

Faith Under Fire – Part 1

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So, also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

(James 1:9-15 (ESV))

We will find, as we continue to study through this Book of James, that while many matters of truth will be considered and explained, “faith” will remain throughout as the heart of the message.

And we’ll also find, that God has cleverly intertwined various warnings into all these many matters and issues that He brings forward, warnings about that ever-present “adversary of our faith”, that of “sin”. Sin!

And sin will surely put our “faith under fire” at every turn, testing it, and trying it with everything sin has within its power, and always with its goal, ever to be, to cause our faith to fail.

A reminder about the power of sin! While we ourselves are ever and always solely accountable for the sins we commit, the devil and his minions truly are ever and always a compelling force, a power supply, within the circumstances of our sin.

We learned that truth right from the beginning of these scriptures, as Adam and Eve were being tempted by their own desires, the devil was right there, with clever words of beguilement, “pressing them onward” towards their failure.

And though Adam and Eve tried their best to come up with some acceptable excuse for their sinful behavior, God would not have it. When it comes to sin folks, we must understand, “we are always accountable and without excuse”.

And that is so much more the case with you and me who are believers living on this side of the “Cross of Christ”. We now have the Holy Spirit. And we now have these scriptures that so very clearly instruct us and encourage us. We truly are without excuse when “sin” and the minions of the devil come calling on us, to “test our faith”.

And again, as I have mentioned several times over the past couple of messages, the “testing of our faith” comes in so many different forms, and it takes place continually throughout our day.

Here, in these words of James, beginning in verse 9, we find just one more example of sin’s attacks, this time, focused on our thought processes, when we look around us and observe the people we encounter. Listen!

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So, also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:9-12 (ESV))

Here in these words, God is instructing us to examine the deep recesses of our thoughts and attitudes. And implicit within these words is a warning about the conclusions that our minds might draw as we consider our own position in life, and also, as we look around us and consider the positions of others, and how their position in life does or does not relate to our own.

Now, later, in chapter 2 there will be a more in-depth consideration of this particular matter, but for the moment, God is bringing to our minds, just how, in the quietness of our own thoughts, sin is an ever-present predator.

And He explains those thought processes more clearly in verses 13-15. Listen!

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Folks, this is how most sin begins, within the recesses of our own minds. A thought hangs around within our mind for too long and after a while it becomes a desire, and then after another while, it becomes a behavior.

We see how that worked with one of the first sins mentioned within these scriptures, with Cain and Abel. Cain seemed to think that his special offering to God should be accepted and appreciated by God. But for God to be glorified by our behavior, we must worship Him in the way that He prescribes. Cain didn't do that, and his offering was rejected. And from there, the meanderings of Cain's mind took him to places he should not have gone. And you can see the words of these verses 14-15 at work in Cain's mind and behavior. . .

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Here, we can how Cain was tempted to "get even" with someone, perhaps God, but especially Abel. But first, being faithful to His word, God did stop Cain and warn him away from his sin. We read how God is faithful to do that in . . .

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV))

And here, God did that! Here, He warned Cain away from his sin. He tells him

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?
⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV))

Folks, God is our loving Father. And He is constantly aware of every thought that come into our minds. And He knows that if wrong thoughts are allowed to linger within our

minds for very long, they can eventually work their way out into sin. Verses 14-15 again
...

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Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully
grown brings forth death.

Sin is so very clever. And the words in Genesis 4 seem to imply that sin almost has a
mind all its own, presenting sin as being like a predatory animal. Those words of
warning to Cain, again.

sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

This is the way sin works folks!

It seems always to be looking for ways to put our "faith under fire", using any of the
circumstances of our daily life to tempt our faith to fail. Here in verses 9-12 we read of
one of those ordinary circumstances. Listen!

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because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its
scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So,
also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man
who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive
the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Think for a moment, what is taking place within our minds, that prompts God to give this
warning. Here, God is bringing our deepest thoughts into consideration. He is having
you and me to consider more than just our having of an adequate amount of money to
meet our daily needs, He is asking us to consider the "hidden attitudes" we have
towards our condition.

And so, may I ask you and me that simple question? "What is our attitude towards the
living conditions and the lifestyle that we find ourselves in today? Are we happy? Are
we satisfied? Are we contented with who we are, and where we are in life?

