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A0709 – March 4, 2007 – Jas 1:13-15 – How Death Is Born

Okay, we've seen the DVP responses to trials; the proper mental attitude, Consider it all Joy, the proper prayer, Ask for Wisdom, an illustration, Boast in Spiritual Riches and the result for believers who follow these DVP responses, Receive Divine Favor. Now we are going to turn to look at DVP responses to temptations in verses 13-18.

- III. DVP Responses to Temptations (1:13-18)
 - A. How Death is Born (1:13-15)
 - B. How Life is Born (1:16-18)

In this passage James argues two things. First, we are the source of death. Second, God is the source of our regenerate life. Therefore, God is not responsible for sin and death, man is and man is not responsible for good and regenerate life, God is. Thus, the passage hinges on the nature of man versus the nature of God. Man's nature is temptable and mutable (changeable) but God's nature is untemptable and immutable (unchangeable). So, here we're going to jump into some pretty heavy theology.

James 1:13-15 Μηδεις πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι Ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι· ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπειραστός ἐστιν κακῶν, πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα· ἕκαστος δὲ πειράζεται, ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας ἐξελκόμενος καὶ δελεαζόμενος. Εἴτα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τικτεῖ ἁμαρτιαν· ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον. **(BYZ)**

James 1:13-15 Let nobody being tempted say "I am being tempted from God"; for God is not capable of being tempted from evil, and He tempts no one. But each one is tempted from his own private desire being dragged out and enticed. When the desire has conceived it gives

birth to sin; and when sin is full-grown it brings forth death. (**Authors Translation**)

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (**NASB**)

The proper DVP response to trials is the mental attitude of all joy which is possible if we have the knowledge of verse 3, that the approval of our faith produces endurance. If we let endurance have its complete work then we will receive the crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ. But we have to be very careful in times of trial because all trials are accompanied by temptations. Because of the close connection between trials and temptations we might be tempted to think they are both sourced in God. In other words, because trials come from God we might be tempted to think that temptations also come from God because of their close association. But this would be an illogical HVP conclusion. This conclusion manifests a misunderstanding of the nature of God since it is His nature which renders Him incapable of being tempted. In short, if God is not capable of being tempted then He is incapable of tempting others. Further, to say “I am being tempted by God” amounts to blaming God and that is a HVP response (unlike Job). Thus, there is something about the nature of God which renders Him incapable of being tempted and tempting others. If God is not the source of our temptations then who is? James says it is us, our own private lusts. Therefore, we should never blame it on God or the devil or anybody else, we should only blame ourselves.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”. The verb **say** (*legeto*) is a present imperative. It is a command to follow. It is a sin to say when tempted **“I am being tempted by God”**. Therefore, we should never blame God for tempting us. Rather, we should respond like Job who, when under trial accompanied by temptation did not blame God (Job 1:22). Job becomes the role model.

The word **tempted** is *peirazo*. It is from the same root of the word used in vv 3-4 translated “trial”. But there’s a contextual difference here so that v 13 translates it “tempt”. Context is always the decisive factor in the meaning or

nuance of a word. Since the word is used here as “a solicitation to evil” it is translated “tempt” not “trial” and God is separated from being the source of temptation. God never solicits to evil. Therefore no one should say when they are tempted, **“I am being tempted by God.”**

What James is addressing is those times in life when you are in a trial and temptation comes. By way of illustration let's return to the Garden in Gen 2-3. God made everything good (Gen 1:31) and gave Adam and Eve every green thing to eat except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). This introduced a period of trial. Would they pass the trial or fail the trial? God was using the tree as a point of testing in order to demonstrate their character, that they were good (Gen 1:31). He did not use the tree as a temptation, that was what Satan did. Satan was able to use the same tree God made to test them as a tree to tempt them. He accomplished this by suggesting an alternative interpretation of the tree. God said if you eat of the tree “You will surely die” (Gen 2:17). Satan said “You surely will not die!” (Gen 3:4). Satan was a liar from the beginning and is the father of lies (John 8:44). Hopefully you can see how the tree of trial was seized by Satan and misinterpreted. This example is meant to show that times of trial can also be times of temptation and that the temptation arises from a misinterpretation of reality. If we understand reality, that is, if we have a DVP on any given subject in the universe then it will not be a temptation. However, if we have a HVP on any given subject in the universe then it will be a temptation. As long as we trust God's interpretation of reality then we will be fine. But the moment we begin to doubt God's interpretation of reality then we are tempted. God wants us to trust Him and His interpretation of reality. Therefore, all temptation ultimately arises because we our minds are deceived. This is what happened to Eve. She was deceived or beguiled. Her mind began to wander from reality and this alternate reality was a temptation to her and she sinned and this brought forth death. Therefore, we should not be deceived (James 1:16). The areas in which you are the most tempted are the areas in which you are deceived about reality. This is why the Bible commands believers to be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2). The mind must be renewed to the proper DVP orientation to God's truth.

