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BIBLE TEACHINGS

Unmistakable Passion for God Under Trials

James 1:12-18



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Unmistakable Passion for God Under Trials

(James 1: 12-18)

INTRODUCTION

The mature person is always patient in trials. Sometimes the trials are testings on the outside, and sometimes they are temptations on the inside. Trials may be tests sent by God, or they may be temptations sent by Satan and encouraged by our own fallen nature.

It is this second aspect of trials – temptations on the inside – that James dealt with in this section. We may ask, *“Why did James connect the two? What is the relationship between testings without and temptations within?”* Simply this, if we are not careful, the testings on the outside may become temptations on the inside. When our circumstances are difficult, we may find ourselves complaining against God, questioning His love, and resisting His will. At this point, Satan provides us with the opportunity to escape the difficulty. This opportunity is a temptation.

There are many illustrations of this truth found in the Bible. Abraham arrived in Canaan and discovered a famine there (Gen. 12: 10-13). He was not able to care for his flocks and herds. This trial was an opportunity to prove God, but Abraham turned it into a temptation and went down to Egypt. God had to chasten Abraham to bring him back to the place of obedience and blessing. While Israel was wandering in the wilderness, the nation often turned testings into temptations and tempted the Lord. No sooner had they been delivered from Egypt than their water supply vanished and they had to march for three days without water. When they did find water, it was so bitter they could not drink it. Immediately they began to murmur and blame God. They turned their testing into a temptation, and they failed.

Certainly, God does not want us to yield to temptation, yet neither can He spare us the experience of temptation. We are not God’s sheltered people; we are God’s scattered people. If we are to mature, we must face testings and temptations. There are three facts that we must consider if we are to overcome temptation. These truths will shape our study plan.

Study Outline:

- I. Keep in Mind God’s day of Reckoning (1:13-16);
- II. Keep in Mind God’s Good Intentions (1:17);
- III. Keep in Mind God’s Imputation of Righteousness (1:18).

Supplementary Passage: 1 Peter 1:3-12.

I. Keep in Mind God's day of Reckoning (1:13-16)

This is a negative approach, but it is an important one. James said, look ahead and see where sin ends – death! Do not blame God for temptation. He is too holy to be tempted, and He is too loving to tempt others. God does test us, as He did Abraham (Gen. 22); but He does and cannot tempt us. It is we who turn occasions of testing into temptations.

A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God. Is it wrong to want to pass an examination? Of course not; but if you cheat to pass it, then you have sinned.

The temptation to cheat is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing (passing the examination) in a bad way. It is not wrong to eat, but if you consider stealing the food, you are tempting yourself. We think of sin as a single act, but God sees it as a process. Adam committed one act of sin, and yet that one act brought sin, death, and judgment upon the whole human race. James introduced this progression of sin in four stages.

Stage I, Desire (1:14)

The word *lust* means any kind of desire, and not necessarily sexual passions. The normal desires of life were given to us by God and, of themselves, are not sinful. Without these desires, we could not function. Unless we felt hunger and thirst, we would never eat or drink, and we would die. Without fatigue, the body would never rest and would eventually wear out. Sex is a normal desire; without it the human race could not continue.

It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside God's will that we get in trouble. Eating is normal; gluttony is sin. Sleep is normal; laziness is sin. *"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"* (Heb. 13:4). These fundamental desires of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is constant control. These desires must be our servants and not our masters and this we can do through Jesus Christ.

Stage II, Deception (1:14)

No temptation appears as temptation; it always seems more alluring than it really is. James used two illustrations from the world of sports to prove his point. Drawn away carries

with it the idea of the baiting of a trap and enticed in the original Greek means *“to bait a hook.”*

The hunter and the fisherman have to use bait to attract and catch their preys. No animal is deliberately going to step into a trap and no fish will knowingly bite at a hook. The idea is to hide the trap and the hook. Temptation always carry with it some bait that appeals to our natural desires. The bait not only attracts us, but it also hides the fact that yielding to the desire will eventually bring sorrow and punishment.

