

# Temptation

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**Bible Text:** James 1:13-16  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 12, 2014

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Well, grab your Bibles and I want you to go to James 1 as I want to continue on a trend of giving you very practical exhortations for the believer and this is an area that needs a refresher and a renewal when you think about the culture in the day that we live in and that is this whole idea of temptations and that's simply what I have entitled this, "Temptations." What are they? Where do they come from? Who is responsible for them? What's God's role in it? What is Satan's role in it? What's our role in the whole thing? James is a practical man. He's the pastor of a local church and that's why most scholars feel like he gives us such brass tacks, hands on, practical instruction and teaching and here's what he does in James 1:13 through 16. He says,

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 [notice this] by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished [or brought to completion], it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Now, I don't know what all the problems were in the local church James was exhorting and we can surmise that likely they were taking the doctrine of divine sovereignty which the Bible clearly teaches, which we hold to with all of our heart, but they had warped it, they had perverted the doctrine and gotten it out of balance to where they were beginning to blame God for the trials that came in their life from which they would be tempted by their own lusts and fall into sin.

So James wants to clarify and make some things clear here so let's begin by dislodging, if you will, or exposing two false assumptions about temptation and about sin. 1. The devil made me do it. Now, that used to be popular more so years ago, just kind of a joke, sort of a tongue-in-cheek thing, comedians would say it. It seems like I remember one comedian just using that line all the time, "Well, the devil made me do it." I've seen it on bumper stickers. I mean, we would all like to shirk the responsibility for our behavior. It's natural to blame others. In this liberal, progressive and pop psychology infused culture that we live in, people throw around the word about demons as if they have these bad traits, these bad destructive tendencies and, "Well, that's my demons." No, that's you.

That's you. It wasn't the devil and it wasn't demons. James says very clearly it's your own lust. It's your own lust that is the problem.

Now, some say, "Well, you know, it's just a part of being human." Not really, it's a part of being a fallen sinful human. We all have that inner lust. You see that, of course, in Genesis 3, how we are in Adam and all of us are fallen in Adam and therefore we have these propensities for self and sin and rebellion against God. But we're always prone to shift the blame just like Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden. You know, Adam said, "Well, it was the woman you gave me. So ultimately, God, you caused it and that's why I sinned." But we need to get honest about it. Remember the story of David in the Old Testament when he sinned with Bathsheba and the prophet came to him and rebuked him and David was humbled and immediately confessed that he had sinned and it was his fault, and it was his responsibility.

Now, because of our evil sin nature, now, yes, we have a new nature, a new creation within us when we are saved but the old unredeemed humanity, call it what you want, some people get real upset if you say Christians have a sin nature; well, it's semantics, call it what you will, there is a still propensity to sin within us. We are still housed in fallen unredeemed humanity that we will fight with until we get our new glorified bodies. I think that's why the Apostle Paul said, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Then he says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." So we have that reality to deal with. Now, there is some mystery there. I wish I could put it on a little graph and make it all just very mathematically or scientifically accurate but the Scripture doesn't allow us to do that. I think actually it's beyond our comprehension anyway but we do know the reality that it is there, it is in us, and since this evil trait still exists though the new man is there too, an outward trial that we face can turn into an inward temptation but it's us who does that. Take Abraham, father Abraham, for an example. The Bible told or rather the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 12, "I want you to leave your people, your land, all that you know. Leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a place that I'm going to tell you." So he is supposed to leave and he's supposed to leave everybody but he had a temptation, didn't he? He said, "I think it would be okay if I bend the corners on God's instruction a little bit and I just take righteous Lot along with me. He's a good boy and I just need his companionship so I'm going to take Lot with me." So then he takes Lot and that's the third thing that happened. He is told to leave, leave everybody behind. Then he says, "I'm going to compromise to temptation. I'm going to take Lot." He takes Lot and he conceives the sin and then there's the consequence of the sin, he loses Lot to Sodom and then we see the whole Arab/Israeli conflict coming out of all this ultimately. And we all face the same type scenario. God does not want us to yield to temptation yet neither can he spare us the trials in a fallen world that inevitably we turn into temptations. Remember, we are not God's sheltered people, we are God's scattered people. I suppose it might be nice if the moment we are saved we're raptured out of here and glorified in heaven and never have to deal with sin problems again but if that were to happen, there would be nobody here to carry the Gospel. So God's got a purpose for leaving us down here in this struggle.

