

# Temptation

- James 1:12-18

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## James 1:12-18

*12 Blessed [is] the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is*

*tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

## **1:12-18**

The idea of the term "blessed" within the Christian faith is an often overused and misunderstood concept. We want to see "blessedness" as a state of ease, freedom from trial, testing, or, in the case of today's topic, the absence of temptation. The idea behind blessed is indeed a 'happiness,' a 'blissfulness,' but the conditions for such, ...the parameters of such, ...do not necessarily encompass a dynamic of ease, rest, or freedom from adversity. James' angle on this is that people are "blessed" because they have found happiness and a contentment in life that reaches beyond adversity, cares, labors, and even death. Such a state comes only through an alignment of one's life priorities, passions, and motivations with those that God holds primary. It comes through seeing and understanding what is truly important through new eyes. It comes through a transformation... a "renewing of your mind," ...a learning of God via both study *and* experience (Romans 12:2).

James tells us that those who are blessed are those who endure temptation. What is crucial to such, is understanding the magnitude of the concept. For temptation is more than just some Hollywood movie concept. It is the pull of Satan,... the world, and especially, *our flesh*. Refusing to surrender to the desires of our flesh is the simplest and clearest litmus test of our love for Christ. It is the honest manifestation of our true level of love toward our Savior and His Word. Jesus said it quite succinctly in John 14:15, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*"

Now "endure" in verse 12 means more than just "making it through the immediate situation." It has in it the idea of a long term successful triumph over the testings and temptations of this life. For those who *truly* love Him, this triumph is not only possible, but truly is the proof...the *reflection*, of how much we love. *Real* love will motivate one to crawl across shattered glass. Sadly, many people will never know such love...giving or receiving! Whether we want to admit it or not, our indulgence in sin is manifesting our lack of love toward our Savior and certainly negates the title, "Lord of our Lives." Our involvement in sin is only proof of our love of self.

Now with that being said, the truth remains that there are not any of us that will not struggle with this issue. No one will escape temptation in this life. However, scripture teaches us that the answer to triumph over such is not through a grit-your-teeth discipline, but that it is effectually a natural "side-effect" of our love for Christ. If we are truly in love with Him, obedience comes much more naturally. In fact, the more we love Him, the more we obey. That's just the way it works, no matter how much we want to deny it! In fact it is simply impossible to endure temptation in any consistent and enduring way without a very real love for Him. When we focus on Him and the "seeking first the kingdom of God," sin becomes a far less desirable alternative.

Wayne Detzler says, "True Christian perseverance is not tied to tenacity. It is rather the work of God the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. The starch in a saint's spine is shown by Scripture to be nothing less than the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit."



"...for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life." This statement must be dealt with honestly. While we know from the whole of Scripture that no one can take our salvation away once received, we also know that many folks live much of their lives attempting to fool others as well as themselves that they are indeed reborn, but eventually such is manifested not to be the case at all. Obviously James is saying that the crown of life, ...*our eternal life with God*, will not be a reality until we have been tested and we have "passed." That undoubtedly makes many of us quite uncomfortable. It's hard to rest when you don't know where you stand. That's why the doctrine of eternal security is so critical to our understanding. However, if the heart of man is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9), then how can we know for sure where we stand?

The Bible repeatedly speaks of the fruit we produce, or *fail* to produce. We are told that we will "know a tree by its fruit." A cherry tree doesn't grow apples. If we are saved, if we are indeed born again, then we can absolutely expect certain attributes to rise to prominence in our living. This fruit will appear and remain. This is how we know where we stand in Christ. That doesn't mean we will ever achieve some level of perfection or will ever attain a sinless life, because that is not going to happen. But we will see faithful and consistent growth in sanctification and maturing. We will grow in the manifestation of our faith. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Saints are sinners who keep on going."

