

The Book of James

Lesson 2: Temptation and Every Good Gift -- James 1:13-18

We are remarkable creatures when it comes to blame. From the very first garden, the human instinct under temptation has been to point a finger somewhere else. The man blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent, and underneath both of them ran a quieter, more dangerous accusation: God, you put me here. You made me this way. This is partly your fault. We have been rehearsing that line ever since, often without noticing we are saying it.

James will not let us hide there. He names the lie out loud: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.'" With surgical clarity he cuts the cord between God and our sin. God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempts no one. The pull we feel toward sin does not come down from heaven. It rises up from within us, from our own desire, which conceives and gives birth to something that grows up to kill us.

It is a sobering diagnosis, and James does not soften it. Desire conceives, sin is born, and sin fully grown brings forth death. He wants us to see the whole arc, because we usually only notice the first flicker and tell ourselves it is harmless. But in the same breath he turns our faces upward to something beautiful. If sin is the thing that crawls up from within, then "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Here is the heart of this lesson. The God who never tempts us is the God who never stops giving to us. He does not flicker like the sun moving across the sky, warm one hour and gone the next. He is steady, generous, unchanging light. And the greatest gift He has given is new birth: "of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth." So we come to this passage to learn where temptation really comes from, to stop blaming the God who only gives good, and to marvel that this unchanging Father chose, of His own will, to make us new.

Group Discussion: Why do you think it is so tempting, when we sin, to shift responsibility somewhere else, even subtly toward God or our circumstances? What does honest ownership of our own desires open up that blame shuts down?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life are you most prone to say, in effect, "this is just how I am" or "God knows I can't help it"? What would change if you brought that exact area into the light of James's words this week?

Read James 1:13-18

Study Questions

1. James insists, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (v. 13). Why is it so important doctrinally that we never trace our temptation back to God, and what does this verse protect us from believing about His character?
2. Think about the last time you gave in to a temptation. How honestly did you own it as coming from your own desire, and how much did you quietly blame your circumstances, other people, or even God?
3. James describes a progression: desire "lures and entices," then "desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (vv. 14-15). Walk through this anatomy of sin. What does it teach about how temptation actually works in us?
4. Where in your own life can you see this progression at work, a desire you have been feeding that is moving toward something destructive? What would it look like to interrupt it early rather than wait until it is "fully grown"?
5. James warns, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers" (v. 16). How does self-deception play a role in the movement from desire to sin, and why does James treat clear thinking about temptation as an act of love toward his readers?
6. In what area are you most likely to deceive yourself, telling yourself a story that makes a sin seem smaller or safer than it is? Who in your life is allowed to speak honestly to you about it?
7. James declares that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (v. 17). What does this verse teach about the character of God and the source of everything good in our lives?
8. Spend a moment counting specific good gifts in your life right now. How might deliberately tracing them back to the Father reshape your heart away from the discontent that often feeds temptation?
9. James says, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (v. 18). What does this teach about how a person becomes a child of God, the role of God's will and the word of truth, and why does this new birth matter for the whole argument of the passage?
10. Look back across the whole passage. James moves us from the lie that God tempts us to the truth that God only gives, and gives even new life itself. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to change how you handle temptation or how you see your Father.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 3:11-13, the first instinct to blame rather than own sin; 1 Corinthians 10:13, God provides the way of escape and is faithful in temptation; Matthew 4:1-

11, Jesus faces temptation and answers with the word of truth; 1 John 1:8-10, the deception of denying our sin and the cleansing of confession; James 4:7-8, resisting the devil and drawing near to God; 1 Peter 1:23, being born again through the living and abiding word of God.