

The dynamics of temptation

James 1:12-16

9/26/1999

The book of James, Chapter 1. We have been preaching consecutively through the book of James, and we have come now to this section in James, chapter 1, verses 12 through 16, which, God willing, we will be spending two Lord's Days expounding and looking at. And so, if you'll open your Bibles to James, chapter 1, we'll read together verses 12 through 16. Now, James has been talking about our responsibilities in the context of different kinds of trials. And he has told us we are to have joy in the midst of our trials. Well, one of the types of trials that come upon us is solicitation to commit sin—temptation to sin. And it is to this particular kind of trial that James turns our attention to now. And in verse 12, he says:

“Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. 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: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.”

Now temptation to sin is something that we all struggle with every day. We are daily bombarded with solicitation to commit acts of sin, to the point that we feel that we are in a constant state of attack and warfare with reference to this matter. And there are two somewhat unusual aspects to this warfare that I want us to consider together for a couple of moments, and the first is, is that this war that we have with sin and with temptation in our lives is very frequently a silent war. And what I mean by that is that we don't say anything about it. We don't acknowledge that it's going on; we act as if nothing is really happening. We pretend to other people like all is well and all is quiet on the battlefield.

There are probably several reasons why we don't speak openly about our struggles with sin. We find it hard to admit that we have weaknesses. We are oftentimes ashamed that such evil and base things attract us, or that are a temptation to us. And we are afraid that others will somehow think less of us if they know that we struggle with sin, or that we have certain areas of weaknesses in our lives. And we *do* this all the while thinking that other people don't have the same struggles that we have.

But First Corinthians 10 and verse 13 says, “There is no temptation *taken* you but such as is common to man.” And so the temptations that *you* face are the same ones that everyone else faces, some to a greater degree, some to a lesser degree, but we all face the same types of temptations. Do you struggle with sinful anger, or with sexual impurity, or with covetousness, or pride, or rebellion, or hatred, or jealousy, or resentment, or envy? Well, so does everyone else. These are not sins that are peculiar to you, but they are sins that are *common* to mankind. And yet, we all kind of tend to go around *pretending* to each other that we've put all those things away long ago, and that we really don't struggle with them anymore. And so we keep quiet about it, hoping that others will not think that we struggle as we do. And of course this violates the admonition in the book of James, chapter 5 and verse 16, which says, “Confess your sins one *to* another and pray one *for* another that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

And so it is important for us to recognize that though this is frequently a silent war, and that we don't talk much about it to each other, it is a very real war. It is a war that's going on in everyone's life who professes to be a Christian, and it is a war that is waged daily in each of our experiences and existences.

The second unusual aspect of this warfare is not only that it is frequently a *silent* war, but it is also one for which we are unfortunately quite untrained to wage. We are untrained as to who the enemy really is and how he works. For example, Paul says in Second Corinthians 2 and verse 11, regarding Satan gaining an advantage of us, he says, "We are not ignorant of his devices." And I think a great many Christians nowadays couldn't say that, because I think a great many Christians *are* ignorant of his devices. They are ignorant of the nature of indwelling and remaining sin and how that dynamic works within their lives. They are ignorant of what constitutes worldliness and what doesn't, and oftentimes what people *think* constitutes worldliness isn't worldliness at all, and what they *don't* think constitutes worldliness is *precisely* that.

And so people are untrained with reference to who the real enemy *is*. They are untrained as to what weapons are available to us. You see, it does no good to have great weapons at your disposal if you don't know *where* they are and if you don't know how to *use* them. You've got to know how to employ the weapons of the warfare that God has provided for us in our struggles against sin.

In Second Corinthians 10 and verse 4, it says, "The weapons of our warfare are *mighty* through God to the pulling down of strongholds." And so we have mighty weapons at our disposal and our battle against sin, but if we do not know that they exist or if we do not know how to use them, then our struggle is going to be largely ineffectual. It is unfortunate but true that most Christians are far better equipped to defend their position on the millennium than they are to defend their souls against sin. And so if we are going to be experts at *anything*, we ought to be experts at understanding the dynamics of temptation and how to battle that temptation.

Now, it is my intention to combat these two aspects of this warfare to which I have referred this evening. I want us to bring this battle against sin out into the *open* and stop pretending that it doesn't exist, and then I want to give us some training in this warfare so that we will be better *equipped* as to how to fight it. And so we, as the people of God, need to acknowledge that we're in a war, and we need to be equipped and trained to fight it successfully, and this passage in the book of James is particularly suited to enable us to do that.

