

Living by Faith III: Over Temptations

August 27, 2017

James 1:13-18

My friend Hyunsuk used to be a drug addict. But he finally met Jesus his savior in his early 30s. He was radically changed. Because of the love of Jesus, he and his wife wanted to be a missionary in Turkey. He was taking some classes to be a missionary. One day his wife went to Korea to visit her family. On the way home from the airport, he had a temptation. Even though he wanted to follow Jesus, he couldn't resist the temptation for drug. It took some time, but in God's grace he was fully recovered from that failure. A couple of years later, I saw he and his wife was leaving to Turkey as a missionary couple. He shared how powerful temptation was and how much God humbled him.

Where does a temptation come from? I shared a story of my friend, but is he only one who is vulnerable? He gave in drug, but what about alcohol? How about food, money, success or fame? They can be as dangerous as drugs. Is anyone here free from all kinds of temptations? When James said in verse 13, "*when tempted*", he implied every human will be tempted. Whether Christians or non-Christians, the rich or the poor, the old or the young, it doesn't matter who we are. Temptations can come to anyone at any time. So, again where does a temptation come from?

We can look at Genesis to understand how it began. When God created Adam and Eve, He blessed them to rule over all creatures. They could eat all fruits in the Garden except for the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Gen.2:17). That was the only restriction for them to acknowledge God as the Creator and themselves as creatures. Then Satan came and said to the woman, "*Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?*" (Genesis 3:1) Satan began to tempt Eve by twisting God's word. We know the rest of the story. Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan and ate the forbidden fruit. Since then, sin came into the world. The LORD God cursed Satan and said to him, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*" (Genesis 3:15). Since that time on, Satan has been tempting all human beings who come after Adam and Eve. Until when? Until he (Jesus) will crush Satan's head, which will be the end of the age, or until we go to heaven. This is the fact. No one is exempt from temptations. Sitting in a pew doesn't mean that we will have fewer temptations. Devoted missionaries can have as many temptations as street people. So, rather than avoiding temptations which will come to us anyway, we need to learn how to overcome temptations.

Before we look at how, let's consider some characteristics of temptations. One thing we will have to understand is that a temptation is not by God, as James says, "*No one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone*" (v.13). We believe God is sovereign. All things were created and are controlled by God. So, is a temptation also in God's control? Let's review how the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes God's providence.

27 Q. *What do you understand by the providence of God?*

A. *"The providence is*

*the almighty and ever present power of God
by which God upholds, as with his hand,
heaven and earth
and all creatures,*

*and so rules them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and lean years,
food and drink,
health and sickness,
prosperity and poverty—
all things, in fact,
come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.”*

If what we just read is correct, doesn't this mean that temptations come from God? Also, we read in Genesis 3 that it was God who “*put enmity between Satan and the woman, and between Satan's offspring and hers.*” Then, shouldn't God take the responsibility for temptations?

Our Bible uses three different terms for the challenges we are facing – trials, tests and temptations. However, all three words are actually the same word in Greek (πειρασμός *peirasmos*). God's test sounds positive for us and a temptation does not. God may test us as He did Abraham in order to bless us, and Satan will tempt us to sin against God. Then, why do you think the Bible uses the same word (πειρασμός) to describe tests, temptations and trails. I think it implies at least three things. First, God is sovereign over all things, including temptations. Satan will keep trying, but he cannot tempt God's people without God's permission. God knows in his sovereignty that we can come out as pure gold. So sometimes He allows Satan to tempt his people just as he tested Job. Secondly, it is we who can turn trials into pure joy. It doesn't matter whether it is from God or Satan. Whether it is a trial, test or temptation, we can turn it around. It depends on our response to circumstances. As we develop perseverance which transforms our character, we will experience pure joy. We will come out as pure gold. At the end, we will receive the crown of life. We are responsible for what we get through temptations. Thirdly, since we are responsible, we can't blame God. James provides two reasons. One is “*God cannot be tempted by evil.*” It means God is holy. No evil can stand before the holy God. Another reason is “*God doesn't tempt anyone.*” It means God is good. He never wants to harm his people. We can't blame God.

