

That Is Tempting

James 1:13-15

It was a veritable playground growing up at Barakel with its 350 acres of woods surrounding a small lake. We could hunt, fish, snowmobile, toboggan, and ride bikes. Adjacent to Camp was another 15,000 acres of National forest just waiting for an adventurous teen to explore.

One early spring I decided to head out on our little Honda 90 motorcycle given to us by my Grandpa. I ventured across the highway to explore some trails. It was on the chilly side with patches of snow still covering ground in the woods so on this particular afternoon I decided to wear my snowmobile suit for some added warmth. I donned my helmet and headed down the camp road to the two track I was going to ride. Crossing M-72 I turned left onto the trail and pulled back on the throttle. It was a fairly straight stretch of road and got my speed up around 35 miles per hour when all of a sudden the handlebar twisted. The next thing I knew the backend came up and I was going over. It turns out that my front wheel hit a very soft patch of sand that caught the wheel fast turning the handlebar sideways upending the bike with me taking a spill.

I'm not sure how long I laid there but I remember reaching in my back pocket to get my handkerchief to put on my bloody nose. I remember picking up the bike, but I don't remember crossing the road, waving to my Dad who was heading into town or how I got home. The next thing I remember is lying on the living room floor writhing in pain and my brother frantically calling the camp nurse.

So now you are thinking that explains a lot about me from past head trauma.

That serves as a good lesson for us regarding our topic today found in **James 1:13-15**. It was not wrong to ride the motorcycle. It was not wrong to be on that trail. It was not wrong to be going the speed I was going. What was wrong was not paying attention to the signs that indicated there might be trouble ahead. That's the nature of temptation and it only takes a second for temptation to become sin.

We can be going along in life thinking everything is just fine, even with some temptation we may be facing, and wham, out of nowhere, the temptation grabs us fast and before we know it, we have lost control and fallen into sin.

Whereas in **verses 2-12** we see that trials test our faithful endurance, the verses we will discuss today and next week test our moral endurance. Consider from our passage first, the source of temptation.

I. THE SOURCE OF OUR TEMPTATION – vs. 13-14a

Let's get a working definition of the word temptation before we go any further. In the Greek it's the same word that we saw earlier translated as trial or test back in **verse 2, 3 and 12**. The primary meaning of temptation is to try the strength of. In the previous verses we found that the trials were something external used by God to determine the strength of our faith and to then grow that faith through the test. In this case the test is used in a positive way to see if our faith is genuine. These external circumstances are to mature us as we see in **verses 2-4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."**

We are more familiar with how the dictionary defines temptation. It says that temptation means to try to persuade, to induce or entice especially in doing something that is immoral or sensually pleasurable, to arouse desire by attracting.

Depending on the context, the word can be translated as testing or tempting. Where testing is meant to draw us closer to God, temptation is an enticement to sin against God. One source suggests that **"temptation, by its very nature, feels wrong. God's moral law is written in the heart of every human being (Romans 1:20), and when a sinful temptation is introduced, our consciences immediately sense danger."**

Let me just say before we go any further that the temptation itself is not sin. We can eliminate a lot of guilt feelings by remembering that. Satan wants us to believe that and many Christians go around burdened with guilt because he has made them believe that the temptation is sin. Keep that in mind.

When it comes to temptation, **verse 13** tells us something that is very clear – temptation is universal. **“When tempted”** conveys the idea that everyone will experience it. It doesn’t say *“If tempted”*, which implies that we may or may not encounter temptation, but **“when tempted”**. Just like everyone will experience testing, everyone will experience temptation. Man, woman, boy, girl, young, old, rich, poor, healthy, sick, godly, ungodly – everyone. No one is exempt from temptation.

Consider these examples from Scripture.

Adam and Eve

Cain

Noah

Abraham

Joseph

Moses

David

Jesus

Peter

Ananias and Saphira

If Jesus faced temptation, what makes us think we will somehow be exempt?

It has happened in the past to us.

It is happening right now to us.

It will happen in the future to us.

As long as we draw breath, we will be tempted in some way. It doesn’t matter who we are or where we live. We can think being on a remote island or cloistered in some monastery will somehow diminish the temptations. The disciples found that even spending time with Jesus didn’t keep them from temptation. **So what is the source of temptation?** In our passage we see our rationalization about temptation.

