

Holiness and Temptation

Text: **James 1:12-18**

Introduction: If you are a visitor here at The LCN this morning, I would like to introduce you to the 6th message in a series that I have entitled, "In the World, But Not of It." This phrase was part of the content found in a prayer of our Lord's in **John 17**.

In the Prayer, He asked the Father to empower Christians to live a vastly different lifestyle than that which we so often see in others. It was not a part of Christ's request that God would take us out of the world, but that He would take the world out of us.

Jesus' prayer, in other words, was that the Father would make us holy men and women. With this end in mind, we're going to look, today, at the subject of holiness and temptation.

Oscar Wilde was a famous English writer who wrote among other things, "The Importance of Being Earnest." He was considered a literary genius.

He could not, however, control his passions. Wilde was once convicted of committing acts of gross indecency which included a weakness for "beautiful youths."

He answered his critiques by saying, "I can resist everything, but temptation."

We cringe when we consider his lifestyle...but if we're honest, we also understand to some degree what he meant.

If it were no challenge for us to resist sin, then the Bible would not even have to speak to the issue.

However, we all know that it is...

“...Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though^[a] every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.”
(**Genesis 8:21**)

...and so we find passages like the one that was read this morning from **James 1**.

Here the brother of our Lord seeks to offer some wise counsel about the topic of temptation which we would do well to heed. Let's take a look at it.

I. Don't be discouraged when you're tempted (James 1:12-13).

James presents two good reasons why you don't have to be discouraged by temptation.

A. First, you're not the only one who is tempted.

Listen to what the text says beginning in verse 13, "When tempted..." Note that James does not say "if tempted".

He knows that everyone is an expert on temptation because we all encounter it! The Apostle Paul agrees with his assessment and so reminds us that there is *“no temptation that has overtaken us, but such as is common to man”* (**1 Corinthians 10:13**).

The writer of Hebrews throws in his two cents when he says, just as our Lord was tempted in every way, so also are we (**Hebrews 4:15**).

Why these admissions?

They wanted us to realize that only a fool would believe that he or she is immune to temptation.

If the Lord Jesus was tempted by the Devil to rebel against God, it stands to reason that we, as His disciples, can be as well.

As one man said, "Temptations are sure to ring your doorbell, but you don't have to invite them into dinner."

B. Second, God doesn't have it in for you.

Unfortunately, there are some people who blame God for the temptations they face and the resulting sinful actions.

We saw this from the very beginning *"The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."* (**Genesis 3:12**).

James is forced to clear up this misconception.

When it comes to sin, there are at least a couple of things that the Almighty God of the universe cannot do.

- First, He can't be tempted to sin.
God is absolutely holy and perfect in every way
*"As for God, his way is perfect:
The Lord's word is flawless;"* (**Psalms 18:30a**).

He is not like human beings who are born with a sinful bend.
As a matter of fact, the only way to come into His presence is to have our sin removed through the sacrifice of His Son in our place
"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (**Hebrews 10:10**).

God will have nothing to do with sin.

- Second, He cannot tempt anyone else to sin.
In the Greek, the same word is used for "trials" or "temptations."
While God certainly does lead us into trials for the purpose of testing our faith (**James 1:2-4**), He never entices us to do evil.
Even when God hands some over to sin, it is only in response to their own evil desires (**Romans 1:24**).

Illustration: Preacher Ray Stedman once was tempted to steal a beautiful pewter salt and pepper shaker from a restaurant where he was

having breakfast. He thought, "All I have to do is put it in my briefcase and walk away." He didn't, of course, but the next Sunday he shared the story to illustrate that anyone can be tempted, even a preacher.

A week later he received a gift in the mail. It was the pewter salt and pepper shaker. Evidently someone from his congregation heard his story, went back to the restaurant and purchased them for him. He thanked the anonymous donor and said, "I also noticed this incredible flat panel TV!" By the way, have I told you that I was really tempted lately to steal that?

Application: If you're going through a particularly difficult temptation right now, I hope you find comfort in knowing that you're not the only one. Even a preacher can be tempted. Remember, God isn't the source of your temptation. The next verse reveals that.

II. Don't be drawn away when you're tempted (James 1:14-15).

The word that is used for "drawn away" is a picture of a fisherman trying to coax a fish from its hiding place under the water. He puts on a special lure that is simply irresistible so that the fish takes the bait and is caught by the angler.

So it is with us. James says that we are dragged away and enticed by an appetite, in our case, for evil desires. This understanding begs two questions.

A. What is the source of evil desires?

Desires by themselves are not fundamentally evil. It is normal for a fish to want food. However, many things, that in themselves may be harmless, can become quite harmful when combined with something else.

Take carbon, for example. By itself it is needful and good. The same is true of oxygen, but if we combine the two we get carbon monoxide, a deadly gas.

That's the problem that we have with our natural desires.

Under the control of the Holy Spirit, they are normal and can even lead us to see that God is the One who satisfies our deepest needs.

