

Studies in James

Lesson 4

Temptation

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In his work entitled "Temptation," theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer vividly portrays the battle we all wage with temptation.
 - A. "In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled, The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire or ambition or vanity or desire for revenge or love of fame and power or greed for money... At this moment God is quite unreal to us. He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real... The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us."
 - B. In this study we want to do our best to come face to face with the reality of temptation.
 1. It's interesting to note that James, the Lord's brother, has a great deal to say on the subject of temptation.

- a. And yet, as you read what James teaches about temptation, there is a deliberate ABSENSE of criticism or condemnation in his writing on the subject.
 - b. James' approach to the subject of temptation is rather "matter of fact" – treating the problem as if it were simply one of many difficulties Christians will face in life.
2. Rather than shame his readers for giving in to the powers of temptation, James does two things:
- a. First, he clears up some common misconceptions about temptation – such as why is it that some people seem to NEVER have a problem with temptation, and why is it that GOD allows us to BE tempted in the first place.
 - b. Second, and perhaps and perhaps most important, James offers some rather simple solutions that will enable all of us to continue our WALK WITH GOD in spite of the constant enticement to yield to the power of temptation.
3. Therefore, let's take a few moments to look at some of the vitally important truths James teaches about this subject in the first chapter of his epistle.
4. **James 1:13-18** – *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. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 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. 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.

BODY:

- I. Before we begin, we need to keep in mind certain basic facts about temptation – James will expand on these later in his teaching.
 - A. First, we need to keep in mind the fact that when temptation's allurements come, we can't accuse God of being responsible.
 1. Why? The reason is simply because James tells us God is the giver of *"every good gift, and every perfect gift."*
 2. And He CONTINUES to be the giver of, *"every good gift, and every perfect gift,"* even when we occasionally live inconsistent lives.
 - a. **James 1:17** – When James speaks of God as, *"the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning,"*

some understand this to mean that God is consistent, and that there is no variation of shadow cast by turning.

- b. However, Vincent (Vincent's Word Studies) argues that there is no comparable idiom in the Greek. Rather than referring to God, other translations suggest the variation and shadows cast by turning are those of mankind.
 - c. We could compare this to the rotation of the earth which causes variations in the intensity of light and, therefore, shadows.
 - d. While the sun is fixed, the earth turns or rotates, and in that rotation, causes variations in intensity of light and shadows – like the shadows on a sundial.
3. Therefore, it appears that James is saying God continues to be the giver of *"every good gift and every perfect gift"* even when WE cast a shadow by OUR turning – or to put it another way, God continues to love and bless us even when we occasionally cast shadows by our own inconsistent living.
- a. This is why the Lord promises He will never leave US nor forsakes US. **(cf. Heb 13:5)**
 - b. We may leave and forsake HIM, but His love for us continues.

- c. In fact, the apostle Paul tells us God loved us, "*while we were yet sinners*" (**Romans 5:8**), and He CONTINUES to love us IN SPITE of our sins.

B. Secondly, we also need to keep in mind that we are SOLELY responsible for yielding to temptation.

1. We can't blame anyone other than OURSELVES.

- a. James will tell us that everyone is tempted, "*when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*" (**James 1:14**)

2. As much as we might like to blame our situation, or some other person for yielding to temptation, we simply can't do what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden and pass blame.

- a. **Genesis 3:11-13** – After God found Adam and Eve hiding in the garden after their sin, and Adam tried to explain that they were ashamed to appear before God naked, the Lord said, "*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?*" 12 *Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."* 13 *And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

- b. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent, but NEITHER of them had the courage to say, "I take FULL responsibility for what I did."
 - c. The BLAME GAME is perhaps the most popular game we play when it comes to explaining why we yield to temptation.
 - d. It's NEVER ENTIRELY our OWN fault, rather we try to lessen the burden of accepting full responsibility by putting some of the blame on our circumstances, our situation, our environment, our society, our parents, or husbands or wives, our friends and associates. But NEVER entirely on our ourselves.
- C. Third, we need to keep in mind the fact that there is NOT A SINGLE PERSON, living or dead, that hasn't wrestled with temptation and occasionally lost the battle – none, that is, except the Lord.
- 1. Temptation knows no barriers and plays no favorites.
 - a. It affects both husbands and wives, business executives and homemakers, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the salesman, the banker, the teacher, the student in school, the preacher, the elder, the deacon, the Bible class teacher, the song leader, the one who is called on to lead in prayer or wait on the Lord's table, and on and on we could go.

