

James 1:13-18**"God and My Temptation"**

Imago Dei Church (Raleigh) | 1/21/18 | Sunday AM | 3 Services

INTRODUCTION

If you haven't been with us, we've been studying the book of James. James (Jesus' brother) has been encouraging a group of scattered Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Christ even as they find themselves in this season of trial and difficulty.

He reminds them that God is working to accomplish his purposes in their lives, even in their trials.

IN the passage we're looking at today, James takes this one step further.

James understands that the trials he's been talking about will not come in isolation.

They will be accompanied with temptations of various kinds. Temptations to despair. Temptations to doubt God's goodness. Temptations to sin in all sorts of ways that we think might make the trials themselves easier and less painful. We may even think that if we would just give in to sin in this one particular area, then maybe we could even get out of this trial altogether.

So the trials themselves will be accompanied by temptation to sin.

But James also knows that he's writing to a bunch of Christians who are drawn to sin *even when they aren't facing specific trials*.

Many people, even many Christians, think that when you become a Christian all the sudden you shouldn't struggle with sin anymore.

But that's not true—John says so directly in 1 John:

1 John 1:8, 10

[8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Christians do still struggle with sin and temptation. Christians aren't freed from the presence of or struggle with sin after their salvation, but they are freed from the **power** of sin in our lives.

This is what Paul tells us in Romans:

Romans 6: 14

[14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

James knows the same thing that Paul knew: Christians will still be tempted to sin, but we are called to resist it—flee it—because Christ has

defeated sin at the cross and empowered us to fight it through his Spirit who lives in us.

So, James has been writing to his scattered people and reminds them even in the midst of their **trials and struggles**—“**remain steadfast**” (v.12)—remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what should they do when **temptations** come to sin against God and reject Christ’s loving lordship?

(APP) Last week we talked about how none of us is exempt from the trials of life. Every stage of life has some element of trial to it. The same is true today. One thing I know for sure: you will face temptation this week, today, maybe before you go home today. How should you respond?

Let me give you **three encouragements or exhortations from James’ reply.**

EXHORTATION #1: UNDERSTAND THE SOURCE OF YOUR TEMPTATION

(1:13-14)

James 1:13–14

[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.

James first cautions his readers against a common mistake they and we are all tempted to make: **blame-shifting**.

When we see temptation coming our way, we want to know whose fault it is that we are tempted to sin.

(ILL) Affluenza defense from a couple years ago.

(ILL) This is common to every person who has ever had or been a child: mom comes in to break up a little spat between two kids and what's the first thing we say? "He started it." OR "He took my toy." OR "He called me a mean name."

And as Christians, we do the same thing. We know there's something wrong with us desiring to go after sin, so we immediately look for the source so we can remove the blame from ourselves and put it on someone or something else.

"Where did this come from?"

So James cautions against doing something very silly—blaming our temptation on God.

God

Now, there's something about this that makes sense. James has just finished telling us that God is working in and through our trials to bring about his purposes.

Could it be that he is also tempting us to do the same?

James says, "no." God is not the source of your temptation. Why?—2 reasons:

1) Because "God cannot be tempted with evil. . ." [v.13]

James grounds his reason in the **character of God**.

How do you know God is not tempting you? Because God hates evil. He hates sin, and no part of him is inclined towards it. He is—with his entire being—repulsed by sin, not drawn to it.

2) Because God hates sin, he in no way wants to lead his people into sin—" . . . he himself tempts no one." [v.13].

Why would God—**who hates sin, is not himself drawn to sin, and is working at the cost of his own Son's life to deliver his people from sin**—why would this God try to tempt his people towards it?

It doesn't make sense. James says, 'Be careful, lest you accuse God of something he is utterly unworthy of.'

Us

Instead, James tells us, the place to locate the source of our temptation is not God, but in ourselves—**"[14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."**

James says, "you want to know where your temptation

The overwhelming impulse we feel when experience temptation is to look outside of ourselves and ask, 'What is happening to me? OR 'Who is doing this to me?'

James says, "Look inside. YOU are the source of your temptation.

