

YIELD NOT TO TEMPTATION

(James 1:12-18)

INTRODUCTION:

In chapter 2:2-12 James has been talking about trials of the faith, now he switches to the topic of temptation. In verse 2 he writes, “**Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.**” In verse 12 he writes, “**Blessed is the man who endures temptation.**” Then in verses 13 through 18 he goes into detail about temptation, the inevitability, source, and victory over it. Trials and temptations. It is interesting that the Greek word for trial and temptation is the same. There is a connection. The connection I believe is that every time we are faced with a trial of our faith, there is a temptation to sin lurking underneath it. Temptations are trials and trials can lead to temptation to mishandle the trial in a sinful way.

We don't hear enough about handling temptation from the pulpit today.

Wayne Oates, noted Christian psychologist and writer, asks, "When is the last time you heard a sermon or read a book on temptation?" This is an interesting question. When have you? It may have been awhile. Not many books are being written on this by the church or sermons preached by preachers.

Whatever the reason for the church not talking much about temptation, the idea hasn't vanished. People are going to psychologists and therapists to learn how to cope. But before you go to the psychotherapist and spend a lot of money, it may be better to go to the Word of God to see if there is any help there. I believe that there is.

James has some very pointed things to say about temptation. He approaches this subject very firm and direct. Let's listen to the Word of God today. We will see that James presents to us 4 basic facts about temptation that we must all understand and accept if we are going to overcome this thing called temptation.

TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE (13A)

Fact number 1 - temptation is inevitable.

In verse James says, "**When you are tempted..**" He does not say "If you are tempted..." Temptation is always present in life. Much like death and taxes, temptation is inevitable in this life.

You will never be without temptation. Never. If, when you became a Christian, you thought that all the old struggles and temptations would be automatically left behind - all those luring, enticing voices would be silenced and all the desires of your sinful nature would just go to sleep--then you must be very disillusioned. For temptation is something all of us face.

There is an opposing force constantly trying to draw you in the opposite direction of the pattern of life that God wants you to live. Paul speaks about that force and calls it 'indwelling' sin in Romans 7. We still have the presence of sin within and without. Even though you strive to follow the example of Christ, there are powers that will always be trying to drag you down.

Look at the people sitting around you. Each one of these persons wrestle with temptation just like you do. Temptation plays no favorites. It's a struggle of pastors, politician, and all people alike.

So this is the first fact James wants us to know - temptation is inevitable. Admit it and learn how to deal with them God's way.

DON'T BLAME GOD FOR YOU TEMPTATIONS

The next fact that James wants us to know about temptation is that we are not to blame God for our temptations. James says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I'm tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone

In this verse James is calling us to assume personal responsibility for handling our temptations. He does this by warning us against trying to shift the blame or responsibility for our falling into temptation to God by saying, "God is tempting me!"

It's an old line. We've all used it at one time or another. Consciously or subconsciously. We learn creative ways of shifting the blame, of coming up with excuses for giving into our temptations so we can avoid the pain involved in taking personal responsibility. The words are different but the underlying issue is the same. Some say "I just couldn't help myself, It was beyond my human will to resist." or " The Devil made me do it."

This line of reasoning has been going on since the beginning of time. When Adam ate of the fruit and God asked "What is it that you have done?" Do you remember what Adam said? "The woman you gave to me, she gave to me from the tree and I ate." What was he saying? "God, You set me up!

Here I was, enjoying the beauties of the garden, and along came this woman you brought into my life. If it hadn't been for her, I wouldn't have been tempted.

That thought is exactly what James is challenging here. He is saying here that God is not the one to be held responsible for your sin. That no one ever twists your arm behind your back to trick you into sin. Certainly not God! God is just not like that.

Although temptation is inevitable you must be very careful NOT to conclude from that it is excusable. That it is something that somehow just happens to you apart from your will or choice.

If you give in to a temptation it's never God's fault but it's yours. For He has provided for you all you ever need to overcome it. You have simply chosen not to draw on all the good and perfect Gifts and Resources He has given you from above.

TEMPTATION HAS A PREDICTABLE PATTERN (14,15)

The third fact James tells us is that temptation has a consistent and predictable pattern about it. Verses 14-15 explains the process:

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.

To be tempted is not sin. Jesus was tempted at all points like we are yet without sin, the Bible tells us. Sin comes when we give in to the temptation, when we yield to temptation. Here's how it works.

The temptation first comes in some form which appeals to our desires and we are enticed.

The Greek word translated "drawn away" is a fishing term, which means literally "dragged away." For a fisherman to catch fish, he first needs to provide a bait that interests and entices a fish. You don't go fishing with clothes pins on a line. Do don't drop a clothes pin in the water and expect a fish to take the bait. No, you put a nice juicy, wiggly worm on a hook on a line. When the fish comes along it sees the bait and says, "Umm, that looks delicious. I believe I'll go over and check that out. I think that I will take a big bite. And WHAM, the fish is caught and is dragged away.

