

*Temptation: James 1:13-15*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
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We're back in the book of James this morning, and we come to a section dealing with temptation. Do you face temptations in your life? If you are a believer, which will mean you are fighting the fight of faith, then you should be very aware of the temptations that constantly confront you in life. The question that these verses address is: Where does temptation come from? Does it come from the world around us? Does it come from God, who is in control of all things? Or does it come from within us?

It's going to be very humbling for us to study these verses this morning, because we are going to be left without any excuses. We can't make any excuses for our sin. When we give in to temptation it is our fault, and our fault alone. We can't point fingers. We can't blame anyone else. Because the temptation comes from within us, and our sinful desires lure and entice us toward sin.

The verses we'll be looking at are verses 13-15 in chapter 1. The last time we were in James (3 weeks ago), we looked at verse 12, which is an encouragement to remain steadfast under trial—the same theme that we saw back in verses 2-3. And now in verses 13-15 James turns to this matter of temptation and sin. But he's not completely changing the subject, because trials and temptations are closely related. In fact, the word that is translated "tempted" in verses 14 and 15 has the same root as the word that is translated "trial" in verses 2 and 12. James transitions from the theme of trials to the issue of temptation, because temptation *is* a trial, and every trial will involve temptations. These two things go hand in hand, and James is now going to clarify something about temptation that is so crucial for us to understand.

I want to make three points this morning from these three verses—one point from each verse.

**I. Don't Blame God, For God Does Not Tempt (v. 13)**

The point of verse 13 I'll summarize this way: Don't blame God, for God does not tempt. I mentioned that the word for "trial" and "tempt" is the same root word. But look at how James is using the word to speak of two different issues, although related issues. In verse 2 we are to count it all joy when we meet *trials* of various kinds, because we know that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. The result of the trial is steadfastness and maturity. It produces good things. And then verse 12 tells us that the one who remains steadfast under *trial* will receive the crown of life. There is a great reward for those who are steadfast under trial. In

verse 13, though, the focus changes. There are similarities, in that every temptation is a trial, and every trial contains temptations. But there is still a distinction between the two, because a temptation involves an enticement to sin. Being lured toward sin. And that's what verses 13-15 are about.

In the flow of thought here from verse 12 to verse 13 (and if we were to put ourselves in the shoes of those who first read this letter) we can see how the comment about trials in verse 12 would call to mind Old Testament examples of God testing his children. For example, God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22:1 uses that very word. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it's the same word that James uses. "After these things God *tested* Abraham . . ." Another example is in the book of Judges. God says, "I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to *test* Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not" (2:22). From these examples and others, the question arises in the midst of a temptation, Well, maybe God is testing me. And then we may go a step further and think, Maybe God is *tempting* me to sin. Maybe God is trying to lure me into sin. Maybe He is trying to destroy my faith. If God is in control of everything that happens, and He's the One who brought this trial into my life, then He must be the One who is tempting me to sin.

And therefore James makes this crucial point. He doesn't deny the truth that God is in control of everything. He doesn't deny the fact that God is the One who brings trials into our lives to refine us and sanctify us and build our faith. But the point that James makes here is that we must NEVER suspect that God is luring us into sin. We must NEVER blame God when we fall to temptation. We must never say, "I am being tempted by God."

Why? Why can't we blame God? James tells us in the second half of the verse. "*For* God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." The point is: Don't blame God for your sin. And the reason given is: God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. James grounds this command in the character of God. Don't blame God, because God is entirely righteous and perfect and holy. He never sins. He is never tempted to sin. He cannot be tempted with evil. And if He were to tempt anyone to sin, if He were to lure anyone or entice anyone toward evil, He would be sinning. And so the one statement flows from the other. God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. To say it another way: God is perfect and holy and righteous, and all of His dealings with us are perfect and holy and righteous. He never sins or is tempted to sin, and He certainly does not entice anyone into sin.

When we look at a verse like this, we need to be reminded of two very important biblical truths. First is the truth that God is absolutely sovereign over every event, every decision, every heart, every temptation, every sin. Nothing happens in this world that God has not ordained. And all things are working according to God's plan, accomplishing His goal to display the full spectrum of His glorious attributes. And as God looks at the big picture and sees how every detail adds to the beauty of His masterpiece, He delights in it. God is sovereign, and James is not at all trying to undermine that truth.

The second truth that we constantly need to be reminded of is the fact that we are responsible for our actions. We may think that since God is sovereign, we are just robots. If God has ordained everything that comes to pass, then what does it matter if I sin or not. And that's exactly the kind of attitude that James is denouncing here. No! You cannot blame God. You cannot point the finger at Him. You are completely responsible for your sin. You are the one to blame. You are the guilty party.