When David looked upon his neighbor’s wife, he would never have committed adultery had he seen the tragic consequences - the death of a baby (Bathsheba’s son), the murder of a brave soldier (Uriah), the violation of a daughter (Tamas). The bait keeps us from seeing the consequences. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He always dealt with the temptation on the basis of the Word of God. Three times He said, *“It is written.”* From the human point of view, turning stones into bread to satisfy hunger is a sensible thing to do; but not from God’s point of view. When you know the Bible, you can detect the bait and deal with it decisively. This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

Stage III, **Disobedience** (1:15)

We have move from the *emotions* (desire) and the *intellect* (deception) to the *will*. James changed the picture from hunting and fishing to the birth of a baby. *“When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* Desire conceives a method for taking the bait. The will approves and acts and the result is sin. Whether we feel it or not, we are hooked and trapped. The baby is born, and just wait until it matures.

Christian living is a matter of the will, not the feelings. We often hear believers say, *“I don’t feel like reading the Bible”* or, *“I don’t feel like attending prayer meeting.”* It is only children who operate on the basis of feeling, but adults operate on the basis of will. *They act because it is right, no matter how they feel.* This explains why immature Christians easily fall into temptation: they let their feelings make the decisions. The more you exercise your will in saying a decisive ‘no’ to temptation, the more God will take control of your life. The apostle Paul reminded the Christians at Philippi:

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure”
(Phil. 2:13).

Stage IV, **Death** (1:15)

Disobedience without a shadow of doubt gives birth to death, not life. It may take ten years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death. If we would only take what God's Word says about sin seriously and see this final tragedy, it would encourage us not to yield to temptation. God has erected this barrier because He loves us. *"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?"* (Ezek. 18:23)

These four stages in temptation and sin are perfectly illustrated in the first sin recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3.

- The serpent used desire to interest Eve, (Gen. 3:5).
- Is there anything wrong with gaining knowledge?
- Is there anything wrong with eating food?
- Eve saw that *"the tree was good for food"* (Gen. 3:6), and her desire was aroused.

Paul described the deception of Eve in 2 Corinthians 11:3.

"But I fear, lest any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Satan is the deceiver, and he seeks to deceive the mind. The bait that he used to trap Eve was the out of bound tree that was good and pleasant, and that eating of it would make her wise. She saw the bait but forgot the Lord's warning:

"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"
(Gen. 2:17)

Eve disobeyed God by taking the fruit of the tree and eating it. Then she shared it with her husband, and he disobeyed God. Because Adam was not deceived, but sinned with his eyes wide open, it is his sin that plunged the human race into tragedy - [Read 1 Tim. 2:12-15 and Rom. 5:12-21]. Whenever you are faced with temptation, get your eyes off the bait and look ahead to see the consequences of sin: *the judgment of God*. *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23).

II. Keep in Mind God's Good Intentions (1:17)

One of the enemy's tricks is to convince us that our Father is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. When Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would not put the tree under an injunction. On the other hand, when Satan tempted Jesus, he raised the question, *"If your Father loves You, why are You hungry?"* The goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptation. Since God is good, we do not need any other person (including Satan) to meet our needs. It is better to stay hungry *in* the will of God than to be full *outside* the will of God. Once we start to doubt

God's goodness, we will be attracted to Satan's offers and the natural desires within will reach out for its bait. Moses warned Israel not to forget God's goodness when they began to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land (Deut. 6:10-15).

We need this warning today.

James presented four facts about the goodness of God.

"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" (1:17).

First, God gives only good gifts.

Whatever is good in this world comes from God; whatever is evil is from man himself. As from the sun all light comes, so from God all good comes. If it comes from God, it must be good, even if we do not see the goodness in it immediately. Paul's thorn in the flesh was given to him by God and it seemed to be a strange gift; yet it became a tremendous blessing to him (2 Cor. 12:1-10). God's Goodness sometimes allows His children to experience *afflictions*. The Psalmist says, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Thou art good, and dost good; teach me thy statutes"* (Ps. 119:67-68).

Prosperity is the unhappy occasion of much wickedness; it makes people conceited of themselves, indulgent of the flesh, forgetful of God, in love with the world, and deaf to the reproofs of the word. Psalm 30:6, *"And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved."*

If we are not careful with our prosperity, it can lead to self-confidence and self-confidence is link to carnal security.