But...When we combine them, with our inclination to sin, we get a deadly combination.

B. What is the effect of evil desires?

Once a believer begins to entertain evil desires holiness is up for grabs.

Consider these three stages describing the process of falling into sin as put forth by James Adamson.

First, I feel the pull and lure of a sinful craving. Though no harm has yet been done, I am on my way, unless something or someone alters my course.

Second, the craving or lust is impregnated by the flesh and gives birth to sin.

Then third, the sin, unless it is properly confessed and repented of, will develop to its fullest potential in my life and result in my death at the Day of Judgment.

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (**Revelation 21:8**).

Application: Some of us may be thinking, "Wait a minute! I'm a believer so even if I choose to hang on to sin, I know that I have eternal life." As your pastor and someone who loves you, if these are your thoughts, may I warn you not to be so confident?

The Bible says, *"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"* (**Romans 8:14**). If you are continually being led about by the drive to

satisfy your own sinful cravings, then you are not a child of God. You are still on the outside looking in.

III. Don't be deceived when you're tempted (James 1:16-18).

There are many sources of deception, but the one that is implied in this context is self-deception.

While some fall into sin because they are misled by others (For an example see Eve in **Genesis 3:6**), many simply wander off in an attempt to satisfy their own lusts. What do we miss when we do this?

Great blessings from God!

A. God is the giver of good gifts.

Everything that God gives to us is good. This statement is every bit as true today as it was when it was written 2,000 years ago, because God doesn't change. Nothing can interrupt the flow of His goodness to us.

James compares it to a light that cannot be extinguished or obscured

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." (**1 Chronicles 16:34**).

B. God is the giver of new birth.

The greatest gift that God has given us is new life in Christ.

We are literally "born again" through the word of truth, i.e. the gospel.

James goes on to say that we are "a kind of firstfruits of all He created."

When we look at the old testament, The firstfruits of the human body or the field were considered sacred and offered to God (**Exodus 4:22; Exodus 23:19**). So, we, as firstfruits, are set apart (sanctified) by Christ and offered to God for His purposes.

Application: Have you experienced this new birth? Have you placed your trust in Jesus? Do not be misled by the offerings of this world. They may look good, but they lead to death.

Application: Here are some suggestions for how to overcome temptation.

1. *Pray* - Jesus instructed His disciples to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation*" (**Matthew 6:13; Luke 22:40**)."

2. *Devour the Scriptures* - They are profitable for training believers to walk in righteousness (**2 Timothy 3:16**).

3. *Avoid Compromising Situations* - On the TV show *Hee Haw*, Doc Campbell is confronted by a patient who says he broke his arm in two places. The doc replies, "Well then, stay out of them places!"

"reject every kind of evil." (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**) That is good advice.

4. *Get enough rest* - In our house we have a saying, "Nothing good happens after midnight." Why? Usually when we grow tired, we let our guard down and do things we wouldn't do if we were more alert. There is a direct connection between being watchful (i.e. "staying awake") and standing firm in the faith.

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." (**1 Corinthians 16:13**)

5. *Ask for Accountability* - Accountability works best when we seek it for ourselves. If you're struggling with a particular temptation, ask someone to help you overcome it.

Conclusion: God is not a cosmic killjoy that is seeking to take away all of our fun.

He understands that life is enjoyed the most when it is lived inside of the protective boundaries that He has set for us. If we wander outside of these boundaries it is possible, even likely, that we will reap devastating consequences.

Several years ago Kathy Chapell and a friend gathered up their kids and made a trip to the St. Louis Zoo. A new attraction had just opened called

"Big Cat Country," which took the lions and tigers out of their cages and allowed them to roam in large enclosures.

Visitors observed the cats by walking on elevated skyways above the habitats. As Kathy and her friend took the children up one of the skyway ramps, a blanket became entangled in the wheel of the friend's stroller. Kathy knelt to help untangle the wheel while her two sons, ages three and five, went on ahead. When she finally looked up, Kathy discovered that the boys had innocently walked right through a child-sized gap in the fencing and had climbed up on the rocks above the lion pen.

They had been told that they would be able to look down on the lions, and they were doing just that from their hazardous vantage point. Pointing to the lions below, they called to their mother, "Hey, mom, we can see them!"

Obviously, they had no idea how much danger they were in. Kathy saw immediately, but what could she do? If she screamed, she might startle the boys and alert the lions. The gap in the fence was too small for her to climb through. So, she knelt down, spread out her arms, and said, "Boys, come get a hug." And that's exactly what they did.

Even though it was pretty exciting to be so close to lions, it was far better to get a hug from mom. And so, they ran for the love that saved them from danger greater than they could possibly comprehend.

Is the love of God calling out to you today to return to a holy walk with Him? Is it time for you to say "no" to a particular temptation and to renew your commitment to living within the boundaries He has set? If so, this is the time to do it.