Make no mistake: ***we will be tested***. We ***will*** be tempted! David reflects in Psalms 17:3, "*You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.*" The outcome of such testing actually gives us the ability to reflect on our life's progress, though a lot of us would rather not look in there. Through such reflection we are able to ascertain whether we need to make changes to draw closer to Christ, or that perhaps even consider that we aren't reborn at all. We are still living, *albeit somewhat blindly*, in the flesh, and therefore ***still lost***. Through it all, this promise still stands: ***once I have been approved, I WILL receive the Crown of Life***. That is a state which is experienced in *this* life, not just the next. But for sure, a person must first be ***proved*** before being ***approved***. Paul called upon Timothy to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed." However, know this: *the testing is not for GOD to discover what you are, but for YOU to discover what you are!*

How will this "testing" take place? In what way will we be tried? James makes sure we understand that God is not somehow tempting us to do evil to see if we can "make the grade." God does not tempt man to do evil. He doesn't have to! Such temptation naturally arises from within the heart of man and is revealed in our free-will reality. God allows choice in order to provide the environment for true love and clarity to exist. The alternative is force and/or fatalism, all of which is not love, and certainly not the nature of our Creator.

Within the original word rendered here as "tempt," is the word "test." Jesus Himself was not immune from this as we read how He was tested in the wilderness. Jesus however lacked the corrupt nature we possess, so He was not drawn to sin from within Himself the way we are. He was tested directly by Satan who already had done a number on mankind as a whole. Being a fallen *human* creature, Satan doesn't often need to tempt me directly, as I have that issue well in hand by myself. My temptation generally comes simply from within myself: ***my*** flesh, ***my*** fallen nature. However Jesus ***was*** tempted. He was tried by Satan, and the fact is, God the Father stood back and allowed it. But God is not the ***author*** of our sin, nor the ***instigator*** of temptation.

God will, however, assist in your ***rescue out*** of temptation if you actually want out of it and call upon Him for His help. However, often people do not honestly *want* out of the sin, despite outward appearances! If you call upon Him, you must be prepared! His direction at that point may not be easy to accept and often can be extremely daunting to pursue! Rarely, if ever, is His rescue without an uncomfortable aspect. Rarely is there the proverbial "easy way out." That's why we so often choose to reject His involvement and go with what we want instead. How often we can tend to think, "Hey, I go to church. I serve, I read my Bible and am part of the community, so I am okay," but then our practical "real world" life is anything but Christ-centric and Lordship driven. Note Jeremiah 7:1-10.

God allows these testings, these temptations to come, but in His love He hopes and desires the best for us and will be there for us if we call. His genuine want is that we trust in Him and triumph over our temptations, and, through it all, become stronger for having gone through it. God leads us into righteousness. (Psalms 23:3 and Psalms 139: 23-24) Our flesh leads us to sin. We do not have to submit to sin, nor do we have to be beaten by it. A child of God is not only given the forgiveness of sin upon our salvation, but has been given the power *over* sin.

So make note: we cannot place the blame on God for our failures, yet ironically some will try to point fingers. In fact, in most cases we can't even honestly blame Satan! He started it all, yes, but the fact remains the root of all sin is from within the heart of man.

Mark 7:15, 20-23 tells it to us straight: "*There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man...*And He said, '*What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For*

*from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

It's easier to take the position of "The devil made me do it," because then we can project our guilt onto someone else and not take responsibility for our actions.

All of Satan's efforts to lead men into sin are powerless to affect us unless we actually allow ourselves to be drawn away by our own desires. So the bottom line is what IS your desire? For it is here that the power of our actions resides. If we do not find evil more desirable than our love for Christ, then we will not be drawn into any sin. The enticement may have been originally from Satan and his boys, but it is our own lust of the heart that pushes us over the edge! The answer to our victory in this matter lies in Luke 9:23, "*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*"

However, know this: I can spend all of my life's energy on trying to not sin and, frankly, wearing myself out in the attempt, or I can focus on loving God, finding ways to saddle up closer to Him, spending my time on Kingdom efforts and community relationships. There are many things I can practically do to build my love for my wife, and the same exists when it comes to my love for Christ. When love and the pursuit of a growing love relationship consumes me, I find I have little time or energy left to pursue the desires of the flesh. David's sin with Bathsheba could have been prevented if he had not allowed himself even to be in the place where sin's calling could be heard. He should have been in the battle with his troops, not chillin' out on the balcony with nothing to do while everyone else was out on the battlefield!

