

# Faith Without Works is Useless

## An Expositional “Journey” Through the Epistle of James

### 4-From Where Do Temptations Come? Part 1

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March 14, 2021

#### **James 1:12-16**

**12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.**

**13 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.**

**14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**

**15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

To the Glory of God

The Bible teaches that God is Sovereign. He is *absolutely* Sovereign. God is absolutely Sovereign *over everything*. And God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- *all the time*. Now all I just did in the last three Statements was to extrapolate what the first Statement actually means. So, when we say that God is “Sovereign”- we mean to say that there is nothing that exists that operates outside of God’s complete Control.

Now many within the modern Church have watered down this Truth about God’s Sovereignty- to mean that God *knows* about everything. And by doing that- they have *limited* God’s Sovereignty to be ONLY God’s Omniscience. But the Bible is crystal clear:

#### **Isaiah 46:9b-11**

**... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure ... Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

Now there is simply no honest way to read that Passage (and a hundred more just like it) and not realize that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time.

But that means that God is also absolutely Sovereign over “Evil”. All the time. And God is absolutely Sovereign over satan- all the time. And God is absolutely Sovereign over the evil Decisions of wicked men- all the time. Nothing and nobody operates outside of God’s complete Control and Order and Will and Desire. So, nothing happens that God did not *want*. Nothing occurs that God did not either passively “allow” or actively “cause”.

Now over the years, fallen human beings have developed Man-made Teachings that say *some* variation of this scenario:

- Satan moves *first* and attacks God’s people
- Then those believers “rise up in faith”; “bind the devil”; and speak against the attack
- Then God rides in like the 7<sup>th</sup> Calvary to rescue them

... and in that false Belief- the only reason God doesn’t do that- is because the individual supposedly doesn’t have enough Faith; or there is Sin in his life; or who knows what else. And this Teaching may sound great- but there is a problem with it. The Bible doesn’t teach it. Never has; never will.

Instead, the Bible teaches that, God always moves first. Not satan and not Man. God always moves first. God originates everything and Man responds to what God does.

You see, before time began, God decreed all that would occur. And God issued His Plan; and He established His Will; and He permanently fixed the way things will happen. And from that moment until now- God invincibly Works to assure that *all* that He has decreed and planned and willed to happen- will happen- *exactly* as He decreed it. And that includes everything from the rise and fall of nations; to what you decided to eat when you woke up this morning. And it also includes the Temptations that you face each day.

The Bible teaches that satan CANNOT and DOES NOT operate outside of God’s absolute Control; Allowance; or Causation. And so, satan has to go to God; ask Permission; and get it- BEFORE he can do *anything*. Let’s look at how this works by reading **Job 1:6-12**:

## **6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment satan rebelled against God- he was cast out of Heaven. Jesus said this casting was like lightning (**Luke 10:18**). And **The Revelation 12:8** says, “there was no longer a place found for them (satan and the deceived angels) in heaven.” So, I

**7 The Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.”**

**8 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”**

**9 Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing?**

**10 “Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.**

**11 “But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”**

**12 Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.**

Here satan asks God for Permission to take all that God had given Job- away from him. And in verse 12- God gives satan Permission to do that. But that Permission comes with a *restriction*; a *limitation* on what satan can and cannot do:

**“Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.”**

The result that we read about in verses 13-19 is that all of God’s gracious Blessings that He had mercifully given to Job- was suddenly taken from him- *including* his ten children! And satan used both “natural things” like the “fire of God” (verse 16) and a “great wind” (verse 19). But satan also used other sinful people- like the Sebeans (verse 15) and the Chaldeans (verse 17).

Now this was very hard. It is one thing to lose *some* of your possessions in some terrible storm or through the violence of other people. But to lose **EVERYTHING**- all at once- was a terrible thing to happen to somebody that the Bible says was,

### **Job 1:1b**

**... blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.**

Now keep in mind that there was NO Insurance in force to replace what Job lost here. So, this Loss was Total and Complete. And the result was that now Job was destitute. And the Temptation for Job was to get mad at God; protest God’s

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conclude that this meeting between God and satan in **Job 1:6** occurred on the earth and NOT in Heaven.

unfair and mean treatment of himself; and to withhold his Worship. Yet look what Job did:

### **Job 1:2**

**Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground...**

So, Job was in the most traumatic Agony of his life. And he demonstrates that Agony by tearing his robe; shaving his head; and falling to the ground. But then- in his Agony- he also did something else:

**... and worshiped**

Yes, Job was torn apart. Yes, he was grieving. And the Temptation here was to shake his fist in God's Face and, in his Grief- blaspheme God.

