

When We Have Succumbed to Temptation

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Spiritual Maturity

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We turn in scripture to Proverbs chapter 7 and we read this in connection with our study of James chapter 1. We will read also from James chapter 1. In James chapter 1 we're going to focus on temptation and what our attitude is supposed to be when we fall into temptation, and that's why we also read Proverbs chapter 7, because the whole chapter is describing how a person falls into temptation, especially with regard to sexual sins but really, the description here in Proverbs 7 is kind of a pattern for how God's people fall into all various kinds of temptations, into all various kinds of sins. So that's why we read Proverbs 7. Proverbs chapter 7.

1 My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. 2
Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.
3 Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. 4
Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy
kinswoman: 5 That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the
stranger which flattereth with her words. 6 For at the window of my house
I looked through my casement, 7 And beheld among the simple ones, I
discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, 8
Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her
house, 9 In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: 10
And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil
of heart. 11 (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: 12
Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)
13 So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said
unto him, 14 I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my
vows. 15 Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face,
and I have found thee. 16 I have decked my bed with coverings of
tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. 17 I have perfumed
my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18 Come, let us take our fill of
love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. 19 For the
goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: 20 He hath taken a bag
of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. 21 With her
much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips
she forced him. 22 He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the

slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; 23 Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. 24 Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. 25 Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. 26 For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. 27 Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

Now we also turn to James chapter 1. James chapter 1, and we will read the first 16 verses. The text will be verses 13 through 16. So we will not reread that. James chapter 1.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting [lacking] nothing. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it [the beauty of its design] perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. 12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Now the text, verses 13 through 16,

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

So far, we read God's holy word.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, by way of introduction, I want to make sure that we are understanding the progression of thought so far here in the first chapter of James. James, remember, is a leading elder in the church at Jerusalem. James is writing to saints who have fled Jerusalem because of severe persecution. He knows that life is difficult, very difficult for many of them, and truly life is difficult for all of them in their own way, and he is encouraging these saints. He is giving them practical, pastoral instruction as they go through their trials and up to this point in the letter, that's what the

word temptations has been referring to, to trials. For example, in verse 2, James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations." James is not saying there we are to rejoice when we fall into sin, when we fall into temptation, but we are to rejoice when we come across various trials. Rejoice in your trials. Why? Because God will use those trials to bring you further along in your spiritual maturity. Then in verses 5 through 8, James says, if you need help in this, if you need help in heeding this exhortation to count your trials all joy, then ask God for wisdom. Ask God for wisdom to see your trials in this good and positive light that you might have patience and that you might continue to patiently endure through the trial God gives you. And then in verses 9 through 11, James gives examples of what wisdom looks like. The poor man, he can rejoice in his trial of being poor, because he can rejoice in the fact that he is rich in Jesus Christ. He rejoices in the fact that he's exalted in Christ. And the rich man can rejoice in the fact that he has been shown his sins. As a rich Christian, he's been shown his spiritual poverty outside of Jesus Christ and how he needs Jesus. And then in verse 12, James tells his readers to remember to look ahead. All of them. "Blessed is the man which endureth temptation," whatever trial, blessed is the man that endures, "for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

Well now here as we come to verse 13, there is a little bit of a shift and what James does here in verse 13 is address the fact that God's people are not always enduring their trials faithfully. James knows that the trials of life are hard, and he knows that God's people often stumble and fall, and they don't always endure in their trials and James knows that the people to whom he's writing need instruction when it comes to this as well. God's people don't just need encouragement to endure through the trial, but they also need good instruction for when they have fallen into sin and have succumbed to the temptations. They need wisdom for these moments also and that's what we find here in the text this evening, practical instruction for God's people when they have succumbed to the temptations and they felt like the trials were too much and they gave in. The fact that this is in scripture tells us that this is also a very important word for God's people today. This is a word that we need to hear also.