So, first of all, the first false assumption is: the Scripture, though Satan is real and demons are real and they are active, yet I believe it is one of the ploys of Satan and demons to get us to focus on them and discount our role in choosing the sin. That's why he says here, "if you are enticed and carried away," listen, here's what the text says, "by your own lust." Now, child of God, you know what that does to us because you have to face your own lust so many times every day and face your own choice to sin so many times every day, do you know what that does to you? It humbles you how weak we are but it gives us some joy to look upward and see how mighty our Savior is. Where sin abounded, there grace did much more abound. Amen? What a joy that is to know.

Well, the second false assumption is: God made me do it. "Well, God is bringing this trial on me and that caused me to be tempted in sin." In essence you're saying God is testing me with this temptation, God is tempting me with this evil thing, but that's absolutely wrong because the text points out very clearly, verse 13 again, "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 God is not the author of the temptation that you face. He says here in a little simple and clear phrase, "God himself cannot be tempted by evil." In other words, there is nothing about the very character, the innate nature of who God is, that can in any way be allured by evil. In other words, there is no aspect of evil, though he knows evil, he is not allured by it, drawn to it or in any way himself tempted to it. Nothing in any way. Nothing in God that in the slightest way could desire evil and then James backs it up with the next phrase that, "He Himself does not tempt anyone." Now, when you're converted, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live within you and our job is to walk in submission to the Holy Spirit. The job is the quest of the Christian is, to choose to walk by the initial promptings of the Spirit of God as we are taught by the Spirit from the holy Scriptures. Now, this Spirit who lives in us is never going to lead you into temptation. That's not what God does. It is of, once again, your own lust that turns a difficult setting, situation, season, whatever it is, into a temptation to commit sin.

Now, look at verse 14, "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." I don't know if I can say it absolutely but I think generally speaking we could say a temptation is when we have what is a God given good desire that we fulfill or are tempted to fulfill in a dishonorable or ungodly way, of a way that is outside of the will of God. The student says, "Well, I want to make a good grade on the test tomorrow. The temptation, I'll look at my neighbor's paper as they are taking their test." Nothing wrong with the desire, certainly that's a good desire to make a good grade, but the temptation comes from our own weakness and the old lust of the heart. A good desire, "I'm hungry. I want to eat. I think I will steal to meet my need of hunger." A good desire, a God given desire fulfilled in the wrong way. Now what happens? We take the good thing and by our own fallen perverse nature, our own lust, that is, we make it a tempting situation.

Now, let me give you this journey to death because the wages of sin is death, and James is so practical and so specific in laying out for us the trend or rather the pattern that always happens when we choose to fall into sin. First of all, I'll call it stage I: the luring of lust. The luring of lust. Look at verse 14, "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." Now, the word "lust" here would be talking about an inward

craving or desire that is outside the will of God or has no regard to God and God's will and what pleases him. He says literally here we are carried away by this lust. He uses, this is actually a word from hunting or fishing of the day where you're drawing a game animal or more specifically maybe a fish over on the Tennessee river, the bass fishermen will tell you that those bass like to hide behind rocks or under stumps or under logs and the lure draws them out from their hiding place. That's what he's talking about here. We are enticed out. Now, the word "enticed" here is a little different than carried away, it has the idea of a baited hook. You can see the bait but you can't see the hook on the inside. Now, that's what our lust does, our lust pulls us out to grab something, to do something, to behave in a certain way to please ourselves, to satisfy ourselves, without taking into consideration that the bait always has a hidden hook. Always has a hidden hook. Like the fish that is drawn out of his retreat, when he senses the bait he is enticed to take it and he comes closer, unaware of that hidden hook within and, my friend, listen to me: sin always has a hook. It always has a hook.

