

James 1:13-15

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Date: 10 October 2021

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, CFC. We'll be in the book of James, chapter 5, starting in verse 13.!

So James writes, 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. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

In seventh grade, I remember getting caught cheating on a homework assignment for a science class. I don't even remember what science we were studying. It shows you how much I cared about that class.

[1 : 18] But we had an assignment where we had to go home and read this chapter and look for sentences on the page that were on our sheet, you know, and fill in the blank. Just to prove we had read it.

And I kind of thought, it's kind of a waste of time, you know. And so I didn't feel like doing it. And so I thought, you know, in all my seventh grade wisdom, I thought, Well, I'll just copy my friend Alexander tomorrow.

He's a smart kid. You know, he's in the orchestra. Like, he's going places. I'll just copy him. He'll have it, because he's a book winner. And so that's exactly what I did.

And the parapro caught me, and she didn't really like me. And I was kind of a brat. This is before I was a believer, by the way.

But Mr. Brown, the actual teacher, he did like me. I'm not sure why, but he did. And I knew I could talk my way out of it with him. So when she caught me, she brought me up, you know, showed my homework assignment, all this kind of stuff.

[2 : 15] And I just said, Well, you know, Mr. Brown, you assigned this thing, okay? You told me to copy from the book. I see no difference copying from my friend. What's the issue here?

I had to read the sentences. They're right here. And he laughed, looked at the parapro, and said, Well, you know, he's got a point. And it counted. So that's how I'm here today.

Past seventh grade. But, yeah, I essentially turned it on him, though. I'm giving you the short version. But when I really was kind of arguing with him, which is more playful, I basically turned it on him.

I said, You know, this is really your fault for giving me such a dumb assignment. I didn't use that word at the time. But, you know, I just thought, This is so ridiculous. This is really your fault. If you really wanted me to learn something here, do something right, or do something profitable, you should have assigned a different type of homework.

And so I essentially blamed him for what I had done. Right? And I turned it on him. And obviously, you all know the reality.

[3 : 17] What I did that day was wrong. My actions, my desires, my decisions were deceitful. They were sinful in that moment. But it's really telling, though.

I mean, this has been, to put it in the more abstract statement, right, this has been the pattern of man forever. We always shift blame throughout all of history. The rebel left to himself never admits responsibility for rebelling.

And this is as old as the Garden of Eden. When Adam is approached for his sin, he does not admit his wrongdoing to God. Rather, he shifts the blame.

But not to Eve. Specifically, he says in Genesis 3, chapter 3, verse 12, he says, The woman whom you gave me, God, the woman whom you gave to be with me, is the reason I sinned.

So he's saying, God, this broken vessel that you created did this evil. With the subtle implication being, God, you are responsible for what I did. If you didn't want me to do this, you shouldn't have given me this woman who made me do these things.

[4 : 25] And everything that led to me committing this sin is external to me. It's all you, not me. Adam, essentially in that moment, was saying, God does tempt, and he tempted me.

And of course, that is a blasphemous lie, but a blasphemous lie that Adam believed nonetheless, and a lie that all of us prior to Christ believed. And this pattern didn't stop with Adam and Eve. It continued all throughout the Bible and all throughout history. Job chapter 2, verse 9, Job's wife was ready to curse God and die as she exhorted her husband to do likewise.

In Ezekiel chapter 18, verses 25 through 26, the Lord rebukes the whole nation of Israel in the midst of her sin. And he says of them, Yet you, Israel, say, So Israel says to God, The way of the Lord is not just.

Hear you, Israelites. God responds, Hear you, Israelites. Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sins, they will die for it because of the sin they have committed, they will die.

[5 : 44] And this pattern of shifting blame has always been true of fallen man. This is why James is addressing the issue in his epistle, because it's still an issue at his time. It's still an issue in our time.

And he was clearly concerned that his audience was susceptible to such sin during a time in which they are being trialed, which we've talked about in the weeks past.

And so to start this text, James, what does he do? He starts with a strong affirmation of God's holiness, that God is without blame. And that's point number one for this morning.

