

## Session 1

April 16, 2023

### THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

#### James 1:13-18

Those of my generation will recall a groundbreaking comedian named Flip Wilson. In one of his shticks, he wore a wig and a dress that transformed him into sassy-mouthed Geraldine. But he is probably best known for the simple line, “The devil made me do it.” While there may be some truth to that idea, we dare not blame all the evil we conjure up on the devil alone. Our own sin nature is quite capable of destroying us with sin. Jeremiah the prophet put it bluntly: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” James, the brother of Jesus, is quick to point out who we can point fingers at—and who we can’t—when it comes to temptation.

**The source of temptation (vv. 13-15).** Because of the old English words that show up in our Bibles, there may be some confusion over the meanings of “tempting” versus “testing.” While the words are certainly related, *tempting* is enticement to do something wrong. Its goal is *failure*. The word *testing*, on the other hand, means to *prove* or *evaluate*. The connotation is positive; the goal is not failure, but *success*. Adrian Rogers used to say, “The devil *tempts* us that we might stumble, but God *tests* us that we might stand.” James makes that point in verse 13. When *trials* (or *difficulties*) come our way (see 1:2-3), we must look at their *purpose*. If the provocation is to sin, we must not see God as their source, for God “doesn’t tempt anyone” (v. 13). The reason? He is above sin! He isn’t tempted by evil, nor does He use evil to somehow ensnare us. In fact, God’s desire is that we *not* sin! (see Rom. 6:12-14 et al.). James’ focus here is not the devil’s temptations (that’s another lesson!); rather the ever-present corruption of the *sin nature*. “But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires” (v. 14). So where do these evil desires come from? That’s the question I posed to a preacher friend who argued against an inherited sin nature. He agreed that all will sin (eventually), but believed people are born in a neutral state. “So why do we sin?” I asked. He replied that we have a “tendency” toward sin. I agreed. That tendency toward sin is called a sin nature! And we inherited it from Adam (see Rom. 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 15:20ff). While verse 14 describes the *source* of sin, verse 15 describes the *sequence* of sin: a sinful desire gives in to sinful action; and sinful action continues to “grow,” ultimately leading to death (see Rom. 6:23). **For reflection:** *Read Paul’s struggle in Rom 7:14-21. The language indicates Paul is talking about himself and speaking post-salvation. How does this unique passage inform our discussion?*

**The solution for temptation (vv. 16-18).** Now, James returns to the character of God. He has already pointed out what God *is not*. Now he turns his attention to what *God is*. And he prefaces it with a strongly worded warning. The “don’t be deceived” of verse 16 refers to any idea that God is a tempter, or somehow the author of sin. On the contrary, God epitomizes the direct opposite. The old English translation says “Every good gift and every perfect gift...” In reality, James uses two words for “gift.” The first emphasizes the *act of giving* and the second the *gift itself*. The idea, then, is “every act of generously giving and every perfect gift itself” comes from God above. The remaining verses are rich with descriptions of God’s character. He is *immutable*, or *unchanging* (v. 17). He changes neither in His essence, nor His will. Any idea that God somehow changes His mind at the whim of man is misguided, for He operates “by His own choice” (v. 18). By His own choice, He offered *salvation* (v. 18). By His own choice, He

presented His salvation by the “message of truth,” the *gospel*. By His own choice, He made believers *acceptable* before Him. That’s the idea behind making us a *type* of His “first fruits” (see Lev. 23:9-11). For reflection: *I titled this section “The solution for temptation.” How do you think these descriptions of the character of God reveal the solution to temptation?*