

Unholy Temptations and the Word of God that Overcomes Sin

James 1:13-27

James 1:13-27 - *"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. ¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."*

Background Notes

In the first half of James 1 we considered the "holy trials" that God allows us to face, as tests of our faith in this life. Now, beginning in verse 13, the subject shifts to "unholy temptations" -- that is, temptation to sin. This passage may be a little confusing because the same Greek word is used for both the holy trials of verse 2 and the unholy temptations of verse 13. It can be especially confusing when you're reading the King James Version, because the English word "temptations" and "tempt" is used in both cases. However, it's the context that makes the difference. Verse 2 has to do with holy trials of our faith, and verse 13 has to do with unholy temptations to sin.

1 Corinthians 10:13, a well-known verse about tests and trials, uses the same Greek word for both the tribulations that test our faith and the temptations to sin that we experience. Let me paraphrase that verse: "No test of your faith or temptation to sin -- no test or temptation has overtaken you that are not common to man. In other words, no test of your faith or temptation to sin has come your way that no one else has ever had to face. But God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tested or tempted beyond what you are able to handle -- even though the test may be very difficult to

handle. God promises that you will never face a test of your faith or a temptation to sin that you can't endure! You will never face a test of your faith that you can't handle, and you will never face a temptation to sin that you can't resist. Because God allowed the test or temptation to come your way, He will also make a way of escape so you may be able to bear it."

What a promise! Notice, by the way, that the way of escape from the test or temptation is not necessarily relief from the situation -- but the power and strength in Christ to endure the test or resist the temptation.

Doctrinal Points

1. God does not tempt anyone to sin

Verse 13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."

God does not tempt anyone to sin. Verse 13 is quite emphatic: God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He Himself tempt anyone. You can't blame God for your sin! You can't blame God for your sin because He made you, and you can't blame God for your sin because He made the person or the material world by which you are tempted.

Only **good** gifts come from God (v17). He is the Father of all light, not darkness. There is not even the slightest shadow or variableness in God. He is infinitely perfect and pure and good. 1John 1:5 – *"God is light and in him is no darkness at all"*. So when we yield to temptation it is our own fault. We can't even say "the devil made me do it!" We bear full responsibility. Because of our sinful natures, we are vulnerable to temptation and can be drawn away and enticed (v14).

The problem is not in the temptation itself, whether it be a suggestion or an attraction to do what is wrong. The problem is when we **yield** to the temptation! Remember, our Lord Jesus was tempted -- but He did not sin. The temptations of Christ were totally from without. He did not yield in any way. He did not have a sinful nature -- but we do have sinful natures. We have sinful natures, and when we yield to the temptation in action -- or even in thought -- it is **sin**.

Sin brings forth death. Death means separation. Unconfessed sin results in separation from fellowship with the Lord for the believer, and eternal separation from God for the unbeliever! Don't be deceived as to these truths – *"God does not tempt anyone to sin"(v16)*.

2. God uses His Word to overcome sin.

Verse 18: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. 19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Question: What is God's primary method for helping us to overcome temptations to sin? Answer: the Word of God. God uses His Word to help us overcome sin. Notice the emphasis on the Word of God in this passage. First, God uses His Word in our conversion. Verse 18: *"of his own will he brought us forth by the Word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."* The Word of God is a good seed that produces fruit when it's planted in good ground, the good ground of a heart prepared by the Holy Spirit. It brings forth life.

Remember that the "first fruits" of the harvest were always dedicated to God in the Old Testament. So **we** are to be dedicated to God (v18). If we're truly dedicated to the Lord then we will be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (v19). We will produce the righteousness of God (v20). And we will lay aside all filthiness and wickedness (v21).

Well, this all **sounds** great -- but how do we do it?! At this point, some of you are probably saying, "I've tried many times and failed!" What's the key for overcoming sin? The key is in verse 21: *"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul."* The word is already implanted in the believer, but now it must be received.

The Word of God is the means God uses to save your soul forever from the **penalty of sin**, and it is also the means that God uses to save your soul from the **power of sin** in this life. God uses His Word to help us overcome sin in our lives -- but we must do more than just **hear** the Word. We must humbly **receive** the Word, and **absorb** it deep into our hearts and souls, and let it **work its way out** in obedience and blessing. If you only hear the Word but you don't receive the Word, you're like a person who looks into a mirror, sees messed-up hair or dirt on his or her face – and then walks away and does nothing about it (v23-24)! Is that the way you react to the Word of God?

Maybe you had your five-minute devotional Scripture reading this morning, but by noon you couldn't even remember what you read. Have you ever had that experience? You've only "heard" the Word – in one ear and out the other! You haven't

received Word. You haven't done something in your life with what you read. How can the Holy Spirit use the Word to overcome sin in your life if it's just in one ear and out the other, and it doesn't get down into your soul?

However, if you read the Word of God, and meditate on the Word, and continue to look into this perfect "law of liberty" (v25), and let the Word of God have its effect on your life, then this is the means to overcome sin and find victory and blessing. God uses His Word to overcome sin.

Here's an illustration: I know a few people who have gotten into running as a way of life. They tried all kinds of diets to lose some weight, but nothing worked. Then they began to read about the benefits of running. They not only read about it -- they actually started to run! They received the word about running, they started to run, and now they're so into it that they feel guilty if they don't run at least three times a week! It has become a way of life. And guess what? Their problem with weight has been automatically overcome as a result.

Do you see the illustration? You will never overcome sin by your own strength. It's like trying to pick yourself up off the floor by pulling on your shoelaces. You can't do it! But if you really get into making the Word of God an essential part of your life - reading and studying and meditating on it (even the minor prophets!) -- then you are **receiving** it. The result? You will find power over sin in your life! Just as the runners automatically weighed less, so those who receive the Word will automatically sin less! God uses his Word to overcome sin.

Practical Application

Will you pass the "OWS religion test" this week?

Will you pass the "OWS religion test" this coming week? What's the OWS test anyway? *"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"* (v26-27). Do you see the OWS test? Will you visit an orphan? Will you help a widow? Will you keep yourself separate from this evil world system?

So you think you're religious? So you think you're a "good person"? Well, try this OWS religion test from God! All around you, there are a lot of desperate, hurting people who have needs that you may be able to meet. Will you meet some of these needs this coming week?

There's a lot of evil and temptation in this world, and it's all around each one of us. Will you "keep yourself unspotted" from the evil of this world system? Will you pass the separation test this coming week? Will you pass the OWS religion test this coming week?