2. And coupled with the fact that EVERYONE has lost battles to temptation, we need to understand that temptation is NOT ALWAYS linked to sexual sins – which is the way we usually think of temptation.
 - a. We can be tempted in a WIDE VARIETY of ways – including temptations that are oriented toward possessions, or positions of power and prestige (pride), as well as temptations toward people.
 - b. And the temptations toward people may not be sexual in nature, they may be anger, resentment, bitterness, hatred, slander, and so forth.
- D. And so, as we look more closely at the teaching of James on the subject of temptation, the Lord's brother presents four basic facts about temptation that are vitally important for us to understand.
 1. We need to understand and ACCEPT these four basic facts before we will EVER be successful in dealing with the problem itself.
- II. So let's begin by take a closer look at the four basic facts about temptation. We covered SOME of these same basic facts in our series of lessons Practical Solutions for Common Problems, but it never hurts to remind ourselves of these truths, especially on such an important subject as this.
 - A. FACT ONE - Temptation is always present in life. **(v. 13a)**

1. James says, *"Let no one say WHEN he is tempted..."*
 - a. Did you notice that James didn't say, "IF" we are tempted, but rather "WHEN!"
 - b. This is much like the statement in James 1:2.
 - (1). It's not a question of "IF" we will encounter various trials, but rather "WHEN" we encounter trials!
 2. Therefore, we need to accept the fact that temptation is inevitable.
 - a. We will NEVER find a place on earth where our fleshly nature won't somehow be aroused in some way toward wrong things.
 3. Webster defines temptation as: "To entice to do wrong by a promise of pleasure or gain."
 - a. The word is also synonymous with, "to seduce, to allure into evil, to persuade."
 - b. Therefore, we need to understand and accept the fact that we will ALWAYS face the challenge of being "enticed, seduced, allured or persuaded" to do something wrong and evil, by the promise of "temporary pleasure or gain."
 - (1). This is a simple fact of live.
- B. FACT TWO - Temptation is NEVER prompted by God. **(v. 13)**
1. *Let NO ONE say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God..."*
 - a. The word "*tempted*" used by James in this verse has the idea of "soliciting to do evil."

- b. This is in contrast with our being "*tested*" by God. We have already learned that God will test us to stretch our faith and develop our character.
 - (1). THAT kind of testing is "dokimos," and is designed to do two things:
 - (a). Make us approved – proving that we've been through the fire and our pots haven't cracked.
 - (b). Purges out all the impurities – the impurities that will interfere with our WALK WITH GOD.
 - c. But in this verse (**v. 13**), James wants to understand that God doesn't solicit us "to do evil."
2. When James wrote this verse, he had two choices when he used the Greek prepositional thought, "*by*."
- a. One encompasses the idea of DIRECT AGENCY. This would have implied, "Let no one say God DIRECTLY led me into this sin!"
 - b. The other conveys the idea of INDIRECT AGENCY. This would imply, "Let no one say that God, even INDIRECTLY, led me into this sin!"
3. Which one do you suppose James use?
- a. He used INDIRECT AGENCY – the stronger of the two!

- b. James wants us to understand that God is not even
INDIRECTLY involved in leading us into sin.
 - 4. And there are two reasons for this:
 - a. One – God doesn't even INDIRECTLY lead us into sin
because HE can't be tempted by evil.
 - b. Two – God doesn't tempt anyone ELSE, not even
INDIRECTLY.
 - 5. Our response to temptation (either resisting it, or giving in to it) is
strictly a matter of PERSONAL responsibility.
- C. **FACT THREE** – Temptation always follows the same pattern. **(vs. 14-15)**
 - 1. As I mentioned in the introduction of this lesson, James doesn't
criticize or condemn his readers for yielding to temptation, but
rather treats the subject in a simple, "matter of fact" manner.
 - a. And we've already seen WHY James doesn't criticize or
condemn: Temptation is always present (everybody faces
temptations of one kind or another), and when we yield to
temptation we can't blame anyone but ourselves.
 - 2. Interestingly enough, this passage in James chapter one is the
ONLY PLACE in Scripture where the PROCESS of temptation is
"theologically" established – other passages give ILLUSTRATIONS

or EXAMPLES of the process, but only James let's us step into the mind of Satan to see just how he goes about leading us into sin.

