

James 1:9-18

James 1:9-18 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, (10) but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. (11) For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. (12) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (13) Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (18) Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Questions On The Text

What is the lowly person supposed to glory in?

Verses 9-11: The lowly person is to glory in his exaltation. Lowly, also meaning humble, refers to the poor circumstances they find themselves in. The word translated “glory” means to boast. James’ point is that, far from being a shame or evidence of inferiority, it is a privilege to be lowly, and the rich should remember the temporary nature of their wealth.

What kind of person does God bless?

Verse 12: The person who holds his ground through temptation is blessed and will receive a reward. The word “endures” means to persevere, stand firm, hold ground. The word “approved” means tested and found to be genuine. Test and temptation, in Greek, are the same word, and the right translation is selected according to the context. This illustrates an important truth: With every temptation there is a test; with every test there is a temptation.

The fact that God blesses those who stand firm during temptation is an indication that God wants us to pass the test.

Does God tempt us?

Verse 13: God is not the author of temptation and shouldn’t be blamed for it. This is nothing more than making excuses for sin by blameshifting and attempting to put the responsibility back on God for our own actions and decisions. Not only doesn’t God tempt us, but He is incapable of being tempted by evil. The reason for this becomes clearer in the following verse as James connects temptation, sin, and our natural desires.

How does temptation work?

Verse 14: Temptation begins when we are drawn away and enticed by our own desires. This is an important key. The devil will always work with desires that are already present in us because they give him something to work with.

The word “enticed” means to bait a hook. The purpose of bait is 1) to hide the hook; 2) to make the hook attractive. We learn from this that the devil doesn’t want us to realise that we are being tempted to do the wrong thing, and that temptation is used much like bait; it always involves something that is already attractive to us in an attempt to tempt us to sin.

Is it sinful to be tempted?

Verse 15: It is not a sin to be tempted. After all, Jesus Himself was tempted (see Matthew 4:4-11), and yet did not sin. (See Hebrews 4:15) Sin occurs when the desire gives birth, in other words, is yielded to. The inevitable result of this is death. This ties in with Rom 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Temptation targets the soul – mind, will and emotions. The emotions are appealed to through our natural desires. The mind is targeted with deception. And the will is then urged to choose sin.

What sort of gifts does the Father give?

Verses 16-17: The Father's gifts are good and perfect because He Himself is good and perfect. (Compare this with Luke 11:13.) Saying that with the Father "there is no variation or shadow of turning" is a way of saying that God is constant; unlike all the lights in the universe which change constantly, He never changes. (See Malachi 3:6)

How did the Father bring us forth?

Verse 18: There are two points that James makes out. First, we were brought forth by the will of the Father. In other words, our salvation was not brought about through our own initiative. (Compare this with John 1:12-13.) Second, we were brought forth by the word of truth. Peter says something similar in 1 Peter 1:23 where says that we were born again through the Word of God.

The purpose of our being born again is that we might be "firstfruits." Firstfruits was mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament. It refers to a sacred portion that is offered to God and therefore holy.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Why should a lowly person rejoice in their humiliation?

What are good strategies for overcoming temptation?

Why do you think that a person who overcomes temptation is referred to as a person who loves God? (vs. 12)

How does the devil use our own desires against us in temptation?

What are common already-present desires that the devil uses to tempt people?

What sorts of good and perfect gifts has the Father given you?