



## **The Truth About Temptation**

### **James 1:13-21**

#### **When a trial becomes a temptation**

Christians who first heard the letter of James were struggling with undeserved and inescapable suffering. They were discriminated against racially because of their Hebrew heritage; and they were discriminated amid their own race because they were Hebrew Christians! Their suffering affected them economically and vocationally. They were cheated in the marketplace and by their employers. James wrote to encourage them to remain in Christ; to see that whatever happened to them was ultimately for the good. Trials can lead to testing, which leads to perseverance, which leads to maturity, which leads to being fully formed in Christ, lacking nothing and leading to [the crown of] life.

James continued his point by telling Christians that they must not allow the trials of life to become temptations to sin. It's as if our trial leads us to a fork in the road; a choice between two paths; two futures. James was originally written in Greek. Interestingly, our English words for *trial* and *temptation* come from the same Greek word. James wants us to remember how closely tied temptations can be to trials. Is there ever a trial that doesn't result in a temptation? So there is a choice. One choice leads to life, the other, death. Which way will we go?

#### **Temptation comes from within**

v. 13 says that the source of temptation is our own passionate desires; that is, our own lusts. God is never the source of temptation. James makes it quite clear that God never, ever has any intention for us to do evil. It has never occurred to God to bait us to sin. God does not do "sting" operations. For that matter, James insists that when believers are tempted, it doesn't even come from Satan. Yes, Satan, is called the Tempter. But James doesn't believe in the "Devil made me do it" theory. James asserts that any temptation we face comes from within. Something deep inside of us—something selfish—floats to the surface. That something is a short cut to one's own sense of self-gratification and self-pleasure.

Note that James says, "one's own," meaning what tempts you may not tempt me, and vice versa. So, don't judge someone as less than spiritual because of the temptation with which they struggle. That person may not struggle with your issues! Thus, James teaches that every person experiences temptation—rich or poor, young or old, prince or pauper, royal or commoner. "When tempted . . . ." is a given! You will never reach a stage in life where you are not tempted, this side of heaven. So, temptation in itself is not sin. Jesus himself was tempted. But if we entertain it, play with it, and allow it to bring us out into the open ("dragged away and enticed"), it gives birth to sin.

## **Temptation can be resisted . . . together**

When tempted, remember that God is good. (v. 16) He is not like the constellations or clouds that change. He is fixed. God always has our good in mind; no matter what.

When tempted, ask Him to show you what that good is. V. 19 says that we should be quick to listen to what God is doing. We should be slow to gripe about our situation. And, we should be slow to be angry with God and others.

James tells us that human anger can never bring about God's will, and he has to be speaking here into (at least) the zealot option of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The Zealots, if you remember, believed God's will was so urgent that violence was necessary . . . How many church problems could have been resolved had folks been quick to listen and slow to speak and (therefore) slow to get all worked up into anger? (Scott McKnight)

When tempted, look within. Ask yourselves, "What is this lust inside of me desiring to short circuit what God desires to do?" Name it. Identify it and then get rid of it (v. 21).

When tempted, go back to the Gospel, the Word of Truth (vv. 18, 21). Humbly accept it. (We never outgrow our need for the Gospel!) Pray "Jesus, you have rescued me from the inevitable death of pursuing the path of temptation and sin. Why would I ever want to go back down that path again?"

When tempted, look around. James wrote to the Christian community. This letter was sent with the intention that those who heard it would hear it in a family setting. That together, we would watch out for each other (a thought repeated in James 5:19-20). Together we would encourage one another during our trials. Together we would remind each other that our own selfishness is what brings temptation in our lives, and not God. Together, we will teach and hear that God is good and loving; that He wants only what will lead to a rich, full, mature, and complete life. Together we will be quick to listen for His wisdom; slow to be angry and bitter because of the trial; and will in humility receive His Word.

"The mother never has such success in showing her affection to her child as when he is in distress, sick, poor, or imprisoned. So Christ shows His affection to His children when tempted, or when bested by temptation." —William Gurnall, *Christian in Complete Armour*