May I remind us that the Apostle James is a no-nonsense, get-straight-to-the-point kind
of messenger from God. And that is the manner in which these considerations are

being given to us. God intends for you and me to confront our own selves with these kinds of questions.

And so, may we ask again? How do you “feel” about your own personal financial condition right at this moment? Are you satisfied and content with the amount of money you have? What about your house? Is it nice enough? What about your car, your truck, those clothes you are wearing? Is your jewelry real? Is the stone in your ring as big as you would like it to be? Think about it!

And while we are considering our own financial condition, what is our attitude towards the way that other people live as compared to ourselves. When you observe other people, especially those you know to have more money than you, do you envy them? Do you despise them? And what about those “other people”, the ones who obviously have less than you have? Do you think less of them because they live in that “other” part of town?

And while we are asking these questions about ourselves, may we ask another one? What do you think that other people think about you, and about your lifestyle, and about your living conditions? Do you think that they think you are rich or that you are poor, or perhaps somewhere in between?

We can't, of course, know what other people are thinking about us, and you would probably protest strongly that you don't really care what other people think about you. But may I assure you and me, we do! We do! We really do care what other people think about us, about the way we look, our clothes, our hair, our truck.

May I confess to you that while I love the pickup truck that I have right now, I really don't like its color. Why? It's because it is the standard color of the U. S. Forestry Service, one that they cycled out and sold to the public. And because I know that most men know that it is an old Forestry Service truck, that puts a “taint” on my acceptance of the color of the truck. And that is silly of me, and probably to some degree is even sinful. Because that truck runs just great, and it does everything I need it to do.

The truth is, there are a lot of emotions that go into our dealing with the way we live each day, and not only the basics of it, do we have enough food, or adequate clothing

or good transportation. But it has just as much to do with what we “think” and “feel” about our finances, and especially what “we think” that “other people think” about us.

Again, I want you to know that I know that to some degree, we each want to protest that we don’t have such thoughts. And it may be true that some of the things I’ve said are not true about you. But folks, some of them are. That is why God addresses money and the things of lifestyle in so many ways and in so many places in these scriptures. These things really do matter to us. And we ought to address them in the way that God want us to address them.

So, may we look for a moment, at some of the things God does say about this matter. In Matthew 6, when speaking about the basic necessities of life, Jesus said,

31 . . . do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:31-34 (NKJV))

Now, note in those words that it is not just a matter of our “having” enough of the basic necessities of life, it is also the “worrying” that Jesus is concerned about.

One basic truth that prevails is that there are very few people among us that are truly confident and happy and satisfied with their financial condition. And it doesn’t really matter which side of the “cultural divide” a person finds themselves on, wealthy or “dirt poor”. The poor, suffering in their poverty, and wanting desperately to have more, while the rich, somewhat in the same vein, can never seem to have enough. With the bottom line being that most people are, to some degree, “unsatisfied” with the amount of money they have in the bank.

Jesus addressed that intense desire for more money and the things that money can buy, using the word “mammon”. And as you may know, “mammon” is a word that implies not only the idea of “money”, but it also implies all the “high-life” that wealth can provide, the lifestyle, the importance, power and position that comes with having more money. And it also implies the “desire” that resides within a person’s heart, a desire

that is so strong that it becomes a “master” to us, dictating the things that we think and that we do.

And so, in Matthew 6:24, Jesus warns us away from our desire for “mammon”. Listen!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Folks, I know that I must draw our time to a close today. But with these, and other words of warning, God wants you and me to better understand how the “wiles of sin” work within our minds and souls every day.

At every turn, there are new opportunities for sin to bring our “faith under fire”. Here today, with this example of making comparisons between what we have or don’t have in this life. And how all of that compares with what our neighbor has or doesn’t have.

And for most of us, those kinds of thoughts do often flood through our minds and bring our “faith under fire”. And as God warns us here in this Book of James, “sin” has its beginnings, right here, within the recesses of our minds. A simple thought that hangs around within our mind for too long. And when left unattended, that thought will become a desire, and then, without our even realizing it’s taking place, it becomes a behavior, a wrong behavior. Sin!

As for these kinds of thoughts spoken about today, God encourages us with these words from James 1:12 (ESV)

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

May I close with a special quote from the book “Future Grace”, by John Piper! It is particularly applicable to the intent of these scriptures. The quote is this, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him”.

Amen! Let’s pray.