

## Lesson Three

### THE TEST OF BLAME FOR INWARD TEMPTATIONS

#### 1:13-18

We learned in our last study that life in a fallen, sinful world is a life which is exposed to troubles and trials. We also saw that God sends trials into the life of a person to prove the genuineness of their faith, and to develop stamina and endurance in their service of Him. In these trials, God is calling us to holiness and obedience. However we must not blame God for any sinful, evil efforts which may occur during the trials. God does not call us to disobedience by enticing us to sin (1:13-16), but instead He is the source of everything good (1:17, 18).

Just as it is common to man to be tempted, it is also common to man to blame someone or something else for his being tempted to sin, as well as giving in to sin. When God confronted Adam with his sin in the Garden of Eden, Adam's excuse was **"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."** (Genesis 3:12). When the Lord then confronted Eve with her sin, she said, **"The serpent beguiled me and I did eat."** (Genesis 3:13). In essence, they both were blaming God. So from the very beginning, one of the basic tendencies of mankind has been to shift the blame for their actions to others. Every parent knows that children are born with this ingrained in their natures. This is known as inborn depravity.

The wise man Solomon described this tendency in **Proverbs 19:3, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth (rages) against the Lord."** The Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who was a contemporary of Christ, perceived that "when the mind has sinned and removed itself far from virtue, it lays the blame on divine causes."

As has been previously mentioned, the Greek work for testing and temptation is the same word, which can have two meanings. One is to test in order to prove, and the other is to entice or solicit to evil. In verse 12 it is used in the sense of testing under trials, and in verses 13 and 14 it means to entice to do evil.

#### **I. THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION - 1:13, 14**

***"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."***

Outward trials frequently provide an occasion for the development of sinful attitudes within. When a person doesn't understand these trials, it is easy to become bitter and blame God. James adamantly opposes such reasoning. While God sends trials, we cannot blame Him for the evil effects of the trials. James gives us two insights about God which show that He is not blameworthy for evil. First is:

## A. The Nature of God

### 1. God's Character

God's absolute pure and holy character makes Him invincible to the assaults of evil. Evil has no appeal to God. Evil is repulsive to God. God has no weakness, or tendency in His being to which temptation an appeal. **Habakkuk 1:13** asserts of God, ***"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity."***

### 2. God's Actions

Second, God's actions are never designed to use evil as a means to tempt anyone. This is an absolute statement. James is not interested in explaining the origin of evil, for he knows that Satan is called the tempter. God hates sin and does not participate in sin. He is the lawgiver and judges all sin (**James 4:12**). Thus, God's design in our trials is to prove the genuineness of our faith, and not with a view in mind to encourage us to sin.

The differing design or purpose between testing to prove, and tempting to sin, is seen in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. In **Matthew 4:1**, we read, ***"Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."*** The rest of the account (**vs. 2-11**) clearly reveals that Satan's designed action was intended to tempt or solicit Jesus to sin. Whereas, God, the Holy Spirit, designed action was to test to prove the sinlessness of Christ.

One time a group of engineers designed and built a new bridge over a river. After completing it they brought a heavy train and stopped it on the bridge. A bystander asked one of the engineers "What are you doing?" He replied, "Well, we built this bridge, and we are testing it." The bystander then asked "Why, do you think it is going to fall down?" The engineer replied, "No, we are proving that it won't fall down!" For the same reason, Jesus was tested to prove that we have a Savior who could not be enticed to sin. Satan laid the weight of all his deceptive power upon the Savior, and He stood the test.

## B. The Nature of Man

A second evidence that God is not responsible for tempting us to sin is seen in that it is our fallen inward nature that makes temptation attractive to us. ***"Every man"*** emphasizes the fact of original sin. Every child is born with the impulse to sin. In **Psalm 51:5**, David states, ***"I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."*** It is not external circumstances but internal wicked desires which lead to sin. One time a man got lost on a trip and entered into a small town to ask directions. He met a small boy and asked him, "Where am I?" The little boy thought a moment, then pointed his finger at him and said, "There you are!" Blame for sin points to us, not to God.