But Job did NOT grieve, "**as do the rest who have no Hope.**"

**(1Thessalonians 4:13).** The Grief Job had- at all of his earthly Possessions being suddenly taken from him- did NOT preclude him from worshipping God.

Now it is very important to understand that Job didn't act this way because he was brave; or courageous; or because he was philosophical. No, Job worshipped God in the middle of his Agony- because he was saved. And what *helped* Job to act this way- was because- somehow- he had a grasp on God's Sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> And this Event is in the Bible to teach us how *all* saved people are supposed to act- in the time of *our* Temptation. But now listen to what Job said,

### **Job 1:12**

**"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."**

Now some very famous television Preachers<sup>3</sup> have taught that Job was simply delirious from all his Suffering- and that he was just talking out of his mind here. But in the very next verse- whoever wrote this Book (Jeremiah?) added an inspired and infallible Commentary to what Job said and did:

### **Job 1:12**

**Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God**

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<sup>2</sup> Job had no inspired Books to teach him about God's Sovereignty. Even though Job lived during the Days of the Patriarchs (the Days of Abraham/**Genesis**), the **Book of Job** was not written until many hundreds or thousands of years later. Evidently, God had revealed Himself to Job- without the aid of any infallible Writings.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Price; Creflo Dollar; and Kenneth Copeland

... and that means that Job was NOT sinning by assigning this horrific Suffering to *originate* from God. Somehow, Job knew that all that fallen and sinful human beings have on this earth- comes from God. And that includes all of our Blessings; as well as all of the “Evil” that befalls us.

Now you would think that this would have been enough. Yet satan goes back to God and asks Permission to do even more damage:

### **Job 2:1-6a**

**1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.**

**2 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.”**

**3 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.”**

**4 Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.**

**5 “However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.”**

**6 So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power...**

... yet, once again, notice that God *limits* the amount and the degree of Evil that satan can do against Job. So, although He gave satan Permission to “**touch his bone and his flesh**”- God drew a line and said,

**... only spare his life.**

... so, what happened?

### **Job 2:7**

**Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.**

... and, once again, the Temptation here was for Job to feel aggrieved at God; and reach the Conclusion that God was unfair and mean. Many people today would go to that place. But how did Job respond to this great Evil?

## **Job 2:8**

**And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.**

Job's life now consisted in him scraping his many boils with a broken piece of clay to try to stop them from getting infected. And the fact that he is sitting among the ashes signifies his great Agony and his Turmoil.

We need to remember that, at this point, the conversation between God and satan were unknown to Job. All Job knew was that this Good and Gracious God, Who had chosen to forgive him of all Sin and save him; the God, Who had made him one of the richest and most powerful and famous men of his generation; the God, Who had blessed him with vast tracts of land and innumerable head of livestock- along with many, many slaves- had also chosen to make him a childless pauper- who spent his days scraping his boils with a piece of clay.

Try to imagine how everything in Job was being challenged and the Temptation to scream out at God and reject Him- had to be very great. And then, to add insult to injury- listen to what his wife said to him,

## **Job 2:9b**

**... “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”**

So, how do you respond to your dear Wife- who was obviously devastated at the loss of her children; and the prospect of having to become a beggar? What do you say to her? Listen to what Job did say,

## **Job 2:10a**

**But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?”**

Now the word here that was translated as “**foolish**” comes from a Hebrew word [*nabal*; Strong’s #5036], that means: *someone who is dense morally, intellectually, and spiritually*. So, for Job to say this to his Wife was to equate her with the Gentile pagans, who didn’t know God.

But was Job correct to say this? Well, the writer of Job thought so, because at the end of verse 10, he gave another inspired and infallible Commentary and said,

**... In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

... meaning Job was NOT sinning by saying that Adversity- *ultimately* comes from God.