So in the first place, then, this evening, let us consider together the source of temptation—the *source* of temptation. This is contained in verses 13 through 14. Now the temptation we face and struggle with *every* day, we need to ask ourselves the question, Where does this temptation come from? What is its source? What is its *origin*? Because understanding the *source* of the attacks upon us is the first step towards *combating* them. If you're sitting there in a foxhole and bombs come flying in and landing all around you, and you don't know where they're even *coming* from, then you're going to be completely ineffectual in mounting a counter-attack in order to put a *stop* to that. And so James tells us, first of all, with reference to the source of temptation, what it is *not*. He says there's one sector that you don't need to worry about temptation coming from. In verse 13, he says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he *any man*."

So in considering together what the source of temptation is *not*, we need to mark it down that it is not God that is the source of temptation. People use this ploy of blaming God to relieve themselves of the responsibility for their struggle with sin and their falling *into* sin, and it is a ploy that is as old as Adam and Eve.

We say to God, Well, God, you made me this way. You made me with these desires and with these weaknesses, and so therefore, God, it's your fault. You're the source of my problem. Or we say, God, you allowed this circumstance, this person, this situation, to come into my life and to develop, and so, therefore—it's like Adam: The woman which thou gavest me—you know, she's the one who caused me to eat the apple. And He turns to Eve, and Eve says, Well, the serpent that *you* made. And so they were always blaming something other than *themselves*.

And so people say, Well, God, you made me this way. You allowed this circumstance. *You* could remove this weakness, God. I've prayed so many times for you to take away this weakness, and you haven't done it, and so, therefore, God, it's your fault that it's not *gone*. Or people say, Well, God, I prayed that you would stop me, and you didn't stop me.

And so people wind up conjuring up all kinds of thoughts within themselves as to how, in fact, God *is* tempting them, and *is* responsible for their temptation and for their falling into sin. And what James is saying here is, Let no man say these kinds of things! And the construction in the original is, Stop saying this! And it's clear that some of the people to whom he was writing *were* saying this. And he's saying, You stop saying that God is the source of your temptation, or the one who's responsible for your sins. Because to *say* such things is the height of blasphemy, because when you accuse God of tempting you, you are accusing Him of moral impurity.

In verse 13 it says, "God *cannot* be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Now when it says God cannot be tempted with evil, it means there is nothing in God that responds to temptation. When evil is out there in the universe or the world, God can't be tempted by that. God will not be tempted to fall into covetousness, or into lying, or into stealing, or into immorality, or into murder, or anything like that. Nothing that is in the universe tempts God. It has no appeal to Him, it has no attraction to Him.

It's kind of like if you're driving down the road, and you see a dead animal in the road that's been run over about six times by a car. How attracted are you to that? Do you just want to get out there and rub your face in it a little bit? The very thought is revolting to you. There's nothing in that that's attractive to you. There's everything in that that is revolting to you, and you want to get away from it as fast as you can, and there's nothing that is desirable.

And so in the same way that we are repulsed by such a thought, God too is repulsed by sin. He cannot be tempted with evil. And no matter what you lay out in front of God, He's not interested. And it goes on then to say, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither *tempteth* he *any* man." That is, He cannot extend to others as attractive what is revolting to *Himself*. And the point is simply this, there is nothing in God that responds to temptation; therefore, there is nothing in God that could *extend* temptation to other people. And so the source of solicitation to evil must itself be evil. And since God is *not* evil, and since God is not even *attracted* by evil, then He *cannot* be the source of temptation to evil. And so, this is what the source of temptation is *not*.

Now notice, secondly, what the source of temptation *is*. And we are told very clearly in verse 14. It says, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” The source of temptation, it says very clearly, is our own lust. And so the enemy is within. The enemy is *ourselves*. Now James is not ignorant of the existence of Satan, and he is not ignorant of the existence of the world, and that these things are *sources* of temptation, but you see, *both* Satan *and* the world have to *appeal* to our own sinful desires within ourselves if they’re to have any *effect*.

