

Temptation vs. Testing James 1:12-18

Introduction

How many times have you heard someone say something to the effect of "the Devil made me do it"? This statement is heard very often when someone does something that even society in general agrees is wrong, whether the person is a Christian or not. You might hear from the child who takes a cookie without asking or who was told not to do so that they don't know why they did it; perhaps the cookie mysteriously floated across the room into their mouth and they had no choice but to chew it and swallow. You may hear a politician caught cheating on their taxes, cheating on their spouse, stealing from their campaign funds, or anything else they may do making excuses for themselves or denying the allegations altogether, but not owning up to the transgression. What about the teenager coming home from a party drunk blaming their friends for pressuring them so much to drink that they just had to give in? Did those friends hold them down on the floor, force their mouth open, and pour the alcohol down their throat? Then there are the less obvious issues such as the woman in the office who is eating lunch with coworkers that joins in the latest gossip about so-and-so doing such-and-such. When the person they were gossiping about catches wind of the conversation, learns what she was saying, and confronts her about it, she says that all the others were talking about it and, even though she was uncomfortable talking about it, she didn't want to be left out or make the others feel uncomfortable - she didn't mean any harm and she knew it wasn't true. Or, how about the prominent preacher caught in the midst of adultery. While some have owned up to their sin, others have tried to twist God's Word around so that they come out smelling like a rose in the situation or say that they woman came onto them and "made them do it". I could go on. Why do all these things happen? What causes people to fall into sin? Is Satan really able to tempt all these people and CAUSE them to sin? Does he sit on the shoulder of the man in front of his computer, type in the name of a website, hold his eyes open and make him look at pornography? Is he making the child taking a test at school turn his head and look at the answers on his neighbor's test? Does he really make the pregnant, unmarried girl walk into the abortion clinic? I believe Satan gets a whole lot more credit for the sins that people commit here on Earth than he deserves or is even capable of. We have to remember that he is a created being as we are and he is not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent as God is. That's not to say that he and his army of fallen angels are not active, but as we'll see in our text this morning, they are not able to make human beings do something that they really do not want to do. If someone would read James 1:12-18, we'll dive into God's Word to see what He has to say about temptation.

(pray)

- I. God DOES NOT Tempt Us To Sin (v.13)
 - a. Testing/trials differ from temptation, although the terms are at times used interchangeably.
 - i. Testing is used by God to build us up (v. 12) - as we looked at last week, testing develops perseverance, spiritual maturity, and hope. God's purpose through testing is NEVER to cause us to sin. We may have lessons that need to be learned and we may experience the same test multiple times until the desired result is achieved, and we may sin in the process of going through the test, but that is NOT God's desired result. He is looking to make us into what He wants us to be through the testing process, similar to the testing process in school - the test is intended to see what you have learned, not to cause you to fail. If you fail, it is because you haven't learned the lesson, not because the teacher intended for you to fail.
 - ii. Temptation, on the other hand, attempts to break us down (v. 14-15). Temptation seeks to cause us to sin which, in turn, disrupts our relationship with God. Sin is a spiritual cancer that may start small, but has the capability of overtaking our entire life and eventually destroying us completely if it goes untreated. As we know, Christ is the cure for our spiritual cancer.
 - b. Allow me to give a couple examples of testing and temptation from the Bible to help explain the difference further.
 - i. Job - you will recall that Job was a man of God that even God Himself highly recommended as one who would never deny Him or lose his faith. Notice that Satan had to go to God to request

PERMISSION to test him. Even though God did not initiate the test, He allowed Satan to test Job to prove that Job would persevere, develop spiritual maturity, and then reinforce the hope of reward in eternal life. While there are consequences for sin and sin may lead to situations that "feel" like tests, such was not the case for Job. Nothing he had done caused this test. It was brought on to test his perseverance and eventually, to make him a better follower of God.