Our lust draws us to the bait, then our lust deceives us as to the consequence of taking the bait. What does the Bible say, "A man's heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things." Have you learned that you cannot trust or listen to your heart? You live by the word of God, not by the things that come from your rotten heart. "Well, I just feel like..." Who cares what you feel like? Do you know you're so corrupt it took the death of the Son of God to atone for your heart? You can't trust your heart. It will deceive you. It will deceive you as to the reality of the consequence of being lured in and taking this bait. Our lust blinds us to the hook or the consequences. King David again, sees Bathsheba, lust fills his heart. Instead of fighting the battle at that point and he may have already sinned in his heart but he at least could have fought the battle at that point but he gives in and he walks through the first and the second warnings of his conscious and the Spirit of God, and then in his power he has Bathsheba brought to him. He commits the sin of adultery and then to cover up his sin he has to have Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, murdered in battle. And then because of his sin and wickedness, God brings a consequence of taking the life of Bathsheba's child born to David. You see, David when he first saw that and he had lust in his heart, never conceived of the hooks hidden in that bait and that's always the way it is. Lot goes out with Abraham and Lot looks and the Bible says he saw the well, fertile, well watered and fertile plains of Sodom. Never took into consideration the wickedness and the ungodliness of the people in the culture of Sodom. Now, what happens? Lot ends up losing his entire family to the wickedness of Sodom and the sodomites. Sin is a bait that lures us because of our own lust and brings forth destruction and consequences into our lives.

Now, let me say this: the normal and natural desires of life are God-given and in and of themselves are not sinful. I mean, without them we wouldn't exist and this is where a lot of people get zealous but biblically unbalanced. Hunger is a proper desire. I mean, we wouldn't survive without the desire to eat, but gluttony is a sin. Rest, getting proper sleep is a God-given desire and proper and balance but slothfulness or being a sluggard as Proverbs says, is a sin. Sexual desire is normal and God-given. Without it the human race would not propagate, but adultery and fornication and sexual perversity, of course, is sin.

So when you take that good desire and you satisfy it outside of God's will, that's when we get into trouble.

Now, some try to be spiritual and in their zealotry try to just say, "Well, I'm just going to deny myself of these things," and I've seen people get obsessive even into idolatry about fasting and not eating thinking that somehow that's an indulgence in the world and I'm supposed to deny myself of that indulgence. Now, I'm not saying God didn't lead some people into fasting and I thank God for that pattern and when the Spirit of God leads a man or a woman to do that, that's a good thing to do but you can make that an idol and an obsession, sort of an asceticism of you punishing yourself by denying yourself "worldly pleasures." And then those who would say, "Well, I have these sexual temptations and these sexual desires." The first thing you do when you have a sexual desire is to praise God for it because it's God-given, but if it is for someone or something in some setting that is not pleasing to God, it's outside of marriage, that's when the repentance battle must start. So the desire is not bad. One of the worst things you can do as a young man when he's growing up and wrestling with the hormones that God gave him is to tell him that's evil. That is not evil, that is good. We just know that the sex drive was meant to be governed and guided by godly parents, godly friends and relatives, and a godly church family. So rejoice in the gift of it but say, "O God, I don't want it to be used and expressed outside of your will." That's where our lust comes in. We often do that.

So what is the secret? Well, the secret, again, is not denying that this is real and God-given, I mean, these passions and these drives are the steam that makes the machinery work, but steam that is uncontrolled brings destruction. So the goal would be a quest, a striving and purposeful life whereby I live under constant control and that capacity to begin a lifestyle purpose and pattern where you're controlling the God-given desires and not as a pattern walking in immoralities or sinfulness, is only available to the child of God. The lost man has no capacity to fight these things in his life. And it is a fight. I think that's one of the reasons why the Apostle Paul said toward the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight." This is a warfare mentality. We're in enemy territory and we even have an enemy within, plus all the enemies without, but we're going to win because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, there is the luring of lust, secondly, notice there is another stage in this journey to death and that is: the stronghold of sin. He simply says in verse 15, "when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin." What he means here is there is a time when the emotions and the mind are beginning to be lured by lust but there's a time when our will acts on that lust and then it gives birth to sin. Now, the apostle here, James, changes the analogy from hunting and fishing to the analogy of giving birth and what a hideous child, the child of sin is when the lust in our hearts and minds is accompanied by our will and we choose to sin. Sin therefore is the union of our lust and our will. When we give into lust and we birth sin, it looks like no big deal usually and the longer you go, the more calloused you become and more and more you think, "Well, it's not that big a deal." But wait until sin matures and I think that's what he means when he uses the phrase here "when sin is accomplished." It has the idea of coming to its end result; coming to maturation, and I call this the stronghold of sin. That's the next stage, that stronghold of

