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Who is to Blame? James 1:13-18 Part Two

We have been considering various tests of a living faith. The very first test that we have considered in this epistle is the “Response To Trials Test” in vv. 2-12. And what is the proper response to trials? The answer is perseverance. Not the “let’s just get through this” kind of perseverance but rather a “loving God” kind of perseverance. We saw this in v. 12. And how specifically can this love for God be manifested in the midst of our difficulties? By **“counting it all joy when we encounter various trials.”** Hopefully none of us will be satisfied until this is the experience of our lives, until we have reached this standard of excellence which is so clearly put before us in **verse 2.**

But James is not satisfied with just giving to us the proper response to trials in our lives. He also wants to give to us the improper response to trials. And we find this in vv. 13-18 **“Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God,” ; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (17) Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. (18) In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”** Every difficult thing that comes into our lives will either strengthen us or tempt us. Every difficult thing that comes into our lives will either be used to build us up or to tear us down.

But who is to blame if we respond improperly to the trial? One of the hardest things for a man to say is, “I am guilty. I am suffering the consequences of my own sin.” Remember Adam, when he yielded to that first temptation? He turned to God and said, **“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”** And so it is with us, all too frequently. And by responding in this way we implicate God in our personal failure.

James wants to make sure that God is in no way directly or indirectly accused or even implicated in our failures. In order to accomplish this goal he gives five different proofs.

The first proof is the Nature of Evil. Look at v. 13, **“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He himself does not tempt anyone.”** What do we learn about evil in this verse? **“Evil cannot tempt God.”** Just as darkness cannot effect light, evil cannot effect God. The Bible teaches us that God is perfectly separated from sin. Therefore evil cannot tempt God and neither will God tempt others to evil.

The second proof is the Nature of Man. Look at v. 14, **“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”** The world is full of traps and snares that have been baited by Satan. The nature of man is such that our natural healthy desires can turn into lust when we view the perceived satisfaction of those desires as being more important than obedience.

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Within our humanness this potential for waywardness is a constant threat.

Let us look at **Romans 7** for a moment. Beginning in vv. **15-16**, it says, **“For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. (16) But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.”** In other words, the law is giving the right signals to the new me in Christ but I am not conforming myself to those signals, to those messages. Why is that? Look at vv. **17-18** **“So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. (18) For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”** Whether we like it or not we are still tied to Adam and to the fall in our fleshly body which has not yet been redeemed. And therefore it many times does not work in harmony with who we have become in Christ. So much so that we read in vv. **22-23**, **“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (23) but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.** Our fleshly body, which we have inherited from Adam, is so unruly in respect to the law of God, we are described as being at war with it.

Can this war be won? Certainly in vv. **24-25**, **“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (25) Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** This war is to be fought in the strength of Christ. If we will give ourselves up to Jesus as a living sacrifice making ourselves fully available to Him, this battle can be won on a daily basis. The victory Christ enjoyed over sin while in this world will therefore become our victory.

Let us consider the dynamics of this victory for a moment. Though Christ was human and possessed the very same physical and psychological needs as ourselves, He was also fully God. He therefore never sinned because his natural human desires were never more important than obedience. Satan could bait the hook, seeking to get Christ to meet His needs, His legitimate God given needs, in inappropriate ways. But no matter how Satan baited the hook, Christ never entertained the thought of doing something that was inappropriate, sinful or evil. Even when His physical and psychological needs cried out within Him to be satisfied.

Consider Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane as He was contemplating his approaching death on the cross. We find the account of this incident in **Matt. 26:36-46**. What does it say? **“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” (37) And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. (38) Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” (39) And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”** Would you say that His physical and psychological needs were crying out to be satisfied? YES. There was no way that his personal needs were going to be met through all that he was going to suffer, in fact quite the opposite would be true. So here we see Christ’s physical and psychological needs crying out to be satisfied. But did He ever entertain any thought other than obedience? And the answer of course is, “No, He did not.”

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What was Jesus full prayer? “**My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me but not My will but Thine be done.**” This same unwavering, determined resolution to be set apart from evil can also be ours as we permit Christ to live in and through us.

Why can't we blame God for our improper responses to trial? First of all because of the nature of evil. Evil cannot impact God, therefore God cannot be tempted to evil nor can he tempt us to evil. Secondly the NATURE OF MAN. We are not drawn to entertain evil in our spirit by God, we are not drawn to entertain evil in our spirit by Satan. Rather we are carried away and enticed by our own lust. We will now consider a third proof

The Nature of Lust

The third proof that James offers is the nature of lust. Let us read vv. 15-16 “**Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**” Most people think of sin as a solitary act. But it truly is a result of a process which James illustrates by using the picture of childbirth. And nowhere in this process is God involved.

The process begins with “lust” (EPITHUMIA) or strong desire. What does the verse say? “**Then when lust (EPITHUMIA)**” We look at an expensive new car that we can't afford but it reaches out to us and tugs at our heartstrings. We somehow know that this could very easily compromise our standing as the Lord's faithful stewards but this car has created within us a very strong desire.