- ii. Paul - Paul was placed in prison several times, he was stoned, he was mocked, and eventually, he lost his life because of his faith in Christ and spreading the gospel. Paul seems to recognize that God is not doing all of this to him, but allowing it to happen to strengthen Paul's faith. Paul understood what his relationship with Christ was about and that he should expect to suffer for the sake of the gospel. What better testimony to those who sought to harm him than to have joy and peace in the midst of trial?
- c. On the flip side, there are also examples of those who were tempted to sin and succumbed to the temptation.
 - i. David (II Sam. 11:1-4) - A couple of things come to mind regarding David's temptation. First, he was not where he should have been. His army was out fighting a battle and traditionally, the king would be out with the men, if not fighting alongside, at least cheering them on and giving them direction. Second, when David saw Bathsheba, he lingered too long. Instead of turning away or retreating back into the palace, he looked in and allowed the temptation to take hold and grow. At no point did he decide that what he was thinking was wrong and try to fight it off. This was of his own doing - God did not cause it.
 - ii. Eve (Gen. 3:1-6) - The Bible tells us that Satan, in the form of the serpent, came to Eve and planted the seed of doubt about what God had commanded. Again, instead of turning away, Eve lingered by the tree and continued to listen to the voice of the serpent. Again, it was not God who was doing the tempting, and as we'll see in a moment, it wasn't really Satan tempting Eve to sin. Eve did exactly what she wanted to do, which leads to the next point of our text.

II. Temptation comes from within our own flesh (v. 14).

- a. Satan may plant a seed of doubt, entice us, attempt to get us to question God's Word, but the actual temptation comes from our own fleshly desires. God gave us certain desires that are good when used in the context of His original intent (sex in marriage, hunger, thirst, self-preservation), but in the context of sin, these desires become twisted and perverted.
 - i. While Eve was directly enticed by Satan, it was her own fleshly desire that led her to take the fruit and eat of it. Satan didn't grab her hand, open her mouth, and make her eat it. She was attracted to the fruit as food with her hunger and with the selfish desire of having a position equal with God.
 - ii. Adam was indirectly enticed by Satan, as the Bible states that Adam was there with Eve during this conversation, but it was his fleshly desire within him that tempted him to take the fruit from Eve and eat. Now whether it was his desire for Eve and knowing that he would lose her or if he was tempted by the same desires as Eve is not clear. But the bottom line is that his flesh tempted him to sin and he gave in.
- b. And when fleshly desire is given into, it leads to sin.
 - i. Back to David, he could have said no to his desire to have Bathsheba, but because he didn't check it when the desire first rose in him, it grew until it eventually overtook him and he sinned. Of course, this first sin led to several others in his attempt to cover the first one. And that is how it goes, even in our own lives. Think back over your own life and remember that little thing you did that wasn't right, then when confronted, you lied about it so that you wouldn't get caught. And, very often, when someone gets away with one sin, it will lead to others because the person will get the idea that they are immune from the consequences of their sin.
 - ii. With Eve, instead of saying what God actually commanded them regarding the tree and leaving it at that, she listened to her fleshly desires. She hung around, allowed the desire to grow, and it eventually overtook her to the point that she sinned. And then, so as not to be singled out, although I really don't know her motives, she gave the fruit to Adam leading to his sin and the curse upon creation that we are now living in. How often do people do that? It is said that "misery loves company". People will often try to entice others to join them in their sin to keep from being singled out. The world calls this "peer pressure", and it is a powerful tool that Satan uses to play upon the desires of the flesh.
- c. And then sin leads to death. Upon Adam's sin, death came upon mankind, the whole creation really. 2 types

of death occurred when Adam sinned.

- i. There was a spiritual death. Man was immediately separated from God, no longer in perfect communion with the Creator. The walks in the garden in early evening were over. The open line of communication with the Lord was severed. Man was suddenly on his own.
- ii. And not only did a spiritual death occur, but flesh was no longer eternal. Man was sentenced to live a set life on this earth and die physically, eventually disintegrating back into the dust from which he came. I am amazed when people, especially Christians, talk of death as being a natural thing. If death is so natural, why is everyone so afraid to die? I argue that death is an unnatural result of God's curse on creation because of the sin of Adam. Now, having said that, we can be at peace with death through the blood of Christ because then we know that physical death is not the end. We can be made alive spiritually and our relationship with God restored, and our hope is that in eternity, the perfect communion that God created and intended with Adam will be restored. In the meantime, we must deal with sin and the temptation to sin.

III. Temptation can be overcome (v. 16-18). Through the blood of Christ, for those of us who have trusted in Him, our relationship with God is restored and we can overcome our fleshly desires.

