

## **Believing the True Character of God**

James 13-18

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Warning

Statement of what God's character is not

Corrective moral truth

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Warning - Let no one say when he is tempted "I am being tempted by God"

Statement of what God's character is not- God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Corrective moral truth - But each one is tempted when he is carried away by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death.

Warning - Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.

Statement of what God's character is - Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

We need to lead our hearts by preaching correct theology to ourselves. Knowing and believing the true character of God will equip us to make God honoring choices in times of trial and temptation.

Here in this section we're shifting from the concept of trials to that of temptation. It's actually the same Greek work used for both. Listen to what John MacArthur says about this.

The Greek word peirasmos has the basic meaning of trying, testing or proving and can have negative connotations, depending on the context. In v. 12 the word is used in the sense of trials, or testings. But in verses 13-14 the idea is clearly that of temptation, of solicitation to evil. Here James is dealing with an entirely different concept. The same word, in noun or verb form, is used for both ideas because the primary difference is not in the pierasmos itself but in a person's response to it. If a believer responds in faithful obedience to God's Word, they successfully endure a trial; But if they succumb to it in the flesh by doubting God and disobeying, they are tempted to sin. Right response leads to spiritual endurance, righteousness, wisdom and other blessings. Wrong response leads to sin and death.

Douglas Moo says "Every trial brings temptation. But while God may test or prove His servants in order to strengthen their faith, He never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith."

First Warning

(V 13) - Let no one say when he is tempted "I am being tempted by God".

Notice James says "**when** we are tempted - not **if**. Everyone faces temptations, right? So this passage is clearly for everyone.

**1 Cor 10:13** reads "no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man." All temptations are "common to man" so nobody can say "No one is going through what I am! No one understands my temptations!" There will always be someone going through, or who's been through what you're dealing with.

But this verse isn't really about whether or not we are tempted, it's about what not to do when we are tempted.

Check out this note from MacArthur about the real substance of this verse - Just as it is common to man to be tempted, it is also common for him to blame someone or something else, not only for his being tempted but also for his giving in to it.

We're more than happy to say "the Devil made me do it", isn't that exactly what Eve said? Who did Adam blame? God! It was the wife YOU gave me! We're tempted to say "Yikes, really Adam?" But that's exactly what James is warning us against here "Don't say "I'm being tempted by God". The Bible wouldn't warn us against it if we didn't need to hear it.

Why can't we say "God is tempting me"?

The rest of verse 13 is the Statement of what God's character is not- God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Listen to this section from R. Kent Hughes

"God is unable to be tempted - He is "untemptable." The sense is that "God is unsusceptible to evil' evil has never had any appeal for Him. It is repugnant and abhorrent to Him." Evil cannot promote even the slightest appealing tug in the heart of God. Because he cannot be tempted to sin, James' conclusions follows: "nor does He tempt anyone" to sin. God has never tempted us to sin because He cannot! It is a moral impossibility. This is extremely important because the human inclination from the Garden of Eden to this day is to consciously, or at least subconsciously, blame God and thus try to palliate (relieve or lessen without curing) our own feelings of guilt."

Now maybe a teeny little flag came up for some of you when you heard "God can't be tempted" Jesus is God so what about Matthew 4:1 - Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. or Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things.

This is not in any way the thrust of this passage so I don't want to go on a long tangent here, but at the same time I don't want to avoid a legitimate Biblical question that is at least, in part, related to the text. My purpose in going here is not to confuse you or to sound profound and deep. My purpose in every word I say is to magnify God and to accurately handle His Word. To proclaim Him and His glory in a way that makes our worship of Him even deeper and richer. So here goes: Could Jesus sin?

Every commentary I read, video I watched and conversation with Ty I had talked about the two natures of Jesus - He was Fully God and fully man. It was said that if we look only at His human nature, that in every way he was a man who could think and make real choices, yes, He could have chosen to sin. The trick is that our view of the nature of man is that of a sin nature. Jesus did not have that. It's better to think of his human nature as like that of Adam and Eve before the fall. They were in every way human, able to think, feel and make real choices but they were free from sin, but nonetheless able to sin. So if we were to talk about Jesus human nature apart from his divine nature, then we could say it was an abstract theoretical

