

promises His eternal blessings (“the crown of life”) only to those who are truly His, that is, those who love Him. The same terminology is used by Paul in Rom 8:28.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

But in the following verses, Paul explains to us the very means by which sinners come to love God, for the next verse, v. 29, begins with the word “For.”

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:29–20)

Here we understand more fully how James uses the word “promise” in our verse when he writes “..which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” How could God promise the “crown of life” to anyone if their salvation ultimately depended upon their own choices and abilities? But, based upon the Scriptures we know that those who are predestined are called and thus truly come to faith in Yeshua and are therefore justified. Moreover, because of God’s all powerful and ordaining love, all who are justified will be glorified. Surely there is a cooperation between the believer and God, for we must persevere; we must remain faithful, and we must “count it all joy” when encountering various trials. But we do so as God enables and strengthens us to persevere and to love Him to the end. Persevere we must; persevere we will!

13–14 Let no one say when he is tested, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Note that in the opening phrase of v. 13 I have changed the English of the NASB from “temped” to “tested.”¹ As noted earlier, the Greek word *πειράζω* (*peirazō*) can carry both the idea of “testing” as well as

1 Note the Christian Standard Bible (CSB, formerly HCSB) translation of v. 13: “No one undergoing a trial should say, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn’t tempt anyone.”

that of “tempting.” Since it is clear that James is continuing the subject of how the believer is to bear up under trials (v. 4), it seems best to translate the opening phrase of our verse with “tested” rather than “tempted,” since in the previous context it seems clear that such trials are external and God is the One Who may bring such external “trials” or “testing” upon His children for their good and spiritual growth. We see an example of this in Genesis 22 when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”
(Gen 22:1)

Note that the Lxx uses the language as in our verse, utilizing the Greek *πειράζω* (*peirazō*) – ὁ θεὸς ἐπείραξεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ (“God tested Abraham.”)

“*I am being tempted by God*” – Now James goes on to describe temptations that are internal, that is, those that arise from the sinful nature which remains in the believer and must be constantly overcome and subdued. When, in the midst of “various trials,” one could give in to the weakness of the flesh and begin to wonder why God would allow such testing. To entertain such a perspective is the first step to questioning the goodness of God. Thus James warns us here not to be swayed by the sinful flesh but to recognize the source of such thinking and reject it as contrary to all that we, as believers in Yeshua, know to be true.

To fall prey to the sinful nature is precisely what happened with Adam and Chavah. Instead of accepting that they had sinned and that their sin preceded from their own hearts, ultimately Adam blamed God, for it was God Who gave him Chavah.

The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate. (Gen 3:12).

...*for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.* – James is not here entering into the full debate over the so-called “problem of evil” which tries to answer the question of “how did evil enter into the world?” What James is categorically asserting is that God is not the source of evil but that “in his holiness God stands far above evil and cannot be influenced by it.”¹

1 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 48.

Here we see James affirming the attribute of God’s holiness. He cannot be tempted by evil because He is infinitely and eternally holy. He has no weakness whatsoever because He is infinite in His power (omnipotent). As such, He is never tempted by evil, for by His very nature He cannot sin. Only a being who is able to sin is susceptible to temptation.

Nor does He ever tempt anyone to sin, for to do so would also be contrary to the infinite holiness of His being. Some may object because it may seem the Scriptures teach differently, that God gives some people over to sinful passions (Rom 1:25-32). But what the Scriptures teach is that God may allow depraved mankind to go their own way, that is, to be who they are as controlled by the sinful nature. But such depravity does not have its source in God Who is holy. Rather the Scriptures teach that sin came into the world through Adam:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... (Rom 5:12)

Therefore, as we face various trials in life, we must stand against any thought that springs forth from our sinful nature which would cause us to question the goodness and holiness of God. In all things, God is holy and will maintain all of His promises to those who are His, that is, “those who love Him.”

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. – Here James specifies the true source of sin, which is the sinful nature. It is the remaining corruptions of the sinful nature, the flesh, that wants to yield to sin. James describes the sinful nature as “lust” (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*). The Greek word *epithumia* can be used to describe both good desires¹ and evil desires. The majority of times that this word is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, it describes sinful desires, i.e., the pull of the flesh to do that which is contrary to God’s righteousness.

The participles “carried away and enticed” describe what the sinful nature is capable of if given into it. “Carried away” (ἐξέλκω, *exelkō*) could just as correctly be translated as “dragged away”² and “enticed”

1 E.g., Phil 1:23 where Paul describes his desire to “depart and be with Messiah.” See also Lk 22:15, the words of Yeshua: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

2 BDAG, “ἐξέλκω,” p. 347.

(δελιάζω, *deleazō*) carries the sense of “enticed” or “lured” into a trap.¹ Thus, the child of God must constantly be “putting to death” the deeds of the flesh and progressing in being sanctified more and more unto God. As Paul writes:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 5:5–8)

15 – Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Now James uses the metaphor of conception and birth to illustrate the method of the sinful flesh to bring about sinful behavior which ultimately results in death. Here he is giving the general description of how the sinful nature, dominated by “lust,” is the pattern of life for the unbeliever, a pattern which is ultimately characterized by death, that is, separation from God.

