little or no regard for others. However, Jesus taught, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Paul wrote, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). John wrote, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

James instructs that one should: (a) care for the weak (James 1:27); (b) not disrespect the poor (James 2:1-ff); (c) be careful with our use of the tongue toward others (James 3:9-10 cf. 1:26). The use of tongue is spoken of throughout this book, six times (James 1:19; 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9; 5:12).

"Angry words! O let them never from the tongue unbridled slip;
may the heart's best impulse ever check them ere they soil the lip
Love is much too pure and holy, friendship is too sacred far,

for a moment's reckless folly, thus to desolate and mar
Angry words are lightly spoken, bitterness though they are rashly stirred,
brightest links of life are broken by a single angry word
'Love one another,' thus saith the Savior; children obey the Father's blest command"
(Song: Angry Words, by H.R. Palmer);

(d) be fair in business (James 5:4-5). (e) Seek to convert the lost (James 5:19-20).

6. Attitude towards the world

James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: ...to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Some love the sinful things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). James warns, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Hebrews says, "Pursue... holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

7. Attitude towards time

James 4:13-17: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.'"

The end may be closer than one thinks. This point is made in one of Jesus' parables, where God says to one, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20).