

Studies in James

James 1:9-18

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The Message

We have seen how our faith gives us the ability to be joyful under trials. James' message must have spoken directly to the early Jewish Christians who themselves would have been no stranger to trials and persecution. It is in these times that we also need to show endurance, patience or perseverance. This will in turn work out maturity and completeness within our Christian lives. This is quite a challenge. When we are undergoing hardship, do we pray for the removal of the affliction, or for wisdom to make a right use of it? Whom do we blame when things go wrong? (James 1:13-15)

Wisdom is so important to our Christian life and faith, not the wisdom that this world purports to know, but the wisdom that comes from God. Wisdom from God enables us to look beyond our difficulties, to see the truth of a situation, and to know unswervingly that God will not forsake us. It enables us to face and dismiss our doubts and fears, and present them all to God.

Why should our faith have to be tested? We are all familiar with the Bible's teaching on the refiner's fire, and God wants to complete the work in us that He has begun. In addition, we live in a fallen world, but we are called to be *"salt of the earth. But if the salt is tasteless, how can it be made salty again? For it no longer has strength for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a grain-measure. Instead they put it on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13-16).

Biblical faith is active or dynamic, not passive or static. The faith that we have in the Lord should cascade into every area of our lives; there should be no discrepancy between belief and action. Testing of our faith helps our belief become action. Is it any wonder that the Church is growing the fastest in countries where it faces the greatest persecution? Yet in this testing we can see God's grace and mercy (Isaiah 42:1-4, Revelations 3:19-22, Hebrews 12:1-12), and gives us confidence to proclaim the Good News.

The Bible is full of paradox. Jesus teaches us that leadership is expressed in servanthood. In James we again confront a paradox when we read verses 9-11 which continues in the theme of trials and endurance. It is harder for a Christian to have material possessions because these things can distract away from the Lord, yet a Christian who has nothing must *"take pride in his high position"*. (James 1:9).

What the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the Bible, and what we have in our relationship with God should mould and shape our entire mind set, and our very motives for doing the things we do in the way that we do them. We should fix our eyes on the Lord knowing that we are looking at the *"Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, 'says the Lord', the One who is, and who was, and who is coming, the Almighty"*. (Revelations 1:8, James 1:12).

We also need to remember that God *"chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created"* (James 1:18).

Questions

1. In this fallen world in which we live one of the responses that we can so easily use in times of adversity is “It’s not my fault!”. We live in a culture of blame - and sometimes people will go to almost any extreme to blame somebody or something else. As people of God we have responsibility, and this means being humbly prepared to admit when we are wrong and also being prepared to take full responsibility for our actions. We need to be teachable people - we don’t know everything, and this is why in Church - that assembly of God’s people, we can learn so much. Try to identify occasions when you have blamed somebody else when really the fault was yours, and remember the thoughts and feelings you were experiencing at the time. In prayer consider how that situation might have had a very different outcome if you had acted in a way in which Jesus would have done. Give the thoughts and feelings you had at the time to God, and ask that He might strengthen you to take the responsibility that He has given to you.
2. Spend some time meditating on verse 18. Let this truth be written on your heart.