

“Overcoming Temptation”  
(James 1:14-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. James told us this morning that when we are tempted, we can't blame God:
  - a. God is holy and cannot be tempted by evil.
    - (i) He cannot be tempted to do anything wrong.
    - (ii) He cannot even desire to do anything wrong.
    - (iii) His infinite holiness pushes all sin away with infinite hatred.
    - (iv) This is why the unbeliever will never stand in His presence.
  - b. Because of this, God does not tempt anyone.
    - (i) He wills that we do good, not evil.
    - (ii) He's not going to tempt us to do anything against His will.
2. It's true that He ordains that we will be tempted.
  - a. But it is by the evil that arises from the creature.
  - b. God didn't create the evil, but He does use it.
    - (i) God uses evil for good purposes: Adam's sin, Joseph's brothers, the crucifixion.
    - (ii) This shows the infinite wisdom of God: that He can bring something so good out of something so bad.

B. Preview.

1. If we can't blame God, who can we blame?
  - a. James tells us that we must blame ourselves.
    - (i) “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (v. 14).
    - (ii) There are evil things outside of us trying to get hold of our affections.
    - (iii) But there are also corrupt affections within that take hold of those evil things – sadly, we want them.
    - (iv) That lust gives birth to sin.
    - (v) And sin, gives birth to death.
  - b. We must not deceive ourselves.
    - (i) We always want to shift the blame to someone or something else.
    - (ii) James tells us we can't shift it to God; it rests solely on our own shoulders.
2. This evening, we're going to consider two things:
  - a. What causes temptation and sin.
  - b. And realizing the cause, how to short-circuit the process so that we might sin less and glorify God more.

## II. Sermon.

### A. First, what causes temptation and sin?

1. The first step to understanding it is to realize we have sin in our hearts.
  - a. James calls it lust, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (v. 14).
    - (i) It's what is left over of our old nature.
    - (ii) It's called in Scripture the flesh, or the old self (Gal. 5:17; Eph. 4:22).
    - (iii) It's basically the desire for evil.
      - (a) In this respect, it's contrary to the new nature, which loves what God loves.
      - (b) The flesh is hatred of what God loves and hatred of God.
      - (c) The old self is love of self, love of pleasure, love of things we shouldn't have.
  - b. This corruption remains in the Christian as long as he lives.
    - (i) Thankfully, it will be removed at death, when we are made perfect and enter into heaven.
    - (ii) But because it won't be removed until then, we must struggle with it all our lives.
2. It becomes visible when what it desires is offered to us.
  - a. This is where we must be careful.
    - (i) When we don't see it so clearly in ourselves or our children, we think it isn't there.
    - (ii) But it may only be that we haven't come into contact with that which our particular heart desires. Perhaps we have, or at least know things we are susceptible to.
    - (iii) Children, you especially need to be careful:
      - (a) Your lives have been sheltered.
      - (b) You've been protected by your parents.
      - (c) You haven't been exposed as much to the things of the world.
      - (d) Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that sin isn't there.
      - (e) It is. It's in every one of us.
  - b. When that thing is offered to us – whatever it is that we shouldn't have – our lust is activated.
3. When our corrupt affections fasten on that thing, we have entered into temptation.
  - a. Owen likens the object of our lusts and our lusts as two hands reaching out to each other.
  - b. When they fasten their grip on each other, then we have entered into temptation.
  - c. At this point, it is very difficult to break the grip: most often, we will fail.
4. If we can't compel our hearts to let go, then we will sin.
  - a. Even if we don't end up committing that particular sin, we have still sinned:
    - (i) To desire something sinful is sin by itself.
    - (ii) Even having this corruption in our hearts is sin.