Okay, but how does this work? Satan is the instrument by which God brings Adversity to our lives. But why would a Good God bring Adversity to the lives of His Own children? So, they may share in God's Holiness. Please look at what the writer of Hebrews taught about this from **Hebrews 12:3-13:**

**3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

**4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;**

**5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;**

**6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."**

**7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?**

**8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.**

**9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?**

**10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.**

**11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.**

**12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,**

**13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.**

Okay, that takes care of things like Suffering and Evil and Troubles in the world that we, as believers, face. God allows Evil and Suffering to His Own children- so that, by and through the Fire of Suffering- they can be changed into the Image and Likeness of Jesus and then share in God's Own personal Holiness (verse 10). And so, even though the Fire of Trials and Sufferings, "**seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful**", we are promised by a God, Who cannot lie- that, "**to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness**". And that is the reason we are to, "**strengthen the hands that are**

**weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for [their] feet”,** so that those who are burning in the fires of Suffering and Trial will Not despair- but persevere through the Trial to the glorious End.

Amen. But these Trials and Sufferings originate from outside of us. God uses satan to bring these Trials and Sufferings to us. And we struggle through the Fire and in the Fire- to be changed. But from where do our Temptations come? Do Temptations also come from satan? Do Temptations also come from outside of us? Here in verse 13, James infallibly wrote,

**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.**

So, the first Principle that James wants us to understand about our Temptations- is that God does NOT do the tempting. And that means that God NEVER puts evil Desires into our hearts. Okay. So, based on this- it seems that we can now very easily formulate a biblical Doctrine about Temptation. And this Doctrine of ours will have three parts to it:

1. **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"**
2. **God cannot be tempted by evil**
3. **[God] does not tempt anyone**

But how do we know this? Because over and over again, the Bible teaches that God is Perfect; and Sinless; and Righteous; and Holy; and Pure; and untainted by any Sin. And when you add up all of God’s Attributes- you come to the correct conclusion that God is not *able* to have any sinful Inclinations. He doesn’t possess the Power or the Ability to Sin or to be sinful in any capacity. His Own pristine Character and Nature simply will not *allow* God to possess any evil Desire. And so, then we would continue to formulate our Doctrine by saying,

Satan tempts us

And we would have some precedent to think that way. After all, the unknown writer of **1Chronicles** (Samuel/Ezra?) said,

**1Chronicles 21:1**  
**Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.**

Satan “moved” David to sin against God. And the word, “**moved**” as used here comes from a Hebrew word [*cuwth*; Strong #5496], which means: to incite;

*to allure; to instigate; to provoke or to mislead.* This word has the sense of acting with harmful purposes in mind- to lead people astray or to entice them to sin. Sounds like Temptation to me.

Okay, and so, from that- many have come to the conclusion that satan sits on our left shoulder- while God or Jesus or an Angel sits on our right shoulder. And both of them are whispering in our ear. Satan is whispering and telling us to do something “Wrong”; while God or Jesus or an Angel is whispering- telling us to not listen to satan and to do something “Right.”

And we are in the middle between the two. So, there is one “vote” to do “Evil” and one “vote” to do “Good”- and we have the “tie-breaking vote”.

Now this actually makes a lot of sense to our natural mind. And it seems fairly “biblical”. And I would suppose that the overwhelming majority of the members of the modern Church believe in this Doctrine. I have even heard it taught from several Pulpits. But I learned it by watching “religious cartoons” early on Sunday morning before we went to Church back in the early 1960’s. And one of the reasons this Doctrine has become so popular- is because it is easy to teach; easy to learn; and easy to believe.

But there is a very serious problem with this Doctrine. The Bible does NOT teach it. The Bible has NEVER taught it. What I just described to you is NOT what James taught. In fact, the Christian Church is on record as categorically REJECTING this Doctrine.

You see, what I just described to you is what the ancient Gnostics taught. Nearly 2,000 years ago- those Heretics attacked both the Grace of God and the Character and Nature of Jesus Christ by *manufacturing* a Man-made, “Doctrine of Devils” that is now called, “*Dualism*”.

Now a great way to comprehend “*Dualism*” is to understand the premise behind the “*Star Wars*” movie series. In that fictitious setting- there are two great Powers:

1. The Force of “Good”
2. The Force of “Evil”

So, in the movie, when they say, “*The Force be with you*”- they mean, “*May God bless you*” or “*May God be with you*”.

