

How Temptation Operates & Is Overcome

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Non Series - James

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Bible Text: James 1:13-18

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James 1 is where we are this evening in our study of the word of God. James 1. We read beginning at the 13th verse down to verse 18. James 1:13,

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Trials and temptations arrive in the same events. As we said this morning, every test, every trial becomes a platform for temptation due to the reality of the presence of a spiritual enemy, Satan, and due to the reality of the flesh that is still in us. They arrive in the same events, in the same life, but they involve different dynamics. A trial or a test is an opportunity for Christian obedience. It is used by God to train us; to develop us; to purge us; to cleanse us; to prepare us. It is an opportunity for Christian obedience. A temptation is a solicitation to disobedience. A trial, a test, is straightforward and in terms of the motives of God for these things, it's good. A temptation is deceptive and it's evil. God is the author of one; God is never the author of the other. God tests but God does not in the sense of how the word is used in our text, God does not tempt.

If God is not the source of temptation, then who or what is? How does temptation operate? How is sin conceived in our lives? Well, the next verses answer that question. We're looking at these verses under three headings. Each one we have put in a way that represents a step of action on the part of the believer and we've talked about: these are steps of action that we take when we are mindful of temptation. As we are mindful of our struggle, our battle with sin, then these thoughts ought to kick in. This is what ought to be going through our minds. We ought to go to a passage like this one and rehearse, remember what God teaches us here, or after we have failed because we know we do fail. Then we need to think about our failures accurately, biblically. We need to think about

our sinning accurately, biblically and so we come to a passage like this one and we're able to do that.

Three steps of action, the first one we looked at this morning and it's this: when mindful of temptation, guard your thoughts about God. When mindful of temptation, guard your thoughts about God. He tells us what we must never say and he tells us why we must never say it. What we must never say, verse 13, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,'" that somehow God is responsible for my being drawn out toward sin. That God is somehow responsible for inviting me and leading me into sin. Don't ever say that. Don't say it to yourself and certainly don't say it to anyone else because, why not? It's not true. It's never true. When he says, "Let no one say," this makes this a universal commandment. This is something that we ought to always remember. Whoever we are, wherever we are, whatever it is we are struggling with, it is never, ever God who tempts us. Why? Because he himself is untemptable. He cannot be tempted with evil and therefore he himself tempts no one. There is nothing in evil that God delights in. There is nothing in evil that God is in accord with and so he would not lead you into that which he hates.

So when mindful of temptation, guard your thoughts about God. That brings us to our second course of action. We see this in verses 14 and 15. We can state it this way: when mindful of temptation, remember how sin operates. When you begin to become aware of the reality of temptation, then you need to remember how sin operates. You can remember how sin operates because God tells us how it operates here. He describes it for us. We have a divine word so this isn't speculation. This isn't theory, this is with absolute accuracy, this is the divine word about how sin is conceived in our lives, how temptation operates in a human being and as we said this morning, the word "temptation" in this particular context means "to be allured by sin; solicitation to do evilly." It's an invitation to an act of disobedience. When this happens, we must never think that God is tempting us but there is something we must think about. There is something we ought to think about and that is how this thing operates. God reveals that for us right here.

But before we look at that, I think the very fact that it's here raises a question: why would God walk us through how temptation operates in a person's life? Why would he walk us through this process? Well, two reasons occur to my mind: for one it makes plain the fact that temptation cannot be laid at God's feet. He's not responsible for tempting us. This will make that plain and, actually, I think that is the overarching trajectory of everything that's being taught in this entire section. More than anything else, this section protects our minds against the thought that God is a tempter. As I said this morning, there is nothing ever more important in our minds at any given time than our thoughts about God and so that's the number one thing in this entire section: we ought to think rightly about God. As we said this morning, those thoughts that are expressed in verse 13 are blasphemous thoughts, that you would take holy God and think of him as the tempter. That we would take holy God and therefore think of him as the deceiver because every temptation is a deception.