The evil fisherman of your soul, the devil, knows what to put before you to bait you, to entice you to bite. It may be something different for each of us. For one it is greed for more possessions. For some, single and married, it may be illicit sexual pleasures. For others it may be anger and saying destructive things about another person. For some it may be thoughts of worthlessness, and guilt. The evil one knows what bait to use.

Temptation follows a predictable pattern. **First** there is the presence of the bait, something that catches our desires and entices us. **Then** there comes a thought to yield to this certain temptation. **Then** we are faced with the choice to yield. **Then** there are the predictable results. The results are sin is conceived and when full-grown it brings death, spiritual death.

When your desire and the bait meet they produce a birth through yielding to that desire and that birth is called sin. And that sin when it is full grown brings death.

Everyone put your hand out. Imagine with me that you have a lemon in your hand. Feel how cold it is since you just took it out of the refrigerator. Feel the two knobs on the ends? Ok, now take a knife and cut the lemon in half. Careful! Don't cut yourself. Oh, look at the juice run down over the sides. Now, put one half down and just hold the other half of the lemon. Now, look at the inside of the cut lemon. Lean down and smell the lemon. Get a good full sense of the lemon fresh scent of the just cut lemon. Ok, now squeeze the lemon. See the juice ooze up and cover the surface of the cut lemon? Now - lick the lemon. That's right! Lick the lemon. Ok, who feels like you have more saliva than you did a minute ago? How can that be? It was only pretend! The reason is because your body reacts to that which your mind thinks about. That is why it is so important to set your mind on what Philippians 4:8 tells us, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lively, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praise worthy - think about such things.

You see, it all begins in the mind. When the thoughts that enter your mind begin to tell you to go for the bait that is laid before you, you are faced with a decision. You either can turn the thoughts off and saying not to them or you can give in to them and choose the bait. You either give the thoughts a green light or a red light. And if you chose to enter into the fulfillment of your lust you then enter into a death state. A state of separation from God. A life filled with guilt and frustration and bitterness and emptiness and boredom.

James says that temptation always follows a predictable pattern. You need to be aware of the pattern, so that you can fight the temptation in God's way.

YOU CAN WIN OVER TEMPTATION

The final thing James tells us about temptation is that you can win the battle with temptation. Verses 17-18 give us this hope:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creation.

God has given us gifts which enable us not to yield to temptation. He has given us the resources to deliver us from temptation.

How can we effectively deal with temptation? Verses 17 and 18 give us the answer. Since all good things come from God, dwell on that which is good. Think about the consistency of God's goodness. Think on those things which come from God. Think on God's good gifts.

This passage mentions one of the greatest gifts God has ever given us and it is the gift of our own spiritual birth which came about through His Word. Notice that this new birth came about in your life so that you might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. By firstfruits James is referring here to the Old Testament practice of offering to God that which is your very best.

In Romans 12:1,2 Paul summarizes our responsibilities in light of God's mercies and gifts:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

How can you win? According to Romans 12:1,2 by giving yourself to God and by renewing your mind. Only through the Scriptures is their found consistent victory over temptation. God not only caused us to be born again by His Word of Truth. He has also chosen to deliver us on a daily basis the same way. Since the real battle is in the realm of your mind. So the placing of the living truth in your mind is the only way to counteract the evil thoughts.

The Psalmist asks the question *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You;*

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You! (Psa 119:9-11 NKJV)

Someone has said, "A dusty Bible leads invariably to a dirty life." The key here is your thought life. The way you handle those fleeting thoughts is the way you will handle temptation. Someone has said "If you sow a thought you will reap an act. If you sow an act enough, you will reap your character, and if you sow your character you will reap your destiny." It's just a matter of time.

CONCLUSION:

Sin and temptation are not something to play around with. James says, "**Do not be deceived my brethren.**"

Several years ago a noted circus performer was attacked by one of his trained animals. This is the eyewitness account: "After the man had shown his complete mastery over several lions, tigers, leopards, and hyenas, he concluded his act by introducing an enormous boa constrictor nearly 30 feet long.

He had purchased the snake when it was only 2 or 3 days old, and for 25 years had handled it daily so that he considered it perfectly harmless and completely under his control. As the huge serpent slithered along, its head erect, its bright eyes sparkling, the entertainer gave a prearranged signal to the powerful creature.

As it had done every day before, it began to coil its heavy folds around him. Higher and higher it rose until the man and the serpent seemed blended into one, and the hideous head of the snake was raised above his own. Suddenly the trainer gave a muffled cry, and the audience burst into applause! Their cheers froze on their lips, however, for it soon became obvious that the man's scream was a death wail of agony. Without warning, the boa constrictor's serpent nature had returned, and its shiny, rippling body embraced him for the last time. The crowd heard bone after bone crack as the killer tightened its hold.

The man's plaything had become his master and destroyer. You must never play with sin or temptation, pamper it or flirt with it, but you must learn to take it very seriously, to hate it, crush it and to run from it at its earliest manifestations. Deal with it as James instructs us. Give yourself to God. Fill your mind with the good thoughts that God gives us. Know that you are a new creation in Christ. Then you will reap the promise of verse 12, "**Blessed is the man that endures temptation...**" Amen? Amen!