Was it God's fault that Eve was tempted? No. God told the truth about the tree. He never lied to them. She believed a lie about the tree and when she

did she was deceived and this led to her being tempted. Therefore it was Eve's fault, not God's. The same is true for all of us. Each of us is tempted when we believe a lie. For example, it is suggested by the world that sexual fulfillment can occur outside of marriage. If you believe that lie then you are deceived and sex outside of marriage will be a temptation for you. On the other hand, if you believe that sexual fulfillment can only occur inside of marriage then sex outside of marriage will not be a temptation for you.

Now, with respect to temptation it is clear that it is never sourced in God. However, this does not mean that God does not permit temptation. He does. For example, in the case of Job God permitted Satan and his wife and friends to tempt him Why? Why did God permit Job to be tempted? Surely God could have prohibited it. So why didn't He? Because God wanted Job to love Him by choice and not by force. God wanted Job to choose Him for Himself and not because he had no choice. God wants genuine relationships with people.

Now, the word **he is tempted** should actually be translated **he is being tempted** because it is a present passive participle. The passive voice shows that there is someone or something outside of him that tempts. So, the person being tempted here is right about one thing: that something outside of himself has triggered him to be tempted. But if he says that something or someone is God then he has come to the wrong conclusion. Let's understand this distinction between what tempts and who is tempted. Too often we take on a pagan mentality when it comes to temptation. We like to argue that the thing outside of us overwhelmed us so that we had no choice in the matter. This is the victim mentality of paganism. I'm just a victim of my environment. There's nothing I can do about it. I'm not responsible. And that's blame-shifting and the Bible doesn't go for that. The Bible says there is something you can do about it and we'll learn about that in a moment. But, let me give an example of blame-shifting that we are all too guilty of. Remember the Garden? Remember after they sinned they made fig leaves to cover their nakedness and then they heard God moving in the garden and they hid. Remember God said to Adam, "Where are you?" And God said Why are you hiding, have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat? And what did Adam say? It was the woman you gave me. She gave to me and I ate. See, it was her fault God, not mine. Then when God turned to Eve what did she say, "It was the serpent." More blame-shifting. It's not my fault God, it's his, I'm just a victim. This is pagan thinking, these are pagan responses.

Pleas that “I’m not responsible, I’m a victim” are not biblical. This brings us to another point. That the agent that tempts is responsible for tempting but the agent being tempted is responsible for being tempted (e.g. Gen 3:14). For example, Satan was held responsible for tempting Eve (Gen 3:14) but Eve was held responsible for being tempted (Gen 3:13, 16). The only reason she was tempted was because Satan suggested an alternative interpretation of the tree. When she was deceived by this suggestion she was tempted to eat and she was held responsible for eating. When she ceased to live by faith in God’s word she resorted to “sight” and was deceived (Gen 3:6). So, temptations are designed to tempt but they don’t always tempt a person and this just goes to show that we are responsible for being tempted. She did not have to eat. Neither the tree nor Satan crammed the fruit into her mouth. She was not a victim of Satan or the tree. If she was she wouldn’t have been judged by God. But she was indicating she was responsible for being tempted. She had a choice in the matter. So, we can never blame our failures on the temptation. We can never say “The temptation overwhelmed me; I had no choice in the matter.”

So, if someone says “**I am being tempted by God**”. Literally this says “**I am being tempted from God**”. In other words the source is God. If someone says this he has come up with the wrong answer. Why? James says, **because God cannot be tempted from evil**. James is saying that there is something about God’s nature that renders Him incapable of being tempted. And if that’s true then God didn’t tempt you. What’s the logic here? James’ logic is compelling. If it were possible for God to tempt you then God would first have to be tempted by evil. But God’s nature is such that He cannot be tempted. Therefore, God is not the source of your temptation. And further, it follows that **He Himself does not tempt anyone!** He never has and He never will. What is it in God’s nature that renders Him incapable of being tempted? We might posit that what it is that is a part of God’s nature that does not permit Him to be tempted is His immutability which is highlighted in v 17. God’s nature never changes! To be tempted by evil would cause an essential change in the nature of God and that’s not possible. God’s character never changes! He is the same yesterday, today and forever! So, if God is not the source of my temptations then who or what is?

Verse 14. **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** So, you are tempted when your lusts are activated.