sin. Everybody sins but you can fight sin and you can be a repenter of sin. You do not have to live in the stronghold of sin. You don't have to.

I was asked one time that can a young man fight and overcome his sexual lusts and temptation. I said, "What I want to know is is he in the fight?" I don't want to know if he is absent from struggling, I want to know is he in the fight. And we all can be in the fight and we can help each other in the fight, that is, appropriate people to share appropriate things with about our struggles. But that's where we are to be, fighting at this level before sin becomes a struggle, before it is accomplished, it comes to its mature end and is a stronghold. For example, in Proverbs 5:22 the Bible says, "His own iniquities will capture the wicked and he will be held by the cords of his sin." There is a binding and a confining and a destroying element that finally comes when sin is accomplished. You'd better be glad as a child of God that when you toy with and tamper with and experiment with some sin and cross some lines you know you shouldn't cross that God deals with you. God humbles you and that's one of the ways you know you're God's child. He doesn't just let you go on. He deals with your heart about it. In the Bible in Jeremiah 51, Babylon is called a stronghold. In Ezekiel 30, Egypt is called a stronghold. What's the characteristics of Babylon, ancient Babylon and ancient Egypt? Total depravity. Given over to, in bondage, strongholds of sin. So there is that point when the luring of lust is accompanied by our own will and if we continue in that we get into what the Scripture describes as a stronghold, being held by the cords of sin.

Now, stage III on this journey to death and that is: death. Notice what he says here in verse 15, "when lust has conceived," that's stage I, the luring of lust, "it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished," that's the stronghold, "it brings forth death." In other words, when sin has run its course, it always produces death in our lives. But this is not talking about eternal death, eternal damnation or lost in hell forever, that's the final destination for all mankind apart from Christ but it's talking about deaths that Satan can bring into our lives. Though he can't have our eternal souls, he will work to bring all the kind of death to us he possibly can.

Now, let me just mention these and we'll be through. Here I think he's talking about things like family death. A man has the luring of lust. He allows that luring of lust to let him cross the line. His will gets involved and instead of repenting and fighting at one of those levels, he continues on and pretty soon there is the stronghold of sin and sin never stays still. It will work on you until it brings forth death and before long it costs him his relationship with his spouse. It costs him his relationship with his children. And there is a family death. Sin brings death. Proverbs 7:22-23 talks about how willful sin finally pierces the man and it costs him his life. I don't think it's talking about physical life, I think it's talking about the familial relationships that are destroyed because of the sin he allows in his life.

What about financial death? Proverbs 5:10 talks about the hard earned goods will go to the house of an alien. A man who gives himself over to the luring of lust, his will gets involved, he conceives the sin, he walks in the sin, it becomes a stronghold and then the point will come when it can lead to financial ruin and financial wreck. How many times,

for example, have we seen some professional athlete who made unbelievable amounts of money and then we'll hear that they are bankrupt and then we hear what kind of lifestyle they lived. Just willful giving in to every lust and every pleasure and every indulgence that culture can give them.

It can bring family death, it can bring financial death, and it can bring moral death. It can be a point where a man yields to the luring of lust, he gives in with his will, he commits the sin, he walks in the stronghold of sin until God gives him over and he dies morally. Romans 1:24, God gives him over to the lust of their flesh. Proverbs 5:11 says, the flesh and the body are destroyed. They are people who are given over to be completely overcome. They are no longer in the fight, they are given over to the destruction of sexual immorality. It is a moral death.