So he describes how it actually operates that we might understand that God is not tempting us but in doing that, there is another very practical reason to walk us through the steps and that is knowledge, in this case, is fortification. I mean, the better we understand what is actually happening in our lives, the more informed we are about what is actually taking place in our lives, the better equipped we are to be able to withstand evil. To be able to recognize the process that is going on and to take steps, when we're aware of it, and to stop it. To make obedient choices. As we walk through these steps and we see how it all plays out, we'll recognize that the earlier that we can recognize what's going on in our lives, the better equipped we are to put a stop to it.

So what do we see here? I want to point out three things. First of all, note that temptation is a universal experience. Temptation is a universal experience. Verse 14, "But each person is tempted when. But each person is tempted when." Just like he said no one ought to think the thoughts of verse 13, so everyone, this is our experience whenever temptation takes place in our lives. Each and every person in this room, this is how temptation operates in your life. You see the way temptation operates in my life is the way that temptation operates in your life is the way that temptation operates in anybody's life. This is the experience of every human being and, by the way, that knowledge is fortification against a very powerful deception which is the deception that comes to us and tries to say to us that our particular situation is unique. That we are not at fault if we just give in to this. We are not at fault if we just follow our desires in this situation because, after all, our situation is so unique that, "If anyone else were in my shoes, they would do the same thing that I'm about to do. But they don't know what I'm struggling with. They don't understand my struggle because no one else has ever been where I'm at." Has that ever been whispered into your ear, that your situation is unique and so in some way you are justified in disobeying God in this particular situation because, after all, you've been given a very, very unique trial that no one else has ever walked through? If you haven't ever said that to yourself intellectually, I'm certain you've felt it emotionally.

Now, he says this is universal, "each person is tempted when." This is what is true for each and every person when it comes to temptation. This also means that we had all better be prepared for temptation. The question is not whether or not we will be tempted to sin, the question is when and how and are we prepared for it. What are we to know about it in advance? What are we to do about it once we recognize it? We all face temptations. We have a very real spiritual enemy and the flesh in us is real. There is indwelling sin. There is a sin principle at work in each and every one of our lives, every Christian, so temptation is a universal experience.

Second, temptation is an internal experience often offered to us externally. Something external to us starts the process but we experience the temptation internally. That's what he describes here, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." You see, and these desires we know internally. And he uses two words here that present us with a fishing or a hunting analogy. He says in verse 14 that each person is tempted when he is lured, "exelko" is the word. It means "to draw out; to draw away." The lexicon says this: to drag away with connotation of initial reluctance; drag away. The second word translated "enticed" in the ESV. "Deleazo" means "to lure; to bait and thus

to entice; to lure by the use of bait; to arouse someone's interest in something." So the idea is and it's like fishing or hunting, you're drawn out and enticed. You're dragged away and baited. And what stands at the center of this dragging away and this entrapment, what stands at the center of it is one's own lust. You see, this is not explained by God tempting us, this is explained by our own desires. "Epithymia" is the word that is translated "desire," so it's really a neutral word. It can speak of something, it just always speaks of a strong craving for something; a longing for something; a strong desire for something. It could be for something good; it could be for something evil. But this is what's at work in all of our temptations, our own desires.

So here is how Satan snares his prey or here is how your flesh would lead you astray: there is the offer of something, there is the knowledge of something, then finds a match in your desires and as a result of your desire, you're drawn out toward that whatever it may be and you end up taking the bait. Drawn out toward it, enticed by it and it is your desire that results in you giving in to it and often what is at work in terms of this desire is not a desire that is sinful in and of itself, but because of the temptation the desire turns into a sinful choice. The desire is perverted, twisted in one way or another. For example, sexual desire in and of itself is normal and right. God given. God ordained. But there is also a God ordained way that that sexual desire is to be satisfied, a righteous way that is to be satisfied. When the desire for sexual satisfaction draws one away from the safe ground of what God has ordained and then you are enticed in such a way that you make a choice that violates the will of God. It's not that sexual desire in and of itself is sinful but now that sexual desire has been perverted, put to use in a way that is a perversion of what God has ordained. Now that is sin. Sin has been conceived. The desire for food is not sinful in and of itself but if my desire for food would lead me to steal from you, then that desire has been perverted. It has been put to use in a way that would lead me astray.

