

TEMPTATION: JAMES 1:13-15

SERMON TEXT JAMES 1:13-15

James 1:[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. (ESV)

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TEMPTATION: WHAT IS IT?

DEFINITION

The spiritual danger of temptation is that we will fall into sin, and by doing so, we will lose our witness for Christ and do harm to ourselves, our loved ones, and the body of Christ.

If I asked you what it feels like to experience temptation, you could probably describe it or at least tell me about specific instances of temptation in your life. But if I asked you to define temptation, that might be challenging. So let us define temptation:

TEMPTATION IS AN ENTICEMENT TO SIN AND EVIL.

Now this is not exactly the same thing as saying you were tempted to have a late-night snack, or you were tempted to sleep in on a Saturday instead of waking up early to exercise. We are using the word ‘temptation,’ not in a popular context, but in a biblical context.

A good example of this is found in Luke chapter 4, where Satan blatantly entices Jesus to sin. Jesus has fasted for 40 days and Satan comes and tempts Jesus three separate times. In the second temptation Luke records the following, in Luke 4:5-8:

Luke 4:[5] And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, [6] and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. [7] If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

TEMPTATION DOES NOT COME FROM GOD.

Because temptation is an enticement to sin, it should come as no surprise that we are instructed (in James 1:13) *not* to blame God when we are tempted.

- God is perfect in His divine nature and cannot be tempted [*Although Jesus, in human form, voluntarily subjected himself to temptation, he still could not have sinned.*]
- And as such, God does not entice anyone to do evil.
- Why, then, does James warn us against blaming God when we are tempted?

The short answer is that we want to blame someone other than ourselves for our sin.

- Look at Genesis 3:12-13...

Genesis 3:[12] The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” [13] Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

- Adam blames God for creating Eve (“the woman YOU gave to be with me”), and Adam also blames Eve. Then Eve blames Satan.
- The fact is that we sometimes want to blame God –
 - “God, if you wouldn’t have done..”
 - “God, if would’ve come through...”
 - “God, if only you would have...”
- But God is not the tempter.
- God will TEST you, but he will not TEMPT you.

Look now at the beginning of James chapter 1.

*James 1:[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet **trials** of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

- One thing that must be discussed is the difference between **trials** and **temptations**.
- You might not know that the word for ‘trials’ in James 1:2 and the word for ‘tempt’ in James 1:13 are, in fact, the same word in the Greek.
- How do we reconcile this?
 - Well, we know that God tests & builds our faith through trials.
 - But make no mistake: every trial contains temptation.
 - Every time we experience a trial, there is a temptation to unbelief; there is a temptation to alleviate suffering through the sinful flesh, whether it be overeating, overspending, sexual immorality, or being short-tempered and harsh with your words, to name a few.

- But do these come from God? ABSOLUTELY NOT.
- God's motive in trials is not to entice the believer to sin. On the contrary, God's desire is to encourage the believer to faithful perseverance resulting in spiritual completeness.
- So we can say that God may put you through a trial, but He will never tempt you to sin.

So where, then, does temptation come from?

TEMPTATION COMES FROM BOTH SATAN AND MY SINFUL DESIRES.

SATAN

- In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, Paul refers to Satan as the 'tempter'
- In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called 'the accuser of the brethren'
- In John 8:44, Jesus calls Satan 'the father of lies.'
- 1 Peter 5:8 says that, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."
- We also know that Satan tempted both Eve in the garden and Jesus in the wilderness.

However, Satan is not omnipresent as God is, meaning that he cannot be everywhere at the same time. When you are tempted, therefore, it is unlikely that you are being tempted by Satan directly. Even so, because the earth and its inhabitants are presently under the curse of sin, and because Satan is "the prince of the power of the air," we must conclude that Satan plays a role in all human temptation.

But whatever role Satan plays in tempting us, it is most often the case that Satan will simply seize upon our natural desires. Why do we say this?

MY SINFUL DESIRES

- Look now at James 1:14...

James 1 [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

- Temptation comes from within my own heart and mind.
- It turns out that, as Jeremiah 17:9 claims, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick..."
- This is why Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:11 to "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." Satan, the tempter, tries to exploit areas of weakness within our hearts and minds.
- Before we can overcome temptation, we must be honest and biblical about where it comes from. And this is especially challenging because the culture we live in wants to tell you that you are not to blame; that you are not accountable.

