

BROOKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH

Bible Study

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Lecture VI

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Facing your Temptations

As we concluded our study last week, we talked about the danger of making excuses when we have done wrong. We learned that the ‘Blame Game’ has been in operation from the beginning of humanity. We see this in **Genesis 3:12-13**, Where Adam and Eve started the game. Adam blamed God, then Eve. Eve turned around and blamed the snake. Every since then, we have been blaming each other.

A person who makes excuses is trying to shift blame from himself or herself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his or her wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.

For God cannot be tempted by evil.

Because God cannot be tempted by evil, He cannot be the author of temptation. James is arguing against the pagan view of the gods where good and evil coexisted.

Nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

God does not wish evil on people; He does not cause evil; He does not try to trip people up. Our failures are not God’s fault. God may test believers in order to strengthen their faith, but He never tries to induce sin or destroy faith. God does not want us to fail but to succeed. See these examples of God testing his followers: Abraham (**Genesis 22:1**); Israel (**Judges 2:22**); and King Hezekiah (**2 Kings 20:12–19**; **2 Chronicles 32:31**).

At this point, the question may be rightly asked: *“If God really loves us, why doesn’t he protect us from temptation?”* A God who kept us from temptation would be a God unwilling to allow us to grow. In order for a test to be an effective tool for growth, it must be capable of being failed. God actually proves his love by protecting us in temptation instead of protecting us from temptation. He provides a way to resist: *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* (**1 Corinthians 10:13**)

GOD’S WAY OUT OF TEMPTATION

God gives us these resources during temptation:

- **His presence.** *“He will not leave you nor forsake you.”*
(Deuteronomy 31:6 NKJV see also Hebrews 13:5)
- **His model — Jesus.** *“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*
(Hebrews 2:17–18 NIV)
- **His guidance.** *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*
(Psalm 119:105 NRSV)
- **His mission for our life that keeps us directed.** *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*
(Hebrews 12:1 NIV)
- **His other people with whom we share encouragement.** *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
(Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV)
- **His forgiveness when we fall and fail.** *“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
(1 John 1:9 NRSV)

James 1:14 – *“But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; .”*

Some believers thought that since God allowed trials, he must also be the source of temptation. These people could excuse their sin by saying that God was at fault. James corrects this. Temptations come from within. Here James highlights individual responsibility for sin.

But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire.

- Behind the idea of the evil desire is **the Jewish doctrine** of the two **yetzers**. This has to do with **the Jewish belief** that all people have two **yetzers** or impulses — an impulse to good and an impulse to evil—and that these impulses war within them. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that James is building upon this Jewish idea. The rabbinic duality of **yetzer hara**, the so-called “**evil inclination**,” and **yetzer hatov**, the “**good inclination**,” is more subtle than the names connote. **Yetzer hara** is not a demonic force that pushes a person to do evil, but rather a **drive toward pleasure** or **property** or **security**, which if left unlimited, can lead to evil.

The **NIV** adds the implied evil to the Greek **epithumia (desire)**, which can but does not have to imply an evil craving or lust. Normal desires, such as hunger, can also be the starting point of temptation if they are allowed to control our actions. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (**Matthew 4**), the temptation came through a natural desire for food after a long fast. Satan urged Jesus to satisfy that desire in an inappropriate way, at the wrong time. The temptation was real, but Jesus did not sin by experiencing it. He would have sinned if he had given in to the devil’s suggestion.

Desires can be either fed or starved.

If the desire itself is evil, we must deny its wish. It is up to us, with God’s help. If we encourage our desires, they will soon become actions. The blame for sin is ours alone. The kind of desire James is describing here is desire out of control. It is selfish and seductive.

Does James take Satan off the hook by placing responsibility for temptation on our desires? No, he does not. We will see later (**chapter 3:15; 4:7**) that the role of Satan was very much in James’s thinking. Part of the answer here is in the word by (**hupo**), which can refer to both the agent and the cause. This same dual use is present in English. We can say, “**He was led by his friend**” or “**He was led by the hand by his friend**.” In the former case we are speaking of the agent doing the leading; in the latter, we are referring to the means or cause used to do the leading. Likewise, we may be led by our desires, but it is the devil behind the impulse when we are going in an evil direction.

