

Place: Lurgan Baptist 19:10:2003

Reading: James 1:1-16

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

5. TEMPTATION

James's letter to the scattered believers of the first century is as up to date with the pressures facing modern man as any best selling book currently on the market. In fact already in this opening chapter he has dealt with a variety of subjects. In (1:2-4) he has touched on *Stress*: in (1:5-8) he has spoken on the need for *Wisdom*, in (1:9-12) he speaks on *Joy*, and now he deals with the problem of *Temptation*. Someone has said that this little epistle is like " a collection of sermon notes." The British writer Oscar Wilde said, " *I can resist everything but temptation.*" Few people today speak of temptation. Morality is almost a forgotten word in our generation. This is the day of relativism, which simply means that most people believe there are no absolutes. Consequently, they have no restraints. Ted Turner, who pioneered the explosion of Cable Television said in a meeting of the National Newspaper Association in the U.S.A. " *The ten commandments are out of date and irrelevant to current global problems. Nobody here pays much attention to them because they are too old.*" He also told the Dallas Morning News that " *Christianity is for losers.*" My as we have entered the third millennium relativism, the religion of modern man seems to be sweeping the western world. And into such a climate, James's words about temptation are so relevant. His caution echoes through the corridors of time to the door of the 21st century, " *Do not err, or don't be deceived my beloved brethren.*" (1:16) So having dealt with external trials James now turns to internal temptations. Now remember there is a difference between the two. *Temptations are sent by Satan to make the Christian Stumble, trials are sent by God to make the Christian Stand. In Testing you, God is aiming at your Maturity, in Tempting you Satan is aiming at your Misery.* God always tests to bring out the best, but Satan always tempts to bring out the worst. In

(1:2) James is using the word " *trial*," to mean " *external trial*," but here in (1:13) he is using the word " *tempted*," to mean " *internal temptation*."

(1) A PROBLEM WE MUST FACE

It's the problem of temptation. Did you notice how realistic James is here ? He says, " *when*," and not " *if*." In (1:14) he says, " *But every man is tempted.*" Temptation for the believer is not a matter of " *if*," but of " *when*." Writing on the subject of Temptation, the New Bible Dictionary puts it like this, " *Satan test's God's people, by manipulating circumstances, within the limits that God allows him in an attempt to make them desert God's will.*" (Job 1:12 2:6 1 Cor 10:13) Now this problem of temptation is so important especially to young believers that I want to hammer out some vital principles in relation to it. Firstly notice,

(a) THE WHAT OF TEMPTATION:

What is temptation ? I think we are at least part of the way there when we recognise what it is not. If there are four words that could transform the thinking of many believers right they are these “ *temptation is not sin.* ”

How many seeds of doubt and defeat have germinated in the soil of ignorance about this point. Yet this is one of the clearest truths in the whole Bible and one that can be seen by referring to only one verse of Scripture. Do you recall what the Book of Hebrews says about our Lord Jesus ? “ *For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* ” (4:15) My the Saviour was battered by allurements and temptations of every kind yet He emerged from it all “ without sin.” Christ was tempted, but don’t dare to tell me that He sinned. Several years there was a film that came out, it was entitled, “ *The last temptation of Christ,* ” and it was screened on channel four. Do you what it suggested ? That the Lord Jesus had an affair with Mary !

My *Christ was not able to sin !* But have you fallen for the Devil’s lie that temptation is sin ? Is that why you are depressed, defeated, discouraged ? It was the late Guy King who said that “ *temptation is when you’re asked to do it, sin is when you do it.* ” (a)

(b) THE WHO OF TEMPTATION:

Did you notice what James says, “ *Every man is tempted,* ” (1:14) I heard about three preachers talking over lunch. One suggested they confess their sins one to another. One said, “ *That’s a good idea, I’ll go first. I have to admit it, but I take the odd drink.* ” The second spoke up and said, “ *I would not want others to know about it but I like to gamble.* ” They both looked at the third preacher and said, “ *We have confessed our sins now its your turn.* ” The third said, “ *My sin is gossip and I can’t wait to get out of here.* ” You see, we all have our own lusts. There are those particular areas of specific temptation we have to personally deal with.

“ *Every man is tempted.* ” (1:14) Becoming a Christian does nothing whatever to remove a person from the sphere of temptation. Just as Christ’s coming into the world did not banish temptation universally, so His coming into the human heart does not banish it personally. It’s the testimony of the ages that for the Christian believer temptation is not removed. We may have been “ *delivered from the kingdom of darkness,* ” (Col 1:13) but though we have been taken for ever out of Satan’s grip and possession, we have not yet been removed from his interest and attention. (a) (b)

(c) THE WHEN OF TEMPTATION:

John Hunter in his book, “ *Knowing God’s Secrets,* ” tells of how as a young believer, seeking to live for God he was much distressed by the problem of temptation. He describes how he encouraged himself with the thought that some day temptation would no longer be a problem in his life. He imagined that as he grew older he would assume a tangible form of respectability which would solve all the problem of temptation, and that he would eventually arrive at the

state where he would be free from temptations awful effects. As the years passed he stated he had learned two basic realities.

