

Perfect and Complete (James 1:22-25)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/31/2014)

Introduction

1. The apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos for his faith in Christ. He wrote the book of Revelation, introducing it with these words: “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9).
Three words demand our attention: (1) Tribulation, (2) Kingdom, (3) Patient endurance
2. These words form the theme of the Christian life, a life that James addresses in the first chapter of his epistle.
 - a. Testing (tribulation) is the *ground* of spiritual development—a *condition* deemed necessary for spiritual growth.
 - b. Hope (kingdom) is the driving *motivational* impetus of spiritual growth.
 - c. Steadfastness (patient endurance) is the proper *behavior or action* necessary to spiritual growth.
3. Salvation is a process. Initially, salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the behalf of sinners with no contribution on their part.
 - a. Nevertheless, salvation requires change wrought by grace through “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5).
 - b. Obedient faith is a gift of grace, but it is not static.
 - c. Obedient faith requires *knowing* the purpose of God and *understanding* how He achieves that purpose; hence, *wisdom* comes (v. 5), then *acting* on that wisdom in obedience (v. 22).
4. We close the first chapter by summarizing James’s instruction in fulfilling the charge: “*Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*” (v. 4).
 - a. We need to define and examine steadfastness again.
 - b. We need to examine our progress in His purpose.
 - c. If we don’t find that progress, what must we do to improve our conformity to His purpose for us? “*So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin*” (4:17).

I. Steadfastness

1. Steadfastness (*hupomone*) simply means to “stay and remain,” to hold the course, to stand fast and not move.
 - a. *Testing* produces steadfastness but not as a primary cause.
 - 1) Testing is like the soil in which seed is planted, providing conditions necessary for the seed to grow and be fruitful.
 - 2) For the growth and fruitfulness to take place, the seed must “stay and remain” in the soil.
 - b. *Testing* provides the condition in which grace enables steadfastness through the obedience of faith. “*And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root [grace]; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. . . . As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience [steadfastness]*” (Luke 8:13, 15).

2. The necessity of the grace of steadfastness is clearly evident in Scripture.
 - a. *“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 1:12)
 - b. Those who do not “stay and remain” under the trial of faith will not be saved: *“By your endurance you will gain your lives”* (Luke 21:19).
3. The mark of steadfastness is “doing”: *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (James 1: 22).
 - a. Our works will be judged at the coming of Christ: *“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life”* (Rom. 2:6, 7).
 - b. Sadly, many self-deceived people who think they are saved will discover they have not “stayed and remained” in the obedience of faith.
4. Steadfastness is illustrated in Scripture by three things in 2 Tim. 2:1-7: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer.

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”

II. How Am I Doing?

1. Christians are being persecuted everywhere, and every indication is that it is an imminent threat in this country.
 - a. We look at these large issues and pray that we may be prepared to face them when they come.
 - b. Jesus taught, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33)

“This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:14-19).
2. The not-so-apparent-but-real indicators of the grace of steadfastness (or lack of it) show up, not in dangerous times, but in the areas of life affected by stubborn pride and willfulness.

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5, 6).

 - a. What about your prayer life—alone and with the church? *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thess. 5:17). *“So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church”* (Acts 12:5).
 - b. What about time spent in the Word of God? *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15).

- c. What about your service to saints of God? *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Gal. 6:2, 3). “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer” (2 Corinthians 1:6).*
- d. What about reconciliation and harmony in the church? *“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23).*

III. What Must We Do?

1. James is very specific about what it takes for believers to exercise the grace of steadfastness: *“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).*
2. We must carefully examine our hearts in the light of Scripture and under the eye of the Spirit, being ready to act on whatever He reveals. *“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19-21).*
“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (4:17).