

## Part 4—The stages in temptation

### Excursus: James 1:13-18

- 1) Negatively—No one should blame God when they are tempted [*peirazo*]—1:13-15 (cf. Genesis 3:12)
  - a) Because of God’s character—God is incapable of being tempted [*peirazo*] by evil
  - b) Because of God’s actions—He Himself tempts [*peirazo*] no one (cf. Genesis 22:1; Judges 2:22; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 32:31)
    - i) Each of us is to blame for yielding to temptation [*peirazo*]—1:14 (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:11)
      - (1) Our own desires [*epithumia*] draw us away [*exelko*] from a place of safety
      - (2) Our own desires [*epithumia*] entice us [*deleazo*] with attractive looking bait
    - ii) We must be aware of the generations spanning from desire to death—1:15
      - (1) Desire [*epithumia*] {the grandmother}, after becoming pregnant, gives birth to sin [*amartia*] {the mother}
      - (2) Sin [*amartia*] {the daughter}, having completed its course, gives birth to death [*thanatos*] {the granddaughter}
      - (3) Cf. the parallel generations in 1:12: testing—persevering—life
- 2) Positively—Beware of spiritual deception—1:16-18 (God is the source of genuine goodness, not temptation)
  - a) Remember Who is genuinely good—1:17 (astronomical illustration)
    - i) Good things come from above
    - ii) Good things come from the Father of lights (not darkness)
      - (1) With whom there is no variation
      - (2) Or changing shadow
  - b) Remember that God the Father gave us eternal life of His own free purpose—1:18
    - i) Through the word characterized by truth
    - ii) That we might be the firstfruits of His creation

### **Stage 1—Inclination (we are curious, we may struggle feebly)** (James 1:13)

- 1) We encounter the object of temptation and are attracted to it.
- 2) Neither the object nor the attraction necessarily involves sin in itself.
- 3) However, the desire cannot rightly be fulfilled under the circumstances.
- 4) Cf. Jesus’ temptation to food (Matthew 4:1-4; Luke 4:1-4)
- 5) When temptation is dealt with at this stage, no sin is committed. At this stage there is no guilt before God.

### **Stage 2—Consideration (we embrace)** (James 1:14)

- 1) The temptation at the stage of inclination is not resisted or dismissed.
- 2) We become preoccupied and fascinated (and at times obsessed) with the object of temptation.
- 3) We do not flee from the temptation (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:11; 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:22)
- 4) This is the stage at which temptation begins to involve some element of sin, because our minds do not have to dwell on the object of temptation.
- 5) We can respond rightly at this stage by focusing our thoughts on specific objects of righteousness. (cf. Philippians 4:6-9)

**Stage 3—Permission (we rationalize)** (James 1:15)

- 1) At some point we decide the object of temptation is worth embracing. The overt act has not yet occurred—indeed, it may never occur, for we may never encounter an occasion to follow through on the decision.
- 2) We give permission to the temptation and inwardly agree to commit the deed whenever it becomes possible.
- 3) We think, *“I’m not hurting anyone else.” “It’s not that big of a deal; God understands.” “This sin is better than ...” “I’ll stop next time; this will be the last time.” “This is an exception because these are exceptional circumstances.” “I want/deserve some comfort, peace, and/or pleasure.” “I have no other choice.” “It is a need or only right that I ...” “I have already failed in my mind, so I may as well do ...”*
- 4) Sometimes we will agree to some less obvious act as a substitute for the full and obvious sin. Cf. Jesus’ teaching on character assassination for murder, lust for adultery, verbal loopholes for perjury, etc. (Matthew 5:21-48) This gives us some false comfort and a measure of blindness about the sin.
- 5) Once the decision is made, we are implicated in the sin. We have actual guilt before God, even though we may not feel guilty at this moment.

**Stage 4—Participation (we surrender)** (James 1:15)

- 1) We willfully take part in the commission of the sin or the omission of the duty.
- 2) We have stopped struggling with the temptation and indulge in it. We think, *“I must have ...”, “I need ...”, “I have to ...”, etc.*
- 3) Our will is weakened and thus it becomes easier to participate in the sin the next time.
- 4) We may experience a sense of sorrow, shame, or emotional guilt. (*“I can’t believe I did that again!”*) This usually follows our momentary sense of gratification/pleasure/relief when we surrendered to the temptation.
- 5) Genuine confession (acknowledgement) of our sin is necessary at this point (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9). However, too often we delay that confession, further complicated by our unbiblical view of God (*“I’ve sinned too many times for Him to forgive me. I’ve done it again.”*)
- 6) Sometimes a type of confession comes long after our sin, after we think we have punished ourselves enough, or have experienced greater pain from the consequences of our sin. We think we are now ready to try talking to God.

**Stage 5—Habituation (we grow accustomed)** (James 1:15)

- 1) Each time we yield it weakens our will, which leads to further indulgence.
- 2) We do not take the drastic measures necessary to avoid future temptation.
- 3) We grow accustomed to the sin; it begins to seem normal and part of our spiritual environment.
- 4) We begin to view our life and interpret reality through this lens of hopelessness.
- 5) We are in danger of becoming a slave to the sin. (cf. Psalm 19:13; 119:133; Romans 6:12-14)
- 6) We continue to keep our sin private. We will bear this burden alone. No one else will have to know. After all, everyone else in the congregation seems to be doing well. We are too embarrassed to admit our struggle with sin.

**Stage 6—Identification (we are in slavery)**

- 1) Sin becomes a regular part of life. We begin to understand our selfhood in terms of our relationship to the object of temptation. We can no longer imagine living without the sin.

- 2) Sin does not merely characterize our outer conduct, but also our inner frame of reference.
- 3) Trying to rid one's self of the sin feels very much like trying to kill one's self. Cf. Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5

**Possible throughout stages 2-6—Legitimation (we justify)**

- 1) We no longer see the sin as sin.
- 2) We attempt to redefine the sin so that it is no longer sinful (at least in our own thinking)

**Other truths to remember**

- 1) Every temptation must be dealt with at the earliest possible stage.
- 2) At no level is the sinning Christian beyond the ability of God's grace to deliver.
- 3) Do not presume upon deliverance at some later stage. This puts God to the test in the way that Jesus refused to do. (cf. Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-13)
- 4) Every Christian must seek God's grace early and employ those means that God has ordained for securing sanctification in the face of temptation. We must avail ourselves of the resources that God has given to us to fight the battle against temptation.

[Thanks to Dr. Kevin Bauder for the organizing the basic thoughts on the stages of temptations.]