God is holy. Point number one, God is holy. He says in verse 13, 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. It's a firm affirmation. Holiness means to be separated from sin and totally, entirely committed to God.

[6 : 52] And that is exactly who God is. The one who is perfectly committed to himself and without sin. Totally separate. There's no blurring. There's no lines touching. Totally, totally separate.

The phrase, God cannot be tempted with evil, literally translates from Greek as something like, God is inexperienced with evil. He doesn't even experience it.

He's never sinned. He will not sin. And he has not sinned. It is against his nature. Now recall that James is writing to dispersed Christian Jews throughout the Greco-Roman world.

These believers were facing hardships, persecution, and trials of various kinds. It could be easy for them to face that temptation at such a time, such a time to blame God.

Well, I'm feeling angry because of my circumstance, which sovereign God brought on me. How often do believers question God in the midst of crisis? How often do we try to shift blame to God in our hearts when we cannot believe the evil we so quickly run to?

[8 : 01] And it seems that James is concerned that his audience would be tempted to do such a thing. And so he reminds them of God's holiness to avoid any such foolish thinking.

I think one of the great proofs of God's holiness and our sinfulness is found in Isaiah chapter 6. Go ahead and turn with me there. We're going to be there for just a minute. So keep your thumb in James.

But Isaiah chapter 6, starting in verse 1. Isaiah writes, again, chapter 6, verse 1.

He writes, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. And the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[9 : 13] The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And Isaiah said, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

So it's important to understand when we're looking at this text what a Hebrew thinks of when he thinks about knowing something. I'm talking about epistemology, if you like big words.

How do you know what you know, right? To know something was not merely an abstract intellectual ascent for a Hebrew, this kind of thing that you just have in the mind, and now I know it.

Rather, it included the totality of the person as an embodied creature. To know something was to understand it in the mind, in the heart, in the eyes, and in the body.

This is why Moses often uses euphemisms like Adam knew his wife Eve, in the wholeness of his body, in his person, in his mind, in his heart. This is why we are called to love the Lord, our God, with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength in Deuteronomy 6, 5.

[10:31] Because we are to love him in our totality, or wholeness, as Jane puts it in chapter 1, verse 4. So we have Isaiah before the throne of God, and Isaiah in verse 1 saw God.

Isaiah is beginning to know God as he is, and this causes Isaiah to cry out, Woe is me! And this literally means, Damn me to hell for all eternity.

And why would he say that? Because that is the only response one can have who encounters the Lord in his glory. Isaiah didn't even see the Lord's face or feet, only a glimpse, and yet it was enough.

And the angels sing out, Holy, holy, holy. This is a grammatical function. To write it in this way takes it to the superlative degree, meaning God is holy, holier, and holiest.

No one holier. I can't help but say, but anytime I hear that, I hear that in Steve Lawson's voice. Anybody else? You know? This takes it to the superlative degree. Can't help it.

[11:39] But by learning how holy God truly is, Isaiah's only response could have been to recognize that he himself is unholy.

That Isaiah deserves to be cut off from God, who is clean and without sin. Unlike Isaiah, who is dirty and filthy, a filthy rag at best, as he puts it later on in his book.

Isaiah did not say to himself, I have been tempted by God. He knew better than to say that. And you can turn back to James with me.

So God is holy. He is without sin, totally separate from all evil and wickedness, which is why it would be so foolish for James' audience to say to themselves, we are being tempted by God. God cannot offer or entice that which he has never experienced. Now you all can imagine how James' audience might have reasoned like Adam.

[12:51] They might have said, well, God is sovereign and he has allowed these difficulties to surround us. Therefore, he is behind the temptations I face. He's the cause of it. It is actually God's fault that I'm thinking evil in this way.

And this would be wrong for them to do so, as you have already seen. But this raises the question, where does temptation come from? Who or what tempts us?

Is it Satan? And this leads me to our second point, point number two. Man's nature is sinful. Point number two. Man's nature is sinful.

Looking back at verse 14 in James, James writes, but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. James seems to be saying that we are the source of our own temptation.

[13:51] We are tempted when we are lured and enticed by our own desire. What he's saying here is that we are born with a sin nature. And this is all throughout the Bible.