We take as our theme this evening, "When We Have Succumbed to Temptation," and we look at that theme under three points. First, we look at with whom the blame lies, who is to blame. Second, the death cycle that follows. And third, the sober admonition. Just to be perfectly clear, as I said, up to this point, the word temptations has had the meaning of a trial, a trial that God sends us. Now here in verse 13, James starts using the same word, temptation, to refer to the idea of being tempted to sin and of falling into sin. And that's clear just by reading verse 13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Now we know God tries us, but God does not tempt us. If we wanted to paraphrase verse 13, we could put it this way, let no man say when he is tempted and when he yields to the temptation, I've been tempted by God, and the idea then is this, no one can say when he gives in to the temptation that he couldn't help it because after all, God was the one tempting him. And the idea is pretty straightforward. If God is all-powerful, and if God is actually the one enticing me, and God is the one luring me into sin, well, who can resist God? And so, if

God's the one tempting me and I fall into sin, then I can't really be held responsible for my sin. It's God's doing. It's God's fault. He should receive the blame, not me.

Now you can imagine how that kind of an attitude could have easily begun to characterize some of the saints who had been driven away from Jerusalem because of persecution. Here they are, far away from their home church in Jerusalem, living as strangers in a Gentile world, surrounded by pagans, surrounded by pagan temples. Here they are, many of them poor and suffering, enduring mockery and ridicule, not fitting in with their surroundings at all. And it is hard to live as a Christian that way and you can imagine how some of them were becoming dissatisfied with their situation and they had started making compromises and started falling into sin, maybe making friends with the ungodly, maybe even joining with them in their worship at the pagan temples, maybe getting short tempered, growing in bitterness and resentment. And as an excuse for their sins, they start thinking and talking this way, "Well, God put me in this situation. What does he expect? If he doesn't want me to sin, why doesn't he change my circumstances for the better?" Right? "If God didn't put me here, I wouldn't be tempted to fall into these sins."

What makes this kind of talk even easier is the fact that this is exactly how the ungodly neighbors around them would have talked about their idol gods. Think of the gods of Greek mythology. They were a capricious, vengeful, wicked bunch who as gods even tried to tempt people to fall into sin. And so when the world talks that way, and the world has that as their excuse for living the way that they want, it's easy for God's people to start thinking and talking that way too. In addition, this is what we're all inclined to do when we fall into sin, and maybe we feel somewhat guilty for our sins, we look to blame someone else and if there isn't anyone to blame, well, then we're even willing to blame God. And even when we blame others, in the end, we're blaming God for putting that person in my life. Think about what Adam and Eve said in the Garden of Eden. What Adam said, children, some of you looked at it this past week in Catechism. Right after Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, what did Adam say when God said, "Have you eaten of that tree?" And Adam says, "The woman, she gave me to eat." And he doesn't just say that, you remember what he said, "The woman whom thou gavest me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Right there, Adam in his sin blamed God.

And we're no different by nature, and the saints in James's day were no different. Again, every time we blame our sins on our circumstances, what we are doing is blaming God. Right? "If only I wasn't so poor, I wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath day. It's God's fault. If he wants me to keep the Sabbath day, he should give me more money. If only I had better parents, I would be more inclined to obey them. Why doesn't God give me better parents? If only my wife was giving me what I needed, I wouldn't have been driven to commit this sin. Or, if only I wasn't driven out of Jerusalem by the heavy persecution, I wouldn't be tempted to party with my Gentile neighbors on Friday nights and worship with them at their temples." And in each one of these cases, what we're really doing is blaming God. We're saying, "God tempted me. God gave me these friends. God was the one who made our paths cross. If he didn't want me to fall into this sin, why did he give

me this contact, this friend? God made me a loner so that I don't have good Christian friends. That's why I'm acting the way that I'm acting. God did this."

