

The Deception of Temptation

James 1:13-15

Intro

It is sad how God gets blamed for the bad things that happen. But He is often ignored for the good things. For example, the majority of planes fly safely every day. No one thanks God that all the passengers made it safe through the skies. But one plane crashes and many get mad at God. People don't "blame" God for the good things that happen in life. However, when one thing goes wrong God is to blame.

The same thing is true in the face of trials and suffering. Often we do not thank God for all the good things that happen. But when the bad things happens we cry out, "Why, God did you let this happen!" We tend to blame God when difficulties come our way.

But in this passage of James 1:13-15, James is going to teach us to quit blaming God as the cause of the bad things that happen like the trials and temptations that we face.

Context of James

James is writing to people who are persecuted and struggling. Although they are united now to Christ and learning to trust Him, their lives are full of difficulties. How then should they go through their trials as Christians? This is the question James seeks to answer for them and for us as well.

God Cannot Tempt or Be Tempted

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone (James 1:13).

Does God really tempt people? No! He tests people, but He does not tempt them to sin. God allows Satan to tempt people only in order to refine their faith and to help them to trust and be dependent on Him as in the case of Job (Job 23:10; 13:15).

Job said, "*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.*" (Job 23:10).

The reason that temptation does not come from God is because He cannot be tempted by evil. God is omnipotent, holy, absolute pure and He fully resists any invitation to sin or to do evil. Also there is no hint of moral depravity whatsoever in Him. Thus God could never be the author of temptation.

The source of temptation lies within humanity. Humans are tempted by their own evil desires. Each person is to blame for their evil desire.

Often it is so easy to blame others and to make excuses for the times one falls into sin. Some of the excuses that a person uses are for example:

- I couldn't help it because everyone else is doing it.
- It's the other person's fault – they tempted me.
- It was just a mistake. I was pressured into it.
- I didn't know it was wrong. Besides nobody is perfect.
- It's God's fault, He made me that way.
- The Devil made me do it.

Back in the early 1970's there was a TV show called the Flip Wilson Show. He was a comedian who popularized the phrase, "The devil made me do it." This is another excuse that people give. Let me say that it is a lame excuse and not true.

The first instance of “the devil made me do it” excuse was in the Garden of Eden. Eve says, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13). Her excuse did not get her off the hook and it won’t help us much, either. When you read the passage of the temptation in Genesis 3 you learn that Satan did not pick the forbidden fruit off the tree and shoved it into Eve’s mouth and moved her jaw up and down to eat it. No. Eve took the fruit and she ate it by herself and gave it to Adam who didn’t refuse it. They were both to blame. So the devil didn’t make her and Adam DO IT.

Yes, the devil and his demons tempt us to sin. But “the devil made me do it” is far too often used to excuse our own bad and evil choices. Except in an instance of demon possession, the devil cannot make us do anything. The devil is absolutely worthy of blame for much of the evil in the world, but using the devil as a scapegoat for our own sinful choices is counterproductive to achieving victory over sin.

The person who makes excuses is often trying to shift the blame to something or someone else. But a believer in Christ accepts the responsibility for their wrongs and sins. They confess them and ask God for forgiveness and repent.

The Process of Temptation

But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15).

Many people feel as if there’s no defense against temptation. When the first hint of desire comes, they immediately throw their hands up and give in to every enticement. Can you relate to this? What we must realize is that temptation is a gradual process, and it can be thwarted and prevented at any stage.

James says it all starts with desire. Desire leads to enticement. Enticement leads to conception—the conception of sin in the heart. Conception leads to the birth of sin. Sin then grows stronger. And fully-grown sin eventually brings death. This is the process and cycle of temptation and sin.

What’s interesting is that many counselors and pastors who work with people who struggle with sinful vices and addictions notice the same cycle. Let’s look at these 4 stages that James speaks of.

Stage 1: Desire

The first stage of the temptation’s cycle is “*desire*.” Now, the original Greek word is sometimes translated as lust or craving. It is not just a desire or a drive but more of a strong desire or an overdrive.

But what kind of strong desires are we talking about? It can be a strong desire to steal, lie, to take drugs to over drink, a strong desire for porn etc.

All sins fall into the first stage of desires, lust. Look with me at 1 John 2:16-17, “*For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*” Here we have the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

When Eve was tempted to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God had forbidden, the temptation hit on every category: "*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food (desires of the flesh) and pleasing to the eye (desires of the eyes), and also desirable for gaining wisdom (pride of life), she took some and ate it*" (Genesis 3:6).