A. The Rationalization About Our Temptation – v. 13

Rationalization is something we have learned well

from the original parents, Adam and Eve.

It wasn’t me, it was the woman you gave me.

It wasn’t me, it was the serpent.

James takes it a step further in our bid to rationalize the temptation because some people to whom he was writing were saying it wasn’t me, it was God. He’s the one tempting me.

I can’t blame my wife’s fabulous cooking on my being overweight.

I can’t blame my speeding ticket on everyone else who was going faster than the posted limit.

I can’t blame God for my temptation.

Some ancient rabbis taught that when God created man, he was given both a good and evil impulse. They taught that God later repented for giving man evil desire which resulted in his fall, but later on He gave the law by which he could heal himself of his sinful desire. In a moment we’ll find out why that’s not good theology.

But James lays out the utter ridiculous reasoning behind that rationalization. He gives two reasons why God isn’t the source.

1. God’s nature

Look at our verse – **“God cannot be tempted by evil.”**

Scripture tells us the truth that God is holy (**Isaiah 6:3; I Peter 1:16; Revelation 4:8**); God is pure (**I John 3:3**) and that God is without sin (**Hebrews 4:15**). In **Habakkuk 1:3** His eyes are too pure to look on evil with favor. And in **I John 1:5** we read that in Him is no darkness at all.

To be holy is to be set apart from sin and impurity. There isn’t anything in His nature that would even make Him want to sin and nothing that could be offered to Him that would cause Him to do wrong. **As one author stated “God is immune to sin.”** Another said that **God is untemptable**. Sin is not in His nature, otherwise He would not be holy, so He cannot be tempted by evil. So we can’t rationalize that God tempts us because it’s not in His nature to sin or even to be tempted. He doesn’t tempt us directly or even indirectly. His holiness guarantees that He will never tempt us to sin.

Chuck Swindoll writes that God's holiness has two sides. One is the inability to be affected by evil and the other is the inability to cause evil.

Let's remember that God hates sin, so why would He tempt us to sin? His nature is one reason why He isn't the source of temptation. The second reason James gives for God not being the source of temptation is in His nurture.

2. God's nurture

“For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.” (Emphasis added)

If God is holy and desires for us to also be holy in our conduct, why would He dangle the proverbial carrot in front of us tempting us to sin? God does not have some nefarious purpose, some evil intent in which He wants to lead us astray. When Cain was contemplating the demise of his brother Abel, God told Cain that sin was crouching at the door desiring to have him, but he could master it.

James's logic follows that if God can't be tempted by sin, He's not going to turn around and tempt someone to sin. God's nature is to nurture, to grow your faith, not put you in some position that will jeopardize what He wants to do in you by growing faith. God desires our good for His glory. And let me add this. **Why would God want to tempt us to do something that He sent His only Son to die for? What would that say about His relationship with the Son?** We would question His love. It would be a slap in the face of Jesus. He would be nothing more than a sadistic deity with despicable motives. God's nature is that He can't be tempted. God's nurture is that He won't tempt us. So when James states in **verse 13 “Let no one say”** he means that we shouldn't be in the habit of blaming God.

We need to stop trying to rationalize our temptation and instead see the reality about our temptation.

B. The Reality About Our Temptation – v. 14a

“But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire.”

Once again we see the universal nature of Temptation. We also see that the steps of temptation all follow the same pattern, which we will see in a moment. Each man is tempted by his own desires.

Without saying it, the implication is that we can't blame someone else for our wrong choices. Proverbs tells us not to follow the steps of the wicked because they will lead us astray. The psalmist tells us not to hang out with the wicked. We can't even say “the devil made me do it” like what Flip Wilson used to say in his TV show. Temptation stirs up within us the desire to lust after something.

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Matthew 15:18 “For out of the heart comes evil thoughts.”

James makes it very clear that the temptation to sin is from within us, it's in the heart. That's why Proverbs exhorts us that **“Above all else, guard or keep your heart with all diligence, because out of it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)** In other words your heart is what leads you to do good or to do evil. We don't need any prompting from Satan, because sin is in our nature and temptation stirs up our evil desire.

German Theologian and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote “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.”