- a. First, you must learn to recognize temptation (v. 16). It is a deception that tells you that what you desire is better than what God is offering. Isn't that often the cause of our problems? We are so arrogant that we think we know better what is good for us than God does. But, we must develop perseverance through temptation, because temptation will come. A couple of key things that have helped me come to mind.
 - i. You must know the circumstances that tempt you.
 1. Certain places can be a stumbling block, such as a bar for someone with a drinking problem, stores or malls for a shop-a-holic, old hang-outs for those that come from a life of crime or drug abuse, etc. Once you learn these places that pique your fleshly desires, you will be able to avoid them, or, if you are inadvertently led into one, you will know to leave immediately. I love the story of Joseph in Egypt in the house alone with Potiphar's wife. Joseph didn't linger one instant. He recognized that the whole situation was trouble and he turned tail and ran to keep himself from sinning against her, Potiphar, and most importantly, against God. How much trouble could we avoid if only we would learn to flee in the face of temptation?
 2. Know which people that are a source of temptation you. I already mentioned peer pressure. Think of people that you know that made a profession of faith, but refused to change their circle of friends. Maybe their thinking is that they can be a godly influence on these friends, but they have not yet learned that the spiritual life is a growth process, and eventually, in their immaturity in Christ, they fall back into their old sinful habits. (chair) How about the teenager who is dating an unbeliever that is pressuring them to have premarital sex. Advised by everyone who is older, more spiritually mature, and wiser to stop the dating relationship, the youngster defiantly continues dating believing they can be a testimony and withstand the pressure to sin. I'm not saying necessarily that all contact should be avoided, or maybe it should, that is between you and God. I am suggesting that you should know what people have a negative influence on you and be on your guard and be in prayerful communication with God when they are around.
 3. You also must know what situations are a source of temptation for you. The sales representative that travels a lot has to know that being in a hotel room, alone, night after night, and bored is a great source of temptation. They must know what they can do to battle the temptation - reading the Bible, praying, leaving the TV off, leaving the computer off, listening to Christian music, whatever.
 - ii. It is also helpful to have someone you can call. I would also suggest someone other than your spouse. Andrea knows me very well, but because she is a woman, she cannot possibly understand all of the temptations that a man's flesh will bring on to him as I cannot understand all of the temptations that a woman's flesh will bring on her. Find someone you can build a relationship with, of the same gender, that you can trust to be discreet and pray with and for you when you call. Many times, just talking through the temptation will alleviate the desire to sin.
- b. Learn to look for the way out (I Cor. 10:13). This verse points out 3 very important things.
 - i. Everyone is tempted. Because we live in a fallen world in a body of flesh with desires that have been tainted by sin, we are not exempt from temptation, even though we have some into a relationship

with Christ. Even Christ himself was tempted in his perfect condition, so how can we expect to go through this life without it.

- ii. The temptation is never too strong that we can't handle it. Remember that I said that David and Eve lingered too long toying with the temptation? The longer we wait to remove ourselves from the temptation, the stronger it gets and the weaker we get. In response to His temptation, Christ did not give the temptation a chance to grow. He immediately responded with scripture and rebuked the tempter.
 - iii. God is faithful and ALWAYS provides a way out. How many of us check for the emergency exits when we enter a building? I don't, usually. That's what a lot of do when temptation strikes - we neglect to look for the emergency exit that God has faithfully provided. Then, when we realize that we are beginning to be overwhelmed with desire, it is too late for us to get to that exit and we are consumed by the sin. Learn to always be checking for the emergency exits.
- c. Finally, we must lean on God for strength (v. 17-18). Because these temptations come from our fleshly desires, we do not have the power to overcome these temptations within ourselves. We must rely on God for the power to overcome them. This is accomplished in 2 ways.
- i. He has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell us, comfort us, strengthen us, and teach us. As Christians, it is only through His power that we can do what is right. Our cursed inclination is to live in defiance of God's law because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. But with the life of God's Spirit in us, we are made alive and sin can no longer enslave us and death no longer has power over us, but we must call upon Him, lean on Him, and trust Him to lead us through the temptations.
 - ii. He has given us His Word to study and get to know Him. The more we know Him, the more we focus on Him, the less likely we are to succumb to sin. Memorize scripture. What did Jesus use when He was tempted? Unlike Eve, Jesus quoted the scriptures accurately so that Satan did not have a response - He knew that was exactly what God had said and there was no point in trying to convince Jesus otherwise. There was no room for the seed of doubt to even be planted.

Conclusion

Temptation will happen, and in and of itself, is not sin because even Jesus was tempted. It only becomes sin when we give into the fleshly desires causing the temptation. I challenge you to take a look at your life and be honest with yourself. What entices you to sin? Can you recognize places, people, or situations that stir up those desires that tempt you to sin? Are you grounded in God's Word enough to rebuke your desires with scripture? Are you tuned into the Holy Spirit so that you can find the emergency exit when you are tempted to sin?

(pray)