

Temptation And Sin

James 1:13-15

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. (James 1:13-15 (ESV))

As we begin our study of these words of warning from the Lord about being tempted and enticed into sin, may we keep in mind that each of these exhortations that we have been studying about over the past few weeks have directly to do with this matter spoken about here in verses 2 and following, "the testing of our faith". Listen!

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 (ESV))

Whether our testing comes through "doubts" that arise and plague our faith, as in verse 6, or it comes through struggles with our finances, as in verses 9-11, or as here today, with the many forms of temptation that arise, it all has to do with the testing and the trying of our "faith".

But we must always keep in mind that none of these trials will ever come to us without having first been approved of by God, our loving and protective Father. And yes, that realization is often a very difficult concept for us to keep in mind and to accept, that God is personally and intimately involved in each and every difficulty and trial we encounter, but He is.

As our loving Father, He loves us more deeply than we could ever imagine. And He knows how very important "faith" is in the relationship that we have with Him. And He knows that for our faith to strengthen and to grow, it must be exercised, tested and tried. Recall the exhortation in Hebrews 12 that tells us,

5 . . . "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. (Hebrews 12:5-7 (NKJV))

And verse 11,

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11 (NKJV))

Recall also that God the Father demonstrated this same kind of chastening and trials with His own beloved Son, as Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Turn with me to Matthew 4, verse 1, and follow along.

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and *said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus *said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11 (NASB))

Again, it is so very important for us to remember and to accept that God is a loving Father who knows how to disciple and to train up His children in the ways of righteousness.

And nowhere is His "hands-on" involvement in the trials and testing and the training up of our faith better demonstrated than in the words we just read in Matthew 4. It was God's own Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested. Verse 1,

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1 (NASB))

These are some of the most mysterious and puzzling words in all of scripture. And there have been many people who have studied them and come to confused conclusions about them. Verse 1,

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1 (NASB))

To people who have never come to know the heart of God and to trust Him, these words are not only confusing, they can even seem to conflict with the words here in our text in James 1, verse 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. (James 1:13)

Those people will often argue and debate that such words as these in James 1, and the words in Matthew 4 about the Spirit leading Jesus into the desert are a quibbling over semantics, that if you lead someone into temptation, then you are taking part in that temptation, and therefore these words here in James are a contradiction!

Perhaps you have never yourself taken the opportunity to ponder this kind of argument. But may I assure you and me that God has put such passages as these into these scriptures so that we will ponder them, so that you and I can study them carefully, and then resolve any apparent conflicts that might arise within our own hearts and minds.

It does us no good at all when we encounter tough scriptures, to just turn and ignore them or skip over them. God sincerely desires for you and me to study such scriptures as these and to resolve them.

This is where our "faith", that is being tested, must rise up and confront any "doubts" about what we know to be true about God. God really is ever and always our loving Father, and "He is always good and He always doeth good". He is always pure and holy, and He absolutely cannot be tempted by anyone, and neither will He tempt anyone.

And no, we might not be able to comprehend exactly how God is able to do the things He does and still always remain absolutely pure and holy. And such deep things may remain a mystery to us. But we can come to know Him better and to fully trust that yes, He can do the things He does, He can ordain and create all the things and all the matters of creation, even the presence of such things as "temptation" and "sin". And He can actually lead the Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. But in all His "ordaining" and "leading" and "doing", He Himself will never be the actual "causer" or the actual "tempter" of anyone to sin. It is just as these words of our text tell us,

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. (James 1:13 (ESV))

As for temptation itself, yes, you and I will often be tempted, but remember that our being tempted does not mean that we have sinned. Let me say that again, our being tempted is not, in itself, a sinful behavior on our part. Too often, people do get that mixed up in their mind. Yes, temptation is usually one of the first stages, one of the beginning points that does often lead to sin. But just the incident of our being tempted is not a sin itself. As long as we turn from those temptations and not let them have their way, we have not sinned.