Paul wrote about the struggle that is in every believer **“For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.” (Romans 7:22-23)**

In this life, temptation will always be an issue because of the evil desire from our old nature. The reality about our temptation is that it comes from within us. It's the cause of our lust and we only

fool ourselves to think it's not a problem. So the source of our temptation isn't God, it comes from within us. **So what are the steps of temptation?**

II. THE STEPS OF OUR TEMPTATION – vs. 14b-15

Roman statesman, Mark Antony, was a silver-tongued orator who could sway the masses like no other man of his day. He was a dynamic speaker, cunning general and brilliant thinker. But with all his skills there was one thing he could not conquer - his moral weakness. One historian described him as **“a colossal child, capable of conquering the world, but incapable of resisting a pleasure.”**

Like Mark Antony, there are many today who have succumbed to temptation due to moral weakness. **Chuck Swindoll notes “Many Christians are supersaturated with education, biblical knowledge, inspiring examples of moral successes, and sobering warnings from moral failures. Yet far too many have driven headlong into temptation, suffering disaster in work, church, and the home. Temptation knows no limits. It respects no title. It plays no favorites. It ignores all human obstacles, cares nothing about the time of day or night, and camouflages itself in any situation, prepared to pounce at any moment.”**

I have heard that a rat can squeeze through a ½” hole, a mouse can wiggle through a ¼” inch. Every year in the summer we get at least one bat in our house and we wonder how and where. Water runs to the lowest point and causes damage. Temptation lurks around and squeezes in the smallest of places and James gives us four steps in the process.

The first step is to see that our desire is strong.

A. Our Desire Is Strong

“each one is tempted when, by his own desire”

Maybe some of you who are older than me can verify the accuracy of what I'm about to say regarding desire. It's a practice that is now illegal, but I heard that back in the day, movie theaters would create the desire for refreshments by

inserting the picture of popcorn into one of the frames of the movie. Your eye couldn't see it, but your mind registered the subliminal message and it created within you the desire for popcorn. The salty nature of popcorn would also create the desire for something to quench your thirst. So off to the concession stand you would go.

Advertisements on TV create a desire. They know who is watching and at what time so that when little Johnnie or Suzie are watching their afternoon shows, up pops an ad for Disney World creating that desire to visit that magical wonderland.

You didn't know you needed that new vacuum sweeper that does it all while you are eating out. You didn't know you needed new windows or new flooring.

You didn't know you needed a new suit.

Desire is wishing for something and here it carries the idea of craving. The KJV uses the term lust. It's not just a craving for something sensual, lust can be a desire for anything: power, status, money, food, notoriety, or possessions. We can lust for anything. The dictionary says that lust is a desire to gratify the senses. And James says that lust or desire comes from within us.

I think the disciples had a desire for status. They all wanted to be better than the other guys on the team. Judas had a lust for greed. That's why he stole from the pocketbook and sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver.

When he heard that another king was born who would threaten his throne, King Herod was willing to kill babies because he lusted for power.

Desire is strong and can lead someone to do any number of things to gratify it. Lust takes something that is good and creates a desire that turns sinful. A strong desire is the first step.

Second, we notice that our deception is subtle.

B. Our Deception Is Subtle

“But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”

We have all heard the Lays potato chip

advertisement “Betcha can’t eat just one.” It’s simple and subtle. Before you know it, you’ve eaten the whole bag.

KFC has their 11 herbs and spices that are finger licking good.

If you have ever fished, you know about lures. They are meant to deceive the fish. Lures are a decoy that tempt the fish to check it out and bite it to their potential demise.

Again, from the pen of Chuck Swindoll “Through persuasion of curiosity mixed with a big dose of rationalization we find ourselves drawn toward the lure, motivated by our own desire to have.”

Satan created within Eve a desire for something forbidden. He got her to think that touching the forbidden fruit didn’t result in the drastic judgment God said would happen. I wonder if the serpent reached up and picked a delicious piece of fruit from the tree, maybe even taking a bite, just to show that nothing would happen to him. He might have even let a little juice dribble down the corner of his mouth. Perhaps it had a sweet aroma when opened. Maybe there was a crisp crunch that titillated the ears. Touch, taste, sight, sound, smell – all the senses engaged the desire that was intended to deceive Eve into sinning.

Warren Wiersbe writes that “the bait keeps us from seeing the consequences of sin.” The worm hides the hook.

Proverbs tells us that sin is fun for a time. Its deceptive wrapping keeps us from seeing what is really inside the box. Some animal species can camouflage themselves in order to lure prey into their deceptive trap. That is the nature of sin, to camouflage itself so that the desire lures the person into sin. Our deception is subtle and before we know it, our disobedience is sinful.