And in the mind of the writers and producers and the Director- these two “Forces” are both- “Eternal”. They are “co-equal Powers”- that war against each other- *constantly*. And sometimes, the “Force of Good” wins; but on other occasions- the “Force of Darkness” wins. But these two Powers or Forces are in a *perpetual* Battle against each other for the supremacy of Man. And the entire Series is based on that

foundational premise.

Now the Gnostics didn't watch *Star Wars*. And I'm not accusing George Lucas of being a Gnostic. And I'm also not trying to get you to stop watching movies. But I *am* trying to show you how common it is to find ancient Heresies in our modern Culture. And I *am* trying to prove to you that every book you read; and every song you listen to; and every movie or television show you watch- is a Sermon- designed to influence you in a certain direction.

And so, as we engage our modern, American Culture- which we must- we cannot afford to read or watch or listen- *casually* or without discerning just what we are being fed- and then act accordingly.

The Bible teaches that God alone is Sovereign. And by teaching that, the Bible means to convey that God is all by Himself- in His Sovereignty. And so, everything else- including both Man and satan- are "created beings" that are completely *subservient* to God.

So, God is NOT in a titanic Struggle against satan or Evil. God alone rules-supremely. God's Will and Plan and Decree are completely *invincible*. And satan can't do ANYTHING to stop it. What God has determined to do- CANNOT be thwarted. And what God has decreed will come to pass- EXACTLY as God originally planned it. This is all part of what it means for God to be "Sovereign". And it is why we worship Him.

So, while it is true that satan is stronger than we are- satan's power is NOT anywhere equal with that of God. Satan is actually nothing more than a "tool" that God uses to further His Own Agenda. So, satan HAS to come to God and get His Permission to do anything in the earth. Jesus Himself confirms this when He said to Peter in **Luke 22:31&32:**

**Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**

Okay, but then what do we do with *other* verses that *seem* to teach differently- like **Matthew 4:1**, that says,

**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**

Here, Matthew wrote that Jesus was led by God the Holy Spirit. Yes, He was. And Jesus is the only Man, Who was led by the Spirit- *perfectly*. We try to be led. But we hit and miss. Jesus never missed. He was *perfectly* submissive to His Father and He was *perfectly* led by God the Holy Spirit. And He was perfectly led- *continually*. In other words, Jesus was NEVER *not* being perfectly led by the

Spirit. Every moment of every day He was here on earth- Jesus was being led by the Spirit- *perfectly*. And this shows us the perfect Harmony and the perfect Unity that always *has* and always *will* exist- between the three Persons of the Trinity.

But then look what Jesus was led to do. Matthew says that Jesus was led by the Spirit, “into the Wilderness”. For what Purpose?

### **... to be tempted by the devil.**

Now it is very important that we understand what Matthew says here and what he doesn’t say here. Matthew does NOT say that God the Holy Spirit tempted Jesus. Rather, he says that God the Spirit led Jesus to go into the Wilderness- so He *could be* tempted by the devil. And from that we get at least four things:

1. It was absolutely God’s Will that Jesus be tempted
2. Neither God the Father nor God the Spirit tempted Jesus
3. God the Spirit led Jesus into a place- a position- where He *could be* tempted.
4. Jesus was tempted here- by the devil.

... but then we also have to understand that Jesus’ Temptation- here- at this moment- was NOTHING like ours. The Bible tells us over in **Hebrews 4:15**:

**For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.**

So, all during His 33-1/2 years on earth- Jesus was constantly being tempted “**in all things as we are**”- with one notable exception. Jesus NEVER yielded to His Temptations. Not a single time. So, from that we know that Jesus was perfectly sinless- the entire time He was here on earth.

But that is NOT what is going on here in **Matthew 4**. Jesus’s Temptation here was completely *unique* to Him- as being God the Son and has NOTHING to do with *any* Sin we are tempted with. For example, in **Matthew 4:2&3**- Levi wrote:

**And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."**

So, God the Father had told Jesus to fast. And being perfectly submissive to His Father- Jesus *immediately* stopped eating. Now we need to read this carefully. Matthew does NOT say that Jesus was on a “40- day Fast”- even though many people teach that. He merely says that after Jesus had fasted 40 days- He was hungry. So, evidently, there was NO time- frame for this Fast. God had simply told Jesus to not eat. And Jesus obeyed. And then satan comes to tempt Jesus to rebel against His Father’s Will and break His Fast- by turning stones into bread- so He could eat.