God often makes use of afflictions as a means to reduce those to himself who have wandered from him. The prodigal's distress brought him to himself first and then his father.

The Prodigal's Son situation (Luke 15: 14-18);

- **Destitution** v.14
- **Degradation** v. 15
- **Despair**.....v. 17
- **Decision**.....v. 18

Second, the way God acts are Good.

We can translate the second clause *"and every perfect gift,"* another way, *"and every act of giving."* It is possible for someone to give us a gift in a manner that is less than loving. The value of a gift can be diminished by the way it is given to us. But when God gives us blessing, He does it in a loving, gracious manner. What He gives and how He gives are both good.

In the Gospel according to John, in Chapter 3:16 it states - *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (NAS). Eugene H. Peterson in the Message [The Bible in contemporary language] portrays the verse this way: *"This is how much God loved the world: He gave His Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life."*

Such a love as that which induced God to give [that persuaded Him] to sacrifice His only begotten Son to die for the world could not be described; Jesus Christ does not attempt it. He has put an eternity of meaning in the [particle *so*] and left a subject for everlasting contemplation, wonder, and praise, to angels and to men. John uses a similar mode of expression to describe the love of God for humanity in the first epistle of 1John 3:1, *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us."*

He does not say that God has given us some gift, but *love itself* and the fountain of all honors, the heart itself, and that not for our works or efforts, but of His grace [Luther]. It is a wonderful condescending love of the eternal Father, that such as we should be made and called his sons. Strange, that the holy God is not ashamed to be called our Father, and to call us his sons!

Third, He gives constantly.

"Cometh down" is a present participle - *"it keeps on coming down."* God does not give occasionally; He gives constantly. Even when we do not see His gifts, He is sending them. How do we know this? Because He tells us so and we believe His Word. The prophet Isaiah says:

"He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows" (Isa. 30:23 NIV).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Himself spoke with regard to Divine Providence (God's loving care of His people):

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33 KJV).

'All these things' means the necessary supports of life.

Our heavenly Father knows what we need of i.e., all we require for the present life. When our Lord says shall be *'added'* it implies, as a matter of course, that the seekers of the kingdom and its righteousness shall have these as their proper and primary portion.

Jehovah-jireh – the Lord will provide as much of them as he sees good for us, and more we would not wish for. Israel was not only brought from Egypt to Canaan, but had their needs met as they pass through the wilderness.

Four, God does not change.

“With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

The sun, the fountain of light to the whole of our system, may be obscured by clouds; or the different bodies (planets) which revolve round Him, and particularly the earth, may from time to time suffer a lessen or decrease of His light by the intervention of other planets eclipsing His splendor, and His apparent shadow of turning. For example, in our wintry days, the sun undergoes a period of decline; a downward slope to the southern tropics, so that our days are greatly shortened, and we suffer in consequence a great decrease of both light and heat. But there is nothing of this kind with God; He is never affected by the changes and chances to which mortals are exposed.

There are no shadows with the Father of Lights. It is impossible for God to change. He cannot change for worse because He is holy; Exodus 15:11, *“glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”* He cannot change for the better because He is already perfect. (in His infinite nature there is no sin, nothing but goodness and love). In the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:4, it says:

“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.”

The light of the sun varies as the earth changes, but the sun itself is still shining. If the shadows come between us and the Father, He did not cause them. He is the unchanging God. This means that we should never question His love or doubt His goodness when difficulties come or temptations appear. If King David had remembered the goodness of the Lord, he would not have taken Bathsheba and committed those terrible sins. At least this is what Nathan the prophet told the King. Read (2 Sam. 12:7-8). Note the repetition of the word *gave* in this brief statement. God had been good to David, yet David forgot God's goodness and took the bait.

It was the positive attitude that helped to keep Joseph from sinning when he was tempted by his master's wife Read (Gen. 39:7-9). Joseph knew that all these blessings had come from God. It was the goodness of God, through the hands of his employer that restrained him in the hour of temptation. God's gifts are always better than Satan's bargain. Satan never gives any gifts because you end up paying for them dearly. *“It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it”* (Prov. 10:22, NAS). Achan forgot the

warning of God and the goodness of God, saw the forbidden wealth, coveted it, and took it. He became rich, but the sorrow that followed turned his riches into poverty (Josh. 7).