So in the case of Satan, he offers something that he knows is attractive to your lusts and because of your own desires, because of your own lust, you're drawn away from the safe ground of God's ordained will and you are lured by the bait. You know, a hunter may use a trap, a fisherman may use a hook but what makes the trap or the hook effective is the bait and so if you're fishing or you're hunting, you make sure that the bait matches up with the lust of whatever creature it is you're hunting or whatever fish it is that you're fishing after and it's because of the desire of the creature that the hook or the trap is effective. You've baited it in such a way that the lust of the creature catches it. That's what happening when you and I are being tempted so the problem is within us. The problem is what's going on in the realm of our own desires.

Jesus was offered opportunities to sin by Satan but Satan didn't find any matching desires in the Son of God in the sense that Jesus was carried away, you see, in the sense that he was drawn away and enticed. That didn't happen with our Lord. He was offered bread when he was hungry but he was impregnable when it came to that offer because he had no desire for food that would lead him to violate the will of God. He had a desire for food but not in a way that would violate the will of God. Matthew 4:2 says, "And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'" He tempts him.

He offers to him a solicitation to do something that would have been outside the will of his Father, making use of what he knew to be real hunger but Jesus answered, "But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Desire for food? Yes. Desire for food in a way that would violate the will of God? No. So tempted in the sense of an external offer but no matching desires that would result in him being lured away and taking the bait.

So temptation is a universal experience. Temptation is an internal experience. It involves external offers or external opportunities but it always results in an internal struggle. You see, our problem is we're doing battle with a desire for something that we want. What we're struggling with is, "Do I want this even if I know it represents violating the will of God?" That's where our struggle is. Satan appeals to the flesh.

The third thing we see in our text is: temptation that results in sin is a deadly experience. Temptation by itself is not a sin. To be tempted is not a sin. The offer of disobedience doesn't equal the choice of disobedience but temptation that results, due to our lust, due to our desire, that results in sin being conceived, this now turns into a deadly experience. We all are tempted. It's an internal experience. And if sin is conceived and birthed, it is a deadly experience. James quickly shifts to another analogy. He has used that of hunting or fishing in verse 14, "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Verse 15, now he switches the analogy, "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." Now he uses the analogy of childbirth and so these desires are like a mistress, like a harlot, inviting us into an illicit relationship and when that desire is given in to, when that desire toward that which would represent sin is given in to, then sin is conceived.

Let's just stop there and let that sink in. Sin is conceived at the point of desire, that is to say: in the realm of our desires, the life of sin has its beginning. It's in the realm of our desires that the life of sin has its beginning. William Hendrickson said this, he said, "James refrains from spelling out how desire conceives." He doesn't really explain that when he says in verse 15, "desire when it has conceived," he doesn't explain how desire conceives. He goes on to say this, "Desire is able to conceive when a man's will no longer objects but yields. When this take place, conception begins and sin develops and is eventually born." So by my desires, I'm being lured, drawn away, dragged away and baited and when I get to the point that I no longer object but I yield, now a conception has taken place. Sin is conceived and eventually it is given birth, verse 15, "when it has conceived gives birth to sin." In the realm of desire, sin has its beginning, then it is birthed. Sin is expressed in a way like birth. You know, conception is a secret event. You don't see it. A birth is when a baby becomes visible.

So desires are yielded to, sin is conceived and then at some point the sin becomes manifest. It comes into clear view. The choice is made concrete first to ourselves. We are aware of the fact that we have sinned and then it also cannot be hidden. It becomes clear in some way, some form, some fashion to others. I can illustrate it by saying there is much sin that precedes the physical act of adultery. There is much sin that precedes the physical act of adultery. Sinning was going on in the private recesses of one's mind and

heart long before it found its expression in the body. No one just commits adultery. There is sinning going on in the thinking process. There is sinning going on in the realm of one's inner life where no longer is the thought objected to. No longer is the thought rejected. The thought is yielded to before action is ever taken. The conception occurs before there is ever the birth of the sin that takes place.

