

Wisdom! Proverbs personifies it and we see it by faith embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ. James coaches the saints to ask it of God who loves to have us ask and generously gives it. The only qualification given for asking is that we ask in unwavering faith. Be we can't generate that in ourselves any more than we can generate wisdom. Saving faith is the gift of God, generously given without asking. Yet we see the earnest "end of his rope" appeal of a father desiring that Jesus heal his son's illness. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Mark 9:24. Both the faith and healing were cheerfully granted. Peter wavered walking to the Lord upon the waves and sinking cried out "Lord, save me." That cry was earnest and decisive. Double mindedness afflicts all of us from time to time. The flesh competes with the Spirit for dominance in our walk, Galatians 5:16-25, Colossians 3:5-10. James calls it like it is. When under the domination of the flesh we cannot please God, Romans 8:8. This fact leads us to the fate common to all, death. Wealthy or poor, famous or unknown, all die. The brother of low degree can rejoice, even though not wealthy or endued with natural intelligence, talents and skills. Such things may lead to a person's exaltation by others or their domination of others but they have no eternal blessing in simply possessing them. The lowly, humble believer is lifted by Christ, the rich is humbled by Christ, both entering the Kingdom and the glory on the same level in the end. Both face the hot sun of trials and temptations daily and fade as a flower in the heat, whether a little insignificant wild flower or magnificent lovely lily. But there is blessing and reward at the end for those who endure when tried by the hot sun of temptation.

Note: There may be a veiled reference here to the Israeli hope for the Sun of Righteousness rising in judgement upon their enemies and establishing His everlasting Kingdom, Malachi 4:2. The Rapture was not necessarily a well established hope in the early days of the church. Those future Jewish saints enduring the seven years of the Tribulation after the Rapture will find great comfort and encouragement in this letter of James to them

The **crown of life**. What is that? Here it is a crown of recognition (*stephanos*) like the Olympic gold, not a royal diadem worn by a ruler. It speaks of eternal life received by each believer on the basis of faith, John 3:16. The crown of life is not said here to have been earned by one's endurance. It is simply said to be received upon completion of his course of endurance here on earth. The Lord has promised it to them that **love Him**, all believers. All run, all are rewarded. Being rewarded according to our works, our capacity for enjoying that crown of life, is formed by our life down here. Each one's vessel will be full and rejoicing then but capacities of each are of our own making.

Revelation 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

The **crown of life** is specifically named in one other place as a special incentive to those enduring persecution and martyrdom in the early history of the Church prophesied in the letter of the Lord to Smyrna. How precious eternal life is to those who actually lay down their lives for the name of Christ.

Other recognition crowns are named in scripture as ours. Some conditional, by Christ's work in and through us, some by virtue of Christ's work for us on the cross. All are crowns of success, victory, recognition, award, or reward except one. In that horrible act of mockery and torture, a crown of thorns was pushed down upon the head of the Lord Jesus.

John 19:5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

Paul touchingly speaks of the saints the assembly in two separate locations in Macedonia as his glory and crown of rejoicing.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

1Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

So we will cast our crowns before Him in glory, Revelation 4:10.

For more on the race (and combat) and the prize read in context:

1Corinthians 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 1Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

2Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

1Peter 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Note: A **diadem**, the crown of authority and power, is mentioned only three times in the New Testament, all in The Revelation. They are all future and to be worn by three different individuals, the great red Dragon, 12:3; the Beast rising out of the sea, 13:1; and the King of Kings, 19:12.

But what about trials that result in failure and sin?

Are they not temptations God puts before us to see if we are faithful? Far be the thought. Human reasoning would have it that way of course. That is the common thinking among mankind. The common alternative opinion is the devil serves up temptations which we cannot resist. The devil may indeed be allowed by God to test us. Examples of this are Job and the Lord Jesus Himself in the wilderness. While God permitted Satan to strip Job of his wealth and later again of his family, He didn't initiate Satan's actions. And Job neither sinned to deserve these disasters nor did he sin as a result of them. But they exposed a hidden root of personal pride which he repented of when made clear to him.

Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tried, not to see if He would fail or sin but to show that He wouldn't. There is a difference! A profound difference. In our innate pride we seek to put the blame for our sinfulness upon others, even God. There is nothing in God that in the slightest way has any thing to do with evil. It is the extreme opposite of what and who He is. He is absolutely Holy. Love requires that He be Holy. In our daily walk all encounter tempting situations. God doesn't put them there. They wouldn't tempt Him. Jesus suffered being tempted.

Hebrews 2:18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (sin apart). 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The natural man enjoys being drawn away by his own lust. In our reasoning then we might think that Christ suffered, being tempted, because it was so hard to resist. But in Him is no sin.

1John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

Therefore there was nothing in Him that could or would

respond to temptation. On the contrary it is totally and absolutely repulsive to Him, just as it is to God the Father. He suffered because of being exposed to what is utterly horrid, repugnant, disgusting, loathsome, nauseating, detestable, odious to Him. And He suffered because of the insult implied in the trial that He might somehow respond to it. No! He knew no sin, 2Corinthians 5:21.

But James presents the birthing of death (a paradox) in contrast to the birthing of a saint. It begins with lust, simply a longing dissatisfaction in life. In the sinner: **Lust > Enticement > Conception > Sin > Death**. This in each of us! Unless God had intervened we were all Lost! But He did intervene. And He is still. He transforms sinners to saints, not by any of our own will or doing, but of HIS OWN WILL He begat us. Praise His Name! **God > Word of truth > begets us > firstfruits of His creatures**. We are not only begotten of God but are being counted as firstfruits (foremost) of His creatures. What grace!

A free gift of life is coming down from above, from the Father of Lights, from God Himself the Father of all. Note how James characterizes Him as the Father of lights with whom there is no shadow of turning. The Earth revolves and is always half in the light half in the dark. The Moon goes monthly from phase to phase, new to waxing quarter, to full, to waning quarter to dark. The planets vary in brightness depending upon their position as they revolve around the sun and rotate on their axes. Some days are bright others dark and cloudy, but God is unchanging. He in His Love is Giver. He is the source of every good gift and every perfect gift, whether temporal or spiritual, upon Jew or Gentile, saved or unsaved. This is not "church truth." That is Paul's contribution. This is broader. This is God truth. Christian truth. It encompasses all other New Testament truth. Listen up. Take it in. Love it. Live it.

By Ron Canner, July 16, 2008