So, is eating a Sin? Of course not. If we don’t eat- we will die. I think they have discovered that, in *some* circumstances, with *some* people- a human can go around 50- 60 days without food before he dies. So, God will honor ANY Fast that we engage in- because we *have* to eat to live. But, here, Jesus would rather starve to death than to rebel against His Father’s Will and eat.

But, more importantly, we don’t have the Power to turn stones into bread in the first place. So, this would have NEVER been a Temptation to us at all- because we simply CAN’T do it. But Jesus DID have that kind of Power. And yet- out of His perfect Love for His Father- He *refrained* from using the Power He had- in order to be in perfect Submission to His Father’s Will.

So, satan’s Temptation of Jesus here- was for Him to set aside His full Humanity and allow His full Deity to provide for Himself- in rebellion to God the Father’s Will. You see, Jesus had two Natures:

1. fully Human
2. fully Deity

... and those two Natures operated constantly and without conflict in Jesus in a *mysterious* way that we simply can’t comprehend. But we only have *one* nature. So, this particular Temptation of Jesus by satan was NOT something we are familiar with- at all.

Now there is a lot of confusion about this. And many people believe and teach that we are at war between our “fallen Nature” and our “redeemed Nature”. But that isn’t true. Aside from Jesus- no human has two Natures. We only have one. A human being can only have one Nature at a time. So, if we are lost- we have a “fallen” Nature. And if we are saved- we have a “redeemed” Nature. And the transformation of our human Nature- from “fallen” to “redeemed”- is what happens to us in the Miracle of the New Birth.

And so, our battles- as saved people- are between our saved and redeemed Nature and our still fallen Flesh. You see, neither the New Birth; nor Justification; nor even Sanctification transforms our fleshly bodies. Our bodies- our Flesh- are still fallen; they are still rebellious against God; and are still sinful. And that is why our bodies can’t make the trip to Heaven. Our natural, fleshly bodies will die

and decay in the ground- even though we are saved. Why? Because our fleshly bodies are still under the Curse of God.

Now Christianity is the ONLY Religion that teaches that even when we die; and our souls go to Heaven and we are in the very Presence of God- our Salvation is NOT finished. Christianity teaches the union between our souls and our bodies. So, the Bible teaches that our saved souls will be united with a glorified body- in the *future* Resurrection. And at that moment- our Salvation will be finished. So, until we attain “Glorification” we aren’t really “saved” in the sense that our Salvation is past tense and fully completed. But rather, we are still “*being* saved”.

But until then- our fleshly body still craves everything it wanted *before* we were born again. And we *inherited* our flesh and all of those various Lusts and Desires from Adam- when he fell. Both our fallen Nature and our sinful Flesh were *imputed* to us- through the seed of our natural, earthly fathers- at the very moment of our Conception. And those fleshly Lusts- are ever present with us and they war against our justified Souls.

Now *some* of those Lusts are “common”. In other words, *some* Lusts of our Flesh are common with *all* human beings. Other Lusts are common among most all Women; while still others are common with most all Men. And some Lusts are common with young people- *especially* young men. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote to his young “son in the Faith”, Timothy and told him,

## **2Timothy 2:22**

**Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**

... but some Lusts of our flesh are unique to us. And so, while they may not trouble others- we are bothered by these “unique” types of Lusts. Now there are, at least, sixteen different references to either “Lusts” or “fleshly Lusts” in the 27 Books of the New Testament. But perhaps the one that displays the war between the human flesh and the human soul the *best* is **1Peter 2:11**, that says,

**Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.**

... and the word that was translated here as “**lusts**” is a Greek word [*epithumia*; Strong’s #1939], that means: *a strong desire; a longing; a craving; a desire or an inordinate appetite*. And the Apostle John agreed with Peter about the danger of these fleshly Lusts and so, he infallibly wrote:

## **1John 2:16**

**For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.**

So, the “Lusts of our Flesh” or “fleshly Lusts” are the *Desires*; the *Cravings*; the *Longings*; and the *Appetites* of our fallen and unredeemed Flesh. And John said that these Lusts are:

**... not from the Father, but [are] from the world**

... while Peter said they,

**... wage war against the soul**

Now, most of the time, we think of “Fleshly Lusts” as being “sexual” in nature. And that is true- a lot of the time. But fleshly Lusts are ANY Desire; ANY Longing; ANY Craving; or ANY Appetite that appeals to our unredeemed Flesh.