## II. THE PROCESS OF SINNING - 1:14, 15

***"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."***

We are prone to view sin as a single act, but God sees it as a process. James describes this process in [vs. 14, 15](#). Four words can be used to help describe and remember this process.

### A. Desire - “lust”

The word for lust means a “strong craving or desire. It is likewise a neutral word which can describe either a good or bad action. While the vast majority of times it is used in a sinful or bad way, it is also used in a good way in the Bible. In [Luke 22:15](#), Jesus used it when He said, **“With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”** Paul used it in [Philippians 1:23](#) when he said **“Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better.”** James uses it here to refer to a bad, sinful desire.

The normal desires of life were given to us by God and of themselves, are not sinful. Without these desires, we could not function. It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside of God’s revealed will that we fall into sin. Eating is normal, gluttony is sin. Sleep is normal; laziness is sin. Sex is normal; extra-marital sex is sin. The origin of our sinning comes not from an outside tempter, but from an inside traitor. [Jeremiah 17:9](#) states, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** These desires or lusts relate to the part of our psychological being known as the emotions.

### B. Deception - “drawn away and enticed.”

The second stage in the sinning process is deception. Temptation is deceptive in that it appears to be something more attractive than it really is. James uses two words to illustrate his point. The term, **“drawn away”** has the meaning of dragging or pulling something away. It is a hunting term referring to a baited trap designed to lure an unsuspecting animal into it. The second term **“enticed”** was a commonly used fishing expression referring to the bait designed to lure and hook the fish. Animals and fish are drawn to traps and hooks because the bait appeals to their natural desires. It is not until they take the bait they feel the pain of the consequences.

It is our forbidden desires or cravings that make the bait appear exciting. But the bait also conceals and keeps us from seeing the consequences of sin. Lot would never have suffered the destruction of his family had he known what was concealed in the **“well-watered plains of Jordan.”** ([Genesis 13:10](#)). David would never have suffered the tragic consequences which he did, had he seen through the bait of Bathsheba’s tempting body, while she was bathing. As lusts relate to our emotions or passions, deception relates to our intellect or mind.

### C. Design - “has conceived”

The third stage in the sinning process takes place when the will chooses to pursue and consummate what has been rationalized and justified in the mind. However, this can only take place after the mind has been overpowered by the deceptive desires of our emotions. The

illustration which James employs in verse 15 is that of a pregnant woman. When lust has conceived, it gives birth to a child called sin.

The word “then” in verse 15 points to the sequence of events in the process of sin. Sin is the union of the will (our choice) with lust (emotions). Human conception takes place as a result of the physical union of a man and woman. A process is then initiated that will result in the birth of a child in the prescribed period of time.

In like manner when the will chooses to embrace the forbidden desire, the strong feeling of desire becomes impregnated with sin. Just as a child is a person before it is ever born, so sin is present in the heart before it ever gives evidence that it is there. The conception of sin and the discovery of sin may be months apart, but the process has been set in motion. Up to this point, sin has been desired by the heart and fantasized in the mind, but the act has not been committed.

#### **D. Disobedience - “brings forth sin.”**

Illicit lust is the mother of sin. Each lust brings forth (or gives birth to) its own kind of sin. Sin (hamartia) has a basic meaning of “missing the mark or falling short of the target.” The mark or target is the pleasing and honoring of God in the doing of His will. At this stage, James is now clearly describing an act of sin or disobedience to God’s law. That which has been desired, rationalized, and willed is now actually committed. Desire leads to deception, deception to design, and design to disobedience, which is sin.

#### **E. Death - “sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.”**

If the cycle of temptation is completed, the end result is tragedy or death. Death is separation or loss. Sin, having been born, has its own life and development, unless its life and growth is terminated by repentance, it will continue to develop until it becomes “full grown or brought to completion.” It then becomes a fixed habit which governs and determines the character of the person.

The child conceived by lust is born a murderer, a killer. Paul describes it as **“the wages of sin is death.”** (Romans 6:23). Sin brings forth physical death, separating the soul from the body; spiritual death, separating the soul from God; and eternal death, separating both soul and body from God forever.

