

How To Face Temptation

James 1:13-18

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In James 1:13-18, James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” It means that God doesn’t change. It’s called “the immutability of God.” Verse 18, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” or “creation.”

If we’re going to grow in our Christian walk in life, there are two important things that we must learn. We must learn how to face trials or testings, and we must learn how to triumph in the face of temptation. The Christian life involves trials and temptations.

Verse 2 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” Then in verse 13 of our text: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God.’” The two are closely related—trials and temptations. In verses 2-12, the subject matter was testings or trials. They are allowed by God to test our faith, to prove that our faith is real and genuine. There are two areas that prove your faith is real: how you handle trials and how you handle temptations. Genuine faith works in the face of trials and temptations.

Trials are for our good and for God’s glory. They are allowed to strengthen our faith and bring glory to God. But sometimes Satan will try to use our trials to tempt us to doubt God’s goodness, to disobey God and to turn away from God. Many times a trial becomes a temptation to sin. So trials are allowed by God to strengthen our faith, for our good and for His glory. But temptation comes from our own, sinful lusts and draws us off God’s path; it’s for our worse. Someone said, “God will test us to bring out our worth; Satan tempts us to bring out our worst.”

We have to be careful when we’re facing trials and temptations that we don’t disobey God. When we were instructed by Jesus how to pray, He gave us the Lord’s Prayer—which is really the disciples’ prayer—and He said, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” The reason we pray that prayer is because sometimes when we are tried and tested, it becomes a temptation, and we don’t want to disobey God or sin against the Word of the Lord.

In our text, we will learn how to face temptations. There are three things we need to remember. This is simple, based on the text, but is not exhaustive. This is a classic text on temptation. It’s one of many. The first thing we need to remember is the source of temptation, verses 13-14. “Let no one say when...”—notice it’s “when” and not “if”—“...he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”

Back in verse 2, James says that when we are tested, we are to have a joyful attitude. Now in verse 13, when we are tempted, “Let no one say...‘I am tempted by God.’”

1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful...”—here’s a promise—“...who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” That’s a precious promise from God’s Word; that God will not allow you to be tempted above your ability to resist the temptation and be able to bear up under it.

Who is responsible when temptation comes to us? Notice that it’s not God, verse 13. Temptation does not come from God. “Let no one say when he is tempted...”—this is a solicitation to do evil—“...‘I am tempted by God.’” Why does James say this? The reason is because we are so prone to push the blame and responsibility on others, rather than taking responsibility ourselves. We love to play the blame game. We like to blame our parents. We say, “I grew up in a dysfunctional family; it’s my parents fault. They spanked me too much, they didn’t spank me enough or they didn’t give me a loving home.” Or we’ll blame our environment, our job or our spouse.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, we see the first, original “pass-the-buck.” When God asked Adam if he ate the fruit that God had forbidden, Adam said to God. “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” How many guys blame their wives for their problems? “If you would just learn to cook,” and on and on. Then Eve said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” She said, “The devil made me do it.” She got that from the great theologian, Flip Wilson. So we like to pass the buck.

The first step in gaining victory over temptation is admitting that it’s caused by your own, sinful lust, your own desires. Don’t blame God for your problems, and don’t blame other people for your problems. Take responsibility for your own sin. We love to play the blame game. Or we say, “God made me like this” or “God let it happen” or “Why did You let this happen, God!” We like to ultimately blame God. Even Adam blamed God for giving him his wife. He said, “You gave her to me. It was just You, me and the animals. Everything was going fine. But then I took a nap, woke up and I was married.” So we need to be careful and realize where temptation comes from.

I heard of a little boy in Sunday school who heard the story of Adam being put to sleep by God, He took from Adam’s rib to make the woman, his wife, and brought her to the man. Then that afternoon, the little boy was riding in the car with his mommy and had a side ache. He said, “Mommy, mommy, I think I’m having a wife!”

Now there are three reasons why temptation does not come from God, in verse 13. “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” In the Greek—and even in the English—it is very emphatic or for emphasis. In the Bible the first word in the sentence is usually for emphasis. So the focus is on God here. Why can’t God be tempted and doesn’t tempt anyone? First, because God is holy. That literally means that God is unversed in evil,

being perfectly holy and righteous. Second, He doesn't tempt anyone else to do evil. Again, it's emphatic. He, Himself, tempts no man.

