

James Bible Study

Session 2 - James 1:13-18

Study Notes

1:13 - After an extended discussion that challenges followers of Jesus to persevere when facing various external trials (1:2-12), James now calls all Christians to persevere when dealing with inner trials that tempt one to engage in sin (1:13). Temptations are inner trials that test one's moral strength and courage to resist sinful action. Yet while external tests may or may not come from God in order to build character (Gen 22:1; Deut 8:2; Judg 2:22; Mt 4:1), James makes it clear that no one can point to God as the source of internal temptation. God (or life itself) can test human beings, but it is outside of His character to tempt human beings. Inciting one to do evil and testing one's character are two very different things. Therefore, no one can avoid responsibility for their sin by pointing to God because God is perfectly holy and completely set apart from all that is evil.

1:14 - Making it clear that temptation does not come from God (1:13), James now turns to uncover the source of all sinful action—that is, from within sinful human beings (1:14). Sin takes place when a human being is enticed to perform an action that misses the mark of God's moral perfection. The battleground for such temptation is within. The verb for enticed here (Gk = *deleazomenos*) literally means to bait or to catch a fish with bait. The imagery is of a fish being drawn out of its hiding spot by bait. The implication is that human beings not only set out their own bait but are also enticed by it.

1:15-16 – Having clearly stated that sin comes from within sinful human beings (1:14), James now uses some of the biological stages within the human lifecycle (conception, birth, death) to make a point about the lifecycle of sin (desire, sin, death). When wrongful desire is conceived and cultivated by a human being it will eventually give birth or produce sinful action. When this sinful action has been continually acted upon without confession or repentance it will lead to spiritual death. This exact progression can be seen in the Genesis narrative with Adam and Eve (Gen 3) as well as in the narrative of David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-17).⁴ James then adds a plea to his fellow followers of Jesus not to be deceived by sin (1:16). Note here that the issue is one's response to temptation. Being tempted is not necessarily sinful (Mt 4:1-11). Rather, it is one's response to temptation that can be sinful. Will one cultivate a sinful desire and let that desire take its sinful course or will one avoid being deceived by resisting temptation? Just as an attitude of joy toward an external trial can set one on course to complete maturity (1:2-4), so a wrong response toward internal temptation can lead to spiritual death (1:15).

1:17-18 - In total contrast to the notion that God could be blamed for sin (1:13), James notes that “every good and perfect gift” comes from the giving God that created the stars that light up the heavens. Unlike the shadows of the sun that shift and change, James reminds his readers that God remains consistently good. His goodness simply does not change (1:17). Instead of the death cycle of sin—desire, sin, and then death—God gives us birth through Jesus—the Word of truth (1:18). As such, we are the first fruits of His regenerated creation. Here James is playing on common imagery given the agricultural society within which he lived. The first fruits of a harvest would have been the first sign that the rest of the harvest was soon to follow. So also Christians are the first fruits of God’s regenerating work on our planet. Recalling the context of internal tempting, then, it becomes clear that James is challenging his readers to resist temptation by staying grounded in the special relationship they have with God through Jesus Christ. Herein is the key to resisting temptation.

Digging Deeper

Learn more about temptation in the following passages – Genesis 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 10:11-13, Hebrews 4:14-16. What can we learn from Genesis 3 about how temptation works? What does it prey upon? How does it succeed?

What do we learn from the two New Testament passages about how God helps us withstand temptation?

Cycle of Temptation

- Stress (Expectations, Fear of Rejection, Lack of Sleep, School, Anger, Relationships, Fear of Failure, etc...)
- Rationalization/Fantasy
- Acting Out
- Guilt and Remorse
- Shame and Depression
- Recommitments/Time

Does this cycle look familiar to you? What is your cycle when you are tempted and you give into temptation?

How could you break the cycle of temptation/acting out with God’s help