



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Trials and Temptations

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James 1:13-15

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Introduction

James has been talking to us about trials. He has already admonished us to seek joy while in the midst of a trial and to ask God for wisdom. Now, he takes up a different look at trials and he shifts to the issue of temptation. The same biblical word for trial can also be used for temptation. That word is *peirasmos*. The distinction in meaning is determined by the context in which it is used.

The temptation of Jesus in Matthew chapter four is a good illustration of the difference between trial and temptation. Jesus endured a severe trial while fasting forty days in the wilderness, but it was Satan who came and tempted Him. God did not tempt Him but Jesus was tested by His Father—He did endure a trial. God wants us to be victorious through a trial, but Satan hopes we will fail by a temptation.

When tempted..

Literally, "while being tempted." The point James is making is this: we will find ourselves in the process of being tempted. Temptation is a part of our living in this age. Temptation is a fact because sin is a fact. We live in a fallen world and part of our human condition is a lifetime of dealing with temptation.

... no one should say, "God is tempting me."

God allows us to be exposed to temptations but He is not the one who is doing the tempting. Temptation has sin as its root and God has no part in sin. "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil" (Habakkuk 1:13).

The other issue is the inclination to blame God for our failings. Blame shifting has been a fall-back position for

sinners ever since the first sins were committed in the Garden. Eve blamed the Serpent as the reason for taking and eating the forbidden fruit. Adam blamed Eve for his sin. Therefore, we should not even think, and certainly not say, "God is to blame—He is the one tempting me."

For God cannot be tempted by evil,

James uses a word that literally means "untemptable." God is untemptable. God and sin are mutually exclusive. This is one of the distinctive marks of the Christian religion. Our God is not subject to frailties as are the pagan deities. He has no share in the inadequacies of men. He is perfect and sinless in His being. Paul says this of Jesus, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we read about pagan gods, they not only practice sin, but they also encourage sins among men. In reality, these pagan gods are demon-inspired notions, for these gods behave like demons.

The Angelic Description of God

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3)

nor does he tempt anyone...

Perhaps a word about the Lord's Prayer would be helpful here. Jesus taught us to pray and instructed us to say, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." We could incorrectly understand this as if God is the One leading us to evil temptation, but James gives us the proper understanding. God does not tempt anyone. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is saying we should ask the Father to keep us from any temptation that is too strong for us. We must be careful and not think of ourselves as above or beyond the possibility of any sin. We are not as righteous as we sometimes suppose ourselves to be.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

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North Carolina

James

... but each one is tempted when,

Here, James uses the Greek present tense (which stresses ongoing action) to remind us that temptation is an inevitable and continuous reality for all of us. It is always near and it will always be this way until we are taken to Glory.

... by his own evil desire,

James also puts the responsibility for succumbing to sin right where it belongs—on us! It is our own evil desire that leads us into continuous troubles and failings. We cannot walk away from ourselves. It has been humorously said that wherever we go, we are there.

We are also reminded that we have our **own** evil desires. These evil desires are personal and individual. I do not have yours and you do not have mine. Even if people share similar sin patterns, each one has his own way of expressing or practicing his or her specific style of sinning. This is a reminder that we must repent and beware of our sin type, and not be too full of pride over the sins we avoid—they are just not our thing.

The other small but important word to note is **evil** desire. In the biblical language the word *desire* is neutral. There is nothing about desire that is inherently bad. But, we probably think of desire as a bad thing. Jesus desired to eat the Last Supper with his disciples (Luke 22:15). Paul desired to see the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:17). We need to be careful and realize that desires are evil when we make them so.

... he is dragged away and enticed.

Dragged away and *enticed*. Both words are related to animals. *Dragged away* is from an idea of baiting a trap to catch some creature. *Enticed* is from a word meaning to use bait to catch a fish. Baits are effective means to appeal to the instincts of animals. James knows our “animal ways,” our flesh, is subject to being baited by sinful allurements. One of the key differences between animals and humans is the human ability to reflect upon issues of morality. Animals instinctively react to particular enticements, but we are held accountable by God for moral decisions we make.

A Metaphor from Child Birth Gone Wrong

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James has already demonstrated that trials may lead to maturity. Here, is making the opposite point as a warning—trials may also lead to death. The difference is not in the trial, but in our response to the test. We are told that there is something in a desire that interacts with us and is then corrupted. This corruption may, and often does, happen at a level below our conscious thought process. It starts as a small thing, but quickly grows into sin. When sin is allowed to grow it gives birth to death.

Death, in the Scripture, carries the idea of separation. It is true that sin may actually lead to your physical death, but James is saying that sin is a corruption that separates us from that which is good. Our physical death is an act of separation. Our soul is separated from our bodies, and we are separated from this earth-bound existence. Adam and Eve were told not to eat the forbidden fruit because they would die if they did. True, it eventually led to physical death, but first they died in relationship to God, each other, and even nature.

Two ideas to take away from this study:

First, concepts like desire and trial are corrupted by our sinful patterns. Desire becomes evil desire and trials become evil temptations when they are filtered through our base purposes.

Second, James has stressed the idea of process and ongoing action. Sin is a process and we ought to be careful to recognize the slippery slope as soon as possible. The more we continue the process, the harder it is to extract ourselves from further decline. Quick repentance is profitable.

Points to Ponder

1. Can you see that victory over temptation has much more to do with the internal purity of a person than the outside action of a tempter?
2. Note that succumbing to temptation produces death. Jesus came to give us abundant life. Therefore, life comes by repentance of sin and avoidance of sin. One awful characteristic of sin is it often feels like being alive, but in reality we are dying.