And so Satan and the world are secondary sources of temptation that have to appeal to the *primary* source, namely our own lusts, in order to gain a foothold and achieve anything. And so one man has said, “We have found the enemy, and it is us.” And we could say the same thing with reference to our struggle with temptation—the enemy is ourselves. As Proverbs 19 and verse 3 says, “The foolishness of *man* perverteth his way: and *his* heart fretteth against the Lord.” So it’s our *own* foolishness and our *own* heart that perverts our way and that frets against the Lord.

You see, you could chain up the Devil so he couldn’t function at all, and you could have the perfect government and perfect people all around you, and still you would have a problem with sin. And the reason why is because the source of sin is the human heart. Jesus made this very clear in the gospel of Mark, chapter 7, verses 21 through 23, when he says, “For from *within*, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from *within*, and defile the man.”

And so our problem is the enemy within. Now this enemy within is described in our text by the word “lust.” It says in verse 14, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Now when we think of the word “lust,” we very oftentimes think of sexual desires. And while the word is certainly *used* of that, the word has a much broader meaning than that.

The word “lust” here just means a sinful desire of any kind—not just sexual desire, but it refers to sinful desires, such as envy, pride, rebellion, hatred of others, covetousness, gluttony, fornication, desire for the praise of men, revenge, curiosity about evil, self-righteousness. All of these desires that we have within us can be classified under this general word of “lust.” The word “lust” just simply means a *strong desire* to do what is wrong, irrespective of what that wrong may be. So if someone has a strong desire to steal, or if they have a strong desire to lie, or if they have a strong desire to commit sexual immorality, or if they have a strong desire towards lack of self-control in a particular area of their lives, or if they have a strong desire with reference to covetousness or envy—any of these things could be classified lust.

So every man is tempted by his *own* lust; that is, the source of temptation belongs to us; it is within us; we are the ones with the problem. And so the first step to true peace and progress in overcoming sin is the admission of *personal responsibility*—of laying the blame on something else or *someone* else is going to *ensure* continued bondage, because you can’t do anything about the Devil, and you can’t *do* anything about the world, but you could do something about *you*. And if you take care of *you*, then you don’t have to worry about the Devil and the world.

And so when you misdiagnose the source of sin, you make the cure impossible. Now if *God* were the source of temptation—think about this for a minute—if God *were* the source of temptation, you would be *utterly* without *hope*, because who could ever resist God? Who could ever out-figure God? Who could ever overcome *His* temptations? No one would be able to do that. But since God is *not* the source of temptation, but rather it comes from *us*—recognizing that, we can *hope* because God is stronger than we are, He is stronger than our sinful desires, and He can overcome them. And so what James is saying is that we are not fighting God when we are fighting sin. We are not fighting God when we are fighting our temptations and sinful desires.

Now you might say if you are somewhat biblically astute, Well, what about some of the passages in the Old Testament, where it says that God tempted Abraham, like for example in Genesis 22:1? And God tempted Israel. Well, the word there for temptation can also be translated a *testing*. And it is true that God will put *tests* before people, but not with the goal and purpose of soliciting them to do *wrong*. Rather, God tests with the goal of proving and purifying and producing *character*. And in that sense, He tests us all.

Lust, on the other hand, or sinful desire, tempts with the goal and purpose of destroying and killing and producing sin. So don't be disturbed and think there's some contradiction in your Bible when you see that God "tested" this person or that person, and sometimes the word is used, the word "tempt" is actually used, in the English Bible with reference to those situations. But the Good Shepherd *always, always* leads us in the paths of righteousness; He does not lead us in the paths of sin. And it's true that God put a severe *test* before Abraham when He said to him, "Offer your son Isaac on the altar." But it was not a solicitation to evil, nor temptation to sin.

And so it is important for us to realize that God is not the source of temptation, but rather the source of temptation is within ourselves. Perhaps the whole matter can be best summed up by two poems that were written by two different men, both of whom happen to have the same last name. And there was a man by the name of Burns, a very famous poet, who was an infidel. And he had this to say. He says, with reference to God, speaking of God, he says, "Thou knowest that Thou has formed me with passions wild and strong, and list'ning to their witching voice has often led me wrong." And then speaking of himself, he says, "I saw thy pulse's maddening play, Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way, Misled by Fancy meteor-ray, By passion driven; But yet the light that led astray Was light that came from heaven."

And so you see, this man is attributing his wild passions and his going astray to *God*. He's saying, It came from heaven. God, you made me this way, and the light that I got from Heaven led me this way.