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WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

PROCESS

THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION HAS A REPEATED LIFE CYCLE.

THE FIRST STAGE OF TEMPTATION IS COURTSHIP

- Look again at James 1:14...

James 1 [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

- When a child of God lets their spiritual guard down, we become vulnerable to the schemes of the enemy.
- This is when the enemy will seize upon our natural desires; desires that may be otherwise healthy.
- Then much like a large mouth bass, we swim toward the lure, unaware of the deadly hook.

THE SECOND STAGE OF TEMPTATION IS CONCEPTION

- Look now at the first half of James 1:15...

James 1 [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin...

- This conception stage of temptation is a decision in the heart; a decision in the mind.
- Recall the story of David and Bathsheba. There was moment before David sent for Bathsheba; a moment in which David said in his heart, ‘I must have her.’ This is the moment of desire conceiving.
- Remember this: Before the hands commit, the heart has already conceived.

THE THIRD STAGE OF TEMPTATION IS BIRTH

James 1 [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin...

- We have been lured (or courted) by own desires.
- Desire has conceived. In other words, I have decided in my heart to act upon my desire.
- And now, because I have already given in to desire, I am almost certainly going to sin.
- The BIRTH stage of temptation is the actual committing of the sin that I have already purposed to do in my heart.

THE FINAL STAGE OF TEMPTATION IS DEATH

James 1 [15] ...and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

- James does not elaborate on what kind of death he means here; but we know from Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death.”
- So James is at least saying that “sin leads progressively from physical death to spiritual death to eternal death.”¹

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *James, Epistle of John, Peter, & John: New Testament Commentary* (Baker Academic), page 50

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HOW CAN I OVERCOME IT?

SOLUTION

The New Testament is filled with strategies for fighting temptation and living victoriously over sin in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 12:1-2 gives us a blueprint for spiritual renewal and transformation.
- In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God to withstand the schemes of the devil.
- Colossians 3 tells us to set our minds on things above and gives us an exhaustive list of what to do and what not to do as a Christian.

But for our purposes today, we will remain in James chapter 1. Look now at verses 21–25.

James 1:[21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] 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.

PURGE FROM YOUR LIFE WHAT DOES NOT BELONG (VERSE 21A)

- In the first half of verse 21, there is a purging of what does not belong (“filthiness and rampant wickedness”)
- Too many believers are clinging to sin, bottom line...too many refuse to even position themselves for God to do a spiritual renovation!!
- It is impossible to walk in the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit while simultaneously refusing to deal with the sin in your life.
- Overcoming temptation and refusing to deal with your sin are incompatible; irreconcilable.
- Too many have returned to their old way of life and have become entangled in sin. But Paul tells us in Ephesians 4...

[22] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD (VERSE 21B)

- In the second half of verse 21, there is a receiving of God’s Word; not with pride or arrogance, but with meekness.
- Just as you stand powerless in the face of temptation if you refuse to deal with your sin, so also you have no chance of consistently overcoming temptation if you neglect God’s Word.

BE A DOER OF THE WORD, LEST YOU FORGET WHO YOU REALLY ARE (VERSES 23–25)

- Look now at James 1, verses 22–25...

[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

- Listen to the Word of the Lord, brothers & sisters – **You must** put your faith into action or **you will** forget who you are in Christ Jesus, and **you will** be weak when you are tempted.
- If we are to overcome temptation, we must be doers of the Word.
- Verse 25, and we close...

[25] 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.

INVITATION

To the Christian...

- By the truth of God's Word, by the mercy of Christ Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, will you be renewed today?
- There are some of you today who have been struggling with sin for so long.
- Will you respond to Holy Spirit of God's work in your heart today?
- Will you put a stop to being a hearer of the Word only?
- Will you today be a doer of the Word?

To the person who is not a Christian...

- You actually don't have the Holy Spirit of God within you.
- You actually can't, in a biblical sense, overcome temptation.
- You can't put on the new self because all you've known is the old self.
- But all of that can change right here, right now.
- Jesus died the death that you deserved on a cruel Roman cross so that you don't have to.
- Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live."
- Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me will not perish, but have everlasting life."
- You can put your faith in Jesus today. You can give your life to Jesus today.