

# James III – Study Notes

## Introduction

Temptations have many faces: stealing, lying, gossiping, cheating, envying, the list is endless. Christians can dive headlong into temptation, suffering disaster at work, church and at home. Temptation knows no limits. It is no respecter of person. It has no favourites. It pounces at any moment.

In the last sermon, James dealt with all kinds of trials that test a person's ability to keep the faith, despite extreme pressure to give in. In this sermon we are going to explore the test of moral endurance or perseverance. In six short verses James presents the truth about temptation in a straightforward manner. James probes deep below the surface to reveal the inner working of temptation. He began with certain facts that describes temptation and from there he moves to a focus that determines victory.

James 1:13 *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.* Temptation is always present, no one is exempt from it. Temptation is inevitable. There is no **get out of temptation free card**, no alternative route to avoid traps along the way. No one is immune.

Temptation is **never** prompted by God, *no one should say, "God is tempting me."* God does not whisper evil thoughts into our minds. James used a Greek work *ago* which exonerates God. It means that temptation to sin doesn't have its origin in God. While God does use trials and troubles in life to bring about His work in maturing us, God is never the author of temptation or evil.

To be holy means to be separate from evil, set apart. Holiness has two sides, the inability to be affected by evil and the inability to cause evil. God, who has the absolute standard of holiness has the inability to be affected by evil and the inability to cause evil. James taught God is not able to be tempted, nor does He tempt. He is holy.

James 1:14-15 *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Temptation always follows a consistent pattern. Having dealt with a wrong viewpoint that God is the author of temptation, James reveals its true source. James clearly stated that we are enticed by our own lust. Enticed is a fishing term *to bait*. A lure is dropped into our lives. Our problem is that deep within us a hunger stirs, a desire to take the bait: lust. We find ourselves drawn to the lure, motivated by our own desire *to have*. We are tempted to have by our own lust. God has nothing to do with it. Our lustful desire is the direct cause of our sin.

The ingredients for temptation are the external bait and the inward desire. When these two are combined with a will that yields to temptation then disaster happens.

The word conceived is literally used for the conception of a child. It comes from two Greek words *syn* and *lambado* to take together. James said then that when we take the object of the temptation and the internal lust then temptation is conceived. A cycle is set in motion that, if allowed to run its course, results in a sinful act.

King David illustrates James 1:14-15. David should have been fighting a physical battle but he ended up fighting a spiritual one and lost big time! He noticed this beautiful woman from his palace. The focus of his gaze and his internal desire conceived a powerful temptation he did not resist. David moved from temptation to sin and disaster happened. The cycle: He inquired about her, he sent for her, he slept with her, all the while he knew she was Uriah's wife. The sin didn't end in adultery it ended up with murder.

The most frightening thing is that it happened *to a man after God's own heart* 1Samuel 13:14. If someone like David can fall then lets not think for one moment that it cannot happen to us. That's the bad news about temptation.

The good news is this: temptation **can** be resisted. We can resist the desire, turn from the bait, and break the cycle. If we allow temptation to linger, we eventually sin. When sin continues without repentance, James said it results in death. But what does death mean in this context?

James 1:15 again *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* Christian Jews saw people as either traveling the path of life (walking with Christ by the Spirit) or

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the path of death (walking apart from Christ and by the flesh). The death-like existence is the opposite to the abundant life that the Christian should live. The Christian walking in death cannot live out true life in the Spirit. This is the kind of death that James is talking about here.

We also have to understand that sometimes people do die premature deaths because of sin, such as those affected by disease through sexual sin, alcoholism and taking drugs.

Psalm 119:9-11 says *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. <sup>10</sup> I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. <sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* We need to learn to look straight ahead, not to the left or the right. Sometimes we need to run straight past the bait! Flee from evil.

James 1:16 *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.* James said don't be led astray. Temptation will come in many forms and at different times. Don't let your thoughts stray away from the truth. Temptation begins in our mind, so we must face the facts, apply the truth, and think about the consequences in advance.

James 1:17-18 *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.* James, having vividly described the facts of temptation, turns his readers to the source of victory: **God**. Everything good and perfect comes from the **One** who is good and perfect. And God can bring about victory through His Word of truth. God's desire is to bring goodness and perfection in the believer's life. These are the first fruits.

Our focus should determine our victory.

Author unknown: *Sow a thought, you reap and act; sow an act, you reap the habit; sow a habit, you reap a character; sow a character, you reap the destiny.* Christian friends, let's not be fooled today. Minor transgressions, harmless habits can snowball into a lifestyle that destroys the testimony of a believer.

### How do we avoid the slippery slope of sin?

First, victory comes through dwelling on the good. James notes that good and perfect gifts come from God the Father. He gives these good things for a reason. We can't harbor evil in our mind and reap the good results, nor can we nurture good and wholesome thoughts in your heart and produce evil.

We must dwell on the good to reap the good. Paul wrote these words in Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* Question - What do we spend out time thinking about? Are they seeds that grow into thoughts that are true, honourable, right, pure, lovely, good, excellent, and worthy of praise? Or are they ones that slowly poison our mind and set us up for failure?

Victory comes by living in the truth. James says that we have been brought forth *by the word of truth*. The Word will nurture and protect us, giving us all we need to grow. God's Word will literally protect us. Remember the words in Psalm 119:11 that David penned after his moral failure *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

How are we treasuring God's Word in our heart? Are we immersing ourselves in its purifying, refreshing waters? Do we allow the Word to search us in order to cleanse our heart and mind. Meditating on God's Word helps us to stand strong in the moment of temptation.

Can we pray this same prayer as David in Psalm 139:23-24 *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Whatever our particular temptations maybe, God is ready to provide good and perfect gifts that will strengthen our heart and His life-giving power will give us personal victory. Let's ask Him today for his wisdom and help.