

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 46

Temptation – Its Real Source

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Temptation – What It Is

The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines *temptation* as: The act of tempting or the state of being tempted especially to evil: enticement. The word *tempt* means: to entice to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain.

When a dazzling display of temptation comes our way, we may feel as though we are being singled out to do wrong; that somehow we are being targeted more than someone else. It's as though there is an invisible force that makes certain people sin against their will, forcing them into a downward spiral. Does temptation pick on certain people? The Apostle Paul, in sharing with the Corinthian Saints, shed light on the subject of temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) - No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Temptation doesn't pick on certain people. It comes to everyone. In other words the temptations facing the Corinthians were not something new. They were the same temptations people have always been faced with. If God promised them he would provide a way out of their temptation, his Word could be depended upon. So what was their problem?

Part of the Corinthian's problem, was that some of them were not looking for a way *out* of their temptation by way of *endurance*, but were looking for a way to indulge themselves *in* the temptation. They were looking for excuses.

Excuses! From the beginning of time, the oldest human instinct is to blame someone else for their own sin, even after discovering they are in the wrong. In the Bible, in the book of Genesis, we can read about the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Having read this story time and time again, it has become obvious to me that God has a very good understanding of the human heart. He knew all too well that mankind, from the get-go, would be an expert in the art of evasion.

Notice that when God questioned Adam with his sin, Adam skirted the issue by saying,

Genesis 3:12 (KJV) – “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”

And when God questioned Eve, her answer was,

Genesis 3:13 (KJV) – “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

Human instinct is to blame someone else for the sin of which we are guilty. When we enter into temptation, we blame our parents, our teachers, or even our pastor. We blame our poor upbringing, our despicable circumstances; we even blame the way God made us as an excuse for our sin. We may say, “*I can't help it, God made me this way.*”

James gives a strong warning against this view of temptation, and our subsequent sin. James, who was the half brother of Jesus, is thought to have become a believer after the resurrection of Christ. His belief in Christ's message of atonement (reconciliation), led him to offer a word of warning to those who try to find an easy excuse for their sinning. But, before we discuss his warning, we first need to understand their (the excuse makers) pattern of thinking. Apparently, to free themselves from responsibility, people were saying they sinned because they were tempted by God to sin. As strange as it may seem, some people today still believe that God tempts people by leading them into sin. Why? Because they *believe* God has some lesson he wants to teach them through that sin. They don't put it exactly in those words, but that is the underlying implication. They may say, “*God allowed this adversity and pain to come on me, so I would learn to depend upon Him.*” That's like saying; “*God wants me to wallow in the dirt for a while so I can learn to appreciate Him.*” Nonsense!

The truth? God is not the source of temptation. God would never entice His children to destroy themselves in sin. Rather than sending temptation to discourage and thwart our growth, God gives good things to help us grow spiritually.

James 1:16-18 (NIV) - *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

James tells us not to be deceived into thinking that God sends bad things into our lives some days and good things into our lives on other days. Rather, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights. God doesn't change like shifting shadows. God chooses to give us birth (life), not through hard knocks, but through the *Word of Truth*, that we may become models of righteousness.

Temptation – Its Real Source

James 1:13-15 (KJV) - *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

James warns us not to accuse God of tempting us to sin. There is absolutely nothing in God to which evil can appeal. God tempts no one. In fact, as we study the Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:13**, we find Jesus teaching us to pray that we be not led into temptation. We are to pray instead that we be delivered from evil (the evil one). We must never get the nature of the devil and the nature of Jesus mixed up. The evil one (the devil) is the tempter, who comes to tempt people into sin. The righteous one (Jesus) is the deliverer *from sin!*

If the evil one tempts people to sin and Jesus promises to deliver people from sin when they *call upon Him*, what then is the starting point of temptation? What is its real source? James nails it in the following verse of scripture.

James 1:14 (KJV) - *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

The real source of temptation comes from *within* a person; it is their own evil desire, lust, or inner craving. In **James 1:14-15**, James lays out the steps of temptation: 1) lust or desire is conceived, 2) from this conception sin is born, 3) sin then matures and produces its own offspring, death.

The steps are clear: unchecked lust yields sin, and unconfessed sin brings death.

Temptation – Its Solution

The solution for temptation is to be found in a close relationship with the Heavenly Father, resulting in a positive response to the *Word of Truth*. Because God is unchangeable, we can rely on His life-giving Word. Remember, while unbridled lust brings a gloomy scene of death, the bright scene of *new life* literally emanates from God's Word of Truth.

The devil will try each of us, even as he tried Christ. Scripture reveals that Christ, Himself was tempted in every way, yet lived his life without sinning.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (KJV) - *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

As we call upon Him, God gives us the grace to resist the deadly force of temptation in every situation.

Psalms 91:15 (KJV) - *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.*

Questions for personal or group study:

1. What does the word *temptation* mean?
2. Is there an invisible force that *makes* certain people sin against their will?
I Corinthians 10:13
3. Part of the Corinthians problem in dealing with their sin had to do with their attitude about temptation? What were they really looking for?
4. Does God lead people into temptation?
5. What is the real source of temptation?
James 1:14
6. In your own words, what are the three steps of temptation listed by James?
7. What is the *solution* for temptation?
8. How can we resist the deadly force of temptation?
9. What can we do to avoid those things that tempt us the most? **I Corinthians 15:33-34**