

James

Temptation

July 24, 2011

I. Introduction

A. **James 1:12-18** . . . Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord 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 by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. [14] But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. [16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [17] Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. [18] In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

B. Prayer

II. Temptation – It's source and result

A. **James 1:13a** . . . Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God. . . ."

1. In order to keep this verse within the context of what James has been saying, remember that he started in **verse 2** talking about Christians facing trials, tribulations, suffering, testing, and temptations. **Verse 13** is simply a part of the overall message James has been writing about.
2. The first important truth to grasp here is that we are being tempted when we are being enticed, or allured, or attracted, or in some way influenced toward selfishness, sin, and rebellion against God. And we can be tempted to sin by trials, tribulations, suffering, or outright acts of temptation.
3. The second thing I want you to notice is that there would be no reason to bring this matter of blaming up if it were not a problem among God's people. In fact, I don't think any of us – when we are being truly honest – would disagree that we humans seem to be predisposed towards excusing our behavior by putting the blame elsewhere. In fact, we are so weak when it comes to blaming others for our bad behavior that not blaming seems to be the exception, even among us Christians.

- a. Now this is not a new problem. The inclination for blaming began way back in the Garden of Eden. Listen as I read **Genesis 3:8-13** ... They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. [9] Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" [10] He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." [11] And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" [12] **The man said**, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." [13] Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And **the woman said**, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
- b. So we see that from our first parents down through today, our nature is bursting with this propensity to blame someone or something other than ourselves for our bad behavior. However, because we are Christians, this propensity for blaming should awaken at least two specific responses from us.
 - (1) **First**, we should not be surprised when people try to maneuver their way out from under personal responsibility for their behavior by claiming someone other than themselves is the reason for what they have done.
 - (2) **Second**, those of us who are born again, who have the nature of God implanted in us, and who are being conformed to the image of Jesus – we should do whatever it takes to put to death this powerful tendency to blame others for doing what we know is wrong or for failing to do what we know is right. And of course, instead of blaming, we should quickly take responsibility for any wrong doing or failure to love as we ought and to live as God would have us live.
- 4. The third thing I want you to see here in the first half of **James 1:13** is that blaming God is the blamer's supreme excuse. In fact, it is the best excuse any of us can come up with, because there is no one beyond God to blame. In other words, God is the ultimate excuse. If we can get ourselves and others to believe He is at fault for our bad behavior, then we can no longer be held responsible for the wrong we have done. And if we are no longer responsible, then we have absolutely no fault at all for having done what we know is wrong or for having failed to do what we know is right.

B. **James 1:13b** . . . *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God,* for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

1. To believe that God cannot be tempted by evil, we must believe that God is perfectly and completely good – as stated by John when he said: “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (**I John 1:5**).
 - a. When we say that there is no darkness in God, we are saying that God is absolutely good. God is entirely holy. God is perfectly righteous. God is totally just. God is completely pure. God is unfailingly loving. Or to say the same thing from the negative side, God has NO evil desires, no unjust thoughts, no unkind ways, no selfishness, no angry impatience, no interest in returning evil for evil, and no thought at all of leading us into sin. Why? Because “in Him there is no darkness at all.”
 - b. Therefore, God always and only seeks and promotes our good! Whatever He does or allows is always within the boundaries of love and holiness. He never seeks our harm or has any involvement in turning us from godliness to ungodliness, or from submission to rebellion, or from light to darkness. In fact, Paul writes that even: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (**II Timothy 2:13**).
2. Of course, most unbelievers, and sadly, even some of us Christians don’t believe this – and that is why we are prone to blame God for our ungodly responses to trials, tribulations, suffering, temptations, difficult people, and our own evil thoughts and fleshly longings that rise up within us to lead us astray.
 - a. However, in spite of what we are inclined to do, I want to urge all of us to run away as fast as we can from any unholy or demeaning or low view of God.
 - b. May we, as His children, hold God in such high esteem that we would never utter the words: “How could a good God allow that to happen to me? And if He hadn’t, I wouldn’t have _____.”
 - c. The point here is this, we are turning against God when we begin blaming Him for our bad behavior. In other words, blaming God is not just a matter of reaching for the supreme excuse, it is an attack on God’s character that implies He is up to no good.
3. And so we come back to James words here in the second half of **verse 13**: “God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt

anyone.” This is the truth we want to cling to and believe completely so that we see and think of God as He is and as we ought.