possibility that Jesus could sin. But Jesus' human nature never existed apart from His divine nature, which is holy and cannot desire sin in any way. From his conception, He existed as truly God and truly man as well. So it seems our dilemma is with understanding the mystery of the incarnation. How can Jesus be fully God and fully man at the same time? It is akin to the doctrine of the Trinity in that the Bible clearly states that God is three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we also read that God is One. We cannot fully understand the interplay between Jesus' two natures, but we know that He never switched back and forth, so to speak. He never stopped being God to go through temptations, or He never stopped being human to perform miracles. God, in His wisdom, knows how this all works, but we can't fully grasp it as finite sinful humans. But we do know that Jesus withstood real temptations because scripture tells us. In fact, He withstood them more than any human being ever could. If being tempted were on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being fully resisting temptation, we can all agree that the person who successfully resists the temptation has withstood more than the person who gives in at 3 or 4. Jesus successfully resisted all temptations His entire life. So He has endured more than we could ever conceive of. I would love to give you a super clear cut answer to the question "Could Jesus sin?", but I can't. There is some mystery to our amazing God, things too big for us to fully comprehend. But with full confidence I can tell you that Jesus was fully God, and fully man, and because He lived a sinless life of full obedience to the Father, His sacrifice was fully complete in every way. And because of that we sinners can be reunited with God through a sin forgiving, life changing relationship with Christ.

I am super happy to chat with any or all of you about this more, but I'm going to move back to the James passage now.

The big point we need to understand here in verse 13 is that God is Holy and perfect. We need to have that theology right or we'll go wrong in our beliefs and our actions. We cannot blame Him for our being tempted and certainly not for our sins when we give into that temptation. So who is to blame?

Let's read what I've titled the Corrective Moral Truth in verse 14.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away by his own lusts.

Having affirmed that God does not cause our temptations, James turns to the true source: Temptation comes from within.

Just like Eve, we can be deceived by Satan, but we don't need him to be tempted, we can very easily deceive ourselves and give into temptation on our own. As **Jeremiah 17:9** says Our hearts are wicked and more deceitful than all else, so we'll believe lies and doubts about God and His character. If God really loved me, this wouldn't be happening. If God was my provider I wouldn't be short on money right now. These doubts can come from others, from an outside source, but very they come often from our own minds and hearts.

**Proverbs 19:3** -The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.

As James says - we're carried away by our own lusts.

A mantra of sorts in the biblical counseling world is - we do what we do because we want what we want.

Not only do we have a tendency to shift the blame, but we can also end up bitter by comparing our struggles to others. Listen to this section from the Zondervan commentary: "...what one person finds as intense temptation another person may never experience as even a faint enticement, and vice-versa. Temptations are tailored to the individual, and so we as believers must never belittle a person for struggling with something we think of as inane, easy or silly. Instead, we must realize that each of us has particular battles nuanced specifically for us, and we need to give both grace and exhortation to one another to stand firm in times of testing."

God puts each of us on our specific journeys to be a blessing to those we're with. Church, we need to be there for each other. Life can be hard, and the temptation to withdraw or get depressed, or grow bitter can be strong. But look around. We're not alone! Let's be the body of Christ! Let's build each other up! Help each other through the hard times! Cheer each other on through the good times! This is so important because look what James says next about being carried away by our own lusts.

Let's look at verse 15.

Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death.

Later in **James 4:1-3** we hear that the quarrels and fights we're in are caused by the lusts or evil desires at was within us.

Our thoughts have consequences. We need to be intentional about the places we let our mind go. In fact, we should lead our mind! Not let it go! Our thought life is serious business. James shows that our lustful thoughts lead to sin when we give into them. And sin leads to death. Paul agrees in **Romans 6:23** - the wages of sin is death. So all this talk about our thought life is very serious.

According to **2 Corinthians 10:5** We're supposed to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. That sounds good and churchy but what does that look like? Compare your thoughts to **Philippians 4:8** or the fruit of the Spirit. Am I exercising self control or am I following my heart or my thoughts?

**Proverbs 4:23** reads "guard your heart above all things for it determines the path of your life." We need to be intentional about our input, what are we watching, listening to, experiencing? Who are we hanging out with and what are they preaching to us with their words and actions?

Now vs. 16 is the second warning and, is a hinge verse, or a bridge verse.

