

When Temptations Tease– James 1:12-15

Scripture passage – James 1:12-15; Universal issue of T; When T’s Tease

Ran into several good quotes about T this week, from the humorous to the serious

Martin Luther – *I cannot keep birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from building under my hat.*

Or, on a more serious note, this one from **John Newton** – that famous author of Amazing Grace – *Temptations may be compared to the wind, which, when it has ceased raging from one point, after a short calm, frequently renews its violence from another quarter.*

Wise words, but as with all things, the final word comes from *the* Word, and James has a good deal to say about it here in ch 1 (read v12-15)

It almost seems like James is talking about 2 different things here – testings and T’s
But because the word for *test* in v12 is the same word for tempt/*tempted* in v13, there’s no reason to think that James is dropping subject of one, picking up another
Rather, he’s talking about 2 sides of the same coin –
That for every trial in life, there’s a corresponding temptation to forsake our faith

Like financial difficulty in life can tempt us to question God’s provision
The suffering of a loved one can tempt us to question God’s love
The ease/success of the wicked can tempt us to question God’s justice
So James concern is to help us resist the T that comes with trials, by thinking about it rightly and responding to it correctly

It starts by considering the source; When T’s tease . . .

Consider the source (v13-14)

James starts in v12 with the good news, and then moves to the bad news
I’m going to start with the bad in v13-15, and end with the good in v12

To understand what James was getting at in 13a, we have to get into the mind of these first century believers

There were two things going on:

1. They were living among Greek people who believed the gods, fickle as they were, would test/tempt them from time to time in order to get them to stumble
2. The OT clearly says on occasion that God tested certain people
Like Abraham in Gen 22:1; Israelites in Jg 2:22; Hezekiah in 2 Chron 32:31

It’s possible they were combining the Greek worldview with the OT precedent of testing by God – concluding that God tests us (or tempts us) to see if we will sin

James is like, uh-uh . . .

• **It’s not God**

That’s what he says in v13 – *Let no one say when he is tempted* [tested], *“I am being tempted by God”*

It’s simply not true; God does not tempt us to sin; He is not to blame for our stumbling

So how do we reconcile that with the OT?

While God may test you to strengthen your faith, bolster your resolve, or build your character – he never tries to get you to sin

He never tempts you to fail

The T’s of trials do not come from God

He gives a two-fold reason for saying so . . .

For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (13b)

The first part referring to God in his divinity as opposed to Christ in his humanity while he was on earth and was tempted in the desert

Point is – evil/sin has not the slightest appeal to God

In fact, it’s repulsive – his holiness cannot even tolerate the *thought* of it, let alone the *presence* of it

Then he adds to that – *and he himself tempts no one*

When you put those two statements together, James is saying . . .

That because T is an impulse to sin, and since God has zero tolerance for sin, he would never try to bring it about in you and I

That’s like a Dad *trying* to get his kids to do bad things and bring shame to his name

If it’s repulsive to God, why on earth would he ever wish it on us?

He doesn’t – and that’s the point

That’s why we should never implicate him in our T’s

But if the source of T is not God, who is? Clearly from v14 . . .

• **It’s you**

14 – *Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire* . . .

Yes, Satan is busy trying to tempt us

James touches on that in ch 4 – *resist the devil and he will flee from you*

Yes, the sinful pleasures of the world are a constant siren song

But they are not the source/root-cause of your temptation – you are (re-read v14)

This is a problem for us, isn’t it

If the source lies within, we can no longer shift the blame

We can’t say – it’s my parents fault; I can’t help it; The devil made me do it

If you’re going to think rightly/biblically about T, you must accept the fact that when T’s tease, you’re the problem – not the devil, not the world, not your friends; but you

Roy Rodgers once said – “there are two eras in American history; the passing of the buffalo, and the passing of the buck”

But when it comes to the source of your T, the buck stops with you

James places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders . . .

Because T wouldn’t be T if we didn’t desire the things God prohibits

It starts with desires run amuck

Which is why we need to keep a constant check on them

When T’s tease – consider the source and . . .

Check your desires (v14-15)

Check your passions

Check as in – assess them; and if necessary, put the clamps on ‘em

God has given us healthy desires – the question is, are we directing *them* or are they directing *us*?

Do we control our desires, or do they control *us*?

Check them, and make an honest assessment

Ask yourself – What are my intentions here? What do I want in this situation?

Is it *God*-glorifying, or self-*gratifying*? That’s the question

That question covers everything – sexual desires, food desires, money desires, pride, you name it

When T’s tease, check your desires by asking – Is it *God*-glorifying, or self-*gratifying*?

If they’re self-gratifying, do whatever it takes to reign them in, because . . .

• **Temptation starts with wayward passions**

14 – *Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire*

By your own self-gratifying passions; Your own longing for what God has prohibited

That’s what the word refers to here . . .

Each person is tempted when they are lured and enticed by their own longing, their own passion, for what God has prohibited

Understand that the foundational desires of life are God-given, and in and of themselves, are not wrong

Without the desire for food and water – we’d starve

Without the desire for sleep – we’d wear out

Without the desire for sex – we’d die out

God has given us basic desires for good reason

The problem comes when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside of his design

Eating is necessary; gluttony is not

Sleep is required; laziness is wrong

Sex is good; fornication (sex outside of marriage) is sin

Passions and desires become wayward when we seek to fulfill them in ways outside of God’s design

That’s where T starts – at the very moment in your heart and mind when you want something you shouldn’t have, or in a way you shouldn’t have it . . .

