

TRIPPING THE TEMPTER

James 1:13-18 & 4:7

Today, we continue our study of the book of James. Last week we examined **James 1:1-4 and verse 12**, and discovered some ways we can **"TACKLE TROUBLES TRIUMPHANTLY."**

Today, we're going to look at another word beginning with the letter "T"--**Temptation.**

Once again, James does not say, **"If tempted,"** but in verse 13, **"When tempted,** no man should say, 'God is tempting me.'" Yes, not one of us escapes temptation, and behind this ugly "t" word lies the source of many of our personal problems and corporate ills. We sometimes jokingly say that, "we can resist anything but temptation," but in reality temptation is no joke.

Mark Anthony was considered one of the great orators of Roman culture. He was an intelligent person, a brave soldier, a powerful leader. **Outwardly,** his credentials would have put him in the Fortune 500, the Speaking Circuit, Who's Who in America--but **inwardly,** he was a moral midget. One of his associates said to him, **"Thou art able to conquer the world--but unable to resist a single temptation."** | *Temptations during, battling at sailing*

We know from our Biblical heritage that this is our story as well. We are all tripped up by the tempter. Ever since that war in Heaven between God and Satan, and Satan's removal from paradise and his residence on Earth, temptation has been present in the lives of human beings. Don't waste time and effort debating it--temptation is real.

There once was a contractor who had done some much needed repair work for a church in Kentucky but had not been paid for his services. He had written to the pastor and the board of trustees but there was no response.

Finally, in desperation, he decided to take matters into his own hands. During a worship

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service, he dressed up in a devil's costume (red pants, tail, horns, pitchfork and all). As the preacher was reaching the conclusion of his forceful message on evil and temptation, the contractor appeared at the church and took his place on the altar platform.

This makeshift devil looked so convincing, the congregation reacted immediately. Everyone headed for the exit doors, with the preacher leading the way. However, one elderly and rather plump woman tripped near the front of the church in her rush to leave. Try as she might, she couldn't get herself back on her feet. Now the contractor, who was actually a nice man, rushed over to help her up, but the woman cried out, **"Don't you touch me; you stay away from me. I have been a member of this church for 61 years. I have sung in the choir and taught Sunday School for many years. I have baked thousands of pies and sliced hundreds of hams for the annual church social."** Catching her breath, she finally blurted out in terror, **"But I have been on your side all along." ***

James wrote this instruction manual to keep us from being tripped up by the devil. In fact, he contends that through the Power of the Resurrection at work in our lives, we are capable of defeating evil.

Before I go much further, I want to make it perfectly clear that God never tempts us. God allows the condition or environment in which temptation or testings take place, but God never tempts His people with sin. Sin is totally contrary to the will of God.

Turn now in the Book of James, Chapter One, Verses 13 & 14. We are taught, **"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil and He himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his OWN desires."** Even when we pray in our Lord's prayer that phrase, "Lead us not into temptation--but

deliver us from evil"--what it really means is "Let us not fall--when we are tempted by the evil one."

Now, let's see how these verses in James help us to trip the tempter and be faithful followers of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

First, we must have a very clear understanding of the power of temptation.

The Bible says that there is a power at work in the world whose work and mission is not of God's design or desire. You may call it the Devil, Satan, the Serpent or simply evil, but whatever you call it, it's real. Even Jesus had to wrestle this power hostile to God's working on the human scene.

Temptation is powerful, and we all face it, but how we deal with it distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian. Our faith boldly declares, **unless you have a living relationship with Jesus Christ, you will be a victim, not a victor.** Unfortunately, we sometimes forget to rely on our relationship with Christ in dealing with temptation. We make choices which lead to sin, and we end up victimizing ourselves by blaming others. We say:

1. **It's God's fault.**
2. **It's the devil's fault.**
3. **It was Eve and that stupid apple.**
4. **It's my parent's fault.**
5. **I grew up in the wrong neighborhood.**

My friend, there is no neighborhood without sin. We all live east of Eden. And until we take responsibility for the sins we commit and rely on God to help us face temptation, we will never taste the victory promised to us.

Temptation itself is not sinful. Temptation is an appeal to sin. There first must be an enticement, an appeal, a hook that gets its ugly claws into us. Dr. Henry Therssin in his book,

Systematic Theology, writes, "Satan's appeal is in making man desire--what God has forbidden--to know what God had not revealed--and to be what God had not intended." Temptation forces us to focus in on something else besides God's guidelines and God's boundaries. In verse 15 James writes, "After desire is conceived--it gives birth to sin--and sin--when it is full blown--gives birth to death."