James says - Do not be deceived my beloved brothers and sisters. In part it looks back to vs.13-15, saying don't be deceived about the nature of temptation - it doesn't come from God, it comes from inside you. And don't be deceived about the character of God - He's not evil and He doesn't tempt you to do evil. Don't be deceived into believing that. Lastly don't be deceived about the seriousness of sin - it starts with the temptations from within and ends in death. Don't think anything less -sin is serious because it causes a break in our relationship to God. All of that deception should break our hearts. It should break our hearts that we blame God or others, that we think wrongly about God's character, or that we minimize our sin. Why? Here's where verse 16 points forward to verses 17 and 18 our statement of what God's Character is.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Every good thing! Not some, not even most good things, but every good thing comes from God. If there's even an ounce of good in something it's from God! You might say, "but my friend is an unbeliever and took me out for lunch. Didn't they do a good thing apart from God? Nope! That goodness in them is from God. They may not acknowledge that, but that doesn't make it false. Whether or not you acknowledge God does not determine His existence. Like when a kid covers his eyes and says "you can't see me!" He could believe with all his heart that you can't see him because he can't see you. He's invisible. But it's simply not true.

It's only by the grace of God, because of the love of God that any good exists. Every good thing and every perfect gift is from God.

James then calls Him the Father of lights. This is a term from astronomy. He's talking about the stars. This is a statement of God's power. What did God make the stars from? What supplies did He need to get from Menards so he could make the stars? Nothing! He said it and they existed! I've heard God referred to as the star breather. Hebrews 11:3 says it this way "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."

The point James is making is that if God can create ninety quadrillion stars with a word, he can certainly handle taking care of us. God is all-powerful and He is all good.

Then James describes God's character more :He's the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. God's character never changes. God's goodness and power never change.

Hebrews 13:8 says it this way "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

We don't have to worry about which God we're going to encounter day to day. What kind of mood He's going to be in. He is perfectly consistent. We need to follow the pattern of thinking that James lays out for us in this passage. We need to take the warnings - don't say false things about God and don't deceive ourselves, and we counter those by rehearsing truths about God's character namely that God is not a tempter and He's not tempted to do evil and that God is the generous and loving giver of all good things. These Biblical theological truths should shape and reinforce our beliefs which then dictate our thoughts and actions.

Brothers and Sisters we need to get in the Word and find verses about God's character to bolster our faith! Then preach them to ourselves and each other!

**1 Timothy 6:17** Instruct those who are rich in this world not to be conceited but to fix their hope on God who richly supplies us with all good things to enjoy.

**John 10:10** where Jesus says "the thief comes only to kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life and have life and have it abundantly.

That's the God we serve, now let's live like it and talk like it! Build each other up church!

Look at God's goodness at the end of our section. Here's verse 18 - In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

Listen to these words from MacArthur - "In this verse James adds another piece of evidence that God is not responsible, directly or indirectly, for our temptations, much less our sin – namely, proof from the nature of regeneration itself. The new life that the Lord gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ is a godly, holy, Christlike life. It is the life of God in the soul of man."... "Regeneration is the act, and wholly the act, of God," the Father of lights" (v.17), accomplished in the exercise of His will. Though His sovereign will, God washes away sin, grants forgiveness, and plants new life – a completely new nature within each person who trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He even takes residence in that life through His indwelling Spirit (John 14:17, Romans 8:9)."... "Not only theologically but logically, that is the only way life could be given to those who are dead. The dead have no awareness or understanding of sin, no desire to turn from it (John 3:19-20), and no power or resources to change if they wanted to. They do not, of course, even know that they are dead. Regeneration could only happen by the sovereign will and power of God, the Source and Giver of spiritual life."

Listen to **Ephesians 1:3-8** Listen for God's character and the ways it's expressed to us.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He (God) chose us in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the

world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise and glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

That's a sermon right there!! If we want to listen to and live out our James passage - obey the warnings and believe the truths about God's character, then we need to read things like this and preach them to ourselves everyday! If you need to hear about your identity in Christ, and what it means to live like a Christian read and reread Ephesians! Read and memorize the book of James! Get to know Jesus more and more by pouring over the gospels. The better we know Jesus, the more we learn from Him and the more we submit to Him the more like Him we can become!

Let's land this plane! James is a practical book full of practical steps for godly living so I'm going to give you 4 things to practice based on this passage.

**1. Consider and when applicable obey biblical warnings about the heart.**

- don't say you're tempted by God when the desires are from inside you
- don't deceive yourself about God's character or about your own responsibility

**2. Fight Against and/or Flee Temptation**

- HALT - know your weak spots
- Hungry
- Angry
- Lonely
- Tired
- What if your thoughts were on a big-screen tv over your head?

**3. Be accountable for your thoughts and actions.**

- don't play the blame game.
- admit your sin, repent, and make it right to the full extent possible

**1 John 1:9** if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness

**4. Preach to yourself correct theology straight from the Bible.**

- memorize verses about God's character
- the more you know and love about God the better you'll be at living like Him