T is not tempting if you don’t desire the thing you can’t have

It starts with wayward passions

Secondly, on this slippery slope of T . . .

• **Wayward passions cloud your thinking**

Lured and *enticed* were originally fishing terms used to describe a fish that is attracted to the bait on the fisherman’s hook

The bait that would lure and entice the fish away from the safety of its lair due to its appealing gleam, smooth curves, or subtle wiggle (Nathan’s tackle box)

The fish is lured and enticed by these bad boys, until at some point he bites, is hooked, and then dragged away

Is that not exactly how Satan lures and entices us with various baits/temptations?

Baits that conceal the danger of the hook and the consequences that follow?

Baits for the purpose of arousing a wayward passion, and drawing us away from the safety and security of our walk with Christ?

Until at some point, with our thinking clouded and the water muddied, we throw caution to the wind, and bite in a moment of weakness

Only to find that the bait concealed a hook that drags us away fr all that is good/right

No fish would bite into a hook if they knew the consequences

No person would entertain T if they knew the disaster

But far too many do because their wayward passions cloud their thinking

When T’s tease, check your desires . . .

Because T starts with wayward passions; Wayward passions cloud your thinking; and . . .

• **Passion indulged leads to sin**

That’s v15 – *Then desire* [wayward passion] *when it has conceived gives birth to sin*

Wayward passions are always looking for an opp/outlet

Left unchecked, they will always find one – it’s only a matter of time

That’s why “eye candy” is no good, men

You know what I’m talking about . . .

Looking at a woman and savoring the sight, just as long as you don’t taste/touch

All you’re doing is enflaming your desires and making the lure of the T all the more attractive

With your powers of discernment already dulled/clouded by your wayward passions, it’s only a matter of time before you’re hooked, indulging in sin either in your thought life or your real life

Then, not only is your thinking clouded by your *passion*, but also by your *pleasure* . . .

Making it doubly hard to check your desires, and doubly hard to stop

Check your desires *now*, because if you wait until you’re on the black diamond slope of T, the cliff of indulgence comes too fast to stop

Passion indulged leads to sin, and . . .

• **Unchecked sin leads to death**

15 – *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin* . . . passion indulged leads to sin

And sin when it is fully grown brings forth death . . . unchecked sin leads to death

The last stop on the slippery slope of T

You’ve seen a video of a snow avalanche, right?

Where it starts small, but within a moment, gets very large, very fast, and moving very fast it destroys everything in its path

That’s sin – though it starts “innocently,” left unchecked it grows very large, very fast . . .

Leaving a path of destruction that ultimately leads to death for all those affected

That’s exactly what happened to mankind when Adam and Eve sinned

They started an avalanche of death that you and I perpetuate when we sin

Rom 5:12 – *Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*

The unchecked sin of Adam and all mankind, leads to death, physical death, for all of us

That’s also what happened to King David on a personal basis

His wayward passions clouded his judgment, his indulged passions led to sin, and his sin led to the death of his servant (Uriah), his son, and several in his family

In the NT Paul says that some of the Corinthians who ate and drank at the Lord’s Table just to satisfy their appetite and indulge their desires – also died prematurely

Unchecked, unstopped, un-confessed sin leads to death – whether it’s the premature physical death of one of God’s children so they no longer bring shame to his name
Or the spiritual death of unbelievers that results in separation from God in the torment of hell
Or the death of life-to-the-full while you’re still alive . . .
Unchecked sin leads to death
If there were ever a reason to check your desires, this is it

When T’s tease – consider the source, check your desires, and finally, back to v12 . . .

Stay on track (v12)

It’s in v12 that James comes back to his opening thoughts in v2-4, talking about trials
There he exhorted/encouraged us to stand firm because trials produce perseverance, and P produces maturity
But here, he encourages us to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials so that we may receive the *crown of life* (read v12)

James is not saying we are *saved* by enduring trials, but that we’re *rewarded* for doing so
That’s the idea of a crown – it shows honor and reward
Just like the athletes in their day were honored/reward with a wreath-like crown for winning a race . . .
We too, having withstood the testing of trials and temptations, will be honored and rewarded with life
It’s one of the primary motivations to stay on track

- Note – *blessed* does not necessarily mean happy
Happiness is an emotional state of *cheer* that ebbs/flows with the circumstances of life
But blessedness is a spiritual state of *favor* from God that he promises to those who P
Blessed [favored by God] *is the man who remains steadfast under trial*
Why? Because they stand to receive eternal life *which God has promised to those who love him*

Implication here is that if you love God, you *will* persevere because the blessing of eternal life has been *promised* to you
If love leads to eternal life; And if P leads to eternal life; Then love also leads to P
If you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength – you *will* persevere
He will make sure of it in order to fulfill his promise . . .
And so will you in order to receive the prize

Conversely, if u don’t love him, you won’t receive eternal life – the promise is not yours
Nor will you persevere, because perseverance results in life, which is not yours if you don’t love God

This vs makes an unbreakable connection between love for God and perseverance in trials
If you love God, you *will* persevere and receive eternal life – he will help you
If you don’t love God, you won’t persevere, and the only thing left is a fearful expectation of judgment

If you want to *get* on track – love the Lord your God w/ all yr heart, soul, mind, strength
If you want to *stay* on track – keep your eyes on the prize, and persevere when T’s tease and trials test

Consider the source – and don’t look any further than yourself

Check your desires – because T starts with wayward passions that cloud your thinking and lead to sin

Stay on track – keeping your eyes on the prize; you’ll be blessed if you do

Close

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