So where does temptation come from? Verse 14, it comes from our own lusts or desires. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." We have found the enemy, and the enemy is us. It's our own, sinful lusts or passions.

And you need to understand that the Bible teaches that when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they acted as federal heads to the entire, human race. Everyone born after Adam and Eve is born with a sinful nature or capacity. We call it "the fallen nature." It's also sometimes called "the flesh." It's talking about our sin nature or sin capacity; that we are bent on rebellion against God. We are sinners. So it's our own lusts or desires which draw us off the path of God to disobey Him. Evil desires are our own lusts. Our sinful nature is the reason why we can be tempted.

There is no mention of the devil in this passage on temptation. James is talking about being tempted by our own lusts, and the devil isn't even in the picture. You can sin perfectly fine without the devil. There are three enemies of the Christian: the world; the flesh, which is our sinful nature; and the devil. The devil is not mentioned in this text. First, "the world" is the Greek word "cosmos," which means the evil world system apart from God. John describes all that is in the world: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." That's your passions, your possessions and your pride. That's the temptation of the world. Secondly, we have the flesh, which is our sinful, Adamic nature, our own lustful desires. Thirdly, there is the devil. And the devil uses the world and the flesh to lure us off God's path by our own desires.

We must take responsibility. In Matthew 15:19, Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." That's Jesus Christ describing the heart of fallen humanity. In Jeremiah 17:9, it says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

We hear so much in our culture today about believing in yourself, follow your heart, do what you know is right. But we don't know what's right, because we're fallen and sinful. We're rebelling against God. So it's our own, sinful nature that causes us to disobey God.

The second thing to remember when facing temptation is to remember temptation's course. First you remember its source; take responsibility—"I'm to blame. I'm a sinner. It's my desires." And remember temptation's course, verses 14-15. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires..."—that's the source—"...and enticed." "Enticed" means "to set as bait." "Then, when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Notice where sin will take you—death.

James give us three steps in temptation's course. Number one is desire. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." The word "desires" or "lust" is a neutral word. We most often use it to mean sinful desires. But it just means "desire." So in

the context, it could be a good desire, like longing for God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God." I desire God in my life.

Or you can have an evil desire. God gives us desires, and they are not intrinsically evil in themselves, unless they are used in a way that is disobedient to God's Word. He gives us a desire, and when we disobey Him and we yield to our own desires, we step out of the will of God. So when we talk about sin in this text, it's the Greek word "harmatia." It means "to disobey or step over God's commandments." So the course starts with desire.

In verse 14, the words "drawn away" is a fishing term. It means "to lure away." And the word "entice" in this verse means "to set the bait." Luring off the path of obedience is actually caused by my own desires, and then the bait is set for my own, sinful heart. A. Key Robertson said, "Snared by one's own bait."

I'm not a fisherman. I've only fished a few times in my life. Every time I go fishing, I never catch a fish. The last time I went fishing, a friend said, "Let's go out to San Clemente Island on my boat, and we'll go fishing." I said, "Great!" We got on the boat and went out toward the island. I got my pole out, put the bait on the line and put it in the water, and the fish-and-game patrol showed up. They asked for my license. I took out my driver's license and gave it to them. They said, "No, no! Your fishing license!" I didn't know you had to get a fishing license. So I got a big, fat fine for fishing and didn't even catch a fish. That's the last time I go fishing! If you go fishing, get a fishing license.

But the word here for our own "desires" is to be drawn away, to lure. And "entice" means "to set the bait." So we're snared by one's own bait.

Then in verse 15, we see the second step in temptation, which is our disobedience. "Then, when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin." So when we seize the lure, we take the bait and we have actually sinned and disobeyed God. The picture here is of conception and childbirth. So you go from fishing to childbearing. There is conception in the womb, the child grows, the child is born, but in this case, the child is stillborn. Sin brings forth death. "The wages of sin is death." It leads to death.