3. In every temptation there are THREE elements (One of these is implied, the other two are expressly stated).
 - a. First, there is THE BAIT (Implied) – This is usually something that is of an EXTERNAL nature, and becomes the OBJECT of our interest.
 - (1). Satan knows exactly what we like – he knows precisely what will trip our trigger. And everyone is different. What tempts YOU may not tempt someone else.
 - (2). But just because YOU'RE not tempted by that sin DOESN'T mean you're not tempted with some OTHER sin.
 - (3). Everyone has areas of weakness in their lives that Satan can exploit.
 - (4). Therefore, Satan uses ONLY the bait that will lure YOU.
 - b. Second, there is THE DESIRE (Stated) -- While the "bait" may be something EXETRNAL that Satan dangles before us at a distance, the "DESIRE" or "LUST" is found in our own heart.
 - c. Third, there is THE ALLUREMENT - ENTICEMENT (Stated) -- This is found in the terms, "*drawn away*" and "*enticed.*"

- (1). This "allurement" or "enticement" may be either FANTASY or REALITY. And it doesn't really matter which, because BOTH are just as powerful.
 - (2). We might think of this "allurement" or "enticement" as the "go-between."
 - (3). Satan doesn't tempt us by brute FORCE, but by very subtle persuasion.
3. Of course, James warns us that the END result of this "allurement" or "enticement" is DEATH.
- a. And this, "death" can be thought of in two ways:
 - (1). First, a "death-like existence" – meaning we have feelings of guilt, emptiness and depression.
 - (2). Second, and perhaps most important, a "spiritual" death – meaning sin separates us from enjoying true fellowship with God. **(cf. 1 John 1:5-10)**
4. But did you notice that James uses the preposition "by" once again here in **verse 14**?
- a. However, THIS time the word "by" is different from the one in **verse 13**.
 - (1). In THAT verse James says we are not even INDIRECTLY led into sin by God.

(2). But in THIS verse James says we are led into sin
DIRECTLY by our own lust.

- b. So, once again, James wants us to understand that WE are TOTALLY and COMPLETELY responsible when we yield to Satan's efforts of dangling bait in front of us and enticing and alluring us to sin.
- c. We are led into sin DIRECTLY by our OWN lusts that Satan exploits to his advantage. We can't blame someone else.

D. FACT FOUR - Temptation flourishes on inconsistent thinking. **(v. 16)**

- 1. James concludes, "*Do not be deceived...*"
 - a. The word "*deceived*" suggests "being led down the wrong path."
 - b. That's EXACTLY what Satan does when he entices and allures us.
 - c. Satan is DECEIVING us into thinking this temptation is leading us to something GOOD and PLEASURABLE. And while it may not be GOOD, it will CERTAINLY be PLEASURABLE!
 - d. But like the tasty morsle of bait that is dangled in front of the eyes of the fish, there is a hook hidden that will allow us to be ensnared.
- 2. James says, don't allow yourself to be deceived into believing there's no HOOK.

- a. And here's the difference between, "*every good gift and every perfect gift*" that is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, from the attractive, tasty, tempting morsel of BAIT that Satan drops before us.
 - b. One is designed for our GOOD and for our BENEFIT – they are the good and perfect GIFTS that God freely gives US.
 - c. The other is designed for our ultimate DESTRUCTION. It's designed for SATAN'S benefit – it may APPEAR to be good, but it conceals the HOOK Satan will use to snatch us away from God.
 - (1). But that happens ONLY WHEN WE TAKE THE BAIT!
3. And there's another more SINISTER deception here than that of a HOOK. Satan isn't concerned with the fact that we occasionally take his bait without getting caught. He knows if we KEEP taking the bait we will EVENTUALLY get hooked.
- a. The fish that manages to take the bait without getting hooked develops a REAL LIKING for that bait the next time he sees it.
 - b. And so, he will keep going after that same bait time after time until his luck finally runs out. EVENTUALLY, he will get hooked, flayed and fried!
 - c. But sadly, for the fish anyway, he doesn't realize that. He has deceived himself into thinking he can steal bait all day long

and never get caught. He did it BEFORE, so he can do it AGAIN.

