

Chapter II

LET PATIENCE HAVE HER PERFECT WORK

The Jews had some peculiar ideas. One of them was their belief that God tempted them with sin. This was the Rabbi's answer to mankind's sin nature and was a not-so-subtle way of passing culpability for their sins to God. If they could attribute temptation to God, then they could feel self-satisfaction and even justification when they were tempted with evil. With this and many other methods, they went about trying to establish their righteousness before the law.

James did not attempt a frontal attack on these beliefs. Rather he used their beliefs to establish a line of reasoning which would enable him to present the gospel to the Jews. Thus he wrote:

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4)

These verses require a grammatical evaluation in the Greek language in which they were written in order for us to see that they refer to a common Jewish practice. This practice is

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addressed by James in verses thirteen and fourteen, where James wrote:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. (James 1:13-14)

The grammar in this text reveals James did not make a command (imperative) to the Jews to be joyful when they fell into temptations, as it is translated. The word *count* in the Greek is in the aorist indicative tense. It is a past-tense statement of fact. *Fall* is in the aorist subjunctive tense. It expresses a past-tense hypothetical condition. The remaining text has been translated correctly. A free translation of verses two to four is, *My brethren, if you were at any time to fall into any kind of temptation, you counted it total joy; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

James used the fact that the Jews took pleasure in trials to introduce the idea that they ought to subject their faith to scrutiny so that they could be *perfect, and entire, wanting nothing*. This tactic is similar to that of the apostle Paul on Mars Hill. Remember the Greeks were totally steeped in idolatry. They had idols to every kind of a god imaginable. They also had an idol to the *Unknown God*. Paul did not immediately rebuke them for this folly. Rather he used it to introduce the Greeks to the true and living God, Whom they worshipped falsely.

Thus James used the Jews' misconceived ideas of temptation to introduce the idea that the trial of one's faith could have the beneficial result of making that person right before God. A superficial reading of these verses could and has produced the idea that James wrote to a Christian audience. However an exegetical look proves that James wrote to Jews of the *diaspora*, who were steeped in the *traditions of the elders*.

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Thus *My brethren* is used by James in the sense of *My Jewish brethren*. And the joy which the Jews experienced when they fell into various temptations was used to get his *brethren* to test their Jewish faith. This led him to say, *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* (James 1:4).

A tested faith, which produces patience (experience), will establish whether that faith is viable and true or whether it is simply empty religion. At this point we must not forget that prior to the church age, the Jews were the custodians of *the faith*. Nevertheless, through various means, that *faith* had become corrupted and apostate. The truth of the gospel, which had been revealed in the sacrificial system, had become so much empty ritual observed out of tradition.

The Jews were not redeemed by the animal sacrifices. Those sacrifices could never take away sin. They were redeemed by faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was represented in the animal sacrifices. It was faith in the promise of God which produced salvation then and now. Therefore if James could get the Jews to examine their faith in the light of the Word of God, it would reveal that their faith was in their vain works and not in the completed work of Christ, thus establishing the truth of James' s statement that *patience* [experience] *would have its perfect work, so that they could be complete and entire, wanting nothing*.

James was not creating a vacuum. After convincing the Jews of their vain faith, he was ready to supply the truth of the gospel which had been revealed in Judaism, but was now hidden because of the apostasy. In Christ the Jews could come to understand that there was no further need of the temple, or the sacrifices, or of the law. With maturity in Christ, the Jews could come to understand that they were complete in Christ, needing nothing. Therefore all of the traditions

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handed down by Rabbinical interpretation could be abandoned in Christ.