What we often hear today is this, "God made me this way. God made me this way." You hear that by those who want to acknowledge that there is a God, "He made me this way. So either it's not sin, what I'm doing, because God made me this way, or if it is sin, then it's God's fault. And we all know we're not going to blame God for sin, God's not the author of sin, so if God made me this way, then it must be okay." That's how the logic goes. "Or at least, that's good enough reason for me to indulge myself and excuse myself and push away my conscience and continue in this behavior, because if God wanted it different, he should change my circumstances." It's real. "If God didn't give me so many children, I wouldn't be acting so angry towards them right now. If God didn't give me such annoying brothers or sisters, I would be a more likable sibling. I'm just an impatient person. I just have anger issues. I just have these sexual urges. This is just how God made me." And what James says so forcefully in verse 13 is this, "No. Let no man talk that way. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." Why? "For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And the idea is this, the very thought that God is the one enticing us to sin is blasphemous. God hates sin. God can't even be tempted to sin. What is there in sin that would make God look at sin and say, "I want that"? There's nothing. God is already the perfectly blessed, holy, righteous God of heaven and earth. As we know, he cannot lie, he cannot regard sin with favor, he cannot deny himself, and he cannot be tempted to sin and neither does he tempt us to sin. Yes, he tries us. He tests us, but he never tempts us. That is, this is the difference now, God never makes sin look attractive and tries to lure us to commit the sin. No. God hates sin. He forbids sin. God is the one who cursed sin on the cross, and God is the one who has conquered sin and destroyed sin through his Son Jesus Christ. Would he then ever tempt anyone to commit sin? The very thought is absurd and deeply offensive to the Lord. Oh yes, he is the Sovereign One and he is also the Absolute Sovereign One over every temptation. He is sovereign over everything by the very fact that he decreed everything in his eternal decree and he also providentially upholds and governs and directs all things. So that the book of Acts says that when Jesus was crucified by wicked men, God was sovereign over all those circumstances and over that temptation that took over those men so that they went ahead and crucified Jesus. God was sovereign over the temptation that overtook Adam and Eve in paradise. But that doesn't mean that God is the one to blame for the sin committed. God is not the author of sin. He's not the one morally responsible, blamable for the sin committed. When we fall into sin, the blame does not fall on God in any way whatsoever. That should go without saying, but God puts this in scripture because he knows pastorally we need to hear this because this is what we're inclined to do.

God is the one who warns against sin. He's the one who shows us the evil of sin. He's also the one who's regenerated us and who has given us the life of Christ whereby we can resist temptation and endure the trials. That's what we're going to look at next time. God is the one who gives us good things and who hears and who answers our prayers for wisdom. When we succumb to sin, God is not to blame. So then who is to blame? Saints who are scattered abroad throughout the Roman Empire, who is to blame when you fall

into sin? Verse 14, James says, "But every man is tempted," he falls into sin, "when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." So who is to blame when we fall into temptation? Ourselves. Oh yes, we understand there might be external factors involved. Maybe we could say, "My friends were the one who were buying me the drinks. My friends were the one who egged me on. That man or that woman was flattering me and made me feel good about myself." But why did you succumb to the temptation? Because you were drawn away of your own lust and enticed. And the word lust here is simply a reference to our sinful nature. It's a reference to that old man, that inner depravity, the motions of sin in our flesh. And notice how James emphasizes not the external, but he emphasizes the internal, what's going on inside. He's drawn away of his own lust. This is what Jesus emphasizes in Matthew 15. Jesus says, "not that which goeth into the mouth defiles a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defiles a man." And then Jesus says, "but those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile a man for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." These are the things which defile a man. Later on in the letter of James, James will write, James chapter 4 verse 1, "From whence cometh wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?" The sins I've committed, it's not because of what others have done, it's certainly not because God is tempting me, it's because of my own sinful flesh. And that's wisdom, beloved, and that's actually the way of spiritual maturity, to actually say that, acknowledge that, come to terms with that. Even in the very moment when I've fallen into sin, not looking here or there to blame someone else, but to confess this, that's going back in the path of spiritual wisdom and maturity.

The second half of verse 14 gives us very picturesque language., "But every man is tempted," it says, "when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." And the language that James is using there is language that pertains to fishing. Think of a fish. I'm not the fisherman, so I'm not an expert here, but oftentimes predator fish have a certain lair or a certain area that is theirs and they will guard that carefully, and anything that comes across their lair, they'll reach out and devour it. And knowing this, fishermen will run their lure along the edge of that lair, the fish's hideout, so that they can draw away the fish from its territory so that the fish follows the bait. And what a fisherman does then is this, he tries to draw away the fish out of their lair. That's the language every man is, when he is drawn away. And then the fisherman entices the fish to strike after the lure. He draws the fish out of its safety and then entices the fish to go after the lure. And that's the language here. By our own lusts, by our own sinful natures, we are drawn away from our safety place, we are drawn into dangerous waters, and then once you're drawn away, it's hard to stop, to turn back, and to realize where you've brought yourself. You become more and more fascinated by the bait and then it starts consuming your time, it starts consuming your thoughts, so that you forget how far adrift you really are from your safety, and then the only thing that starts occupying your mind is how I must keep going forward and I must lunge after that bait before it gets away from me.