It is true that God is sovereign over all things, and He delights in the big picture of His plans. But that does not mean He delights in sin. When God looks at specific acts of sin, He is grieved. He hates sin. And He would never lure or entice someone into sin. He would never find pleasure in tempting a person with evil. That is contrary to His nature. He would never do that. God says very plainly in Ezekiel 33:11, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." God does not delight in sin or evil or rebellion against Him. And in the trials that He allows into our lives, He does not seek to destroy our faith, but to strengthen our faith.

So we must uphold these two biblical truths: God is sovereign and we are responsible. These two assertions do not cancel each other out. They are both true. And the point we should learn here is that we can NEVER use the truth of God's sovereignty to minimize our guilt. God tempts no one. To accuse Him of that would be to accuse Him of being evil. And yet we are so eager to pass the buck, we will either implicitly or explicitly claim that God is the guilty party.

There are so many ways that we try to blame God and say that He is tempting us. We can be just like Adam in the garden, who said to God, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). Do you see what Adam is doing there? He's blaming his wife for his sin. But not only that, he's also blaming God for his sin, because God is the One who put Eve in the garden with him. "The woman whom *you* gave to be with me . . ." Augustine commented on this. He wrote, "Nothing is as characteristic of sinners as to want to attribute to

God everything for which they are accused. This arises from that vein of pride” (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Gen 1-11, 86). We’re all so full of pride that we desperately look for someone to blame every time we’re confronted with our own sin. We play the victim. It couldn’t be my fault. There must be someone else to blame. When we give in to temptation we want to pass the blame on to someone else, whether it’s a spouse, a sibling, a parent, a boss or co-worker, a pastor, a friend, or God Himself. We are so desperate to justify ourselves that we will irrationally blame our sin on others.

Adam’s reasoning was, “I would have been fine if God didn’t put this woman in the garden with me.” We do the same thing. We may or may not directly accuse God for our sin, but we do so implicitly. We may think, “I wouldn’t lose my temper if my co-worker was easier to get along with, or if my kids were better-behaved, or if my spouse was more considerate.” And the implication is, “God, change these people around me, and I won’t sin so much.” Or we say, “I wouldn’t struggle with lust if there weren’t so many sensual images in our culture.” Or, “I wouldn’t worry about the future if my life was just a little more secure; if I had more money, and if I didn’t have any health problems.” Or we might sometimes think, “My spiritual life would be so much more vibrant and I would struggle with sin less if my small group was more encouraging, or if Sunday School was more engaging, or if the music was more lively, or if the sermons were better.” Or we think to ourselves, “I wouldn’t get impatient if it wasn’t for traffic jams and long lines in the grocery store. If I didn’t have so many things to do, and if the people around me weren’t so slow, I would be a very patient person.” We’re trying to pass the buck, either to another person, or directly to God. But that thinking is so wrong and so dangerous. It’s just a prideful way of trying to justify our actions and pacify our guilty consciences. And it keeps us from humbling ourselves before God to repent or *our* sins and seek His forgiveness. We deceive ourselves so deeply when we try to blame God for our sin. Don’t blame God, for God does not tempt. That’s verse 13.

## **II. Temptation Comes From Within (v. 14)**

In verse 14 James begins with a conjunction that contrasts what he has just said with what he is about to say. He has just said in verse 13, “Don’t blame God.” And now he is going to say, “Blame yourself.” The point he makes in verse 14 is: Temptation comes from within. You can’t blame God. You can’t blame anybody else. Instead, you have to blame yourself, because the temptation comes from within you.

James writes, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” This is a tough pill to swallow.

It's a humbling truth, and I pray that it will sink into each of our hearts this morning. We have no excuses. We can't point to anything outside of ourselves as the cause of our sin. There IS evil all around us. There are sinners all around us, and situations that provide the occasion for various temptations. But the temptation itself arises from within our own hearts. Paul Tripp said, "It's the evil within us that hooks us to the evil outside of us" (sermon on James 1; [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com)). There is evil within us. We are filled with wicked desires. And as we live in this wicked world, those desires find all kinds of ways to manifest themselves.

James uses a fishing metaphor as he describes how this happens. He speaks of being lured and enticed. It's a frightening image if we think about it. Think about the fish who is attracted to the tasty food on the hook. The fish then swallows the lure, only then to feel the piercing pain of the hook. That's how our sinful desires produce temptations. The wickedness within us makes sin look so appealing, so attractive. Our flesh tells us that this particular sin will be so exciting, it will feel so good, it will make us happy. And we convince ourselves that this lure has no hook. We ignore the fact that the momentary pleasure of that sin could kill us. It could lead to our eternal destruction. This leads us to verse 15, which describes this downward spiral.

### **III. Sin Brings Forth Death (v. 15)**

Verse 14 speaks of temptation and desire, and now in verse 15 James traces the progression from desire to sin, and sin to death. The main point is: Sin brings forth death. This process is the opposite of the process described in verses 3-4, "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." That is the upward progression that God produces in us through trials. The testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and then steadfastness produces Christian maturity. But when we are lured and enticed by our own desires, we digress into sin, and sin brings forth death. These are the two paths that are before us.