THE DEVIL AND OUR DESIRES

How does the devil make our desires serve his purposes?

- He offers suggestions from within our environment and experience. What seems at first glance to be harmless may lead to evil. The person who takes Satan’s suggestions into his mind is fighting on dangerous ground. But the devil can’t entice our mind against our will.
- He deceives with false advertising. Fame, sex, wealth, and power are presented to us as though they satisfy. But we don’t have to take his suggestions.
- He singles us out through fear, making us feel as though we are struggling alone. But we are

warned to “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8 NIV).

Knowing that we have these potential weaknesses in our defenses should motivate us to be careful to control our desires.

When he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. The enticement of evil is expressed in two ways — being dragged away or being lured like a fish to bait, and being enticed. Temptation comes from evil desires within us, not from God. We can both build and bait our own trap. It begins with an evil thought and becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more destructive the more we let it have its way. The best time to stop a temptation is before it is too great or moving too fast to control. (See Matthew 4:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:13; and 2 Timothy 2:22 for more about escaping temptation.)

So, we meet the enemy called temptation and discover it is in us. How can we withstand the attacks we know will come?

- We must continually place ourselves under God’s protection (see the spiritual resources listed under the notes for 1:13).
- We must reject the enticement, or temptation by recognizing it as a false promise.
- We must bring into our life those activities that we know God has provided for our benefit — knowledge of Scripture, fellowship with Christ and other believers, good music, appreciation of all God has made — activities that expand our awareness in life.

James 1:15 – “Then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”

James traces the result of temptation when a person yields to it. Desire in itself is not sin, but assenting to its enticement eventually gives birth to sin. Note that the first two steps in the process (desiring and conceiving) emphasize the internal nature of sin. The sequence, described clearly in sexual language, represents the course any sins have taken by the time they are apparent to others. Since it begins within, the help we need the most in combating sin is internal. That help comes from God. The best time to stop sin is at the moment we realize the desire is about to become focused before it has been conceived.

It takes spiritual growth and consistent dependence on God to know when a desire can be calmly evaluated and when a desire can easily become lustful and controlling. Desires that present themselves to us in expressions that begin ***with:***

- “***I have to have,***”

- *“I can’t do without,”*
- *or even “I would do anything if only I could”*
- *are all ripe for conception and birth into sin.*

It is helpful to ask ourselves occasionally, *“What reasoning do I use that tends to lead me into sin?”*

“. . . . At first it [temptation] is a mere thought confronting the mind; then imagination paints it in stronger colors; only after that do we take pleasure in it, and the will makes a false move, and we give our assent. ”

“And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” - Life is given to those who persevere in trials (verse 1:12); death comes to those who allow their desire to run its course. Sin is full-grown when it becomes a fixed habit. Death is referring to spiritual separation from God that comes as the result of sin (*Romans 6:23; 7:7–12; 1 John 2:16–17; 3:14*).

When we yield to temptation, our sin sets deadly events into motion.

There is more to stopping sin than just stopping sinning. Damage has been done. Deciding to *“sin no more”* may take care of the future, but it does not heal the past. That healing must come through repentance and forgiveness. Sometimes restitution must be made. As serious as the remedy sounds, we can be deeply grateful that there is a remedy at all. God loves us. It is his gracious love that breaks the cycle of desire-sin-death. Wherever we find ourselves in the process, we can turn to God in repentance for help. His way leads to life.

James 1:16 – “Do not be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.” (NIV)

The Greek expression means *“stop being deceived”* — deceived about God’s goodness and about the source of temptation. Simply claiming that God is not the author of evil doesn’t automatically mean that he will help us fight it. We might be faced with struggling against sin while God watched, uninvolved either way. James hurries on to spell out our hope. Not only does God not tempt us, he is also actively providing everything good that we find in life. We are not to attribute evil intent to God — God is the source of good gifts, especially the new birth. He is the author of salvation, not temptation.