But it is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus Christ was tempted by the devil. It's only a sin when we seize the temptation, when we yield to the temptation. But we do need to be careful; we can sin by entertaining sinful thoughts. Some people say, "Well, I don't sin. I just think about it all the time. I just enjoy it in my mind." We need to reject that.

Martin Luther said, "We cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, [but] there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair." So you can't stop thoughts from coming into your mind, but you can stop thoughts from dwelling there and you entertaining them. Jesus said, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So we must be careful about that.

The last stage of development in temptation is death. "And sin, when it is full-grown, brings

forth death,” verse 15. So we have desire, disobedience and then death. This is illustrated when Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden. She saw it was “good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes”; she desired it. She ate it—she disobeyed—and she died spiritually as a result.

The word “death” literally means “separation.” Physical death is the separation of your soul and spirit from your body. Spiritual death is separation from God. Eternal death is separation in hell for all eternity. That’s what death means—separation. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they died spiritually—were separated from God—and later they died physically, as well. They left their bodies.

So we need to be careful. Sin leads to death. When David sinned with Bathsheba, in 2 Samuel 11, all his troops were out fighting battles, but he was on his rooftop. Idleness can be the devil’s workshop. He looked down on the next courtyard and saw Bathsheba. The Scriptures say, “He saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.” He then lay with Bathsheba, and the baby born to her later died. And David brought death on Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah. So death was the result of David’s sin.

David wrote about this experience in Psalm 51. He talked about the things he lost when he sinned. Verse 10 says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” He lost his clean heart. Verse 12, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” He lost his joy. “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me,” verse 11. He lost the sense of God’s presence.

And in Psalm 32:3-4, David said, “When I kept silent...”—when he didn’t confess his sin—“...my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.” Unconfessed sin robs you of joy, of peace and of the sense of God’s presence. You can’t lose your sonship, because you’re a child of God, but you can lose your fellowship.

But the good news is in 1 John 1:9, which says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The word “confess” here means “to agree with God.” It literally means “to say the same thing.” God says that you’ve sinned, and you say, “Yes, God; I’ve sinned. I admit my sin.” And God is faithful to carry away your sin, and He’ll cleanse you “from all unrighteousness.” Then you can have your joy back. You can have your peace back. You can have a sense of God’s presence back in your life. Remember before you sin that sin will rob you. So “Do not be deceived,” verse 16 of our text.

The third thing to remember when you are being tempted is that temptation can be conquered. The first thing is the source—it’s your own evil desires. Second, the course starts with your desire, then disobedience and then death. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

From our text, there are two keys to victory over temptation. Number one, remember God's goodness. When you are tested, Satan will tempt you to doubt the goodness of God. Satan may say, "You deserve better. You deserve more. You deserve pleasure. You deserve happiness. God is withholding it from you! God is not good! So go out and get it yourself! Disobey God." Maybe you're sick, going through financial troubles, in stress over some other issue, and Satan whispers in your ear. He'll say, "God doesn't love you. God isn't good. God isn't providing. God isn't taking care of your needs." So you are tempted to doubt the goodness of God. But remember God's goodness.

In verses 16-17, James actually exhorts us. "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." This is the only place in the Bible where God is called "the Father of lights." It is believed to be a reference to the sun, moon and stars. And light metaphorically speaks of goodness, purity and righteousness. So He is called "the Father [or source] of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." God is the source of all good, so don't be deceived.

When we sin, we are basically forgetting God and His goodness. When you yield to temptation, you are forgetting about God. That's what temptation does to you. When you entertain sin, you play with it, you flirt with it. "How close can I get to the line without crossing over it?" When you're entertaining sinful thoughts or you're contemplating it, this is what you're thinking.

Actually temptation needs to be nipped in the bud. Purpose in your heart every day when you get up, "I will not sin against God." Yield yourself to God's Spirit. Walk in obedience to His Word. We need to realize that God is good and that all goodness comes from God. Satan wants us to forget the goodness of God and disobey Him.

Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. He was hired by a man named Potiphar. Mrs. Potiphar is unnamed, but she is the first "cougar" mentioned in the Bible. She saw Joseph, this handsome, young Hebrew, and she approached him. She wanted to go to bed with him. But Joseph said, "How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" He resisted the temptation. Yet he was still sent to prison. Now that's a trial! But every time Joseph opened his mouth in the pages of Scripture, he talked about God. He always kept God in view. Keep your eyes on the Lord, and remember God's goodness.

In verse 17, it says that the way God gives is good. His every act of giving is good. And what God gives is good—"perfect gift." And God gives constantly. In the Greek, it's "keeps coming down." God's goodness keeps coming and coming and coming. And the God who gives is good—He's called "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." That means that God doesn't change; God is immutable. God is good, He's always been good and He always will be good. People change, things change, but God is good and He never changes. He loves you and has your best in mind.

I believe that God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him. It's not a Bible verse, but it's Biblical. You should say, "Lord, I want Your will. I want Your purpose. I want Your plan. I

want to glorify You. I'm leaving the choice with You. I'll go where You want me to go. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll be what You want me to be. I'll say what You want me to say." Leave the choice to Him.

The second step in victory over temptation is remembering that you are His child. Or you might say, remember who you are: a child of God, verse 18. "Of His own will..."—he's talking about God the Father—"...He..."—and what did He do?—"...brought us forth..."—how did He do it?—"...by the word of truth..."—and why did He do it?—"...that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." God's greatest gift is that He has begotten us through the Word of truth so that we might be His special children.

So James is talking about our new nature—God begot us. The way to get victory over temptation is to be born again. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." Without the rebirth, you don't have the new nature. And without the new nature, you don't have the capacity or the ability to live a life pleasing to God. Once you are born again, once you are saved, you have the capacity to please God. If you try to live the Christian life without rebirth, without being born of the Spirit and having a new nature, it's impossible. It's impossible to live the Christian life without being born of God. So you need to be born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus.

What is the source of our new birth? "His own will," verse 18. God saves you by His grace, and He regenerates you as a sovereign work. Only God can regenerate a soul. Only He can give you life. Christianity is the life of God in the soul of man. John 1:12-13 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right..."—or "the power, the authority"—"...to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So God regenerates us by His own will; it's His sovereign work.

And the instrument of our rebirth is "the word of truth," verse 18. "The word of truth" is the Gospel and the Scriptures. By the Spirit of God and the Word of God He regenerates the sinner, and they become the children of God.

But also note that in order to gain victory over temptation, you need to hide God's Word in your heart, "that I might not sin against You," Psalm 119:11. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He answered, "It is written...It is written...It is written." Three times He quoted Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy. That was Jesus' favorite book. So he answered Satan's temptations with the Word of God. We should do the same. The stronger you are in God's Word, the more obedient you are to God's Word, the more victory you will gain in resisting the temptations of the enemy. So the instrument of our new birth was the Word of God, believing in Jesus Christ.

Now what is the purpose of our new birth? It is "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures," verse 18. We're not to be "fruitcakes." I saw a bumper sticker years ago that said, "God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts." I like that.

What does James mean by "firstfruits"? In the Bible days, everyone had farms, and they grew

wheat and corn. Whenever they would harvest their fields, they would first take a corner of their field, harvest that first fruit and give it to God. It belonged to God. The “firstfruits” were the first, ingathered harvest that they saw as belonging to God.

So we are His firstfruits. We belong to God. Remind yourself, “I am a child of God, I have a new nature that God has given me, I’ve been born again by the Word of God and I am the firstfruits unto God.” The firstfruits were to bring glory and honor to God.

The New Living Translation renders verse 18, “He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.” So the firstfruits carries the concept of “His prized possession.” So we are born again and His prized possession. Remember who you are.

Why are we born again? To bring honor to God and to live in holiness. Paul said to the Ephesians, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them,” Ephesians 2:8-9.

So, number one, remember the source of your temptation: it’s your sinful desires. Number two, remember the course of temptation: lured away by deception, disobedience and death. Sin will take you further than you want to go, and it will keep you longer than you want to stay. And number three, remember simply that you’re a child of God, you’ve been bought with a price, your body’s not your own—you belong to God.