### **III. A WARNING GIVEN - 1:16**

#### **“Do not err, my beloved brethren.”**

James immediately follows his dark picture of death with an affectionate warning to his readers. The word **“err”** or **“deceived”** means “to lead astray or cause to wander.” He is speaking the truth in love. “Stop being deceived! Don’t be led astray!” Stop blaming other people, your circumstance, or Satan for your temptation and sins. Above all, stop blaming God by entertaining hard thoughts about Him. Take full blame for your actions and reactions. Your sins come from within your being and have to be dealt with from within.

Verse 16 is a pivotal verse connecting verses 13-15 with verses 17, 18. It serves as a warning against excusing ourselves from responsibility for our sin. (Vs. 13-15), and it is a warning against holding to a wrong view of God's holy and good character (vs. 17, 18).

#### IV. OVERCOMING TEMPTATION BY LOOKING TO GOD - 1:17, 18

***“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”***

##### A. Trusting God's Character

These verses pick up the theme of God's character as a giving God, which James touched upon back in verse 5, and then develops that theme (vs. 13-15) to refute the claim that God tempts men. One of Satan's devices is to convince us that our Father is really holding out on us. That He really does not love and care for us. He convinced Eve of this in the Garden. Temptation is alluring in that it promises to fulfill that which our desires tell us is lacking in our being. Now James turns from the page of evil temptation to the goodness of God by reminding us anything fulfilling, anything worthwhile, anything good or proper is found in the Lord. In contrast to the evil enticements that come from within, all good gifts are from God who is above and over us, and come down to us in a steady stream like the light which flows from the heavenly bodies, of which God is the Creator. ***“God is light and in Him is not darkness at all.”*** (1 John 1:5). James causes us to see that God is unchangeable in His character. The term, “Father of lights” comes from the science of astronomy to describe the change in the intensity which comes from the sun, moon, and stars. The sun gives full light at midday, dim light at dusk, and no light at all in the night. In stark contrast to the changing light of the heavenly bodies, God's character does not change. His holiness and truth remain constant. He can be trusted to fulfill our needs and desires in ways which are pleasing to Him and for our good. Do not allow your routine desires to get hooked by runaway desires.

The expression, “shadow of turning” describe moving heavenly bodies that produce constantly changing shadows on the earth. In contrast, God's character is always trustworthy, unchanging, reliable, good, and faithful. May the prayer of the hymn writer become ours when he says, *“Change and decay in all around I see. O thou who changes not, abide with me.”* The conclusion which James would have us to embrace is that there is never any dimming of the light of God's holy character that would make it even remotely possible for Him to become a tempter of man.

##### B. Understanding The New Birth

In verse 18, James gives his final reason why God cannot be held responsible for our temptations to sin. This is seen in the nature of regeneration itself. He re-birthed us unto a life of holiness, not unto a life of sin. This act of God is referred to as the ***“washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”*** (Titus 3:5). It comes about by God exercising His own sovereign will. It occurs in connection with His use of the word of truth, which is a description of the gospel message of the good news about Jesus Christ. ***“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the***

***word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).*** The result of this new birth is faith in Christ in the lives of believers, and they become a kind of first-fruits of God’s creation. The first-fruits were the first and best of the crops which were harvested and were an indication of what the rest of the crop would be like. These first century Jewish Christians were a pledge of a vast harvest of saved people in the centuries to come.

### **C. Summary**

In the midst of trials which test our faith, we must not blame God for any sinful desires which arise from within us. God’s holy character is good and not evil. There is nothing in Him which is attracted to evil, neither is He able to entice men to do evil. Man is fully responsible for allowing his normal routine desires to turn into runaway desires. When the emotions are justified in the mind, and chosen by the will as being good and necessary to fulfill our needs, the process of temptation is completed, and the act of sin occurs. Sin leads to the tragic consequence of death. Only by a divine intervention on the part of God’s grace and goodness can terminate the life of sin. We must then trust in the power of God and His unchanging, stable character to do us good and not evil.