You need to remember this: sinful desire that is yielded to always has a grandchild because that conception results in the birth of sin but the birthing process doesn't stop with the sin. Isn't that what he says? Verse 15, "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin," get this, "and sin when it is fully grown brings forth," "apokyeo" is the word which literally means "to give birth to; to bring into being." In fact, it's the same word used in verse 18 where it speaks of our salvation and it says, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth," the same word. The Lord gave birth to us, brought us into being in the spiritual realm. In the same way he's saying here in verse 15 that when sin is fully grown up, it gives birth to death. So sin always has its own child and the child of sin is death.

Sin always gives birth to destruction. You say, "Death, death in what realm?" Death in every realm. The experience of death in the temporal realm certainly brought about in the case of our first father. It brought about death in terms of separation from God. Then there is everlasting death that is the result of sin. Sin always gives birth to destruction. Sin always produces killing. Sin always devastates. Only a fool thinks that sinning has no consequences and so in a very picturesque way, it's like he's putting before us a picture: imagine a secret conception that results in a manifest birth and then you have this grotesque child that grows up and produces something even more final and devastating called death.

You see, your temptation is not God encouraging you to disobey him, it is the result of the fact that you have a real spiritual enemy and you have the reality of indwelling sin and there are desires in us, not always are these desires being played upon sinful in and of themselves, but the temptation involves being drawn away from the safe ground of what God has ordained and taking bait that has been designed to appeal to our lusts so that sin is conceived and then birthed and then the result of that is death. Do you want to know what's going on in your temptations? That's what's going on in your temptations.

John MacArthur did a good job, I think, of describing these realities in a very practical way. He described it with four "d's" and you want to write these down and remember these. Here are the four "d's" that sort of capture the process we're seeing in these verses: desire, deception, design, disobedience. Desire, deception, design, disobedience. First, there is the desire and as I said, it's often prompted by something external to us: an image, a picture, something I drive by in my car, an encounter with a person. It begins with desire. It begins with a thought, interest, curiosity. Can I just encourage you tonight: do not satisfy sinful curiosities.

Desire. What does desire lead to? Deception, and here's the deception that he's talking about: rationalization. You see, I have a desire. I know it's not good for me. I know it's

not healthy. I know it's potentially dangerous. What do I do? I begin to rationalize ways, I begin to justify ways that I can in some fashion fulfill that desire. I give myself room to give some space to that desire. I give myself permission to give some space to that desire, to give an entryway into my life with that thing that has caught my interest. Drive by the car lot, there's the brand new car. I know our finances are already in a mess and so I think of ways that I can justify it. "You know, let's just stop by and look at it. It doesn't hurt to look."

Then you move to the third thing and that's design. Now, having allowed this baiting to take me one step beyond where I should be, now I begin to map a way to fulfill the desire. I have the desire. I rationalize the desire. Now how can I fulfill it? And the plans begin to move. The steps begin to be taken. We begin to take action whether it's in our emotions or our thinking or with our feet. We begin to head toward that which will be deadly for us. The fourth "d" is disobedience. Now that thing moves from conception to birth. The process has been completed and I have acted.

MacArthur said this, he said, "It should go without saying that the earlier in the process we determine to resist, the greater the likelihood we will avoid the sin. Conversely, the longer we delay resisting, the more likely the actual sin becomes. It is only the Christian who is able to control his emotional responses to temptations when they first appear who will effectively deal with sin in his life. The principle of nipping it in the bud has no better application than here. The battle must be fought in the mind where sin is conceived. The truth of God which activates the conscience, the soul's warning system must be heard, not ignored. No one can fight the battle in the mind or imagination except the individual believer." Isn't that true? No one can fight this battle but each one of us individually and where it has to be nipped in the bud is in the mind. And as he said so well, the truth of God which activates the conscience, the soul's warning system, must be heard, not ignored.