And that's what happens when we sin, beloved. Isn't this the case when we succumb to temptation that there is a moment, I think I said this a few weeks ago, that there is a moment, maybe even a very deliberate conscious moment, where you commit. You

decide to commit to the sin. "Now is the time when I will lunge and I will carry out this sinful act." And part of the point of the text is this, we need to realize that, beloved. Instead of giving ourselves excuses, instead of blaming others and blaming God, we need to realize that we are the ones committing ourselves to these sins, especially as the children of God who have the Holy Spirit, who are no longer slaves of sin, but who have been freed from sin's bondage through our Savior Jesus Christ. We need to recognize that when we sin, it's because we are allowing ourselves to be given over to our sinful natures, our lusts. We are drawn away of our own lusts and we are enticed and we lurch after the bait and sin catches us in its net. Yes, there are external factors. There are stresses we have in life. There's heartache, there's hurt that make God's people vulnerable to sin. There's our physical makeup. We might say, "Yes, my genes, I have a family history, but we all know in the end, I sinned because I wanted to sin, because I chose. I was drawn away and enticed. And for one reason or another, I wanted to do this." Who is to blame when we succumb to temptation? Certainly not God. James says, the blame lies with ourselves.

Now, in order to further instruct and admonish his readers, remember, he has a pastoral perspective. We'll wrap that up near the end of the sermon. But to further instruct and admonish his readers, James goes on in verse 15 and illustrates the death cycle that is involved here. He goes on in verse 15 to show us where these lustful desires will lead us if they go unchecked and we can call it a death cycle because the figure that James now uses in verse 15 is really the figure of a human life cycle. He mentions conception, giving birth, and maturity, growing up, and he mentions death. He mentions the whole life cycle but we can call it a death cycle because the whole cycle is characterized by death and it leads to death.

Verse 15, "Then when lust hath conceived," and we could perhaps put it this way, when we allow our sinful thoughts to reproduce themselves and to attach themselves to us, right? Just like a fertilized egg attaches to the womb. When we allow our sinful, lustful desires to find a place. "When lust hath conceived," the idea is that's when the lustful desire has arisen within us and then what happens is this, we so often nurture and we feed that lustful desire. We don't abort it right away and cast it away, but we shelter it, we nurture it, we protect it and what happens? It grows. It grows within us. It develops and it takes shape. We could even say sometimes that it feels like it's starting to take a life of its own. And what happens after a certain amount of time? What happens is this, that lustful desire gives birth to sin. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." It gives birth to sin, and the idea here is this, it gives birth to the actual deed, the outward action. The whole process, you understand, the whole process of harboring and protecting those lustful thoughts, all that is sinful itself, but the idea is when all that has run its course, then you have the actual deed being committed.

What's the actual deed being committed? Maybe it's the actual act of getting drunk. Maybe it's the act of stealing. Maybe it's, I've been having these disrespectful thoughts towards my parents and now the word leaves my mouth and I'm speaking disrespectful words towards my parents. Maybe it's committing adultery. Maybe it's worshipping with unbelievers at their temple parties. The actual deed is committed and then what's the next

step? Death, "and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." And the point here is this: sin never brings forth that which is good. Sin never ends in what is good. Sin always brings forth death. This is for all of us. This is for me to hear. Let not anyone ever think that by indulging in a particular sin, we are doing good or that we can bring good out of it. No, sin brings forth death. God is able to perform wonderful things. With God all things are possible. God brings forth life out of death. But that's for God. The word for us is this, sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

It's a death cycle and so part of what James is saying is this, and he'll get to it later on in verses 19 and 21, maybe if you have your Bibles open, you can see where he's going, but what James is saying is this: if you're giving yourselves over to temptation, right, if you're giving yourself over to impatience and to anger, verse 19, if you're giving yourself over to filthiness and rampant wickedness and excess of malice, superfluity of naughtiness, if you're doing that, you need to repent. Sin, any sin, the littlest sin, the sin perhaps that only you know about, that little private sin, maybe it's just the sin of going into the city, sneaking out that bar of gold and putting it under your tent. No one else knows about it. Maybe it's just the sin of lusting after another person in your head. Maybe it's just that sin of making your job your idol. Maybe it's that sin of using filthy language on the job site. That little sin will come to maturity. It will grow and it will develop and it will mature into death.