So, in addition to “Sexual Sins” we must include things that we might not normally think about like: Pride; or Fear; or Money; or Fame; or Recognition; or Success; or even an Ability that we may have; or a special Skill we may possess. *Anything* that builds up and promotes our fallen Flesh- at the expense of magnifying Jesus; *anything* that wages war against our redeemed Soul- and *anything* that is NOT of the Father- but is of the fallen “world system”- is a “Lust of the Flesh” or a “fleshly Lust”. So, these Cravings or Desires or Appetites or Longings might even be a tendency to get angry with people; or to attack someone verbally. Maybe it is an inclination to insult people- or to put them down or to “get even” with them. The list is almost endless.

But here is something odd. What do you notice that is missing with what both John and Peter wrote about these “fleshly Lusts”? There is no mention of satan. At all. Anywhere. Peter simply instructs us to “*abstain from these lusts*” while John says, “*Do not love them*”.

Now, to “**abstain**” from something is to NOT do it. It is to *refuse* to engage in it. It is to *purposefully* turn away from it. The English word, “**abstain**” comes from a Greek word [*apechomai*; Strong’s #567], which means: *to exercise self-restraint; to refrain from; and to use self-control*.

And this tells us that these “fleshly lusts” are part of “Who we are”. They *already* reside in our fallen Flesh and they trouble us. We don’t have to be taught to engage in these Lusts- because they are part and parcel to ourselves. And that means that these Lusts are NOT *external* to us. They aren’t some type of “power” or “force” that lies *outside* of our bodies and which periodically attack us from

*without.* No, these are the Cravings and the Desires and the Longings and the Appetites of our fleshly bodies- which operate normally and naturally as part of our unredeemed Flesh. And that means that these Lusts and Cravings and Desires are ever with us. But that also means that satan does NOT bring these Lusts with him. He doesn't have them- we do. These Lusts are *already* present with us and are *in us- regardless* of whether satan is near or not.

Look again at what James teaches about this:

**13 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.**

**14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**

Now look closely at what James said here. The first Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem said that,

**... each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**

So, the biblical definition of Temptation- as far as James is concerned- is being:

**“carried away and enticed by his own lust”**

Now the word that was translated here as “**enticed**” comes from a Greek word [*deleazoe*; Strong’s #1185], that means: *to bait; to trap; to beguile; to woo; or deceive or ensnare.*

So, we are tempted when we are, *first*, “carried away”; and then, *secondly*, we are “enticed”. So, first, we are taken captive or carried away. We get so caught up in something at the moment- that it draws us or drags us or carries us away. But then, secondly, we are also enticed- we are baited; trapped; we are beguiled; or wooed. We are deceived or ensnared by something.

Okay, but “carried away and enticed” by what? By satan? No. James says, we are carried away and enticed by...

**“his own lust”.**

So, the Lust that is already in our Flesh is what carries us away and entices us. And that insulting Reality is what makes us all accountable to God for what we do. The Lust that carries us away and entices us- is who we are; it is us; it is ours.

And that Lust does NOT belong to satan- it belongs to us. And these Lusts live- constantly- in our Flesh- waiting for an opportunity to war against our souls.

And when that happens- there is a process that begins. Look again at **James 1:15:**

**Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**

So, Death comes by way of Sin. And Sin comes by way of Temptation. And Temptation comes by way of us being carried away and enticed by our own Lusts. And James uses language here that has to do with bringing forth a child. He said,

**Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin...**

So, Temptation, then is the *fertilization* of the Lust that is already resident in our fallen flesh. In other words, Temptation is nothing more nor less than the impregnating of our fleshly Lusts with an Opportunity to act on them. In other words, Temptation is us having an Opportunity to do what we already want to do anyway. And it could be satan; or ourselves; or maybe even other people- who provide that Opportunity for us.

So, when an Opportunity presents itself for us to manifest or display or show or act on a particular fleshly Lust or Desire that we already have- that is us being tempted. So, satan and other people do NOT “make” us sin. A badgering Wife does NOT drive a Man to drink. A “matter of fact” Husband does NOT drive a Wife to cheat. A bad day at the Office- does NOT make a Man go to a strip Club. A hard time- does NOT force people to smoke dope.