Now a minister, also by the name of Burns, James D. Burns, took up his pen and wrote this response. He says, "It could not be; no light from heaven Has ever led astray: Its constant stars to guide are given, And never to betray. When passion drives to wild excess, And folly wakes to shame, It cannot make the madness less, To cast on heaven the blame. The light that seemed to shine on high, And led thee on to sin, Was but reflected to thine eye From passion's fire within. O spurn the guilty thought away, Eternity will tell, That every light that led astray Was light that shone from hell." And so he frames the issue very clearly, that it is passion's fire within that is the source of our temptation.

So that brings us, then, to our second point this evening. Having recognized the source of temptation, what it is not—it is not God; what it is—it is ourselves. And so, therefore, we must take personal responsibility. In the second place, notice the *dynamic* of temptation—the *dynamic* of temptation. The source of temptation, and secondly, the dynamic of temptation.

Now how does temptation work? How does it actually *function* to bring about sin, and when is it that temptation becomes sin? Well, notice if you will, it's *method*. And the method is contained in verse 14, when it says, "But every man is tempted, when he is *drawn away* of his own lust, and enticed." There's the method.

Now lust does two things, or sinful desires does two things when it tempts us. And the first thing it does, as to its method, is it draws us away. Every man is tempted when he is *drawn away*. Now what is it, do you suppose, that he is drawn away *from*? You see, in order to get a Christian to fall into sin, temptation has to get him away from God. There can never be a going towards a sinful desire and a sinful act without a going away from *God*.

So the first thing that temptation does is it tries to stop and break our relationship with God. It tries to make us *negligent* in the pursuit of the means of grace. You get someone away from church, you get them away from prayer, you get them away from Bible reading, you get them away from Christian accountability—you draw them away from all of those things, and they're out there very vulnerable. It's like getting a soldier to take off his helmet, and put his flap jacket down, and set his gun down, and climb up out of the trench, and just start walking around out in the open. He has laid aside all of those things that were calculated to *defend* him.

And so the sinner, then, is separated from God by temptation. The first thing temptation does is try and block the thought of God and of God's words and God's principles out of the mind of the one who is being tempted, and separate him from that. And this is the reason why maintaining our responsibilities and the pursuit of the means of grace is such a critical bulwark against falling into sin in the first place. So, as to its method, first of all it draws us away.

Secondly, then, it says it *entices* us. It says, "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust"—drawn away from God and the means of grace—and he is "enticed." Now the word here for enticed has the idea of a *baited fishhook*. And literally, it has that meaning. The idea is that sin comes along and it presents us with something attractive. And it appears attractive on the surface, but inside is what?—a fishhook. You all do that when you go fishing. You deceive the fish. And you *entice* the fish. And you try and get the fish to believe that he's got a *meal* coming that's going to taste really good on his tongue, and it's going to feel really good in his tummy, but inside is a fishhook.

And so this is what sin does. It comes along and says, Oh, look at the pleasure you will get from this. Look at the satisfaction you will get from that. And so it entices you with the pleasures or apparent pleasures of the sin that you are contemplating. And it does so very oftentimes by appealing to a legitimate need. Maybe it's a need for justice, maybe it's a need for sexual satisfaction, maybe it's a need for owning some property, maybe it's a need for other people to think well of us—whatever it is, sin comes along and seeks to fulfill that need illegitimately. And this is the reason why the Bible talks about the *deceitfulness* of sin. The word "deceit" means to lie, and sin is a *liar*. It offers us something better and something more fulfilling than what God offers us. It offers to meet a *legitimate* need in an *illegitimate* way, and it destroys us in the process.

So this is the method, then, that temptation uses. It draws us from God, number one. And number two, it *lies* to us and entices us with reference to the benefits and pleasures that we are going to get if we commit this act of sin. And so having considered together under the dynamic of temptation its *method*, consider together, secondly, its *mastery*—its *mastery*.

Now, at what point does temptation become sin? It's important to understand it is *not* a sin to be *tempted*. It is *not* a sin to be *tempted*. Because it says of our Lord Jesus Christ that He was in *all points* tempted like as we *are*, and yet without sin. So the fact that you are *attracted* to something that is sinful and wretched, and the fact that you have strong desires for it, in and of itself, is not sin. Jesus was tempted by the devil, in Matthew 4, verses 1 and following, to do all kinds of sinful things.

