

James IRL: Fighting Temptation, James 1:13-18, 10/1/2023

It seems that in the technologically advanced age in which we live there is no shortage of deceptive scams to get your money and personal data. Now some of these deceptions seem obvious. An email from someone in Nigeria asking for your account details so they can send you a gift. Or an email from someone claiming to be Pastor Nate and that I need you to buy me a gift card and send it to me in a hurry. The vast majority of us aren't falling for that one so easily. But there are other deceptive scams that aren't as easy to spot.

I hate to admit it but I fell for one...An internet ad showed up for a sunglasses brand I like, claiming to be sold for a limited time at half-price. So I clicked, and it took me to a website that had the certified web browser logo at the bottom. So I found a pair that I liked, purchased them. However the email confirmation didn't match the name of the company. So I attempted to search my order number? "Did not find" Concerned. When the sunglasses arrived, they came in the authentic company packaging and authentic case and even came with an authentic wipe. But the sunglasses were clearly knock-offs. It's not a fun feeling to be deceived is it. Upon further reflection on this, I realized that I really should have known better. This scam found me when I lacked discernment, I was feeling impulsive, I really wanted new sunglasses, and I'm also always looking for a deal. I was susceptible to the scam and it got me.

Isn't this exactly how temptation to sin works in our lives? Have you ever given into temptation, and after you come to your senses you feel so ashamed, so gullible, and you say what was I thinking? I should have seen that coming? How did I allow that? Other times, we are so deceived by sin that we don't even know we are in it, even though it's eating us for lunch. Or maybe you know it, but you are so deep into it you feel like you can't get out? It starts with a lack of discernment, our guard is down, and that makes us susceptible to sin. But there is good news, because we will learn from James 1:13-18 how to level up our discernment in order to fight temptation when it comes our way.

Remember, we just started a new series, the letter of James, who's the younger half-brother of Jesus, one of the most straightforward, practical letters in the Bible, a letter about how to live out your faith in Jesus In Real Life- your relationships, with your money, in your speech, in your struggles. In the first 12 verses James addresses how to grow through the testing of trials, now he is going to address how to fight temptation.

#1 Discern the Cause of Temptation. ¹³ *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;* ¹⁴ *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire.*

Interestingly, the same word translated testing in v. 12 is the very same word translated tempt in verse 13. And while James says testing through external circumstances comes from God for our good, tempting comes from our own internal desires for our bad. And you can see how this section is connected to the previous 12 verses because someone may say- well if trials are tests from God, then so are my temptations... and shift the responsibility to God. Ah, but James says,

not so fast. That's a deception. The temptation to blame someone other than ourselves for our actions runs deep, doesn't it? Remember in the Garden when Adam and Eve were tempted, deceived and fell into sin? Eve blames the snake, Adam says, "The woman YOU put in here with me gave it to me." And the snake didn't have a leg to stand on...sorry I couldn't help it. Isn't this one of the first things as parents we try to correct in our children. They hit their sister, "Why did you do that?" "But, she was making a face at me." I don't know about you, but my kids never responded, "You know, I did it because my own sin tempted me and I take full responsibility for sinning." Sometimes our finger pointing isn't just across, it's up. When we face temptation sometimes people blame God. "Well God is the one who made me this way so it must be OK." "God gave me this weakness, so you can't blame me for indulging." "God put me in this situation, I didn't have a choice." "God allowed these bad things to happen to me so He is to blame for my actions." Once a woman wanted to meet with me, I believe because she was hoping to get approval for a relationship she was in. She was dating a married man who was cheating on his wife behind her back, but she was totally convinced that they were supposed to be together because God wouldn't have caused them to meet unless he wanted them to be together. This is deception. The truth is that God is incapable of being tempted himself, he is absolutely pure, and therefore he would not, indeed cannot tempt anyone to toward evil.

Now let's be clear, it is not a sin to be tempted. Don't be discouraged when you are tempted. Don't feel guilty about that. Hebrews 4 says that Jesus was tempted in every way and yet did not sin. Sin comes in when we act on temptation. So, James tells us that there is only one cause to your sin, it's not God, it's not your parents, it's not your ex-wife, it's not your boss, it's not even the Devil himself...it's you. I know this is controversial in a culture that wrestles with personal vs. systemic responsibility, whether it be the government, majority culture, big business or law enforcement. I'm not saying there isn't responsibility to be placed on systems or environments. We should work to improve systems, make them as fair and equal opportunity as possible and promote flourishing- that's part of our job description as Christians. But what I am saying is that whenever we remove personal responsibility for our actions we remove human dignity. Without personal responsibility we become slaves, animals or machines. You may be predisposed by your conditions but you still have choice. You may be predisposed to abuse because your were an abuser, but you are still responsible for how you treat others. If everyone else is to blame, you will stay in a perpetual state of victimhood. When we promote the dignity of personal responsibility for our own actions, our own weaknesses and temptations, it's only then that we can begin to make progress. James say, discern the cause of your temptation to sin. It's not God, it's you. Take responsibility for that.

#2 Discern the Destruction of Temptation

James wants us to be discerning about the 3 Ways Sin Destroys: 1) Sin replaces love for God. The word that James uses is for v.14 "evil desire"- Epithumeia- but that's not really the best translation. It's **Over-Desires**, even good or neutral things can become over-desires when they replace love for God. Tim Keller- **"Not that we want bad things, it's that we want things so badly."** A romantic relationship can be good, but if it turns into an over-desire, you want that relationship so bad you it obscures your love for God, and He fades in the background for you to have it. Sin isn't just breaking the rules, it's spiritual adultery. It's wanting something more than

we want God in order to get something that only God can ultimately fulfill- meaning, love, success, happiness.