1. Temptation was just as strong and subtle as it was years ago. 2. That he was just as weak as he ever was and just as prone to failure. My do you think that you will gradually outgrow temptation as you mature in the faith ? If you do, then you've fallen for one of the Devil's cleverest lies ! The truth is, the further you go on in the Christian life, the more you are exposed to the subtlety and severity of temptation !

Do you know when bad temper laid Moses low ? When he was the proved leader of God's people !

(Num 12:3 20:7) Do you know when David was shattered by lust ? When he was King of Israel.

(2 Sam 11:1) Do you know when Peter crumbled into cowardice ? (Mk 14:72) When he had already showed his courage many times before. When does temptation come ? At every point and stage on the Christian pathway. That's why we need to heed the advice of the Saviour, “ *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.* ” (Mk 13:37) (1)

(2) A PRINCIPLE WE MUST FIGHT

You see, it seems James wrote this passage to counteract defective reasoning which ran something like this,

“ *God created all things. Therefore God must have created the evil impulse in man, therefore God is responsible for sin, temptation, and evil.* ” Does this kind of argument ring a bell ? Many folk blame God for their own sin. They say, “ *God created everything, therefore it stands to reason that He created this impulse within me to do evil. Therefore He created sin. God is ultimately responsible. I just can't help it.* ” Is this not the very argument that is used by the adulterer and the gays ? My from the Garden of Eden to this present day men and women have always tried to avoid personal responsibility. Adam said, “ *Not guilty, the woman is to blame.* ” Eve said, “ *Not guilty, the Devil made me do it.* ” You see, Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on.” But what a serious truth we have here. That in a moment of crisis, when things go seriously wrong, when a man has a bad moral fall, or makes a serious mistake, he not only seeks to avoid all personal blame, he can actually say that God is responsible for his sin. Now James gives us two reasons here why God cannot be responsible for our sin and these two reasons are based on the character of God. He talks here about:

(a) THE HOLINESS OF GOD:

Do you see what he says ? “ *God cannot be tempted with evil.* ” (1:13) The Greek word that James uses here is not used anywhere else in the N.T. (*apeirastos*) It means God is attemptable. God is unversed in evil. He has no experience of it and is entirely free from it. God's perfect holiness makes Him untemptable. God can never be defiled. “ *God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.* ” (Hab 1:13) God is Holy, and His command is, “ *be ye holy for I am holy,* ”

(1 Pet 1:16) Is your constant prayer that of Murray McCheyne ? “ *Lord make me as holy, as it possible for a saved sinner to be.* ” God is not responsible for our sin because He is Holy. But James also talks here about:

(b) THE GOODNESS OF GOD:

“ *Neither tempted he any man,* ” (1:13) Since God is not experienced in evil He cannot tempt us toward it.

My God is Holy, “ *God cannot be tempted,* ” and God is Good, in that He “ *tempted no man.* ” My Do you ever that voice that says, “ *Go on, give up, go the way of sin, go the way of the world, the way of defiance, and self-pleasing, disobey God,* ” do you ever hear it ? Well, it does not come from God ! It’s the voice of our own fallen nature ! You see, God Tests us, but He Tempts us. (Gen 22:1) Do you see what James says in

(1:16) ? He says, don’t make the mistake of blaming God for your sin, failure, backsliding. “ *God may call you to endure difficulties, but He will never cause you to experience defeat.* ” Well, what then is the source or cause of the temptations that come to us ? Well, note:

(3) A PROCESS WE MUST FEAR

When we think of sin, we think of it as a single act, but God sees it as a process. Adam committed one act of sin, and yet that one act brought sin, death, and judgement on the whole of the human race. James describes this process of sin here in four stages. He says it begins with:

(a) DESIRE:

That word “ *lust,* ” means any kind of desire not just sexual. (*epithumia* Lk 22:15) It’s the strong desire of the human soul to enjoy or acquire something to fulfil the flesh, and the flesh stands for that part of man’s nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. Now the normal desires of life were given to us by God and of themselves are not sinful. My without these desires, we could not function. Unless we felt hunger and thirst we would never eat and drink, and we would die. Without fatigue the body would never rest. Physical intercourse is a normal desire, without it the human race would not continue. You see, the problem comes when we want to satisfy our desires outside the parameter of God’s will. Eating is normal, gluttony is sin. Sleep is essential, laziness is sin. “ *Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* ” (Heb 13:4) *Its when these desires become our masters and not our servants that we get into trouble.* Now don’t forget what James is about here. He’s anxious that none of us defend ourselves by throwing the blame for our sin, failure, temptation on the Lord, Satan, or circumstances. *Temptation is personal.* Each of us is dragged away, this internal source draws us away and wants us to play outside the boundaries of God ! It begins with desire. But it leads to

(b) DECEPTION:

Do you see those words ? “ *drawn away ... , enticed,* ” they’re taken from the world of fishing ! Indeed the Greek word for “ *enticed,* ” means “ *being baited or deceived.* ” I was reared right beside the River Bann and during my teenage years did a spot of fishing. Sometimes I would use the fly, or the worm, or the silver spinner on the hook. The fish were attracted by the glitter, swam towards it, opened their mouths and were on dry land before they could change their minds.