The language of verse 15 gives us a vivid picture of the self-destruction that we bring upon ourselves when we give in to temptation and let sin fester in our hearts. Our sinful desires will conceive and give birth to sin. And then if that sin is allowed to grow, it will bring forth death. This cancer, that is born within us and grows within us, will kill us. This is a dangerous path to be on, for it leads to eternal death. It leads to condemnation. It leads straight to hell.

### **Is There Hope?**

Well, this has been a pretty depressing sermon so far. What are we to do with this message? We can't blame God or

anyone else for the wickedness that fills our hearts. Our sinful desires will lure and entice us and then give birth to sin, which will then bring forth death. This our sad condition as fallen human beings. How can we escape this plight?

We cannot escape this plight. We must be rescued. On our own, we are totally unable and unwilling to forsake this destructive path. We will not do it, because we don't want to. We don't desire to. Apart from God's grace, our only desire is to sin. We live as prisoners to our depraved desires. It's only by God's grace that we are set free. God must regenerate our hearts, and thus give us new desires. He raises us from the dead (Ephesians 2:5). He removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27). He makes us new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). He causes us to be born again (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; 1 John 5:1). This is regeneration. And if you are a Christian, this is what happened to you. God saved you! You didn't save yourself. You didn't decide one day to desire different things. No. God gave you a new heart. God raised you from the dead!

Paul describes this so powerfully in Ephesians 2, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:1-10).

This is what happened to us. God saved us. God raised us from the dead. And now we live perfect lives, right? We don't have to wrestle with temptations? We don't sin? Wrong, of course. We wrestle with temptations. We fight against the depraved desires that are still present in our hearts. We mourn over our sin. And this battle is evidence that we are believers. If we were not believers, we would not fight against temptations, because we would have no desire to do so. But since we've been regenerated, we have new desires which battle against our old

desires. This is the fight of faith. This is the battle of living the Christian life in this fallen world.

What do you desire? I want each of us to do some introspection here and think about what we truly desire. Our hearts are filled with so many desires, and many of them are conflicting desires. But which desires reach down into the deepest parts of your soul? Do you desire to know God? Do you desire to be in His presence forever? Do you desire to grow in holiness and purity and passion for the Gospel? Do you desire to be more like Christ? If those desires are not present in your life, then you should fear for your soul.

If you don't desire these things, then you are still dead in your trespasses and sins, and your sinful desires will destroy you. You will live your life on this earth chasing each new lure, and suffering from the pain that will result. And when judgment comes, you will receive the just punishment for those sins. As Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, you "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might . . ." This is of utmost importance in your life. Are your sinful desires leading you to death, or has God given you a new heart and new desires that seek superior pleasures?

If you look in your heart and you only see destructive, self-serving, depraved desires, you should cry out to God for mercy. Ask Him to raise you from the dead and save you by the power of His grace. Cast yourself on Jesus Christ, who died to forgive sinners like us. Ask Him to change your heart. Ask Him to change your desires.

Lastly, I want to encourage us in the battle against temptation. We all face temptation. What should we do when the desires in our own hearts are luring us and enticing us toward sin? **1) Confront temptation immediately.** Don't flirt with it. Don't wait. Recognize it for what it is, and confront it immediately. The saying is so true, "Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny." Be on guard to confront temptation immediately. Don't let the sinful thought take root.

**2) Confront temptation ruthlessly.** Take drastic measures to fight temptation. It might not be convenient. It will involve sacrifices. But do the difficult things that need to be done in order to resist temptation. Jesus said, "if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one

eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48).

Confront temptation ruthlessly.

**3) Confront temptation with the Word of God.** When Jesus faced temptation, He used the Word of God to rebuke Satan. Jesus is our example in this. He faced temptation just as we do, and yet He remained completely sinless. Following his example, we need to be memorizing and meditating upon Scripture, so that when the temptation arises within us we have a weapon ready to cut it down. That’s why we have fighter verses. They are for the purpose of fighting temptation. They are for the purpose of fighting the fight of faith.

**4) Confront temptation with a superior pleasure.** Our recent fighter verses have been from Psalm 34, and it says in verse 8, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” In the midst of temptation we need to preach to ourselves and remind ourselves that the Lord is good, and He is so much more satisfying than sin. Pray Psalm 90:14 when you’re tempted. Ask God, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” There’s no greater pleasure than seeing and knowing God, and when we’re tempted we need to push away the deceptive lure of sin and fix our eyes on Jesus and the infinite pleasure of knowing Him.

Let’s fight for joy this week. We will all face various temptations, and our fleshly desires will surely rise up within us and seek to lead us astray. But may we heed the warning of this passage from James 1, that if we succumb to temptation and let sin grow and reproduce in our hearts, it will bring forth death. May we not be deceived by the lure of sin, but instead passionately pursue the ever-increasing and never-ending joy of seeing Christ’s glory.