4. Therefore, James doesn't want US to be deceived into thinking no harm will come because we somehow managed to get away with stealing Satan's bait the first time or two.
 - a. Satan is a MASTER ANGLER. He's been fishing for the souls of men and women since the beginning of time, and he has every kind of bait at his disposal.
 - b. And what's even MORE alarming is that he's EXTREMELY patient. He KNOWS that if he keeps dropping your favorite bait in front of you, you'll eventually be snared.
 - c. It's just a matter of time. DON'T BE DECEIVED!
- II. Although James tells us temptation is INEVITABLE, there ARE ways we can gain victory over it. Here are TWO:
 - A. James wants us to know that victory can be achieved when we dwell on those things that are good and perfect. **(v. 17)**
 1. The apostle Paul told the saints in Rome that the battle of temptation takes place in the mind.
 - a. **Romans 7:22-23** – *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members,*

warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

2. Because of this, Paul urged first century saints to constantly monitor our thinking.
 - b. **Colossians 3:2** – *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*
 3. In the same manner, James reminds us that our Father has provided us with "good gifts" and "perfect gifts" from above.
 - a. Therefore, to REAP the good we need to DWELL on the good and the perfect.
 - b. **Philippians 4:8** – *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.*
- B. James ALSO wants us to know that victory over temptation comes when we LIVE the truth. **(v. 18)**
1. James reminds us that God, "*brought us forth by the word of truth.*"
 - a. This means that we were born again by the word of truth.
 - b. Since OBEYING the word of truth brought us LIFE, failing to LIVE BY the word of truth will eventually bring forth DEATH.

- c. Therefore, we need to put the WORD OF TRUTH in our MINDS, in order to be able to counteract the power of Satan's temptations.

(1). **Psalm 119:11** – *Your word I have hidden [treasured] in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*

CONCLUSION:

- I. How are you doing in the battle over temptation?
 - A. Are you winning victories by:
 - 1. Dwelling on that which is good and perfect?
 - 2. Living the truth?
 - B. Or are you losing the battle by:
 - 1. Failing to realize that temptation is always present?
 - 2. Somehow blaming God or others for your weaknesses, and allowing you to get into situations you can't get out of?
 - 3. Spending too much time looking at the bait, then desiring it in your heart only to be carried away by your own lusts?
 - 4. Believing deceived by Satan's lies that there really ISN'T a hook?

- II. The scriptures give us a very simply solution to the problem of temptation and sin. Since we will NEVER be free of TEMPTATION, we CAN be freed from the SIN temptation causes.
 - A. If you're not a Christian, you can be freed from EVERY SIN you've EVER committed by coming to Jesus Christ.
 - 1. The apostle Peter offers this simple solution for sin: *"Repent and be baptized everyone of you for the remission of sin."* (**Acts 2:38**)
 - B. If you're a Christian who occasionally gets snared by the bait Satan dangles before you, then simply confessing your sins to God and let God FREE YOU from Satan's grip.
 - 1. **1 John 1:9** – John tells us the solution to the guilt of sin is as simple as this: *If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - a. It's as simple as that!
 - b. You don't have to promise God you will never commit that sin again, because He knows you probably will. After all, it's an area of weakness in your life.
 - c. All you have to do is confess that sin to God, let Him forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness, and then try your best to resist that temptation in the future.

- d. But if you slip again, then confess that sin to God, let Him forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness, and then try your best to resist that temptation in the future.
 - e. And if you slip again... well, you know what to do, don't you?
2. Be assured of one thing: God forgives and forgets.
- a. **Isaiah 43:24-25** – *"... you have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins."*
 - b. **Micah 7:18-19** – *Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. 19 He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*
 - c. To sum it up, God blots out our transgressions for HIS own sake, because He delights in mercy.