Now no-one put the worm in the fish’s mouth. He came out of the hole because of his own desire, and he took the bait. *Sin never starts with the bait, it always starts with a desire.* Do you recall King David ? His sin with Bathsheba came about because of his internal desire to play outside the boundaries of God ! David was out of God’s will, he was in the palace when as the Bible says, it was “ *the time when Kings go off to war.* ”

(2 Sam 11:1) So what happened ? Satan baited the hook with an external force. Her name was Bathsheba.

And David took the bait. My do you know what the bait does ? It not only attracts us, but it keeps us from seeing the consequences of sin. In David’s case the death of a baby, Bathsheba’s son, the murder of a brave soldier, Uriah, and the violation of a daughter, Tamar.

Tell me, is Satan dangling a bait in front of you ? What’s her, his name ? Are you allowing your desires to get out of line with God’s desires ? (a) (b) it continues with:

(c) **DISOBEDIENCE:**

Now do you see the stages ? We have moved from the Emotion (desire) and the Intellect (deception) to the Will. (disobedience) You see, it is this assent of the will to what the outward enticement has offered to the inward desire that fertilizes temptation and turns it into sin. Someone has said, “ *it takes two to make a successful temptation and you are one of the two.* ”

(Gen 3:1 38:12 2 Kings 5:20) But do you see how the process ends ? (a) (b) (c) and it ends with:

(d) **DEATH:**

“ *And sin, death,* ” (1:15) Did you know that because of your sin, believer, God can take you home ?

Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead because they lied to God. (Acts 5:10) Many in Corinth were dead because they abused the Lord’s Table ! (1 Cor 11:30)

Others have experienced the death of Hopes, Health, Home, and Happiness ! How can we handle

temptation ? The way Christ did. Three times He said,

“ *It is written.* ” (Matt 4:4) Our Lord knew and used the Word of God. That’s why D.L.

Moody wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible, “ *this book will keep me from sin or sin will keep me from this book.* ” (1) (2) (3) and finally:

(4) **A PRACTICE WE MUST FOSTER**

Don't you feel at times we spend far too much time looking *Inwards* to our failures, and *Outwards* to our Circumstances, and not nearly enough looking *Upwards* to our great God. What kind of God do we have this ? One that “ *cannot be tempted with evil.* ” Do you know that means ? It means:

(a) HIS PERSON CAN NEVER BE DEFILED:

Do you know something ? Sin defiles us ! (Mk 7:23)
But the Lord can never be defiled because He cannot be tempted with evil. Do you ever deeply about this ? Its one thing to grow in our knowledge of God's power, and in our sense of His wisdom, but are we growing in our appreciation of His perfect holiness ? How often do you adore Him for being “ *altogether lovely ?* ”
(S.S. 5:16) (a)

(b) HIS POWER CAN NEVER BE DIMINISHED:

How sin robs a man of power. Lot chooses the plain and people of Sodom and in no time he is just a pathetic powerless has-been. (Gen 13:10-13 19:14) Samson breaks his vow and the tiger becomes a toy. But the sin that saps the believer's strength can never effect the power of God. God cannot be tempted with evil, the ravages of sin cannot effect Him because they cannot touch Him. My God never weakens, God is never “ *off colour,* ” God is never less than omnipotent. And that mighty power is available at every moment for every Christian. Do you recall what Paul says ?
(Eph 1:19-20) My the same power that raised Christ from the dead, is available to you. Undiminished.

(c) HIS PERCEPTION CAN NEVER BE DULLED:

Ours can. How often have you made the wrong decision, adopted a wrong attitude, missed a vital opportunity, because your perception has been dulled by sin, the sin of being out of touch with the Lord. But my because God can never be tempted and touched by sin there is never a moment of day or night, in shadow or in sunshine, when He does not know, understand and appreciate your precise circumstances and your exact need. The psalmist says, “ *He determines the number of the stars, He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord and abundant in power. His understanding is infinite.* (Ps 147:4) My, will you take this home with you ? *Infinite understanding of the minutest detail of your life !* Have you had a testing week ? Are you in the storm ? Do you feel God has forsaken you ? Do you sense that God has forgotten you ? Have you problems, pressures, perplexities about the week ahead ? Listen, *God knows, cares, and understands. And God will undertake, trust Him !*