2) Sin turns us into its Prey. ¹⁴ *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.* Notice that James uses hunting language. Think about how some predatory animals lure their prey with beauty, smells, colors and then just like that, they strike. Portuguese Man-o-War uses delicate tentacles that look like kelp to attract undiscerning fish. They come in for a little nimble, and before they know what happened they are paralyzed, dragged up into the Man-o-War's body and liquified...which is pretty awesome and horrifying at the same time. Isn't this how temptation works? You fill the blank of how it works for you- lust, drinking, lying, pride, gluttony...Temptation has a way of painting a beautiful, alluring picture of desire, fun, of happiness, of escape, of power, of fulfillment- whatever it is that we want, until it grabs hold of us and drags us down into destruction. [Slide] See friends, this is why we should never be intimidated when you hear people say "Christianity is a moral straight jacket." Because don't you see what James is saying? God's limitations on our morality are not to control us but to give us true freedom from becoming ensnared, entrapped in sin. God is not trying to rip you off, he's not trying to control you or make you miserable. He's trying to free you and give you life. Christianity isn't only true, it also works in real life!

3) Sin Always Reproduces Stronger. ¹⁵ *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* I've heard people describe sin as "getting it out of their system." "I need to rage on someone to get the anger out of my system." "I need act on my lust to get it out of my system." Don't kid yourself. This couldn't be further from the truth! When we indulge, we don't get rid of it, James says we reproduce it. And we don't just reproduce more, it's like plucking a gray hair, it comes back stronger and brings a friend. A white lie, seems innocent doesn't it? But when you do it, it begins to create a habit, neurologists tell us that habits good or bad, literally create brain highways that perpetuate the habit and make it easier and easier to keep doing it. So that lie, when indulged has the power to destroy your life. You will eventually lie about something that will cause you to lose your reputation, your job, your family. JC Ryle, writing in the late 19th century wrote this "Habits, like trees, are strengthened by age. A boy may bend an oak when it is a sapling, 100 men cannot root it up, when it is full grown."¹ We just had a 100+ foot white oak removed in our backyard. And it took a team with a giant crane and high-powered chainsaws to take it down. Are there saplings in your life that you are cultivating that are becoming oak trees? Take any temptation that you are prone to and look down the corridor of time see, really discern the destructive path it will take you down. Now let's get to some good news.

#3 Discern God's Provisions to Fight Temptation. ¹⁶ *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 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.*

¹ J.C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, p.7

There is a deception that I hear from Christians. Well this is just who I am, I'll always be like this. I've tried to fight this, but I've just accepted it. As a Christian we can never say that because of who God is for us. Not only does God never tempt us, but the God of heavenly lights gifts us with good things, in the context, the good things he provides are what we need to battle temptation. And his provisions aren't shifting like shadows, it is constant and dependable, right when we need it. What provisions has God gifted us with to fight temptation?

Let me share with you just 6 of them briefly. One of them from our passage.

1) The Provision of the New Birth.

¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. James is describing what happens when we come to faith in Jesus. Everyone is born once, and that physical birth ultimately leads to death. But the second birth, the new birth is a spiritual birth through faith in the word of truth that is the gospel of Jesus (his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins) that leads to eternal life. This new birth also gives us a new nature that desires to obey and gives us the ability to say no to temptation and yes to God.

2- The Provision of Escape- 1 Corinthians 10 ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.* In every temptation God provides an off-ramp, an escape hatch so we don't give in.

3- The Provision of Divine Wisdom- Paul says that we have been given both the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that we have access to what he calls "The mind of Christ." 1 Corinthians 2:16.

4- The Provision of the Holy Spirit- Galatians 5 ¹⁶ *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

5- The Provision of a Praying Community- James 5 ¹⁶ *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

6- The Provision of a New Love- The Scottish Preacher from the 19th century Thomas Chalmers in his most well-known sermon "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection" says this "The only way to break the hold of an object on a human soul is to show it an object of surpassing beauty." I think this is what that Apostle Paul was getting at when he says, Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* I'm living for someone far more beautiful, loving, captivating, fulfilling than anything that this world can offer me. Don't you want that? Don't you want to be loved so unconditionally, that even when you do give into temptation and sin, he doesn't abandon us but forgives us and keeps loving us, embracing us, encouraging us? That doesn't make me want to keep sinning, that makes me want to please a God like that.

Title Slide I'm convinced of the powerful provision of God because I've seen God free me from sin that took root in my heart. I was deceived, seduced and gripped by pornography in my teens and early twenties. What started as a sapling had become an oak tree that was beyond my ability to root out. But after I came to Christ, it was the power of the new birth that began working in my soul. I began to hate my sin and desire to do battle against it. I began to realize the armory of weapons that were available to me for the fight. I began to confess to a few people I trusted who were praying for me and holding me accountable. I learned new wisdom for the fight through God's Word, learning fighter verses to help me not sin. I began learning how to yield to the power of the Holy Spirit and not my own flesh. But the most powerful resource? A new love. See, sexual purity became an act of worship to a God who loved me so thoroughly that he sent his son, Jesus to die for me, in my place.

That is what the Lord's Supper is here to remind us of.