Jesus had said something very similar:

Luke 6:43-45

[43] "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, [44] for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. [45] The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Rather than looking at all the circumstances around us or even within us that may be legitimately difficult, we must be careful not to accuse God and say, "You are leading me into sin!"

Rather we need to look at ourselves and realize it is we who are drawn to sin. We, not God, and not others, are the source of our own temptations.

(APP) That means, **kids**, when your brother, sister, classmate, or whoever mistreats you and you respond in an unkind, selfish, or hateful way, don't say "they made me do it!" No one can make you sin but you.

Students, when the legitimately insane pressures you face daily mean you would have to sin against God in order to be cool, or impress, or fit in—know that you cannot blame others. The temptation is inside of you.

Husbands and wives, your spouse is not the source of your temptation, nor is he or she a justification for your sin. You and you alone are responsible for that.

No matter how difficult or trying the situation is, the temptation to sin against God is always on us, not them.

James says, "understand the source of your temptation."

EXHORTATION #2: UNDERSTAND THE ANATOMY OF YOUR SIN **(1:14-15)**

James 1:14-15

[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.

James starts to dissect the **progression of sin in our hearts**.

(ILL) Maybe you remember **9th grade biology** (maybe you're there now), and the teacher brought in all kinds of nasty carcasses, and you had to slowly dissect and identify the insides.

Well, I don't know how much good knowing where a frog's kidney is, but James wants us to understand the inner-workings of our own sin, so that we will be able to resist when temptation comes.

(A) DESIRE

James 1:14

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

You see that the **first step in the progression is desire**. Now obviously desire **doesn't have to be a bad thing**. It may actually be a desire for a good thing.

James is going to say something very similar about our interpersonal conflict in **Chapter 4:1-3** (if you want to look at that in your groups).

Bottom line: Sin ***always*** begins with desire.

(APP) This is really helpful when we're **trying to get to the bottom of our sin**. When we sin, our desire to please and worship God is redirected towards another, competing desire. That desire ascends the throne of our hearts and we begin to worship it rather than God.

So, one way to figure out what is underneath your sin is simply to ask, "What is it that I am wanting—desiring so bad that I HAVE to have it...wanting so bad that I will sin to get it?"

Desire is at the root of your sin.

But how does that desire become sin? How does it displace our desire to please God?

It deceives.

(B) DECEPTION

James 1:14

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

Desire gets derailed through deception. Note the words James uses: "lured and enticed."

(ILL) I've recently taken up fishing at a very inconsistent and amateur level. And the **whole idea behind fishing** is you're trying to trick the fish into thinking that he's getting a good thing when he's not. The bait itself is

often called a **"lure."** So you throw out a lure and you entice the fish to take the bait and he gets caught (...occasionally, infrequently).

That's **exactly what happens in our hearts.** The desire for something (possibly good) deceives us into thinking that **our greatest need is for that desire to be fulfilled in the way we think it should.** It tricks us.

(e.g., safety, love, acceptance, sex, security, happiness, etc.)

(ILL) Let me give you a **personal example.** I have a desire for my kids to be safe. That's a good desire. But my desire for their safety can become so consuming that I begin to live in fear. And so I could live my life in fear of what might happen, disbelieving that God is either willing or able to care for me and my kids. So now I've started to doubt God's goodness and love.

Did you see what happened there? My good desire *deceived* me. A desire for a good thing took root in my heart and tricked—just like the serpent in the Garden of Eden—into doubting God's goodness.

Well, once my desires deceive me, what happens?

(C) DISOBEDIENCE

James 1:15

[15] Then desire when it has conceived **gives birth to sin**

The desire that deceives leads to **sin that manifests in my heart and life.**

Note the **pregnancy metaphor** here. As the desire takes root in my heart, I foster it and cultivate it, protecting and feeding that desire until it—BOOM—manifests in my life as sinful disobedience.

And **our tendency is to stop there.** But James goes one step further.

Desire—deception—disobedience—

(D) DEATH

James 1:15

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

The natural outcome of sin is death. James reminds us that sin is not some minor mistake that we make. It is rebellion against God that ends in death and destruction.