So James joins his voice with the other witnesses in the Bible warning us about the tempting power of our adversary who is to be resisted at all times. In 4:7 he says, "Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the evil one and he will flee from you."

So, first of all, we must acknowledge that temptation is real and powerful; it begins in us, and no one else can be blamed or held **accountable**.

Second, we must be obedient to the insight in the word of God.

In verse 16, James writes, "**Don't be deceived my dear brothers.**"

Some of you remember Pan Am Flight 103 that was blown apart over Scotland. It is hard to forget the shock and horror of such a hideous act of terrorism. *Newsweek* magazine had photographs of the blue and white fuselage lying on the ground of this peaceful, picturesque Scottish village. This 747 jet, when it was over 30,000 feet in the sky with more than 250 men and women on board, exploded, and the seemingly indestructible, magnificent flying machine came tumbling to the ground.

An immediate investigation was launched to begin to search for those who planted the bomb, and as more information became known, evidence emerged that there was some warning NOT to be on this flight. It was reported on December 5th that someone called one of the Embassies of our country to warn that a bomb would be placed on the plane in Frankfurt, Germany. The warning was virtually ignored. However, some persons in Moscow heeded the threat and transferred to another plane. By changing planes they spared their lives.

The Bible clearly teaches us that there are some thoughts and ideas which should never find a place in our hearts and minds. If they do, we should stop them right in their travels--change our planes and plans and go in a different direction. This is why the Psalmist encourages us to walk in the paths of righteousness--so we are not deceived and eventually destroyed.

The Bible reveals examples of many persons who had to deal with temptation. Some handled it well, and some were miserable failures. Let's look at two persons to whom the temptation of sexual immorality came. One fell to its power--the other did not. In Genesis 39, we read the story of Joseph and Potipher's wife. She attempted to seduce him, but he resisted her advances at great personal risk, and God honored his resistance. Then in I and II Samuel, we read the all too familiar story of David and Bathsheba. David's great failure lay in the fact he gave attention to a force and desire that deserved no attention. He allowed himself to give into temptation, taking the easy path, instead of relying on God to resist.

* Eighteen-year-old Jonathan Edwards wrote in his journal, "Resolved that all men should live to the Glory of God. Resolved secondly that, whether or not anyone else does I will." That is the secret. That is the key. Remember that Jesus was able to withstand all the offers of Satan in the desert because He was **obedient to the insights given in the word of God**. This is what James wants the Christian community to do in every age.

I cannot get out of my mind the witness that Mickey Mantle gave about his unfortunate battle with alcoholism and the destruction it brought to his body and to his life. He allowed temptation to rule him. Later, when he realized he had been deceived, he told everyone not to follow his example. James calls us to follow the example in God's word--just do it! Listen to God's voice only and temptation will no longer rule you!

Third, we cannot resist the seductive powers of temptation if we are looking and laboring in all the wrong places.

In verse 17, James reassures us that "every good and perfect gift is from Above" (not below)--coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does NOT change like shifting shadows.

It continues to astonish me that generation after generation chooses to believe the tempter's lies rather than the Father's Truth.

A great story is told about a man who goes ice fishing. He cuts a hole in the ice, positions his chair, and puts his line and hook down the hole. Suddenly he hears this booming voice behind him saying, "**there are no fish there.**" He gets up and looks around. Seeing no person attached to the voice, he moves his chair, cuts a new hole, and puts his hook down through again. After a bit the same voice says, "**there are no fish here.**" He gets up, annoyed, and says, "say, who in the dickens are you, anyway?" And the voice replies, "**I am the manager of this ice rink.**" Well if you try to catch fish through a hole in an ice rink, you won't catch any fish.

Over and over in the word of God, our loving Father tries to tell us that we will never build a life that will be meaningful and abundant if we keep on our present course. However, we continue to look for love in all the wrong places and with all the wrong people. We think that God is trying to prevent us from having fun and joy. We see God's law and God's book as a negative. We forget that God is trying to teach us to say a decisive "NO" to one way of life in order to declare a resounding "YES" to a greater way of life.

William Shakespeare was so right when he wrote:

"Tis one thing to be tempted--another thing to fall!"

And Oscar Wilde wrote, "**There are two tragedies in life, not getting what you want--and**