Sin is like cancer. That's very powerful. That's very applicable here. Think about that for a second. There are some here this evening who know what it is to have cancer and when you have cancer in your body, what is your greatest concern? What is the greatest thing that you are struggling to have patience with? At least that would be my perspective. It's this: waiting for the surgery to happen so that I can have the cancer removed. The sooner I can remove this cancer, the better because if this doesn't get treated, it will eventually lead to death, and the reality is, the longer this cancer stays in the body and spreads, the harder it will be to treat it. And it's that kind of fear that we really need to have when it comes to those little tumors of sin that are in our lives. And when it comes to our lustful desires, this lustful desire, if I let it linger and grow like a cancer, it will soon take over my life and bring me to death. And what kind of death? Not just physical death, but spiritual death. Hell, darkness, experiencing the wrath of God instead of his favor.

This is why we read from Proverbs chapter 7 this evening because this is exactly what Solomon is warning his son about, his beloved son. "My son. You see that young man? That simple man? Look what he's doing. There he is at night time on the streets walking down the road." What road? Yes, it just so happens to be that he's walking down that road where he knows that pretty young woman lives, and why is he there on her street at night walking past her house? Well, because he's had her in his thoughts. He's allowed his lust to conceive. He's allowed his lustful thoughts to grow within him. He's had all kinds of thoughts about this woman before. Obviously, he knows where she lives. He's been scoping these things out. And now, lust, when it has conceived, it brings forth sin. Now he makes that commitment, that conscious, deliberate choice to seek her out. And lo and behold, he meets her, and she speaks kindly to him and they banter back and forth. She sneaks him a kiss, and she invites him home. And he thinks now he's been drawn away

and now he's enticed. He thinks, "I better snatch, I better lurch after the bait before the husband comes home. Now is my time." You see, he's drawn away by his own lust and enticed and he goes along with her and what does Proverbs 7 say? It says exactly what we read in our text, sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Proverbs 7 puts it exactly that way. "He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

And you know what's really offensive? What would be really offensive is this, if someone would say, "I couldn't help it. God tempted me." You know how offensive that is? No, how should the child of God think? You should think this way, "I will count it all joy when I fall into diverse trials because I know God is my God, Jesus is my Savior, and God has a good purpose in this trial. He's going to mature me, he's going to test me, he's going to show me more of his glory, and he's going to show me as I strive to persevere, he's going to show me his faithfulness and that he hears my prayers for help. So I'm going to count this trial a joy instead of succumbing to the temptation." And in addition, how should the child of God think? He should think this way, "Heavenly Father, give me wisdom. Give me wisdom to think about all this properly in the light of who you are so that I continue to live according to what your word says and not according to my own understanding, so that I make wisdom my sister and understanding my kinswoman so that I keep them close by me instead of walking in the way of foolishness. So that I lean not unto my own understanding, but I acknowledge thee in all my ways. Lord, help me to think straight." And in addition to that, how should the child of God think? He should think this way, we've considered it recently, "Heavenly Father, lead me not into temptation. Since I am so weak in myself that I cannot stand a moment, and since my mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh, cease not to assault me, do thou therefore preserve and strengthen me by the power of thy Holy Spirit, that I may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare but constantly and strenuously may resist my foes. I know that the victory in Jesus Christ is sure. May I live accordingly. May I live as one who knows the power of thy grace and who knows that when I resist the devil, he will flee from me. Lord, help me and show me that thy word is true. Help me to count my trial as joy, to have that perspective of spiritual maturity."

And that's where we come to the sober admonition found in verse 16, "Do not err, my beloved brethren." Or we can maybe put it this way, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." And I think there's a few ways that we can understand that verse, verse 16. I have three things. First, don't blame God. Some of you perhaps are doing that. You are tempted to do that in your difficult situation in the Roman Empire. Don't do that. Don't be deceived. Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that you have a good excuse for giving in to your sins. God does not tempt us to sin. Rather, as he says in verse 17, God is the source of every good and perfect gift. Don't deceive yourselves into thinking you have a good excuse for your sin.