The Scriptures paint **two complimentary ways** that sin leads to death. The first is a **farming metaphor.**

The idea in both of these passages is that **if we cultivate and feed sin, it naturally ends in death and destruction.** And this makes sense. Sin is rebellion against the character and will of God. But God made the world and all that is in it. So if we devote ourselves to going against the grain of the universe, it

makes sense that that's going to end poorly. (Gal 6:7-8; Rom. 6:20-21)

But sin leads to death also in terms of **punishment**. We've already talked about how God hates sin. It is vile and offensive to his perfectly good and holy will. And as the just and perfect judge of all that exists, he must punish our rebellion.

So sin **results in** death, and it **deserves the judgment of death**. These are distinct but connected biblical truths.

(APP) Now, let me pull all of this together with some points of application on fighting sin and temptation:

1. **Be honest about your desires.** Bring them into the light.
2. **Evaluate your desires with the filtering lens of God's Word.**
3. **Cultivate godly desires, and kill sinful ones.** Do this through faithfulness in the God-given means of grace, like ...
 - a. regular personal Bible intake,
 - b. prayer and confession,
 - c. sitting under the preaching of the Word,
 - d. worship with God's people
 - e. biblical community and accountability (i.e., church membership)

4. **Confess sin quickly and explicitly to a trusted friend, small group leader, or pastor. Sin that is allowed to grow always leads to death (spiritual, relational, or even physical)**

EXHORTATION #3: UNDERSTAND THE GRACE OF YOUR SALVATION (1:16-18)

James 1:16-18

[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (ESV)

James has told us to take a hard look at temptation, and he's told us to take a hard look at our sin.

Now he tells us to take a hard look at God.

When trials and temptations come, we can respond in faith because ultimately because we know that our God is a good and loving God who is not looking to destroy us, but to save us.

A few characteristics of God in these verses...

1. HE IS A GOOD GOD WHO GIVES GOOD GIFTS.

He is not the source of our sin and temptation as though he wants to lead us to death. No, his gifts are good and for our good.

2. HE IS A FAITHFUL GOD WHO IS TRUSTWORTHY.

In contrast to Satan, who is the prince of darkness, he is the "Father of lights." He isn't hiding in darkness, but the source of light that beckons us to himself.

And he's not some cosmic shape-shifter, constantly moving as we try to get to him. He's neither a moving target nor a shifting foundation. He is faithful and trustworthy.

3. HE IS A LOVING GOD WHO SAVES US.

James reminds us that **rather than hurling trials and temptations at us in order to destroy us, God is sovereignly working to accomplish our salvation.**

The "**bringing us forth**" here is a clear statement of the Christian's salvation in Jesus.

And he did this "**of his own will.**" God is the one who saves, not us. **Our salvation is the gracious act of a loving God**—not because we deserve it, but because he merely took pleasure in doing so.

Why? Because he's doing the work of redemption and renewal in all creation. That's what James is saying at the end of this passage. Christian, your salvation is a testimony, a foretaste of the whole creation being redeemed and renewed.

Rather than blaming God for our temptation, let us instead marvel and worship him for his gracious salvation!

CONCLUSION

Temptation is coming. It's upon us. The encouragement for us is to know that temptation begins within us, we are the ones who follow it into sin, and God is the one who saves us out of it through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Now friend, if you are here and you are giving yourself over to any sin, let me plead with you: turn from that sin. It leads to only one thing in the end, and that is death, destruction, and the judgment of God. For your own sake, please reject sin and turn to God.

And you are here and you know that you have lived your whole life following after your own desires, giving yourself over to them and following hard after sin, know that even though God is perfectly just in condemning you, he is a loving God, and his word says that he is **"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"** [2 Peter 3:9]. That's why he sent his own son as a sacrifice for those who justly deserve to be punished for their sin.

Today, if you will turn from your sin and run to God through Jesus, you can be rescued from the rightful

outcome of your sin, which is death. That's what it means to be a Christian. Christians are not perfect people, or even good people all the time. Christians are sinners who have been delivered from their sins because of God's mercy.

Would you experience that mercy today?