The next time you are tempted, meditate on the *goodness of God in your life*. If you think you need something, wait on the Lord to provide it. Never toy with the devil's bait. One purpose for temptation is to teach us patience. David was tempted twice to kill King Saul and hasten his own coronation, but he resisted the temptation and waited for God's time.

III. Keep in Mind God's Imputation of Righteousness (1:18)

In the first barrier God says, *"Look ahead and beware of judgment."* In the second barrier, he says, *"Look around and see how good I have been to you."* But with this third barrier, God says, *"Look within and realize that you have been born from above and possess the divine nature."*

The Apostle John used a similar approach in I John 3:9, where *'His seed'* refers to the divine life and nature within the believer, *"No one who is born of God practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."* (NAS).

Note the characteristics of this birth:

A. It is divine. Nicodemus thought he had to reenter his mother's womb to be born again, but he was wrong. This birth is not of the flesh: it is from above (John 3:1-7). It is the work of God. Just as we did not generate our own human birth, we cannot generate our own spiritual birth. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, it was God who performed the miracle.

B. It is gracious. We did not earn it or deserve it; God gave us spiritual birth because of His own grace and will. *"Which were born, not of blood [human descent], nor of the will of the flesh [human efforts], nor of the will of man [human assistance], but of God"* (John 1:13).

Note – No one can be born again because of his relatives, his resolutions, or his religion. The new birth is the work of God.

C. It is through God's Word. Just as human birth requires two parents, so divine birth has two parents - the Word of God and the Spirit of God. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:6).

"For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God" (1Pet. 1:23). The Spirit of God uses the Word of

God to bring about the miracle of the new birth. Since the Word of God is *"living and powerful"* (Heb. 4:12) it can generate life in the heart of the sinner who trusts Christ; this life is God's life.

D. It is the finest birth possible. We are *'a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.'* James wrote to Jewish believers, and the word *firstfruits* would be meaningful to them. The old Testament Jews brought the first-fruits to the Lord as the expression of their devotion and obedience. *"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase"* (Prov. 3:9).

Of all the creatures God has in this universe, Christians are the very highest and the finest! We share God's nature. For this reason, it is beneath our dignity to accept Satan's bait or to desire sinful things. A higher birth must mean a higher life. By granting us a new birth, God declares that He cannot accept the old birth. Throughout the Bible, God rejects the firstborn and accepts the second born. He accepted Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. He rejects your first birth (no matter how noble it might have been in the eyes of men) and He announces that you need a second birth.

SUMMARY

It is this experience of the new birth that helps us overcome temptation. If we let the old nature (from the first birth) take over, we will fail. We received our old nature (the flesh) from Adam, and he was a failure. But if we yield to the new nature, we will succeed; for that new nature comes from Christ, and He is the Victor.

A Sunday School child explained the matter in simple terms:

"Two men live in my heart - the old Adam and Jesus. When temptation knocks at the door, somebody has the barriers to keep us from sin: His Judgment, His Goodness and His Divine Nature. If we heed these barriers, we will win a crown (1:12). If we break through the barriers, we will find a coffin (1:15). If I let Adam answer, I will sin; so I send Jesus to answer. He always wins!"

Of course, this new nature must be fed the Word of God daily, that it might be strong to fight the battle. Just as the Holy Spirit used the Word of God to give spiritual birth, He uses the Word to give you spiritual strength. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:4).

No matter what excuses we make, we have no one to blame for sin, but ourselves. Our own desires lead us into temptation and sin. God is not to blame. But God has erected these three, which will it be?

Temptations, when we first meet them, are as the lion that roared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of Honey within them.

John Bunyan

Assignment

1. James used two illustrations from the world of sports to prove how unguarded people can be enticed. What are they?

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2. Satan tempted Jesus. In what form or fashion did this occur?

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3. Explain the statement, “*we cannot generate our own spiritual birth*” John 3: 1-7.

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4. Who should be blamed when a person commits a sinful act?



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