And James uses a metaphor from fishing here to explain how this all takes place. The starting point is your **own lust**. The Greek word for **lust** (*epithumia*) means “private desires”. These are things other people don’t know about you. They are your innermost secrets. Things you don’t want people to know about you. When it all boils down we can’t blame the world or the devil. They may trigger the temptation but it is your **own private desires** which are responsible for being **tempted**. In fact, theologically speaking, temptation must start within you. I don’t know if you realize how magnanimous that statement is so let me explain.

Private desires start within you. If this is not the case then how do you explain how sin got started? Because, remember, God created everything “very good” (Gen 1:31) and He created two distinct personal creatures that were “very good”: angels and men. To create them with true responsibility and true personality He made them with a will that has true choice. Men and angels have will’s that can choose. This is the created analog to the Creator’s attribute of sovereignty. God has sovereignty and men and angels have choice. If men and angels do not have true choice then they cannot be held responsible for their actions because the only alternative to true choice is determinism or chaos. But God did create men and angels with a will and the choice which stems from the will can operate freely within created boundaries. Therefore, God decided the boundaries within which men and angels have free choice. God also created angels and humans with mutability. Mutability means the natures of men and angels can change. This is the created analog to the Creator’s attribute of immutability. God has immutability and men and angels have mutability. This mutability is confined to created boundaries, it is not limitless.

Let’s test this point. Do angels and men have a will by which they can choose and do they have mutability by which their essential nature can change? Let’s turn to the first sin. Who committed the first sin? Satan. What was Satan’s sin and where did it start? Turn to Ezek 28:14-17. There are debates about whether this passage refers to Satan or not.ⁱ I take the view that verses 1-10 describe the human leader of Tyre but verses 11ff describe a demonic king of Tyre who rules over the human leader. The text seems to indicate that the demon is Satan and he is the real mastermind behind the human leader of Tyre. Now, notice in verses 14-17 where sin started. It started *in* Satan. Note in verse 15 “unrighteousness was found *in* you.” Verse 16, “you

were *internally* filled with violence”. Verse 17 gives a hint at Satan’s own private desires, “Your *heart* was lifted up because of your beauty, You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.” It all started *inside* Satan. So, this tells us something very insightful about being a personal creature of God. It tells us something you might have a hard time believing but its true. If everything is going to be kept in balance with respect to God’s nature, evil and His personal creatures then this has to be true. God created personal creatures with a will that was temptable. This would seem to be part and parcel of being mutable. So, on one hand you have God who is immutable and untemptable and on the other hand men and angels are mutable and temptable. The two go hand in hand. If mutable then temptable. If immutable then untemptable. Verse 13 is saying God is untemptable and that flows from the fact that He is immutable (v 17). But we are mutable and therefore temptable. God made us this way. Otherwise you can’t explain the first sin of Satan and you can’t explain the first sin of Adam. If personal creatures were not temptable then the only alternative is we are immutable. So, temptability is part and parcel of mutability. We were created by God to be temptable. It is a part of our nature. That does not mean we have to fall for the temptation. We don’t have too. But, Satan did, Adam and Eve did and they didn’t even have sin natures.

Verse 14 describes how it happens. How sin gets started and its results. **But each one is tempted**, you, me, every creature **is tempted** from their **own lust**. The word **lust** in the NASB is the Greek word *epithumia* and means “strong or intense desire”. I’m going to translate it “private desire”.ⁱⁱ The first step is that your private desires are **carried away**. The Greek word for **carried away** is *exhelko* and means “to drag out”. It is a passive voice meaning someone or something drags out your private desires. This is the tempter. He wants to make your private desires public knowledge. The second step is that your private desires are **enticed**. The Greek word for **entice** is *deleazo* and means “to bait, to entrap, to beguile”. It’s a fishing metaphor. It is also a passive voice meaning someone or something is baiting your private desires. Someone is going fishing and you are the fish! So they bait the hook with some tasty morsel and try to entice you and drag you out of the rocks so you will take the bait. You don’t have to take it. It tempts some fish and not others but the bait is there to entice you, drag you out and hook you. So, we are tempted when someone entices and drags out our private lusts or desires.

Verse 15 **Then when lust has conceived.** That is, when our private desires have been enticed and dragged out at that moment conception occurs. This is a metaphor from the progression of childbirth. There are four distinct events in the progression of childbirth and James' point is that there are also four distinct events in the progression of sin.

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| 1. Conception | We decide to sin |
| 2. Birth | We commit the sin |
| 3. Maturity | We continue in the sin |
| 4. Death | We Die |

First, a woman conceives. The word **conceives** is *sullambano* and means "together with". It refers to the sperm "together with" the egg. The spiritual parallel is deciding to sin. *Second*, the woman gives birth to a child. The spiritual parallel is committing the sin. *Third*, the child grows up into a man or woman. The spiritual parallel is continually committing the sin. *Fourth*, the man or woman dies. The spiritual parallel is some form of death. So, we have conception of sin, the birth of sin, the maturation of sin and death as a result of sin.