Then, is Satan the only responsible one? No! James says, “*It is not God, nor is it Satan alone, “but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (v.14).* Here the word “be tempted” (πειράζω, *peirazō*) is a term used in fishing or hunting. A temptation is like a bait, snare or lure. A bait or lure itself is not necessarily evil, but it can cause us to sin. For example, music is God's gift, but not all kinds of music are beneficial to us. We know that some type of music can destroy our soul. Success is what we seek for our family, but loving money more than God is idolatry. We need food every day but gluttony, too much food, is a sin. All things can be baits, and Satan can use them. If we happen to take one of them in our evil desire, we give in to the temptation.

James explains this process by using a Greek word, συλλαμβάνω (*syllambanō*), which is translated as “to conceive.” It means literally to “come together or grasp together.” “*After desire has conceived, [when our desire comes together with a bait], it gives birth to sin; and sin, when*

it is full-grown, [when we continue to sin], gives birth to death” (v.15). When our evil desire takes the bait or lure, it brings sin, and continuous sin brings death.

Some sins, like violence or abuse, may cause a physical death, but here death doesn't mean a physical death. We all have sinned. If it is a physical death, we all should be in the cemetery. Since we are here this morning, it can't be a physical death. It doesn't mean a spiritual death either. As we believe in Jesus, God promises our eternal life. *“If God is for us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31).* No one! Nothing! *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).* We cannot die in our spirit as soon as we are born again.

Then, what does death stand for? We can find an answer from the Scripture. The LORD said in Deuteronomy 30, *“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction” (Deut. 30:15).* Here, life and prosperity are the same. Death equals destruction. This is the death James is implying. It is about the quality of life. When a man believes in Jesus, he has salvation. He will not lose his salvation but if he keeps sinning, his life will be a disaster. It is a miserable life, just as the one cursed by God. We don't want to have that kind of life. God wants to bless his people. So, how can we not give into temptations? How can we overcome them?

First, we should not blame anyone for our temptations or trials. James said we cannot blame God because God never tempts us. We cannot blame Satan either because our evil desire causes us to sin. So, we try to find someone else to blame for our failure. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did. When they sinned against God, God came and confronted Adam, and Adam said, *“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” (Genesis 3:12).* Then the LORD God said to the woman, *“What is this you have done?”* The woman said, *“The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13).* Blaming others has become our nature. Whenever we have misfortunes, whenever we make a mistake, or commit sin, we tend to blame others. Blaming others is dangerous because it doesn't do any good at all. I think blaming is the biggest enemy in our relationships. In our home, church and jobsite, we should not blame others for whatever reasons because blaming destroys our relationships. Also, blaming is a sin because blaming people actually means blaming God who has put those people in our life. We should not blame others.

Secondly, instead of blaming others, we need to see them as God's good and perfect gifts and be faithful to them. The people around us, our friends and family are God's gifts. Where we live and work are God's gifts. Our ministry is God's gift. We need to remain in those gifts. *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (v.17).* If we faithfully remain where God called us, I believe there will be less sin. Appreciate what you have now because it came from the Father of the heavenly lights.

Lastly, we need to remain in the Word. *“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (v.18).* A firstfruit is a special offering to God. All believers are to bring glory to God, but believers who remain faithful to the Word will please Him greatly. We become firstfruits through the word of truth. It is not our strong will. It is not our good attitude, but the Word of the LORD can change us. The Word of the Lord transforms us as firstfruits. The Word of the Lord helps us not to be deceived as Adam and Eve were. *“How*

can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Psalm 119:9). Just as the Psalm writer does, we confess, “I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Psalm 119:16). We read and study the Word so that we may offer ourselves as firstfruits to the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we talk about so many things today. You may check out the church website to listen to the sermon again or download the manuscript so that you can see what James wants us to learn about our temptations. Among all those things, I want you to remember one thing at least. God is sovereign God. He knows what you are going through. It doesn't matter whether it is a test, trial or temptation. He wants to bless you over the temptation. He is more than ready to make all things good for you as you love him and as you remain in his word. Brothers and sisters, let us be faithful to what God has given to us. Let us be faithful to the people around us. Let us be faithful to His calling. God knows how much you are trying. And he will bless you, prayerfully in this world; if not here for sure in heaven, with the crown of life. May God bless you as you remain faithful to his calling even in your difficult times. Amen.