And so you may be plagued with a temptation all of your life, and yet be a victorious and mature Christian who walks with God. To be plagued with a temptation is not a sign of ungodliness, it is not a sign of lack of spirituality, it is just a sign of the *reality* that you still have sin remaining in your flesh. And so it is not a sin to be tempted, and it is not a sign of wickedness to be plagued with temptation. But the problem is, is when we give in *to* the temptation.

Now at what point does sin occur? At what point have you given in to temptation? Well James uses the illustration of conception. He says here, “[E]very man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust has *conceived*...” Now this word here for “conceived” is the word that is used for normal conception in human procreation. It is the exact same word that is used of Elizabeth’s conception in Luke, chapter 1, verses 24 and in verse 36. Now, when does conception take place? The answer is, is that when two elements come together and join. When the seed of man and the seed of woman embrace each other and are joined together, then conception has occurred. And in the same way, when sinful desires arise, it seeks the consent of the will. And when the *consent* of the will is joined together with the sinful desire, at that moment, sin is conceived and brought forth to birth.

Now suppose you’re walking down the street, and you see a really nice car that you would really like to have, and you look into the car and you notice that the keys are in it, and nobody’s around. And you are strongly tempted to steal the car. The thought comes to you—I could steal that. And you say to yourself, No. The Tenth Commandment says, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.” And the Eighth Commandment says, “Thou shalt not steal.” And so therefore, I will not give in to that desire, and you walk on down the street. Now, have you committed a sin? You have not. Because even though you were strongly tempted, you did not give the temptation the consent of your will.

Now let’s replay this scenario. You’re tempted, and you look up the street and you look down the street, and you go, There’s nobody there. I’m going to steal it. And so you start to walk around the front of the car to get in the driver’s seat, and then suddenly a door opens, and somebody walks out towards the car, and you change your course of action, and you walk on down the street. And he goes and gets in the car and drives off. Have you committed a sin? Yes. Even though you never actually laid a hand on the car, the temptation that arose within you to steal it *obtained* the consent of your will. And at the *moment* it obtained the consent of the will, sin was brought to birth. It was brought into existence.

And so, if the sinful desire does not obtain the consent of the will, sin has not been committed. But if the consent of the will is given, even if there is no outward act, sin has been committed. And this is what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount, when in Matthew, chapter 5, and verse 21 and following, when He says that you have read of old time, Thou shalt not commit murder, but I say unto you, whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause is, in essence, the same as if he's committed murder. Because anger in the heart towards someone that is unjustified that obtains the *consent* of the will says, I would like to destroy that person, and I *would* destroy that person if I had a chance. Then the temptation to commit murder and the consent of the will to commit murder has been *given*, even though you don't actually go out there and slit the guy's throat.

And He says the same thing with reference to adultery. He says if a man looks upon a woman to lust after her in his heart, he's committed adultery with her already. So here's someone who looks and is attracted, and then gives the consent of his will to that attraction, and even though he never goes over and consummates the act, he has still committed a sin because of the consent of the will. Now it is not sinful to be attracted to someone. And it is not sinful to have thoughts rise up of wanting revenge on someone. It's what you *do* with those thoughts that constitutes either a commission of sin or a lack of sin.

We see the classic illustration of the progression of sin in the life of Achan, in Joshua 7, verses 20 through 21, when it says with reference to the Babylonian garments and the wedges of gold, that he saw them, he coveted them, and then he took them. And so he *saw* them, and the desire arose: Boy, it'd sure be nice to have *that* stuff. And then he *coveted* them—he gave the consent of his will—I'm *going* to have that stuff. And then his hands actually reached out and *took* the stuff and carried it and buried it in his tent.

And so the *consent* of the will and the *acting* of the hands are often very close together. But it is the *consent* of the will, not the act itself, that causes *sin*. The act is only the fruit of a sin that is already committed in the heart. So when I steal the car, I have already committed the sin of theft in my heart before I actually opened the door and popped in there and cranked the key and took off.

Now this is not to say that sins of the heart are *equivalent* to sins of the hands. If I, for example, hate you and I plot murder against you in my heart, I have certainly committed the sin of murder in my heart. But if I don't actually get my gun and go over there and do it—you know what the penalty for heart-murder is? Well, it wasn't the same as the penalty for *actual* murder, was it? And so we cannot say that heart-sins are equivalent to hand-sins in terms of the evil that they are, or in terms of the culpability of them. But it does not say that they are of no consequence.