- b. But, of course, doing that sinful thing is worse.
    - (i) It is a sin to hate someone – which John tells us is to murder them in our hearts (1 John 3:15).
    - (ii) But it is worse to actually kill them: to deprive them of life, their families of their presence or means of support.
    - (iii) It is a sin to covet something in your heart (Ex. 20:17).
    - (iv) But it is worse actually to steal that thing.
5. And when sin has been committed, it brings death, “Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (v. 15).
- a. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
    - (i) The sin of Adam brought death.
    - (ii) But all of us have earned it again many times over
  - b. This is what even our sins deserve as Christians.
    - (i) As our *Confession* put it, “There is no sin so small but it deserves damnation.”
    - (ii) But by God’s grace and mercy, He doesn’t give us what we deserve, if we have repented: “There is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent” (WCF 15.4).
    - (iii) We should not use this as an excuse to sin more, but to sin less out of thankfulness for God infinite mercy.
    - (iv) Paul asks, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” and answers, “May it never be!” (Rom. 6:1-2).
  - c. And so James warns us not to blame God for our sins. It is our own fault.
- B. Second, how can we interrupt the process and keep from letting our lusts become sins?
1. First, we need to recognize that we are the problem and not God.
    - a. He is the One who is perfectly holy and righteous.
    - b. He is the One who gave us life.
    - c. He is the One who gives us the means of grace to overcome our sins.
    - d. The problem is not with God, but with us.
    - e. And so the solution must be that we must change; but how?
  2. Certainly, we need to stay away from the things that tempt us.
    - a. Are you tempted by pride, stay away from the things that feed it.
    - b. Are you tempted by lust, stay away from what feeds that.
    - c. If you are tempted with food, don’t hang around the kitchen or restaurants.
    - d. If with alcohol, stay away from where it’s being served.
    - e. However, we can’t always get away from it.
      - (i) We only have control over a limited number of things.
      - (ii) We cannot rid our lives or our world of everything that might tempt us.
      - (iii) The answer then can’t be limited only to this.
  3. We also need to fight against the particular desires we have for things that are sinful. We must cut off the desire itself.

- a. We must stop it before it takes hold of us.
    - (i) Once it does, we'll generally lose more than win.
    - (ii) When our lust is inflamed, it's very difficult to beat it back into submission.
  - b. That's why we must attack the corruption in our hearts.
    - (i) Again, as John Owen stated it, we must not just attack the fruits of corruption, we must attack its root.
    - (ii) We must mortify our indwelling sin, kill the old man, put our flesh to death.
    - (iii) Sin is basically selfishness, self-centeredness, desire to please self without concern of whether we please or hurt God or others.
    - (iv) We need to cut off our sinful pleasure, consider ourselves crucified with Christ, and risen to live for His glory only (Rom. 6).
    - (v) We must not live to please self, but to please God.
  - c. The Giver of all good gifts has given us help in the battle: the means of grace.
    - (i) He has given us His Word that forbids it, that threatens it with death/punishment/discipline, that promises victory over it.
    - (ii) He has given us prayer to get the help of the Spirit.
    - (iii) He has given us the sacraments to give us additional help.
    - (iv) He has given us Christian Fellowship as a means to encourage us in the fight.
    - (v) We need to use these things: if we didn't eat food, we would have no strength to work – if we don't use these means, we'll have no strength for the battle.
5. But what if we fall into sin?
- a. We must not remain fallen.
  - b. We must strengthen the knees that are weak, make straight paths, or God will increase His chastening (Heb. 12:12-13). It gets worse.
  - c. We must recover, learn wisdom from our sins, move forward.
  - d. It may take a while to vanquish any sin, but it will be vanquished if we keep pressing onward.
  - e. You can't see the effects of a drop of water on a rock, but over the years, it wears a hole into it.
  - f. In the same way, we may not see victory now, but if we keep at it and seek the Lord, we will.
6. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord is not responsible for our temptations, we are.
- a. James warns us, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (v. 16).
  - b. The Lord wills our spiritual health through trials and temptations. Let's learn from them and grow stronger in Him.
  - c. Let's do more than try and stay away from sin. Let's kill the sin in us.
  - d. We won't be able to do away with it entirely, but we can certainly gain a great deal more victory than we typically do.
  - e. Serving and honoring Him is our purpose in life: let's learn what He teaches us here that we might be better equipped to do so. Amen.