C. **James 1:14** . . . But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

1. The first thing I want to make clear here is that even though Satan is not mentioned as a tempter, it does not mean that all temptation comes from within us. The scriptures tell us that Satan is a deceiver, a liar, a roaring lion, and at times, an angel of light who continues to work hard to turn us against God. So though this verse puts the blame squarely on us for temptation to sin, there are other passages that make it clear the devil is also at work trying to ensnare us and pull us into doing what we know is wrong.
2. The second important point here is that in spite of the devil’s part in temptation, he is not the cause of all temptation. Quite often, temptation arises from within us as a result of our own sinful, selfish, fleshly desires, and ungodly thoughts, irrational fears, uncontrolled passions, and unrestrained feelings. And even when temptation does come from outside us, we aid it and lend it strength by the ungodly desires and unholy thinking we allow to go unchecked within us.
 - a. Therefore, when we are being attacked by some temptation, or after having sinned and looking back at what we have done, we ought to look within ourselves first, rather than looking at those outside ourselves as if someone else is to blame for our wrong behavior.
 - b. **Interesting Side Note:** this exhortation to look at ourselves first – especially in relation to those things where we are prone to put the blame elsewhere – appears again in **James 4:1** . . . What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?
3. So why is it important to look within ourselves first when we are struggling with a particular temptation, or when we look back and see that we have done what we know is wrong ,or have failed to do what we know is right?
 - a. It is by looking within – in relation to a specific temptation or sin – that we begin to see the evil desires that we harbor within and how easily we turn those desires loose to influence our thinking, choices, and behavior in that area of temptation. If we cannot see the enemy, we will not be able to fight the enemy. And if we do not want to see the enemy, we won’t.

- b. Therefore, self-examination is vital if we are going to go to war against, and come to hate, and put to death those unholy passions that we yet crave and even treasure above God himself.
- 4. Now it is possible you may think you have no unholy desires within you. If so, I urge you to do two things:
 - a. **First**, pray this prayer daily for one year: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; [24] And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23-24).
 - b. **Second**, ask those nearest and dearest to you to tell you what they think is inside you in relation to ungodly desires and unholy thinking.
- 5. I just gave you one reason why it is important to look within ourselves first when we are struggling with a particular temptation, or when we look back and see that we have done what we know is wrong, or have failed to do what we know is right. Now let me give you two more.
 - a. **First**, every unholy desire that is allowed to live within us, even the weak ones, war against our spiritual life and the work God wants to do in making us new creations in Christ Jesus.
 - (1) As Paul said to the Galatians: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. [17] For **the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit**, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (**Galatians 5:16-17**).
 - (2) Though this war can seem minor some days, it is vital that we remain vigilant day by day, hour by hour, and even moment by moment, because it does not take much for a small, seemingly insignificant skirmish to turn into a major war that seems overwhelming.
 - b. **Second**, in almost all cases, the only power external temptations have is when they can get their hooks into one of our felt-needs or sinful desires or foolish fears. When there is no lust within to be enticed, outward temptations don’t have the same power to gain a foothold in us.
- 6. My final thought on **James 1:14** is this. We do not all lust after the same things. Some of us lust for food, some for power, some for fame, some for riches, some for more possessions, some for financial security, some for unending youth, some for acceptance and approval, and some

for getting even – just to name a few lusts that reside within us. The point is, though we all have internal lusts warring to gain control and fighting to be gratified, we are not all tempted by the same things.

- a. So fight the urge to measure your inward goodness by the badness of others.
- b. And rather than looking down on others for the fleshly lusts they war against, look at yourself and deal with the ungodly desires that you have allowed to go unchecked within yourself.

D. **James 1:15** . . . Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

1. When we are starving, spoiled food from the garbage bin looks good enough to eat. When we are really thirsty, sea water, or even dirty, polluted water tempts us to drink. Yet the end of such risky eating and drinking can be sickness, and even death.
2. So it is with sin – only more so! When we follow our sinful desires, we most often pass through a time of pleasing gratification, or wonderful feelings of happiness, or a sense of well-being that satisfies or soothes some felt-need. Yet such gratifying feelings do not last, and they do not come without a price – and a rather steep price at that.
 - a. The scripture says that the wages of sin is death, not life, happiness, and prosperity.
 - b. God says it this way in **Galatians 6:7-8** . . . “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”
3. Now it is true that death rarely comes quickly to those who sin. In fact, prosperity and personal happiness and fleshly gratification may last for years – at least for some. But there is no stopping the coming destruction of sin any more than there is a way to stop the coming of old age and eventual death. When our sinful desires engage our will and we choose the path of sin, we are choosing the path that leads to death.
4. This is why only our flesh, the world, and the devil are invested in tempting us to sin.
 - a. Our flesh want pleasure and comfort and ease and whatever other gratifying things it can accumulate.

- b. The world is looking for support as it goes merrily on its way down the broad path to doom.
- c. And the devil is out to destroy us – it is as simple as that.

III. Conclusion

- A. Which brings us to the truth that is expressed in **James 1:16-17** . . . Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [17] Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
 - 1. God is perfectly good, and because He is perfectly good, He will have no part of temptation to evil. He will test you. He will try you. He will allow some bad things to happen to you. But He will never do anything to you or for you that will put you on the downward slide to destruction.
 - 2. You see, God created you to live. He wants you to live, and so we see from **verse 12** that it is God who gives the crown of life.
 - 3. It is the devil who wants to harm you in any and every way he can. Jesus spoke of the contrast between himself and the devil in **John 10:9-10** . . . I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. [10] The **thief** comes only to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
- B. May we live as those who believe this portion of scripture – examining ourselves before God to see whatever evil desires remain within us. Should we find anything that needs to go, may we put it out quickly and as completely as possible. And may we make every effort, by God's grace and empowerment, to replace all that gets thrown out with the mind and likeness of Christ.