David put it this way. He said in Psalm 51, verse 5, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. The Apostle Paul said it this way in Ephesians 2, 3.

He says that mankind is, quote, by nature, children of wrath, meaning our very nature is wicked and sinful. God himself, who is all-knowing, all-wise, and perfect judge over the universe, has said in Genesis 5, 6, when he looked over the earth, he said, The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that he only saw evil continually.

From beginning to end, mankind is only evil continually. But just sticking with James' wording to continue, James says that we have these desires as your ESV probably translates it or other translations use that word as well.

The Greek word here is epithumies. It is the same word that English translations often translate as lust. And typically when doing so, it is because the translators identify the word as specifically related to some sort of sexual temptation or desire.

[15:20] And this is often the case in Paul's writings. However, it can be applied to anything. And in its most basic sense, it really just carries the idea of a strong desire for anything, whether that be food, drink, clothes, or what have you.

In fact, in pre-Koine Greek, which is the Greek of the Bible, this word was used to describe the sudden violence found in nature. So a hurricane, a flash flood, a volcano, earthquake, these kind of things.

This violent, sudden urging, this movement. And furthermore, this word *epithumies*, this word desires, it can be understood as a strong, violent urging that comes from within.

So it's not coming from without, but from within, right? Which is why it could be used to describe an earthquake from within the earth, right? A hurricane from within the earth and the sky. It is this powerful, quick, seemingly dominating force that has to be reckoned with.

It cannot be ignored. So what is James saying? He's saying that when we have these sudden urges, these strong desires, and when we are enticed and lured by them, then at that moment, we are being tempted.

[16:44] And we are being tempted because we are by nature sinners who desire sin. And sin occurs in verse 15 after we have gone through the process of this enticement, this desire, and allow ourselves to be lured.

At this point, we give birth to sin, which we conceived when we desired sin. Just think about the implications of this truth.

This means that we are not murderers the minute we have killed someone. Rather, we are murderers the moment we are angry enough to desire to murder someone. We have already conceived murder.

Now murder is going to be born. This means that we are not adulterers the minute we have slept with someone. Rather, we are adulterers the minute we lust after someone.

We have already conceived adultery. Now adultery is going to be born. And this should all sound familiar. It is what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

[17:48] Jesus said, Matthew 5, verse 21 through 22, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Jesus also said in Matthew 5, 27 through 28, You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Now all of this means that there is nobody to point the finger at, nobody to blame, except ourselves. Our greatest enemy, our greatest opposition in terms of temptation is certainly not God, but neither is it Satan, the culture, a political party, or anyone or anything else.

It is us, ourselves. We alone bear the responsibility for our sins and rightfully so. Now this is horrifying news.

We are born as sinners. We desire sin, which means we cannot desire God who is entirely separate from sin, who is the entire opposite of sin. And this news gets worse because sin doesn't stop at being born.

[19:10] No, when sin is fully grown, it produces something. And this leads us to the final point for this morning, point number three. Sin results in death.

Point number three, sin results in death. I'm going to reread verse 14 through the end of our text.

James writes, But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it has conceived its birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Now those terms, lured and enticed, were predominantly used as fishing terms in the Greco-Roman world.

In other words, James is saying that we, like fish, will gladly bite the bait and be carried off by our own desires to death. And that is a perfect picture of this process.

We see something with our eyes. We find it attractive in some way. And then we go after it. And to be honest, there is a source of joy, a source of pleasure in that moment.

[20:27] But it is just that that, a fleeting moment. You can imagine the fish enjoys eating the worm so much that the fish doesn't realize it is hooked right away until it is too late and that fish is flailing about as it dies a miserable death.

James is saying that this is true of us. We bite at what we see. We are slaves to this. And this is why we will all die apart from Christ. Because our desires lead only to death, ruin, and destruction. This is what we see in Genesis chapter 3, verse 6, when Eve first sins. Now this text is written in what's called the grammatical *va* construction for Hebrews.

So all you need to remember with me mentioning this is that is a cue to the reader to read quickly. Right? It's a way of saying read this passage fast. Because that's how quickly this passage occurred in real time.