C. Our Disobedience Is Sinful

“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.”

The temptation itself is not sin. But when we give in to the temptation and act on the temptation, that’s when it becomes sin. James likens it to birth: **“after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”** Our lust yields to the temptation and conceives or births sin. That’s what happened in **Genesis 3** to Eve and what happened to David in **II Samuel 11**.

Think of it this way. If I have a pile of wood over here and a lit match over there it won’t become a fire unless I bring the two together. When temptation and lust come together they birth sin and when sin grows up, our text tells us that it gives birth to death. Our disobedience is sinful and let me remind you that anytime we disobey God’s Word, we sin. Sin is not living up to God’s standard of holiness, which is intrinsically Himself. If our disobedience is sinful, then our death is sure.

D. Our Death Is Sure

“After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

Scripture speaks of three kinds of death.

There is physical death or the cessation of life.

There is spiritual death or the separation from God because of sin. **Romans 6:23** tells us that the wages, our payment, our debt for sin is death.

There is eternal death. **John 3:16** says that if we don’t believe in Jesus as Savior we will perish.

Revelation speaks of it as being cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

So which is James referring to here?

I don’t think it’s physical death. We’re all destined to die once (**Hebrews 9:27**). That’s part of the curse from the Garden. And neither do I think that it’s eternal death because **Romans 8:38-39** and **John 3:16** assure us that nothing can separate us from God’s love because those who believe in Jesus won’t perish but have everlasting life.

So that leaves separation from God and since James is talking to believers here, I believe the separation He is talking about is a separation or death to fellowship because of the sin we committed. The psalmist tells us that if I regard iniquity in my heart

the Lord won't hear me.

I John 1:3-8

If I were to have an argument with Robyn, I have broken my fellowship with her. In the same way, when we sin, our fellowship is broken with God.

Temptation, sin, death.

Desire, deception, disobedience, death.

Walvoord and Zuck indicate that unchecked and unconfessed lust yields sin and sin brings death.

Temptation can't be avoided, but it can be resisted. We have looked at the source of temptation. Then we considered the steps of temptation. Let's close with the solution to temptation.

III. THE SOLUTION TO OUR TEMPTATION

Martin Luther once said that "you can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest there."

The more we say no to temptation, the more we yield to God to control our lives, the more we will desire to live a godly life. Temptation is going to happen to every one of us, but the Christian has a choice. He can either give in to the temptation or he can resist the temptation through the power of God's indwelling Spirit. One thing we can do is understand our own weaknesses and avoid places or things that may tempt and lure us into sin.

Something else that Jesus told His disciples to do was to watch and pray so they wouldn't fall into temptation.

What else can we do when tempted?

A. Spin and Flee

That simply means to run away. Don't flirt with it. I knew someone who flirted with a big snapping turtle by wanting to pet the back of its head. Like that the snapper sliced open the thumb. Run away. Take a lesson from Joseph and flee temptation.

I Timothy 6:11

II Timothy 2:22

Sometimes it isn't possible to flee, so Paul gives another word of advice – stand and fight.

B. Stand and Fight

I Timothy 6:12

On Wednesday nights we have been discussing the armor of God given to the believer to stand firm against the attacks of the devil.

Ephesians 6:10-13 (10-18)

We should never try to face temptation in our own power, especially when the Lord has given us the tools to stand firm. The best weapon is the Word of God. When we read it we need to seek to follow, or to obey it.

C. Seek to Follow

Psalm 119:9, 11

Joshua 1:8

Both passages are reminders to us of the power of hiding God's Word in our heart and meditating on it so that we won't sin against God.

II Timothy 3:16-17 reminds us of the work of God's Word in us as it teaches us to do right, rebukes us when we do wrong, points the right path we should take and instructs us to mature in godly living. For every temptation we face, God has provided some passage to help us stand against it. All we need to do is seek to follow or obey it. Jesus provides the greatest example of using the Word to be victorious against the devil's temptations.

So what if I've already blown it? What then?

D. Supplicate for Forgiveness

I John 1:9

I John 2:1 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

When we repent, fellowship can be restored through God's faithfulness to forgive. There is no better time to do that than communion. You can be victorious over temptation so that you don't sin.