Second, I think the idea is also this, don't deceive yourselves into thinking that your sin is harmless or that your sin won't lead to death. It will lead to death. Paul puts it in

Galatians chapter 6 this way, the same language, Paul says, "Be not deceived. Do not err. Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." Don't deceive yourselves into thinking your sin is harmless.

And third, I think the idea is also this, don't be deceived into thinking what the devil wants you to think, that you are all alone in your temptation, that God does not love you, or that God is against you simply because he's leading you in a hard way right now. Don't doubt God's goodness towards you in the midst of this trial. Instead of doubting God, trust his goodness. Instead of questioning him, submit to him. He is the one who loves you. My beloved brethren in Christ, he is the one who has begotten you with the word of truth, verse 18. Trust his way for you and trust that he will supply you with the grace needed to endure the trials because he will. He is the father of lights with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. His faithfulness is perfect.

So that's different ways in which this admonition can be understood and I think this can be applied to us and is an important word for us. First, don't blame God. Really, who am I even to reply against God? God is light and in him is no darkness at all. I can't blame God for my sins. I sense how blasphemous that is. Let me be honest. "Lord, let me live in truth and let me confess my own sins honestly before thee." Ask for forgiveness, and then ask for help in the battle. He is a very present help.

Second, for us this evening, don't think sin is harmless. Sin will come into your house like a little python, appearing so harmless. You know it's a snake, and maybe we're disgusted by snakes, but for whatever reason, we welcome it into our home. It's small, I can handle it. And then the next thing you know, that snake has escaped its aquarium, it's got you in its grip, and it's suffocating the life out of you. Don't let the little snakes into your home. Strike at sin at the very earliest risings of sin. Kill it. Get rid of your phone, get rid of your internet, get rid of your friends, so-called, get rid of your job if it's leading you into sin. Jesus himself says it in stronger language than what I just said, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee, for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members," one of your body parts, "should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Don't think sin is harmless. Pluck it from you.

And third, keep looking to Jesus and remember how God has commended his love towards you, that he is faithful. Don't buy into that lie that you're all alone in your trial. God has said he will never leave you nor forsake you. If God gave you Jesus to endure the sufferings of hell that you deserve for the sins you committed against him, you can be sure that God now, having blotted out all your sins, will freely give you all things with Christ. If God made you his child, then you can be sure God will preserve you as his child. Keep trusting him. Keep following his word. And remember, in the power of the cross of Jesus Christ, you do have the strength to fight against and resist temptation. You face temptation, not alone, never alone, in the power of Christ. Like the Apostle Paul, we must often say, "Oh wretched man that I am. I've sinned again. The good that I would, I don't do. And the evil that I would not, that I do." But then what does he say? "I thank

God through Jesus Christ our Lord." God gives me the victory through Jesus Christ. And day by day as I fight the good fight of faith, I even experience, you experience this too, we're growing stronger in the battle and the temptations that would lead me into sin, instead of being temptations to sin, I am now really experiencing how they are trials that are refining me, that are purifying me, and sharpening me, and strengthening me, and molding me. I experience that. I experience that maturing. I am growing. It's not a perfect straight line, but God is at work in me. And I even find within myself this disposition that I do rejoice in the trials of life. I am. I can. I have that beginning because I know God is doing a good work here. God is making me grow stronger as a believer, making me more heavenly minded, seeking the things above and that's something that makes me happy, having the beauty of Christ shining in me and through me.

That's growing in spiritual maturity and that's what James has in mind here in this letter for his saints. Live by faith, grow in spiritual maturity. Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations and when you sin, don't fall into that further temptation of blaming God but be honest, go to God, confess, seek forgiveness and experience that with him is strength and the power to endure as we continue to ask him for wisdom and for the grace to go forward. May that truly be our experience and may the Lord use this word to encourage us in that walk of faith. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank thee for this practical instruction. Thy word is good for every need, and it is timely in every circumstance of life. Lord, shape our hearts by it, shape our lives by it. We thank thee that we can receive all this instruction, knowing who we are in Jesus Christ as those who have been begotten by the word of truth. And we pray, Lord, that this word preached might have its good effect to thy name's glory and honor. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.