And so we cannot equate, for example, mental adultery with *actual* adultery. I've seen women say, Well, they committed mental adultery, therefore I have the right to divorce him and go marry someone else. The Bible never says that. It does say if *actual* adultery committed, then there is grounds for divorce and remarriage, but it does not say that with reference to *mental* adultery. And you don't go putting people to death for committing mental murder. But you do put them to death for committing actual, physical murder. And so we must be careful not to equate sins of the heart with sins of the hands. But nevertheless, sin *is* conceived *in* the heart, and then that sin is compounded when it is carried out by the hands.

Well this, then, is the dynamic of temptation, its method, and its mastery. It obtains mastery when we give consent of the will. So in your struggles against sin, if you are tempted by something and you resist it, then you don't need to feel guilty about it. You don't need to feel like you're some awful, wretched person because this temptation arose, or this thought crossed your mind, if you put it away.

And that brings us then to our third and final point this evening. Having considered the source of temptation—it is not God, but ourselves; having considered the dynamic of temptation—its method and its mastery; in the third place, let us consider together the *consequences* of temptation—the *consequences* of temptation.

Now there are always consequences to temptation. And there are, of course, first of all, bad consequences. There are bad consequences to temptation when we give *in* to them. Notice what happens when lust conceives—what happens when it obtains the consent of the will. Sin is committed; sin is given *birth*. And it is important for us to understand that sin is not an inconsequential thing. It says in verse 15, “and when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” And this word “bringing forth” is the word that is used for the *birth* process. We know that a woman conceives and then she brings forth. And in the same way, we conceive sin in our hearts, and then we *bring* it forth into birth through that process. And it says sin, when it comes forth, brings forth death.

Now even the most immature among us know the multitude of evils that come into our lives when we sin. And it is not our purpose to explore all of the bad consequences of sin, but its *chief* consequence, which is death. And so it says, “When sin is finished,” that is, when it is full-grown, when it is brought to maturity, when it reaches its conclusion, it says, “the fruit is death.” And so there is an indissoluble link between sin and death; one follows the other as night follows day.

So what is the death here that is spoken of? Well, he is speaking here, first of all, of physical death. We know that physical death entered into the universe when Adam and Eve sinned. God said, “In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die.” And of course, physical death has plagued the human race ever since. And so when an unsaved, unregenerate person commits sin, that sin brings about his physical death. And sometimes it does so as a direct consequence of the sin, for example, if someone gets drunk and goes drives a car, and gets in a crash and dies, that death is brought forth as a result of that sin.

With reference to the *believer*, at times, physical death is the result of sin. In First Corinthians 11 and verse 30, it says, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep,” because of the way in which they had defiled the Lord's Supper.

Also, it brings to pass *spiritual* death, or deadness. For the unbeliever, spiritual death is the result of sin, separation from God in this life. With reference to the *believer*, spiritual *deadness* begins to set in. There is a hardening towards God and His voice and His Spirit. In Hebrews 3:13, it says, “Exhort one another *daily*, lest any of you be *hardened* by the deceitfulness of sin.” And so sin hardens, it deadens, it debases the nature—makes it more open to evil influence, and less open to good. And so sin has a very deadening effect. It breaks communion with God, it destroys peace, it destroys homes, it destroys churches. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. And how many homes have been killed by the commission of sin and the bringing forth of it.

And then, of course, it brings forth not only physical death and spiritual death, but eternal death. Those who *continue* in sin, unrepented of and unrestrained, *prove* themselves apostate, and they are separated from God for eternity. As it says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

And so in verse 16, he says, Don’t be deceived. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Don’t make any mistake about the *immutability* of this progression—that when you commit sin, it brings forth death. You see, we can’t sin and get away with it. Every sin kills us a little, in one way or another: It kills our relationship with God; it kills our relationship with our family; it kills our relationship with our church; it kills our desires to serve God and to obey Him and to follow Him; it has impacts upon our physical health; and of course, it has eternal consequences if it’s not repented of. Those who go on in sin, and on in sin, are not those who are going to go on to *heaven*.

Jesus says, “Not every man that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out demons in thy name, and done many wonderful works? And then will I say unto them, Depart from me, you”—what?—“workers of iniquity—I never knew you.” And so the fact that they continually went on in sin resulted in their eternal death. I am not saying they lost their salvation, I am saying they never *had* it. And they should’ve *known* they never had it, because they would not turn away from their sins.