Then also there's a mental death, those who give into these sins and find themselves abusing drugs or abusing alcohol. Proverbs 23:29 speaks of the great destruction and the misery of one who is controlled by alcohol. And if that doesn't destroy man mentally, then God will allow a man to get to a point where he gives himself over to false philosophies and false religions and he begins to embrace all kinds of teachings and he has died mentally, given over in his thinking to things that are not right. Colossians 2:23 talks about those who have the appearance of wisdom and self-made religion. Now, notice that phrase, they have the appearance of wisdom but it's not wisdom that comes from God, it's in self-made religion.

Then there is premature physical death. I wish I could tell you categorically from the Scriptures where a Christian is in all of this; how many of these deaths and how far can a Christian go before God deals with them. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. God is sovereign. He deals with different people in different ways at different times for different reasons, but we do know that the Bible teaches very clearly like Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, they committed a type of sin and here's one thing that really the church ought to take note of, listen to me, are you listening? Whatever you do, don't damage the bride of Christ. Now, if you sin in 1,001 ways, listen, there is something God takes very seriously and that's you damaging the bride of Christ. And I'm telling you, by the thousands if not tens of thousands, there are women, there are men, there are deacons, and you just name who they are, who for their own selfish gain cause trouble and turmoil and strifes and divisions within God's church, the bride of Christ, and I'm telling you, whatever you do, don't have that on your record when you go before God. Die to yourself. The Bible says even to give up your own rights going to court if you have to to keep peace with your brothers and sisters in your own church. Ananias and Sapphira sinned in Acts 5, a sin that was damaging to the local church there and God stepped in and killed both of them during the service on Sunday. He doesn't do that very often. I'm not aware of him doing it again, but God was making a point. "There's a time when I will remove," at least a professing Christian. They may have been false professors, I don't know, but there's a time when I believe the Bible teaches even Christians can find themselves coming to the end of life prematurely because the luring of lust was accompanied by their will in choosing the sin, not fighting and repenting there but walking in that sin willfully until it

became a stronghold and then in their case, God chose physical death rather than to let them go on and dishonor his name.

The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 5 that there was a young man in the church that was committing a type of immorality, from the text it looks like he's probably having relations with his step-mother. And it's interesting that the Apostle Paul writes and says, "This kind of sin is not even approved of by the Gentile world." Here's his point: you're committing the kind of thing in the church that even the lost Gentiles wouldn't do. So the shame and the damage to Christ's reputation is on the line and God says, "I am turning one over to Satan," now notice this, "for the destruction of his flesh that his soul might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." From that you can only conclude the boy has eternal salvation but God says, "I am removing him from the earth unless he repents." Now, we have an indication that he did repent and there was restoration, but there is ultimately a physical death. Now, I believe outside the Christian realm, those who do not know Christ, the same thing is true. I believe things like AIDS, I believe things like venereal disease, things that are associated with promiscuity and rebellion and immorality, drunkenness, all of these type behaviors lead to early deaths.

Then, of course, there is spiritual death. Now, here when I say "spiritual death" I don't mean the state of one who's lost but a Christian can come to the point, yielding to lust, adding their will to lust, conceiving, birthing sin, sin is accomplished, comes to its maturity, a stronghold of sin, and they can come to a point to where they die spiritually. What I mean by that, they can no longer hear from God. They're no longer touched by the word of God. They're no longer impressed by the Spirit of God. They become dull and cold and lifeless. I don't know, I can't, I wish I could tell you, "Well, here's how you know exactly when." I don't know when it is. I just know that the Scripture has things like the woman in 1 Timothy 5:6 whom the Bible says, "She's dead even while she lives." His point was she was a widow and after she got over her responsibilities of her husband and her children, she just gave herself and the verse says, "to wanton pleasure." She just gave herself over and forgot that the first and main responsibility of being a widow is to serve God in his church. There's nothing wrong with going to Hawaii. I'm not saying that's wrong, okay? Nothing wrong with folks in retirement enjoying some of that, but you don't just give yourself over like that's the end of life for you is just to give yourself to the pleasures of the world. He says that kind of person is dead even while they live. I think what he means is they become spiritually just dull and unresponsive and you can be sure God's going to deal with that.