The danger behind James’s warning to us not to be deceived - is the temptation to believe that God does not care, or won’t help us, or may even be working against us. The picture is not pretty. If we come to believe we are alone, we have been deceived. If we distrust God, we have been deceived.

And if we dare to accuse God of being the tempter, we have been thoroughly deceived.

What *more devastating example of deception* could there be than seeing the source of all good as the source of evil? Is it any wonder that Jesus leveled this charge at those who had a twisted view of God? *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).* Believing in God is important, but it also matters how we believe in him. As James will illustrate later (2:19), we are capable of believing in God — the wrong way. It is this very deception that James is attacking by his entire letter.

My dear brothers.

The phrase is literally *“my beloved brothers.”* It both softens and directs the warning. James mixes even the hard statements that he must write with reminders of the love behind his letter. People will listen to hard things more readily when they are reminded that the one saying them is doing so out of genuine love.

James 1:17 – “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (NIV)

So how can we keep from falling into temptation? The way is found in a close relationship with God and the application of His Word to daily life. This pattern will lead us to see clearly that every good and perfect gift is from above.

In contrast to the view that God sends evil, James points out here that: (1) God is the source of everything good, and (2) God’s good gifts are also perfect. This part of the verse can also be translated, **“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift” (NRSV).** As is so often the case with the Bible, the meaning of the words is good news even at first reading, and the meaning gets better as we understand it. God is not only the source of good gifts, He is the very source of the giving impulse. The ability to give is one aspect of God’s image in us. And God’s gifts are also perfect. They are good gifts, given at the right time, for good purposes. This can result in God withholding a good gift from us that would not be perfect for us. That same gift may be perfect for someone else. This truth should help us rejoice with others when they receive good gifts from God even though we have not received the same ones.

We can be assured that God always wills the best for us — not good things today and bad things

tomorrow. Whatever happens is for our best. God is not like the well-meaning relative who gives the beautiful, warm coat we have always wanted, but that is unfortunately several sizes too small. God's gifts are very good, and they also fit us perfectly.

Coming down from the Father of lights.

This phrase pictures God as the sovereign Creator of the sun, moon, and stars (**Genesis 1; Isaiah 60:19–22; and John 1:1–14.**) The giving character of God is written into His creation. **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1).** God gives us good gifts — and the light by which to see and enjoy them.

Who does not change like shifting shadows. God's character is always trustworthy and reliable (**Malachi 3:6**). Nothing can block God's goodness from reaching us. What does not change about God is His giving nature. It is constant and consistent. He is undaunted by our inconsistencies and unfaithfulness. We may be like shifting shadows, but God remains the Father of lights. It is a healthy exercise in humility to express our gratefulness to God for His unchanging love towards us.

James 1:18 – “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.” (NIV)

He gave us birth by the word of truth. This is a shining example of the good things God gives (**“every good and perfect gift”**) — he gives us spiritual birth! We are saved because God chose to save us. Our spiritual birth is not by accident or because he had to. The birth is the new birth given to all believers (**John 3:3–8; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 1:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 3:9**). The word of truth is the gospel, the Good News of salvation (**Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15**). We hear about the gift of birth through the reading and preaching of the gospel, and we respond to it. We apply the message to ourselves and our needs. We receive the offered gift. It is God's gift as he gives it and becomes our gift when we receive it.

That we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. Jewish leaders would be well aware of the practice of offering the first crops to ripen just prior to harvest as an act of worship and as a blessing on the rest of the harvest (**Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:9–10; Deuteronomy 26:9–11**).

Believers are first fruits because we are a new creation in Christ; we are no longer sinners separated from God, but God's own children (**Romans 8:19–23; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13**). The rest of all he created must wait for God's plan to unfold, but those who have been given

spiritual birth have been welcomed by the first - first fruit, Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:20**), into the kingdom of God and are part of the new creation that he has established.

As Paul expresses it, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (**Romans 8:22–23 NIV**). Though we have been given spiritual birth, we live in a world that has not yet been transformed. Living as first fruits (examples of God’s goodness and role models of what he can do in a life) in a fallen world ought to be our overriding desire. The letter of James could be subtitled, “How to live as a first fruit.”