Let's put verses 14-15 together in a sequence of events. First, temptation drags out our private desires. Second, we decide to sin. Third, we commit the sin. Fourth, we continue to commit the sin. Fifth, we die. There is a progression here and what we need to learn is that the results of sin are serious and therefore we need to deal with temptation and sin. It also shows us there are five times we can deal with temptation and sin.

First, the best time to deal with sin is before temptation occurs. That is prevention of temptation. Can temptation be prevented? The answer is "Yes". Obviously prevention is the best answer because no sin has been committed. How are you going to keep from being tempted? There are at least three tactics the Bible gives you to use. Actually, the Bible spends more time on prevention than any other way we can deal with sin. This is one method the Lord Jesus Christ used. The best plan is a preventative plan. And here are three steps in the plan. *One*, pray that the Lord will not lead you into temptation but will deliver you from the evil one (Matt 6:13; Luke 11:4). If

this prayer is answered then you are not tempted and your private desires are not awakened. If your private desires are not awakened then they cannot be conceived and you won't commit willful sin. *Two*, do not set up stumbling blocks in yourself (1 John 2:10). Don't set a trap for yourself. If you know you struggle with wasting time don't live without a daily schedule. If you struggle with cussing don't hang out with cussers. If you struggle with shopping don't drive by the mall. If you struggle with alcohol don't drive by the bar to see who's there. This is practical doctrine. Don't set a trap for yourself knowing you will fall into it. *Three*, practice godly living. If you practice godly living this forms a fortress. It's not invincible but it does shore up your defenses. Discipline yourself to godliness so that godly responses become habitual, natural (2 Peter 1:4-11).

Second, the next best time to deal with sin is after temptation but before you've decided to sin. There are two possible responses here. *One*, the flight response. You flee the temptation. As Paul told Timothy "flee" (2 Tim 2:22). Get out of dodge before you decide to sin. *Two*, the fight response. You are going to fight the temptation with the word of God. If you are going to use this tactic you better have a very good handle of the Scriptures. This is another method the Lord Jesus Christ used (Luke 4:1ff). So, there is a narrow window between the temptation and the decision to sin there where you can do one of two things: fight or flight.

Now, don't think that just because you have these tactics you will never sin again. That's just not going to happen. The Bible does not teach sinless perfection. It teaches that we should strive against sin (Heb 12:4) and that sin should be the exception (1 John 2:1) but it inevitably assumes that we will still sin. Nevertheless, you ought to learn to use these tactics so you can use them effectively in your daily walk.

Third, the next best time to deal with sin is immediately after you've sinned. This is immediate correction. If you have already sinned then it is time to confess your sin immediately in accordance with 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness". To confess means "to say the same thing" "to acknowledge". God wants us to face Him and admit to Him that our sin was utterly sinful. He doesn't want us to lie about our sin or rationalize our sin.

He wants us to confess our sin. If you don't confess the sin then you get yourself in some real trouble.

Fourth, the next best time to deal with sin is after you've committed it continually for some time but before you are physically dead. This is time-lapse correction. The NASB translates it "when sin is accomplished" but the Greek word is *apoteleo* and means "full-grown" or "mature". The idea is that the sin has grown in the believer's life. He keeps on committing the sin over and over. How do you deal with this kind of sin? Repentance. Repentance means to have "a change of mind" or "a change of perspective". You need to have a change of mind concerning the sin or sins that have taken over your life and then change directions. For example, Peter teaches, "The Lord is...patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). If you don't repent then sin must be dealt with in the fifth and most serious way.

Fifth, if we don't deal with our sin God will and He administers "death". This is physical death. Now remember, all this is written to believers so what is directly in view here is the "sin unto death". The death here is physical death. For example the Corinthian believers who were not taking the Lord's supper properly. Some of them were sick and others were asleep. Those who were asleep had undergone the judgment of sin unto death. Lastly, for an illustration of this turn over to James 5:19-20.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

So, let's sum up what we've learned today. First, the source of temptation is never God. God has no relationship to temptation or sin. Rather the source of temptation is our own private desires. We can prevent temptation by prayer, practice and not setting up stumbling blocks in ourselves. If we are tempted then we can fight with Scripture or take flight. If we commit the sin then we should confess it immediately. If we do not then we commit the sin continually and this should be corrected by repentance. If we do not then God deals with it by administering physical death.

ⁱ See Tom Constable's Expository Notes on Ezekiel 28:11ff at www.soniclight.com.

ⁱⁱ If humans didn't have "desire" they wouldn't be personal creatures. If angels didn't have "desire" they wouldn't be personal creatures. It's a part of personal creaturehood. If we didn't we couldn't be temptable.

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