

LIFE AFTER FAITH
A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES

LESSON 7 – TEMPTATION 101 – JAMES 1:13-16

If there is one subject in which all of us could use more instruction and better education, it's the subject of temptation...specifically, how to deal with temptation. So far in this opening chapter, James has talked about the trials and tests of life. Here in verse 13, he moves into another type of testing experience when he deals with the idea of being tempted with sin.

Notice in verse 13 that James doesn't say, "If tempted..." but rather, "When tempted." Temptation is an experience that is common to everyone. In this section, James gives us a basic course on the subject of temptation. One writer calls it, "The Mechanics of the Matter." To put it in academic terms...it's Temptation 101. These few verses provide some practical insight into exactly what happens when we are tempted and the danger temptation poses to our spiritual lives. James shares with us three truths in his basic course on temptation. Notice first, James points us to...

The Place Where Temptation Starts

We live in a society that loves to shift the blame rather than accept it. However, in these verses, James makes it crystal clear that we must accept much of the blame when it comes to the origin of temptation in our lives. In verse 13 he says, "When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone..."

In the earlier parts of this chapter, James told us that God works through trials and tests to perfect Christian character in His people. He makes it clear, however, here in verse 13, that when the test of our faith takes the form of a solicitation to sin, God has no part of that temptation.

The holiness and purity of God are such that He can have no association with sinful temptation. He has never been inclined toward sin, nor has He ever tried to pull anyone else in that direction. So, when temptation pushes the buttons in our lives, we can't say, as some do, "Well, God made me this way." When we face temptation, or when we fall to temptation, we can never point the finger of blame toward God.

After telling us that God has no responsibility in sinful temptation, James goes on to tell us exactly who and what is responsible for a temptation to sin. Notice what verse 14 says... "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed." James says there are two forces at work whenever we are tempted to sin...the lust within us and the lure around us.

The lust within us refers to the passions and desires of our soul. In this case, it is speaking of our sinful passions. We are not tempted by things that we don't naturally want. We are tempted by things that we physically and mentally desire and unfortunately, even as Christians, there is a pull on our lives toward sin.

The lure around us refers to the things in our environment that entice us to sin. Think of it in fisherman's terms. A fisherman lures a fish onto a hook by covering the hook with bait. How many of us have found that satan knows exactly what kind of bait appeals to our personal lust, and that he is an expert at drawing us away and luring us into sin? James perfectly describes what's involved in temptation. When the sinful passions within us are presented with the sinful opportunities around us, we have the making of a temptation.

The Product When Temptation Succeeds

As we move forward in these verses, we learn from James exactly what happens when we allow our lust and our luring to come together. Verse 15 tells us what happens when a temptation is successful. “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

In trying to explain what happens when we yield to temptation, James uses language of procreation and pregnancy. He says that when our lust hooks up with an opportunity, a baby is conceived, and when it's born, the name on the birth certificate is sin. But rather than the joy that normally accompanies a birth, the end of that new creation is death.

Now, understand that James is not venturing into some new theological territory. He is simply stating one of the fundamental truths of Scripture...sin always leads to death. God told Adam and Eve that if they sinned they would die. The prophet Ezekiel said, “The one who sins is the one who will die.” In the New Testament, Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death...” and here James only echoes this truth. Sin will always lead to death.

The ultimate consequence of sin is so much greater than just physical death. It is spiritual death. It is separation from God. Whenever we allow sin in our lives, we suffer the consequence of death. For the Christian, that death is experienced in broken fellowship with Christ. For the unsaved person, that death comes when...for all eternity...they are separated from God and punished in hell. Even though the effects of sin may not be immediately felt, they will be deadly. James teaches us that a successful temptation will ultimately bring forth the tragic product of death.

The Person Whom Temptation Stops

In verse 16, James challenges us as his brothers and sisters in Christ, not to be deceived. In Matthew 24:4, Jesus gave this same warning to His disciples, “Watch out that no one deceives you.” Isn't this what sin does? It deceives. Sin promises a party but produces pain. James warns us in verse 16. Don't be the kind of person who is deceived by the candy-coated poison of sin. Don't be so foolish as to think that sheep like us can ever survive the attack of a lion like satan.

According to most Bible scholars, James isn't only talking about being deceived, but also describing someone who is led astray. It is similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 18 when He talked about the sheep that had gone astray. So in other words, the person who is stopped by temptation is the person who wanders from the path they are supposed to follow as they are led astray by something that has tempted them.

As a disciple of Jesus, we are called to follow Him and look to Him for direction and guidance. When we are distracted by the lust and lure of sin, we wander away from Him and into trouble. Did you know that it's against the law to text or even be on your phone while driving unless it's totally hands free? Statistics show that drivers who are texting are around 30 times more likely to be in an accident than those who don't. In much the same way, many of our tragic collisions with temptation could be avoided if we would just keep our eyes on Jesus and not be distracted by the lure of sin around us. Don't be the kind of person who is stopped by temptation because you're deceived and distracted.

Each one of us needs to pay close attention to James' teaching here on Temptation 101. Every day of our lives, we face the danger of our lusts meeting the lures of this sinful world and falling into sin. The good news is that we don't have to give in to temptation. We don't have to be deceived and led astray.