We are tempted to sin, James says when **he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** And at that point- **“when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin...”** So, at that point- we take *ownership* of what is going on. And then James says,

**... and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**

So, it is important to know that we are NOT sinning simply by being tempted. We are tempted all the time. We are tempted- every day- in a thousand different ways. And by God’s Grace; and through the Power of the risen Christ interceding for us; and by the fact that Sin’s domination over us has been broken; and by the fact that God the Holy Spirit resides in us- interceding for us according to the Will of God with groanings too deep for words- most of the time- we do

NOT act out on our Temptations. To God's Glory- we are able to control ourselves

and we actually DO- abstain from those fleshly Lusts.

We own the Process- however- when we allow the Temptation to fertilize our fleshly Lusts. So, Temptation is an Opportunity that is presented to us- to act out on the Lust that we already have. And that Opportunity can come to us from satan; or from other people; or even from ourselves.

But this tells us that the way to overcome Sin- is NOT to wait for the physical act of Sin itself to occur- but rather, to deal with it at the level of our sinful Desires. So, to overcome Sin- requires that we do at least two things:

1. Resist; kill; and starve our fleshly Desires
2. Replace our fleshly Desires with heavenly Desires

### **Romans 8:2-14**

**2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**

**3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,**

**4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

**5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**

**6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,**

**7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,**

**8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

**9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

**10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

**11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

**12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—**

**13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

**14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

... and there is the key in verse 13:

**... if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

So, there has to be a Process that we are ongoingly engaged in- where we are “**putting to death the deeds of the body**”. So, by starving our fleshly Lusts- by NOT feeding them- we will “put to death” our sinful actions. And we do that by substituting our fallen Cravings with holy Cravings; by changing our fleshly Appetites for sacred Appetites.

So, we do NOT become Stoics- who seek to live here on earth without any Desires. Firstly, I DON’T even believe that’s possible. But, more importantly- I don’t believe that is what the Bible teaches.

We must understand that, in the beginning- God gave us- Desires. God created us with Desires and Appetites and Loves and Wants. So, satan did NOT give us our Desires. The Fall did NOT create our Desires. The Fall simply *perverted* the Desires that God gave us and transformed those Desires into Lusts. And now we are driven to Sin- by our Lusts. But the dynamic in the New Birth- is that instead of being cruelly driven by our Lusts- we are now led by the Holy Spirit.

And that means it isn’t wrong to desire something. It is wrong to desire something that is wrong. But we were made to *desire* God. We were created to *want* God; to *crave* Him; and to *delight* in Him. There is not a single place anywhere in the Bible where God tells us to remove our Appetites. Rather He says,

### **Matthew 5:6**

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."**

Dear friends, we do not sin because we desire too much. That isn’t true. We sin because we desire God- too little. We are NOT tempted simply because we possess Wants and Desires. We are tempted because we do not want or Desire or Crave- God.

So, the key to overcoming Sin- is to have *better* Desires; more *heavenly* Desires; *godly* Desires. And with those better and more godly Desires- we will

still be tempted (because we are still living in our fleshly bodies in a broken world- that is dominated by satan)- but we will be tempted a whole lot less.

It is folly to try to fight against our Desires by trying to ignore them. But when we fill our minds and our eyes and our ears and our thoughts with the Beauty and the Magnificence and the Value and the Worth and the Glory of God- it will be much harder for the Lusts of our Flesh to entice us and carry us away. And the single best place to behold the Glory of God- is in the Face of Jesus Christ.

The Reformers designed a Catechism that has guided believers now for over 500 years. And the very first Question is:

*What is the chief Duty of Man?*

... and the Answer is usually memorized as:

*The chief Duty of Man is to know God; love God; and enjoy Him forever.*

But I would change the Question to be:

*What is the chief Delight of Man?*

... and then I would answer it by saying,

*The chief Delight of Man- is to know God; and love God- BY enjoying Him forever!*

... because it is in the *enjoyment* of God; the *delighting* in God; the *celebration* of God- that brings to Him the MOST Glory and that affords us the MOST Joy. And those Desires are truly NOT found in our fallen Flesh- but by the Spirit- in our redeemed souls- that have been empowered to overcome the Flesh- with its Affections and Lusts. Or as the Apostle Paul said in **Galatians 5:18-26**:

**18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.**

**19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,**

**20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,**

**21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

**24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.**

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.