He pictures “lust” (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*) as a seductress who, having lured the person into her abode, conceives (συλλαμβάνω, *sullambanō*) an illegitimate child by him. It is impossible to “undo” the act and thus, apart from being “born again,” the consequences are irreversible, that is, the inevitable result is “death.”

The phrase “and when sin is accomplished” could just as well be translated “and sin, when it is fully grown,” for it may well picture that which is conceived as having been born and having grown up.² James’ point is that, apart from the influence of the “new person/man” and the power of the Spirit to “say no” to the sinful flesh, once lust is conceived it will inevitably bring about death. Ultimately, this is the characteristic of every unbeliever.

The picture of “lust” being “conceived” is simply that process by

1 *BDAG*, “δελιάζω,” p. 217. It is found in non-biblical texts of the fisherman luring the fish into his catch.

2 The Greek verb ἀποτελέω, *apoteleō*, carries the sense of “bringing to completion,” which, when describing a person, could well mean “to grow up.” Note ESV, “and sin, when it is fully grown....”

which the sinful nature begins to stimulate desires. As Manton notes:

Sin, or the corrupt nature, having inclined the soul to an ungodly object, works to set the soul in an evil frame of mind.¹

As noted in the previous verses, the unbeliever has no desire to repent for his sin but, like Adam, shifts the blame to God, claiming that God “tempted” him to sin (v. 13). Being that it is impossible for God to tempt anyone to sin since He is infinitely holy, James teaches us in this verse that the source of sin in a person’s life is when he or she gives in to the lusts of the fallen nature.

An entirely different scenario must characterize the true believer. For the believer, being strengthened and led by the indwelling Spirit, is enabled to say “no” to the lusts of the flesh and to have a life characterized by righteousness. Indeed, a spiritual battle exists within the believer, for the flesh wars against the Spirit and seeks to be in control, as James has stated, to return the believer to being a slave to sin. As Paul writes to the Galatians:

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal 5:17)

The final clause in this verse from Galatians, “so that you may not do the things you please,” should be understood to describe the goal and desire of “the flesh,” the “sinful nature,” i.e., to entice the believer to act in a way contrary to the “new person” he or she has become in Yeshua. Yet the primary emphasis that Paul gives in this verse is that all who are “in Yeshua” must recognize that there remains a battle against the flesh, and that progressively saying “no” to the flesh and “yes” to the Spirit is the inevitable mark of being truly one of God’s children.

Surely this is a battle and the believer’s complete victory over the sinful nature will only be realized when “mortal puts on immortality,” as Paul writes:

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have

1 Thomas Manton, *A Practical Commentary, or An Exposition, with Notes, on the Epistle of James*, vol. 4 in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, (Marranatha Pub., [reprint]), p. 99.

put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY."¹ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"² (1Cor 15:53-55)

Yet all who belong to the Lord will make progress in putting to death the deeds of the flesh and living more and more unto the Lord. Such progress is what it means to persevere in the faith. This is what Yeshua taught in the parable of the sower.

But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. (Lk 8:15)

The practical application of what James is teaching us here is obvious, and Paul's words are clearly applicable as well. If we are constantly to win the battle over the sinful flesh, we must remain ever faithful in the means of grace. These are: (1) Scripture: filling our minds with the word of God and living in accordance to its eternal truths; (2) Prayer: regularly engaging in prayer and communion with God; and (3) The Ekklesia: being in the fellowship of other believers as we are together and encouraging one another to be living testimonies of God's love and grace. Clearly, that which we feed upon, that is, what is regularly filling our minds and thoughts, will have a large effect on our ability to say "no" to the flesh and "yes" to God as we are led by His Holy Spirit.

Remaining faithful in our walk with the Lord is that which enables us to stand firm against the enticements of the world and, by the strength given to us by the abiding Ruach HaKodesh, we are strengthened to resist the snares of the evil one, to say "no" to the flesh, and to have lives which honor our Savior. Thus, to the all important utilization of the means of grace, which are the positive aspects of our sanctification, must be added a negative aspect: we must resolve not to partake of ungodly aspects of the world. It is true that people become like that upon which they constantly gaze. Let us then resolve to fill our lives with that which will build us up in the faith so that more and more we become living testimonies of our Lord and Savior, Yeshua.

1 Is 25:8.

2 Hosea 13:14.