And so, “Do not be deceived,” he says in verse 16, about the immutability of this progression. Death is always the result of sin, and it will either be realized in yourself, or it will be realized in your Savior. And that’s why Jesus had to die for *sins*. Don’t be deceived—sin, when it is conceived, brings forth death. And it did.

But there are not only evil consequences, or bad consequences. There are also good consequences to temptation. Notice verse 12. It says “Blessed is the man that *endures* temptation: for when *he* is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.” And so you see, temptation cannot only have *bad* consequences, namely when we give *in* to it; it can also have very *good* consequences when we *don’t* give in to it. You think, temptation’s a *terrible* thing, and if I just didn’t have temptation in my life, I would be very happy. Well, you would be missing out on a lot if you didn’t have temptation in your life. And what you would be missing out on is the blessedness and the happiness that verse 12 talks about.

This word here “blessed” is translated “happy” in James 5, and verse 11. “We count them *happy* which endure.” And it speaks of a disposition of nature, of blessedness, of contentment, and of joy. It says blessed, or happy is the man who *endures* temptation. And the word “endure” here means to bear with patience; it means to display *constancy under trial*; it means someone who holds up and bears up under the constant pummeling—boom, boom boom—of temptation that hammers every day and in every way. It says, “for when he is tried,” and the word “tried” means approved—it means to be put to the test and approved. And, of course, he is approved by virtue of his *not* giving in to temptation. It says he shall receive life as a *crown*. And the King James has translated, “the crown of life.” But in the original, “life” *is* the crown. That is, eternal life is the final end of those who endure temptation, instead of just simply giving in to it.

And so, not giving in to temptation produces two results. It produces blessedness in this life, not the least of which is a clear conscience and intimacy with God and growth and progress and blessedness here and *now*. But it also gives us the assurance of eternal life, because it is precisely the *endurance* of temptation which is the evidence and demonstration that you will be given life as a *crown*.

Now, does that mean if you ever give in to temptation, there's no hope for you ever being saved? That's not what it's saying. But what it is saying is that as we fight against sin and resist sin, and in the process of sanctification gradually *overcome* our sins, by the grace and help of Christ, and by the application of the means of grace, that forms the basis and ground of our assurance that we will be given life as a crown.

Endurance is a ground of assurance that you *will* obtain life. Why? Because only those who have *received* the grace of God have the *ability* to endure. You've all seen people where they'll repent of sin and they'll fight against it for a little while, and then—pshhhew—they give in to it, and for the rest of their life, they just go *on* in it.

Now, we all have sins in our lives that we fall into, we repent of, we get up, and we struggle against it for a while, and then we fall into it, and we get up, and we *struggle* against it for a while. Paul describes that. I experience that. You experience that. Let's not fool each other. But there's a big difference between someone who is waging a warfare against a sin and someone who's just *capitulated* to it—doesn't even bother to struggle against sin anymore, but either justifies it or blames God for it. And so when we endure and fight against, and fight the good fight of faith against our sins, this gives us assurance of eternal life. Because only those who have received the grace of God have the ability to endure. All others are overcome and overwhelmed by sin.

But endurance is something more. It is the evidence and demonstration that you *love* Him. Notice the last part of verse 12. “Blessed is the man that *endures* temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to” who? “to those who *love* Him.” Jesus says, If a man *loves* me, he will keep my commandments. And the Bible says, if any man love *not* the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *accursed*. Second Corinthians, chapter 16.

And how do we manifest our love for Christ or our lack of love for Christ?—in our desire and efforts to obey Him. You see, those who endure temptation are those who love God. They are the same class of people. And as First Corinthians 13:7 says, love endures all things for the sake of its object. I mean, why shouldn't you give in to your sins? Well, because by not doing so, you're showing that you love God. You want to show your love to God? Say “No” to your sins. The measure of your love is the measure of your endurance. He who loves much, endures much. And he who loves little, endures little.