The time to fight against sin is before it actually becomes sin, to deal with it when it is a mere temptation. (Note: Damian Kyle with the example of the Coke machine.) In the case of Adam and Eve, Achan of Joshua's day, or David with Bathsheba, all their sins began with **seeing**: the conception of sin through the eyes of man. Each had the chance, as well as the power, to walk away from the desire before them. However, the desire for that which was before them was greater than their love for God. Had their love truly reigned supreme toward God, then in each case the conception of sin would have been the end of it. And the conception of sin is not sin. Temptation is not sin.

But the problem with man is that we want to swear off chocolate chip cookies, but still hang around close enough to the bakery to smell them baking. Well Pastor, what are you saying? Are you saying I should move to another house so I don't smell the bakery? Seriously? **Yes, ...seriously.** Maybe I have to lock down my computer or maybe I have to just get rid of it and use public computers. Maybe I have to get a roommate/mentor who will hold me accountable to my comings and goings. A new job? Break off a relationship? Get some help?

"Do not err" or "do not go astray," "do not be deceived or misled." The language denotes a ship off course and in grave danger. The language and the warning is extreme.

Paul warns us in Galatians 6:7, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*"

This reiterates the idea and the question of, "What are you planting?" Many of us are spiritually planting weeds and thorns, yet somehow expecting a field of corn! It just doesn't happen that way in *any* realm.

Our text tells us that everything that comes from God is "good and perfect." In light of this verse, can we not righteously go on to say that if it **isn't** good and perfect (whole and complete), then it isn't a gift from God? Isn't this verse a guide for seeking and gathering the will of God for my life and the decisions I must make for my life? How many of us have tried to force a desire of the flesh into the anointed will of God? We compromise, we push, we twist scriptural meanings, reject counsel from brothers and sisters, and even deny the still, small voice inside of us to get what we want and still hang a sign on it that says "Blessed."

James' word here in verse 18, translated "brought us forth" is the same word as in verse 15 for "brings forth" in the phrase "brings forth death." Thus we see that sin brings death, but God brings forth us as His first fruits. We are the fruit of God's existence. We are important and loved by Him. The choice is ours: life or death. Not just in the issue of cessation of life, that can directly happen due to sin, but it occurs in a much more subtle and insidious manner, by stealing the life that He wants us to have on this planet. A life of joy and peace, a "living large." Life or death: there seems to be no other choices. In this choice lies the ultimate question: my will or God's? In the latter, there is no room for my will. Not in the beginning, with salvation, or anywhere along the road of living in His grace and righteousness. There is no "hybrid life."

Our text reads, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father..." Literally this reads, "Every gift good and every gift perfect from above is continually coming down". So if it IS good, it is from God. But the question is do you know for sure what IS good and what is not? Because I don't. If **I** am in the seat of review and judgment on the matter of what is truly good, then God is not. I would therefore be saying I know more than God as to what is good. Just because your flesh and emotions say that something is good doesn't mean it is in the dispensation of your Father. Just because you really want it doesn't mean it is good. Just because you can't see why God wouldn't let you have it doesn't mean it is good. James' point is that these good and perfect gifts, along with all of the many good things God gives us to enjoy—the taste of good food, the love of our families, the beauty of His creation, and every wonderful experience in life—all of these good things come to us from a God whose very nature is good. As the Psalmist proclaims (Ps 119:67-68), "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes.*"

See, the very cornerstone of salvation rebirth is saying, "I don't know what is good, but God does, so therefore I am going with what He says, not me. Not my *emotions*, my *desires*, my *wants*, my *dreams*." You must know God, not as you may **conceive Him to be** or **wish Him to be**, but as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. I've heard professing Christians say, "My God is not a God of judgment; He is just a God of love." That's nice, but your God is not then the God of the Bible! He is a figment of your own imagination! The God of the Bible is both a God of judgment **and** of love. Or, there are Christians who dodge difficult chapters in Scripture and reinvent God to be in the image of one that they would like Him to be. But that practice is as old as the earth itself: it's called "idolatry." To dodge what the Bible says about God is to make God in your own image, which is idolatry. Are you following the real and true God today or an idol of your own making? The results of the inevitable testing will manifest the answer to that...