Right? That's the idea here. So reading Genesis 3, 6 quickly, Moses writes, So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

[21 : 44] Right? Sin, sin, sin, moving, rationalist, evil, wicked. And it happens quick in a moment, fleeting moment, the pleasure of eating the apple and dead.

just like that. And we already know that God's word of warning to Adam and Eve came true that day. He said to them, you shall surely die.

And when they ate of the tree, they did die. Romans 6, 23, for the wages of sin is death. God's reaction to sin might seem like an overreaction to you at first.

It might seem like God is making a big deal about something that is small. We can all see why murderers or adulterers might need to be punished to some degree.

Right? But the person who tells a little white lies, is he really that bad? The person who maybe skimmed on taxes a little unknowingly, are they really that bad? The person who jokes inappropriately now and then, are they really deserving of eternal conscious torment?

[22 : 53] And don't get me wrong, I do think some sins are worse than others, but at the same time, I believe Paul, when he says the punishment of every type of sin is the same, eternal conscious torment in hell.

The wages of sin is death. But back to the question I posed, how is God's reaction not an overreaction?

And this is where we have to remember the creator-creature distinction. God is the creator who created us, the creation. We exist by his will and for the purpose of his will, which is chiefly to glorify him.

Sin, then, is doing the very things for which we are not created. Every time we sin, we are rejecting God's rule as creator, we are rejecting our rule as creation, and we are spitting in his face.

Can you imagine if a fork in your kitchen wouldn't let you eat, but it smacked you every time you tried to put something in your mouth? I mean, what would you do to that fork? How would you feel?

[24 : 06] Who is this little fork that you bought and maybe even you created who thinks he has a right to reject the purpose for which it was created? That fork would become worthless, only good for burning.

I would be livid. I would want to destroy that fork in a heartbeat. That would be so annoying. Again, we are created to glorify God by being his image bearers.

In other words, we are to reflect his glorious, perfect image. This image that has never experienced evil. And you're starting to see how egregious every sin of ours is.

And you're starting to see that it's not just our sins that God hates. He hates our very sin nature. Our being, which is a result of the fall.

And this is why sin results in death and rightfully so. If we are not living up to our intended purpose, then we should not live because we are worthless in this state.

[25 : 19] God makes this plain in the Old Testament and Paul tapes it all together in Romans 3, verses 10 through 12. God says, of all mankind, none is righteous, no, not one, no one understands, no one seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become worthless, no one does good, not even one.

In so many ways, death is the opposite of holiness. That is why it is so offensive to our holy and living God to be with the unholy and the dead. That is why in the Old Testament, man could not approach God at their own whim in the holy of holies.

The veil separated dead men from the living God. To truly live is to obey God and to not obey God is to die because disobedience is not living.

You want the good life? And I don't mean that in a health, wealth, prosperity sense, but if you want the good life, you have to learn to obey God for the joy that is found in him only.

Now, believe it or not, I'm entering the closing application. It's kind of a downer note. But three applications and then there will be one just concluding thought because I do think this text sheds light on the gospel and should be cause for us to have great hope.

[26 : 45] But I want to give the three applications first because I think it would be more fitting. Application number one, do not play the victim card like our culture.

It is hard to go anywhere in society without everyone telling you that your actions are the result of something external to you. Oh, you were just trained to do that by your bad parents.

That's why you're the way that you are. Oh, that's your classmates' fault for enticing you. That's why you did that stupid thing. Oh, you lose control sometimes because you face systemic issues that are beyond your control.

Not your fault. Oh, that word is a trigger for me. That's why I'm angry and I want to kill you right now. Or how about this? I can't help it. I was born this way.

And that's the age-old lie again and again and again. But on judgment day, God will not allow anyone to squeeze out of anything.

[27 : 46] He knows the heart and He will judge based off the heart. It cannot play the victim card. It loses every time. Application two, and this goes right along with the first one, repent.

And this is simple, right? Simple to understand, maybe hard to do. By God's grace, which He gladly lavishes on His church, we are able to repent of our sins.

We are able to recognize that we rightly deserve to be punished, to die as a result of our sin, which we deserved. But we are atoned for by Christ, who knew no sin, that He bore the wrath of God that we deserve.