Well, Satan's greatest ploy is to convince us that sin brings life when sin can only bring death. Why do you think sin and rebellion is made to look so attractive and so glamorous in the world? Is it not? You name it, rebellion against authority, how that is applauded; how that is modeled. You will not find one show on television where a woman honors her husband. It doesn't exist, not unless you watch "Leave it to Beaver, or Father Knows Best." Amen? Or maybe the Andy Griffith...I mean, that's gone. That's over, and I for one am getting a little tired of seeing a 95 pound woman whoop up everybody all the time, as if women have the same...that's just not true. God meant for ladies generally speaking to



be guarded and protected by husbands and men who love them and care for them and honor them in the right way, in the right biblical way.

But rebellion against authority. Whatever it is, young people rebelling. Even in the church, this is so often applauded as, "Well, these young people are innovative and creative and visionary and relevant." It's just, this kind of thing is so promoted in culture. Fornication. It's just a way of life today. It's just commonplace in our culture. Adultery. Misuse of alcohol and drugs and homosexuality and on and on and on we could go. But what Satan doesn't tell us is the great damage and consequence that comes from these things. Do you know that every single study that has been done on the longevity of those who give themselves over to homosexuality is that homosexual men live 15-20 years shorter than heterosexual men. If any other behavior on earth cut that much of your life off, the government would spend untold millions if not billions trying to keep people out of it, but instead they do right the opposite. They promote it and applaud it. Putting the best spin possible on these wickednesses. Billions of dollars lost in the companies of our country because of the misuse of drugs and alcohol and so many other sins: incompetent work, lost productivity. Billions and billions of dollars spent on mental health and other health issues because of these sins. Satan says this is the way, this is life, this is fulfillment but he's a liar. The truth is out there. Just one time, let them show the result of abortion. Let us see the truth but they're not going to show you the truth. They don't want to do that because Satan's a liar.

But coming full circle, the local church pastor, here James says to his people, "You've got to realize you have within you the seed of your own destruction and until you get to heaven, you've got to fight with that." Now, the glorious thing is if you're truly born again, you're going to get to heaven and if you're truly born again, you have a new capacity to begin to walk in a different purpose and pattern instead of giving yourself over fully to that old nature. But you do have within you the seeds of your own destruction. Calvin said, "There is in all of us the root of our own destruction." You see, sin is pregnant with death when we embrace sin. Did you hear that? When that allurements came and you were carried away, James says "enticed," James says, "by your own lust," and when you reached out and chose by the act of your own will, the devil didn't make you do it, demons didn't do it, by your own will you chose to sin, that sin you embraced was pregnant the moment you embraced it with the child of death. It's a deadly thing you embrace when you embrace sin. That's why I've told you many times and I prayed it today, I prayed it looking over these notes, "O God, save me from me." Amen? Save me from me.

Satan will deceive all of us if we're not careful. He knows that the more we sin, the more we die and the more we sin, the more we become calloused and the more we become enslaved and we think that we are living in our deception but Satan knows that we are dying. Now, Satan cannot affect a true born again child of God's eternal destiny but he will work feverishly to kill everything else in your life that he can. Now, let's just think about those again, just the ones I listed: family death, financial death, moral death, mental death, premature physical death and spiritual death. But there's a death that I think is worse than all of those perhaps all of those put together, that's the death of your witness

for Jesus Christ when you kill or you, there is a death to the effectiveness of your witness. Did you know that if you walk on with sin and commit certain sins and they continue on and strongholds happen and these public things happen, these public deaths happen in your life, it can kill your witness and you may live 30, 40, 50 more years and never overcome the damage to your Lord's reputation. To me, that would be the worst thing of all.

Why don't we just make as a pattern in our hearts and our lives, "O God, save us from us and, God, don't let me dishonor your name. Give me the grace to fight when lust is conceived. Give me the grace to fight when my will wants to turn and commit the sin. God, don't let me move into strongholds and into death because at the end of the day the damage done to me, the damage done to my family, that's very important to all of us but not nearly as important as us dishonoring the name of our Savior." Practical, good stuff for the children of God.

Let's pray together this evening, alright?