And thankfully, one of the most blessed of all of the “graces” of God is that He has put within every temptation, a special “turning point”, an “escape route”. A temptation may be strong and enticing. It may have all the things we like within it. But no matter how much we are tempted to go ahead on into a sin, we will always have a “moment of opportunity” to turn away from that sin and run. God has assured us of that in 1 Corinthians 10. He promises us there that

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB))

Praise the Lord for His mercy and grace!

But with all of that being said, unfortunately, as we know, there are times when we don't listen to and hear God's “still small voice” as He warns us away from those temptations and sin. And we suddenly find that we have gone ahead and “stepped across the line” of sin. It's then that we find that there are often even more and more pitfalls that await us. Instead of our confessing our sin immediately, and turning from it, too often, our minds and consciences reach to find some other form of absolution.

And too often, our first line of defense is to blame someone else. That was exactly what took place with the first sin that man found himself caught up in. When Adam and Eve were tempted, and fell into sin, their first misguided option was to blame someone besides themselves. Turn with me to Genesis 3 and follow along,

8 They (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." 11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The

woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:8-13 (NASB))

Here, Adam and Eve had been tempted by the devil to want to have more than God had provided for them, especially in the matter of authority and decision making. And in their desire for more, they sinned. And then, to compound the sin that they had already committed, instead of confessing their sin and repenting of it, they immediately sought to pass off their guilt to someone else. Adam chose to blame not only his wife, but also God Himself. He said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Here, Adam first blamed God, saying in essence, "God it was your fault. You made the first mistake by giving me this woman. And it was the woman's fault for giving me the fruit".

Then Eve said, "The serpent, he deceived me, and I ate." Blame the devil!

And yes, it is very true that the devil and his demonic minions are always at work doing what they do best, tempting us and causing us to think and to do things that are sinful. But folks, God cannot put it any plainer for us than He has in these words.

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. (James 1:13-15 (ESV))

Yes, God did create Adam and Eve, and He created you and me. And He created us with all the faculties and abilities to think and to do things, even sinful things. But He Himself is not responsible for the responses that we have to the many difficulties and temptations that we face each day. Just as it is with our own children, we can father them and birth them, but their behaviors will be completely up to them.

Here in verses 14 and 15, God gives us a clear explanation of exactly how we get from where we are before we sin, to where we don't want to be in sin. He tells us that

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. (James 1:14-15 (ESV))

Considering Adam and Eve, we don't know how long Eve was questioning her position in life, feeling restricted to only being able to think and to do what God wanted her to think and do. Perhaps it was a long, long time, or it might have only occurred to her the moment that Satan suggested that she should be dissatisfied with God's provision. But however long it was, a desire for "more" entered into the back of her mind. And that desire then mulled around and around until she suddenly realized that she could actually "have" what she "desired". And as her desire realized that it could be fulfilled, it conceived into sin. And then her sin "birthed", and immediately, her soul died.

How Adam became involved, we aren't told. All that the words tell us is that Eve took of the fruit and gave it to Adam who was with her. Those words are as simple as they sound. Adam was actually right there with Eve during all of her rigors of being beguiled and tempted. And these words of 1 Timothy 2 are especially revealing to us. We're told in verse 14 that

14 . . . it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Timothy 2:14 (NASB))

Eve was deceived, but Adam was not, meaning that he had a "clearer head" and was able to think through all that he was doing. He is without excuse. He chose to let his desire lure him down the path towards sin. And then as sin was conceived within Adam's heart, he also died.

How sad for them both! But even more, how sad for all of us, every person born after them. Because, in that moment that Adam and Eve sinned, and died, we all died. To put it in modern terms, at the moment Adam and Eve sinned, their DNA changed and immediately a genetic predisposition to sin was born within them, and also later within us, a predisposition to sin and death that can never be healed, a predisposition that can only be overcome by a whole new birth, a birth in which we are reborn from above, "born again" in Christ.

I must close for now, but please do think on these words often. They are a blessed and helpful warning to us.

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. (James 1:13-15 (ESV))

May we pray!