Can I just ask you: have you gotten used to turning off your conscience? Have you gotten used to just turning a deaf ear to the soul's warning system? And how often do you find yourself having committed the sin when if you'll be truthful with yourself, you were aware you were headed the wrong direction way back here at the point of desire? You knew it but you proceeded to rationalization. You proceeded to design and then you ended up in disobedience but you knew it back here at the point of desire. This is where it must be resisted, these temptations. Satan is shrewd and evil and he knows the bait to use. He knows the lust that exists in your life. You must be wise enough to listen to God, to hear the soul's warning system, the conscience, to have it activated by the truth of a passage like this and say, "I must listen to God at the earliest possible moment when I first become mindful of temptation. I've got to know how this thing operates. When mindful of temptation I guard my thoughts. When it comes to God, I don't assign my sin to him and I realize how this thing operates so that I cut it off before it even gets started."

God is so good to us. He lets us know but there is never a place we find ourselves where we cannot choose – I'm speaking now to believers – there's never a place we find ourselves where we cannot choose obedience. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says this, "No

temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." First of all, do away with the lie that you're in this completely unique situation that no one has ever faced before because even if you're talking about something that no one went through exactly, there is something similar enough and we've all faced it, right? I mean, you could really boil this thing down to: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, boastful pride of life. Every temptation can fall into those categories.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability." So you have your sovereign Father who is regulating every trial and every test and he won't let you be tempted beyond your ability. Next statement, "but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Are you convinced tonight that no matter what it is you're struggling with, the door is always open? The window is always up? There is always a way to flee and how often does the Bible speak to us in those terms? "Flee. Run from." You see, that's the problem, it's our pride. We are flirting with things we ought to be fleeing from. We want to live on the edge of things that we ought to realize put our soul at risk. You know, snuggling up close to situations that could ruin our marriage. That could ruin our testimony. That could ruin our lives. That could damn our souls. And we just snuggle up close to it when what we ought to be doing is running, fleeing.

So will you do it? Will you put sin to death in all of its forms at the earliest possible moment? Will you take personal responsibility when it comes to your temptations so that you recognize those temptations at the point of desire? And if somehow you miss that, you begin to recognize, "Do you know what? I'm rationalizing this." Or maybe even you wake up when you say, "I'm beginning to plan something that's not right." Or perhaps even you've already fallen and then the question is, "O Almighty God, would you show me the way to make this right? I know your word calls me to repentance here and to turn from this sin, then show me the steps to take to make it right and teach me to pay attention to your word as it activates my conscience for, Lord, that's your warning system for my soul. That's your warning system for my soul."

Can I just remind us that this kind of decision is only possible if you know Jesus as Lord and Savior? You see, the truth is before we knew Christ we were slaves to sin. I mean, we can have a mind full of all sorts of intellectual ideas that tell us about freedom from sin but we know no real freedom from sin. But if we've been joined to the Son of God, if he is indeed our Savior, if the Spirit of God indeed dwells in us, if indeed we have new natures, we are no longer slaves to sin, we are now slaves to righteousness and we have a Father who regulates all of our tests so that at any point we can choose, by God's grace and the power of the Spirit, to obey and therefore we must. We must.

Let's bow together for prayer.

Lord, you're so good. You alone are good and you are only good. You do not tempt us. We cannot blame you for our sinful desires. We are so thankful that you love us so much

and care for us so much that with every temptation you provide a way of escape. You provide the way of escape. Please grant us, Lord, the awareness that we need when we are battling with temptation. Lord, help us to guard our thoughts with respect to you and, Lord, help us to recognize how sin operates. Help us, Lord, not to turn a deaf ear to your warnings. Lord, grant that we would be wise enough not to flirt with sin but to flee from it, not to imagine that we're strong enough to snuggle up close to it but to realize that we are so weak that the only place of safety is to run to you. Grant us the humility to recognize our sins, to confess them and to turn from them. Lord, to be honest with ourselves about where we really are and then to humble ourselves in the presence of those against we have sinned and to seek their forgiveness and in that way obey you. Protect your church, Lord. Guard your flock. We thank you that you do. In Jesus' name. Amen.