Well, I have two concluding applications, and then we'll quit. The first application is this: There is no easy way to conquer temptation. It's a hard battle. Those who come along and tell you, “If you just follow these three easy steps, you'll overcome your sins,” are lying to you, and they're lying to themselves. Sin is a hard, bitter, difficult struggle. And so we have to settle in for the long haul. That's what this word “endure” means. Blessed is the man who *endures* temptation. He's someone who settles in for the long haul and is entrenched, and he's going to fight until he

dies. He doesn't just surrender to the enemy the first time a bullet goes flying by. He says, I'm going to take my stand for Christ, and I'm going to battle, and I'm going to fight, and either I'm going to kill sin, or sin's going to kill me. But we're not going to take any prisoners, and we're not going to do any surrendering.

As long as you have sinful desires, you will have temptation. But remember, you have a Savior who has conquered sin in you, and as Romans 6:14 says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." If you will persevere, you *will* victor. That's the promise of the Gospel, and God keeps His word. But if you give up the fight halfway through, and neglect the means—then you will be one of those workers of iniquity, where He says, "Depart from me, I never knew you." And so there's no easy way to conquer this. We have to fight, and we have to fight hard, we have to fight continuously, we have to fight all the days of our life.

But secondly, we need to recognize that temptation needs to be seen as an opportunity, and not as a curse. Temptation needs to be seen as opportunity, not as a curse. You see, when we view temptation positively, it can be seen as an *opportunity*. I'm reminded of the story once of a man who was with his wife, and they were driving down the road in a car, and alongside of the road there, there was a *very*, very attractive woman—very attractively dressed. As they walked by [sic], the man looks at the woman, and the wife sees him looking at the woman, and she says to him, "When you see a woman like that," she says, "are you tempted?" And he says, "Yeah." He says, "But every time I see another woman, it just gives me the chance to choose you all over again."

And you see, that's the blessedness of temptation. Every time it comes, you have a choice. Am I going to choose to sin, or am I going to choose God? And every time you resist that temptation, you are saying, God, I choose you all over again. And you see, if a woman sees her husband look at a lot of women and still be faithful to her, she can be secure in that—not be threatened by it. Because what he's doing is, he's choosing his wife over again, and again, and again, and again, and again. And he's rejecting those opportunities again, and again, and again. Why? Because he loves that woman and he's committed to her.

And it's the same way when temptation comes along. We have the opportunity to choose God all over again. We did it once, and we got saved, right? We said, God, I'm through with all these sins, and I want you. Just like when a man marries a woman, he says, I'm through with every other woman—you're it. And that's what we do when we say "No" to temptation. We're just reaffirming our marriage vows to Jesus Christ, over and over and over again. And what a blessing that is to Him and to us.

And so that which would draw us *from* God can be actually used as a means of demonstrating our love *to* God. It is an opportunity to show *love* to God, to gain *assurance* of salvation and an opportunity to turn an effort to destroy us into an opportunity for blessing *to* us, and an expression of love to God. You see, the Devil comes along with his temptation, and he wants to drive you away from God, and you turn around and use it as an opportunity to express love to God—you've just slapped the Devil in the face and stomped all over him. And that's what Paul meant when he said, God shall bruise Satan shortly under your feet. We, too, can smash his head, even though he bruises our heel good and proper, by enduring temptation and thus demonstrating our love to God.

And so God can take that which is meant for our destruction, namely, solicitation to evil, and use it as a means of assuring us of eternal life when we endure, and of demonstrating our love to Him when we reject the temptation that comes to us.

So if you want an opportunity to love God and to show your love to Him, and you want an opportunity to assure yourself of eternal life, you just take those sins that come along into your life, and instead of giving in to them, you remember that they bring death, and that if you would have a crown of life, you must not, as a habit of life, be a worker of iniquity.

Now next time, God willing, we will bring forth several practical applications and methods that we can pursue in our battle with sin. But in the meantime, focus this week on showing your love to God by choosing Him all over again, each time the Devil comes and seeks to draw you away from Him.

Let us pray. Father, thank you for the love that you have shown to us. Father, we love you because you first loved us. And so, as solicitation to sin comes into our lives, help us to turn it into an opportunity for blessedness and happiness in our life by enduring, and thus gaining assurance that life will be our crown, and by enduring and thus expressing our love to you. Father, we do not love you as much as we should, and we do not show that love as often as we might. And so, Father, we pray that whatever occasions of temptation you see fit to bring into our life, Lord, help us to turn them into occasions to show love to you, and thus derive blessedness and victory in those circumstances. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Page 7* gap in recording (29':28") "is not sin" was inserted