

Where Does Temptation Come From?

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



The writer of the Epistle or Letter of James is traditionally identified as James, the "brother" or relative of the Lord, who was the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

James 1: 1-18 he addresses his words to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." This phrase might appear to refer specifically to the people of Israel, the Jews who are "dispersed" and living in various areas of the world.

But James describes himself as a "servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." So the phrase he uses is really a description of the Church, which is the new Israel, dispersed in a pagan society. Christians are pilgrims and sojourners, whose true home is not in this world. The First Letter of Peter similarly addresses members of the Church as "the exiles of the Dispersion" (1:1.1)

In the next verse of his letter, James acknowledges that Christians will face trials. These should be counted as "all joy" because they test faith, and those who are steadfast in the test will come to be "perfect and complete" as followers of Christ.

James then assures his readers that God will provide the wisdom needed to withstand those trials to anyone who asks. All that's required of us is that we ask with faith that He is able and willing to provide what we need. If we ask while doubting all the while that He can really help us (James calls this being "double-minded") we can't expect to receive any real help; we are like a wave of the sea "driven and tossed by the wind." We need to make a solid commitment to God, and then act with unwavering faith in Him.

Nobody living in the fallen world and trying to follow Jesus Christ will be free from temptation. James acknowledges this, but he cautions that nobody should ever, in the midst of temptation, say that the temptation comes from God. God does not tempt anyone.

The source of our temptations, James says, is our own desires, misdirected and allowed by us to lure us into places we should not go. God has given us desires and appetites, and they can either be used in a healthy way or a destructive way. The choice is ours and so is the responsibility.

If temptation doesn't come from God, what does come from Him? Verse 17a contains the answer in words that we say as part of the Divine Liturgy: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."

The next part of that verse tells us that in God "there is no variation or shadow due to change." This God who calls us to be constant is constant Himself; we can rely forever on that. He has "brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures." That is a manifestation of His love for us—a love we can also rely on forever.