Satan through the serpent implied that God was unfairly withholding something good from them. Eve was deceived by the lie. No doubt the fruit was attractive in appearance, and did taste good. But none of that was relevant. Adam and Eve disobeyed the clear command of God. Through deception, pride tempts us to fulfill the desires of our flesh and the desires of our eyes in ways that are contrary to God's will. If we believe the lie and act on it, we will sin.

It is important to know that temptation is not sin; how you respond to temptation can be sin. If you desire to love God above everything else, then you can endure temptation. Desire for God always crushes temptation. Do you desire to love God more than you desire to sin? Jesus said, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matt. 6:21). What do you value more in your life, the desires for the things of this world or the desire to love God more and more?

Stage 2: Enticement

A strong desire leads to enticement, that feeling of being lured to something. Now, often this can be broken into two steps: *triggers* and *tempting thoughts*.

A *trigger* is anything that gets the process started, anything that gets the motor going. This can be something really obvious, like a sexual trigger—seeing something sexual on TV or on the computer, music with suggestive lyrics etc. It also might be something not so obvious, something internal that creates a state of tension like hunger, stress, exhaustion, or boredom. It might be a negative relational trigger like someone insulting you or rejecting you. A trigger is simply an external event or an internal state of mind that serves as a catalyst for you to be enticed to sin.

The second part of enticement is when your strong desire meets that trigger and it leads to the first thought of temptation. This might be a strong thought, like, "I really want to look at pornography. I need to drink more." This tempting thought is often accompanied by some kind of emotion like frustration, preoccupation, anticipation or a growing obsession. When you entertain those thoughts they start to have a hold on you because they have become an enticing obsession.

Stage 3: Conception

The next stage is conception. This is when desires become action. Psychologists often talk about the idea of ritualization, the habit or habits we fall into that get us closer to the object of our desire. You tell yourself what you're doing is no big deal.

You indulge into the strong desire and enticement. The time between conception and birth might take a day, hours, or maybe only minutes, but birth is the natural follow-through of conception. This is the next stage of what James calls the birth of sin. We give into the temptation fully and we start engaging in sinful behavior of some kind.

After this, the sin grows stronger, and this is when we start to experience those defeated thoughts like, "I might as well keep going," or "It's no use resisting this," and we feel that sense of a loss of control, that overwhelming desire that feels like it can't be stopped. In reality, this tidal wave started BEFORE the moment of indulgence. It started back at the first tempting thought, but we feel it the strongest in the moment before we indulge in it and as the indulgence grows.

In the area of neuroscience this is called hypofrontality. We have a region in our brains called a prefrontal cortex. This region of the brain is meant to put on the brakes from all the impulses we feel and help us make sane, wise decisions based on our values. But hypofrontality happens when, after we've given into temptation over and over and over many times, this region of our brain grows weaker and weaker, like a muscle that experiences atrophy, wastes away. Scientists can even see these changes on a brain scanner.

Stage 4: Death

Finally, a strong desire, enticement and conception all lead to death. Now, we know the wages of sin is death in an ultimate sense—this is the consequence of sin God warned us about long ago before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. In the Bible we learn of three types of death. Physical death, separation of the soul from the body; spiritual death, separation of soul from God; and eternal death, separation of both body and soul from God forever.

Though a Christian is saved from spiritual and eternal death, but if he or she continues in sin they may pay the penalty of physical death. An example is when the Apostle Paul warned the Corinth believers of partaking in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and it brought judgment on them. Paul wrote, *"For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."* (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

Don't be Deceived

In light of this sobering truth, James implores us, ***"Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren"*** (James 1:17). In other words don't blame people or the devil for your temptations and sins. And above all don't blame God. Each one should take full responsibility for their temptation and sin.

Testimony of Jordan Andrade

Conclusion

If you are a Christian and you commit a sin, don't blame God and don't say the devil did not make you do it. He may have tempted you to do it. He may have even influenced you to do it. But he did not make you do it. You still had a choice. 1 Corinthians 10:13 teaches this, *"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."*

God never allows you and I to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand, and He always provides a way of escape. When a Christian says "the devil made me do it" is denying the truth of 1 John 4:4, *"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."*

As Christians we are not immune to trials and we are not immune to sinful temptation either. Some of you today may be involved in a battle against some temptation. The application today is for you. James wants us to know that any temptation we have is beatable. Get in touch with your pastor or one of your fellow believers and have them pray for you and help you actively fight the temptation that you struggle with. Remember what Jesus said, *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation"* (Matthew 26:41). Precious ones, please be vigilant and seek the help that you need.