

A Study in James

The Tests of a Living Faith

James 1:13–18

November 30, 2012

Introduction

We have been studying the issue of trials. James's first test of a living faith involves a believer's response in trials. A living faith will have joy, seek wisdom, and persevere toward spiritual maturity in trials. But what is God's role in all of this? Is God tempting us to sin by bringing a trial? If we fail the test, has God *caused* us to sin!? James assures us that the answer to both of these questions is a resounding, "No!" But he will also help us understand exactly what God's role is in various trials.

Test #1: A Living Faith and Trials (vv. 2–18)

The Question of Temptation (vv. 13–18)

Although God is the author of every trial, He is not the source, nor is He responsible for the temptations that come with trials. Temptations ultimately come from within and promote sin and death.

The Source of Temptation (vv. 13–15)

We can often be tempted to blame things on others — especially when we find ourselves giving in to temptation in trying situations. But verse 13 is explicit that we cannot assign the blame to God. God does not tempt people to sin.

Do not say "God is the Source" (v. 13a)

Notice again that this verse says *when* we are tempted, not *if!* Temptations will come in our lives just as we saw with trials in verse 2. But when we are tempted, we cannot say that God is luring us toward evil.

God's Character (v. 13b)

God Himself is absolutely holy and morally pure (1 Pet 1:16). There is nothing in God that can be tempted or attracted by evil — either in Himself or for someone else. God is unlike the pagan gods who can be

tempted to do evil, or frequently engage in it (Num 23:19). Furthermore, James tells us very plainly that God tempts no one.

But how do we harmonize this with some examples we see in the Old Testament?

Job

What about someone like Job? Did God tempt him? No! God brought the trial, but Satan was the one who tempted him (Job 2:3).

Pharaoh

Was God tempting Pharaoh by hardening his heart (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 8:15, 32; 9:12, 34; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8)? No. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart involved God withdrawing His common grace. God gives grace commonly to all people, including unbelievers. Part of that grace includes the Holy Spirit's restraint of sin (2 Thess 2:6). This is what prevents the world from spiraling into anarchy and unbelievers being as bad as they could be. When God hardened Pharaoh's heart, He withdrew His restraint of sin in Pharaoh's life. Thus, Pharaoh was allowed to pursue his own wicked desires to their natural end. In all this, God did not tempt Pharaoh. Pharaoh acted on his own sinful desires (see verses 14–15).

Remember this rule: *God never tests with the intent to promote sin!*

The True Source of Temptation (v. 14)

So what is the true source of temptation? Ourselves! The real enemy is us! Of course, we may be thinking about Job here. Didn't Satan tempt Job? — Yes, but Satan didn't *make* Job sin. We cannot say, "Satan made me do it!" That's really a cop-out for taking responsibility for our own sins. The fact is, Satan does not cause most of the sins on this planet. People do! The ultimate proof of this will be during the Millennial Kingdom after the Lord's return. Satan and all the demons will be bound for 1,000 years, yet people will still sin (Rev 20:2–8; Isa 65:20).

In reality, there are three sources of temptation: two external (the world and the Devil) and one internal (the flesh). Jesus was tempted only by the external sources since He is not tempted of Himself. But for all other people, those external sources attempt to engage and appeal

to our flesh. James is focusing here on the internal source as the primary source (cf. Matt 15:19).

The terms “lured” and “enticed” draw on the imagery of fishing. When the fish sees that juicy bait and is lured into biting it, he is dragged away by the strong pull of the fisherman’s reel. The same is true when we give in to temptation.

Does this mean that temptation is sin? No. After all, Jesus was tempted and did not sin — and that is an encouraging thought for us! Being presented with a temptation is not sinful on our part. In fact, God promises that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear, and He will provide a way out (1 Cor 10:31).

However, if we are the ones that *cause* ourselves to be presented with a temptation, then that *is* a sin. We cannot rush headlong into a tempting situation and wonder where the 1 Corinthians 10:31 “exit” is just prior to plunging into sin. For example, it would be foolish for an alcoholic to walk into a bar, thinking God will provide a way out of that temptation. The way out is to not go in in the first place. We can’t rely on sheer willpower to resist our own fleshly desires (Jer 17:9).

The Process of Temptation (v. 15)

Ultimately, when we follow temptation into sin, it leads to death. The imagery in verse 15 is of the birth process. The thought here is that when temptation, sourced in our sinful disposition, provokes the exercise of our will, sin is birthed (or is the product). In other words, sin begins the moment our will is engaged in response to that temptation.

Ultimately, sin grows into adulthood and brings death. Death means separation:

Physical Death: Separation of the soul from the body

Spiritual Death: Separation of a person from God

Second Death: Irrevocable separation of a person from God

This verse doesn’t mean that any individual sin will cause you to die physically, although some do. Rather, it means that once sin has run its course with you, you wind up dead. Since all people are sinners (Rom 3:23), all three of these are inevitable unless God acts to bring salvation to a person.

The Source of Good Gifts (vv. 16–18)

In contrast to temptation, God brings good things to people — including trials! God provides trials to prove, refine, and strengthen us!

A Warning about Being Deceived (v. 16)

Notice that James is assuming his readers are believers (“brothers”) here. This warning applies to both what has preceded (the error of blaming God for falling into temptation) and what follows (the error of thinking that trials are bad).

God is the Source of Good Things (v. 17)

Every good and perfect gift comes from God. James describes Him as the Father of heavenly lights — the sun, moon, and stars. God made all of these and He has the power and ability to act. In this context, James is demonstrating that God has the power and ability to act in giving good gifts to people.

Unlike these heavenly lights which move and make shifting shadows, God does not move. He is immutable (unchangeable). Because God doesn’t change, neither does the fact that He is the source of good gifts. Consequently, He is *always* the source of good gifts, *never* temptation.

An Example of what Comes from God (v. 18)

A prime example of a good gift is salvation! James again picks up the language of the birth process to contrast what God does not bring forth (sin & death — v. 15) with what He does bring forth (the new birth).

There are four things we should note from this verse about salvation: (1) Its origin is in the will of God. Personal salvation is something that God willed. (2) He gives us the gift of salvation, causing us to be “brought forth” or born again. (3) The word of God is the means of salvation. God uses the message of the gospel to bring new life. And (4) the purpose of salvation is so that believers would be the first-fruits of God’s redeemed creation (cf. Rom 8:19–23). One day all of creation will be redeemed, and we as believers are the first-fruits or first part of that process.

Just as salvation is a gift from God, so also are trials. As God refines us, we will reflect more of His glory in our lives, bear more fruit, and receive even greater reward!

~AWB