



1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:1-4)

The opening verse of James demonstrates the humble spirit of the Apostle James. Though the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, James omits identifying himself as such, perhaps to avoid the appearance of boasting. He does not proudly describe himself even as an apostle, but simply as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and, by extension, of the people of God to whom this Epistle is written. The Israelite tribes had been dispersed throughout Asia Minor and the known world. His message is to both believing and unbelieving Jews, but also to the Gentiles which will become true members of Israel and truly partakers of the Seed of Promise.

The Book of James contains many beautiful word pictures of God and His Kingdom. The Epistle is more concerned with the practical application of true religion than with the doctrinal basis for it. He instructs in the error of the tongue, of showing deference to the rich and well-heeled above that of the poor and lowly, and of the sincerity that is evidenced of faith through good works.

His opening 'Greeting' is rarely used by writers of the Epistles and demonstrates the sincerity of brotherly love that James wishes to admit at the opening of his counsel. 1"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." A greeting is almost always followed by fond fellowship and brotherly love. So James is our brother, our friend, our fellow servant in Christ, and one who speaks with first-hand knowledge of his subject. Being a familial brother to Jesus, James knew the human side as well as the spiritual nature of Christ better than most of the apostles.

In verse 2 of the introductory verses, James stresses the importance of joy, and not disappointment, at the onslaught of temptations.

This goes often against our human natures, but if we have put on that Mind and Nature of Christ, we shall immediately comprehend the meaning that James is conveying. How strong we grow, and how joyful do we feel, when we are tempted greatly yet prevail against temptation. We feel that we have grown in strength, and certainly we have done so. When my mother placed a dish of chocolates on the table in the morning with the stern warning, "Do not touch!" how grown up and happy did I feel at evening meal when I was allowed the first chocolate treat. How happy the recovering alcoholic becomes at the passing up of every invitation to 'take a drink.'

The devil cannot read our minds, but he has been watching us from infancy, and he knows our weaknesses by our previous behaviors. He exploits, constantly, the chinks in our armor. 2" *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" Please note the allusion by James to attitude and character – he counsels to "*COUNT it all joy!*" We may have no choice but to encounter temptations, but the manner in which we respond to them is solely our prerogative. We may view them with dismay and dread, or we may view them as a source of joy and strength in overcoming them. We should know that the angels in heaven rejoice at every victory of the believer over temptations and snares that the Prince of the Air spreads in our path. Since God has promised to allow no temptation to confront us over which we cannot gain victory, we should take great satisfaction at every victory over those increasing temptations that we face. God is sure that we can overcome even those enormous temptations that come before His child. My mother knew if I could avoid the temptation of the chocolates all day long, I would be a stronger boy. So, too, does God know that we grow stronger with each victory over the temptations of life.

What is the one great accoutrement of defense that enables to withstand temptation? Is it not patience? 3 "*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*" We should readily know that we cannot overcome an entire day's worth of temptation at a single second, but we can do so by overcoming, second by second, every temptation hurled at us. We may know, for certain, that moments of temptation, as well as victory, shall pass. "This, too, shall pass!" is ascribed by a Persian Sufi poet to King Attar of Nisshapur who had the inscription on a ring he wore. When times were full of joy and happiness, he sorrowfully looked at the inscription on his ring – "this too shall pass." When hard times came, he looked with hope to the same slogan. Such an understanding instills patience. Great temptations bring great victory when we withstand them with the patient understanding that "this too shall pass." Faith is the fuel that gives flame to our patience. When we know the long mountain march is about to breach the crest of the mountain, we can slog on we hope and patience – but, in between, many steps must take us there.

4 "*But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*" The human body is strengthened by a regular exercise routine. With no exercise, the muscle of the body will atrophy or turn to fat. The mind is also made stronger by a reading of challenging works and problems. The spiritual soul is made strong by faith worked out in patience. If we omit a regular exercise routine in any of these areas, we will lose ground which must be overtaken by future efforts. Perfection in works is a constant and consistent labor of patience in the things that are Godly and good. If we omit our attendance at worship, at the family meal, at work, for a very long while, how we are reluctant to return to the beaten path. But if we report to work five minutes early every day for twenty years, it is nearly impossible that we shall ever be late of our own doing. It is the same with that perfect work with which the Lord has endowed our hearts. We not only arise with a heart that is warm to service at the beginning, but complete the day with that same heart.

We labor for the Lord as His servant – all of us who believe. We are often rejected by those who should know better – who observe superfluities more than substance. But that, too, is a temptation to overcome. The servant never forswears those for whom it is his duty to serve and to exemplify good works. Why should the servant of God and man?