This strong desire leads to “conception” “Then when lust has conceived” Conception is the point in the process where the desire has now been given life. It is when we have decided to move forward. In this phase of the process we have to somehow justify to ourselves that what we are about to do is “right.” We might say to ourselves. “I know that we will have a great deal of debt but buying a ten year old car would mean we would have a lot of expenses for car repairs so having the debt certainly is no problem. And I know that this will drain our savings but if we get into trouble we can always borrow from our folks or I can work more overtime. I know that we will not be able to give what we would like to the church but money is not the only way to give. Perhaps we can volunteer in the nursery one Sunday a month.”

Having cleared out every mental obstacle the birth actually takes place. Look at v.15 again, “**Then when lust (strong desire) has conceived (or in other words led to a decision to move forward), it gives birth to sin.** Birth is the point in the process where we actually carry out the sinful act.

Let me ask you a question. At what point in our lives should we deal with sin? If you find yourself continually falling into the same act of sin over and over again what should you do? Should we continue to try to fight sin at the point of the behavior or is there a better strategy? Of course there is a better strategy. We need to start our battle with sin at what point? At the point of the desire!! It is the person who is able to control his natural fleshly desires that will be most effective in dealing with acts of sin because he is able to keep the process that leads to sin from getting started.

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How do we fight the battle at the point of desire? We fight the battle with our faith. **1 John 1:4** tells us, **“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.”** And what must we believe? We must believe **Gal. 6:7** **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”** The person who is best able to control his natural fleshly desires is the person who truly believes that to disobey God brings bad things and to obey God brings good things.

A number of years ago I became convinced that when I ate barbecue sauce with liquid smoke in it's ingredients I ended up with a very bad case of gastrointestinal distress. I believed that eating barbecue sauce with liquid smoke resulted in bad things. This is what I believed. And what was the result of this conviction? Or in other words this faith. Even though I love barbecue sauce there was no way that I would have seriously considered taking even the smallest amount of it in my mouth if I believed that it contained liquid smoke. I really did believe that to eat it would lead me down the path of destruction. If Satan had come to me and said, “You know how much you love that barbecue sauce, go ahead and eat it, this one time won't be any big deal.” I am telling you that whatever desire I might have had to eat the stuff would not even be close to overcoming my fear of the potential consequences.

And this is also true of our battle with sin. James wants us to see the consequences of sin as being so extraordinarily high that our fleshly desires are held in check and are never moved to seriously consider a sinful expression. Let us look at **v. 15** again **“then when lust (the strong desire to do that which is evil) is conceived (or in other words given life) it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth (what?)DEATH.**

The “death” that sin brings forth is mentioned in all its undefined terror. I believe the statement is intended to cover every form of terrible consequence that could come to mankind as a result of our disobedience whether that would be to a Christian or a non Christian. The primary reference seems to be to spiritual death, but physical death is certainly included and, ultimately, eternal death as well. The basic meaning of death (THANATOS) is separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body; spiritual death is the separation of the spirit of man from God because of sin; eternal death is what unredeemed mankind will experience when they are cast into hell following the great White throne judgment that we read about in **Rev. 20:11-15.**

We as men and women of faith must believe this. We must come to the place that we see sin and the consequences of sin as far too high a price to pay for whatever satisfaction we might derive through the disobedience. We must come to the place when we look at the barbecue sauce and the hook that is submerged in that sauce and say, “There is absolutely no way that I am going to do this.”

In fact we are so fearful of sin and it's consequences that we look at every situation that we are confronted with very carefully. Why? Because we do not want to be deceived. Look at **v. 16** **“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”** If we really do understand the horrible consequences of transgression we are not going to be gullible people. When I was going through this period of time with the Barbecue sauce I would not just grab the bottle of barbecue sauce on the restaurant table and just pour it on. I would check the ingredients to see if it had liquid smoke listed as one of the ingredients. When it was not clear I would ask. And when I was in doubt I would not eat it.

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If we really do understand the horrible consequences of transgression, we are not going to be people that are easily deceived. Even if we can't see a hook we will be calling our brother and sisters in Christ alongside of us in various situations and asking them if they see a hook!

CONCLUSION

There is a proper way to respond to trials and there is an improper way to respond to trials. When we respond improperly to trials and allow that trial to be a stepping stone to spiritual defeat rather than spiritual victory let us not in any way, shape or form, accuse or implicate God as being somehow responsible. James in an attempt to prove to us that this would be impossible offers up five different proofs.

The first proof is the nature of evil. **“Evil cannot tempt God.”** Look at v. 13, **“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”** Just as darkness cannot effect light, evil cannot effect God. The Bible teaches us that God is perfectly separated from sin. Therefore evil cannot tempt God and neither will God tempt others to evil.

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But we are involved and if we truly want to be set free from this process that culminates in acts of sin and results in death, then we must understand the importance of attacking the problem at its root. And the root of the problem is “desire.” In order to effectively control natural human desires so that they do not turn into full blown lust, we must be convinced of this, “To disobey God brings extraordinarily bad things and to obey God brings extraordinarily good things.”