Jesus was not responsible for our sin, and yet He took the consequence on Himself, and He died. He died, which means we won't die in the eternal sense, because He was raised on the third day.

And for those of you who are not in Christ, I urge you to repent and believe in Him as Lord and Savior. This is your only way of escape from the wrath to come.

[28 : 59] But for the rest of us who are already in Christ, I urge you still, right? The command to repent still stands. Repentance is obedience.

So if we do not continually repent of our sin, then our disobedience is compounded. Right? As John says, if we say we have no sin, we are liars.

So confess sin, and we have an advocate with the Father. Now, application number three, prepare yourselves for trials and temptations. temptations.

The Greek word for tempted that we saw in verse 13, we have actually already seen in the book of James. In chapter 1, verse 2, text I preached on a couple weeks, the word appears.

It is perasmos. It can mean either temptation to sin from, with, or without. And sometimes it only means trial or testing. In chapter 1, verse 2, and in Clay's text from last week, it clearly means trial.

[30 : 01] In our text today, it clearly means to be tempted to sin. I mention this all to say, we prepare ourselves for both temptation and trials in the same way, though they are different things.

We fill our hearts and minds with Scripture to remain hopeful in the midst of trials. And we fill our hearts and minds with Scripture to remain faithful in the midst of temptation.

Easy to understand, hard to do, but we have to do it. So repent, prepare yourself for trials and temptations, fill your mind, your heart with God's word, so that in the midst of it, you'll never be tempted to question God's goodness or his holiness, and you'll see in his word just how good he is.

Now, as I said, before we pray, I want to offer one more thought. It is an encouragement or perhaps better to think of it as a devotional to conclude the sermon. When I was assigned a text, I thought, man, this is going to be a downer.

But it's true and we have to reflect on it. It's important, right? All Scripture is profitable, so this is good for us to hear these hard things. So you've heard me talk about how we are all sinners by nature, that God hates our sin and our sin nature, how we are worthless apart from Christ.

[31 : 31] And that is biblical truth, but oh so hard to swallow. And there is good news, right? This is only one side of the coin, and the other side of the coin is this.

God loves us despite ourselves. Now you can call this point four if you want. It doesn't necessarily come out of our text directly, but it's biblically true nonetheless.

Romans 5, 8, Paul says, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. While we were yet lured and enticed.

While we were yet sinners, Christ loved us. He died for us. You can read into that while we were yet worthless, evil, rebellious, and so on. You've heard me reference this verse many times.

It is a personal favorite. I've not had the chance to unpack it, and I still won't today, unfortunately. But just consider this. There's no reason for God to love us that is in us.

[32 : 36] It's not our hair, it's not our gender, it's not our ethnicity, it's not our intelligence, it's not our wealth, or our poverty. And it's not even our obedience that stirs up God to love us.

So what stirs up God to love us? And it's this, God stirs himself up to love us, and that is such good and freeing news.

Zephaniah 3, verse 17, The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. And notice this, He will take great delight in you.

He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing. It's not on account of us that He loves us, rather, it's on account of Christ in us that He loves us.

And this is why His love cannot fail, because He loves Christ, and Christ abides in us who are saved. Just as you should not question God's inability to tempt us with sin, you should not question God's unfailing love for His church, for Christ's pride.

[33 : 51] I didn't plan this, but it worked out. Nathan mentioned Luke 22 this morning. I was talking about that word desire earlier, how it's usually translated as lust, but it can be broad.

It's not necessarily an evil word. You could use this word rightly to describe your desire for God.

And it was a curious thing, I never knew this, but that's the word Jesus used that's translated as earnestly desired.

So with that desire and that extent to which we seek sin, Christ desires to partake of the supper with us, to be with us. His love is for real in that sense.

It's sincere. It's genuine. And turn with me, this is our last text and I'm not going to comment on it. I just want to close out with reading this. But turn with me to 1 John 4, 16.

Again, I just want to leave us on this note of this gospel hope that we have. John writes, so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

[35 : 03] They believe in his love. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. by this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

Because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment.

And whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. Let's pray.