

# Withstanding Temptation



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 11

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** James 1:12–21; Psalm 119:11; Genesis 3:1–6; Titus 3:5–7; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Blessed is the man who keeps on going when times are hard. After he has come through them, he will receive a crown. The crown is life itself. God has promised it to those who love him” (James 1:12, NlrV).

**WE ALL HAVE EXPERIENCED TEMPTATION.** We decide not to give in to temptation. But in the heat of the battle, our promise fades away. Then much to our shame, we fall into sin. Sometimes it seems that the more we try not to sin, the more we feel powerless against temptation. And we also feel more helpless about our condition. We wonder if we really are saved at all. It is hard to imagine any serious Christian who has not wondered about his or her own salvation, especially after having just fallen into sin.

Fortunately, we can have victory over the temptations that so easily trap us. None of us, no matter how deeply we fall into sin, is hopeless. This is because our “Father of lights” (James 1:17) is greater than our temptation to do evil. Only in God and through His Word can we have victory.

That is the message from the verses we will study this week. Sure, temptations are real. Sin is real. And the battle against self is *very* real. But God is real too. Through Him we can overcome the temptations that come from within (inside) ourselves, just waiting to take us down.

**THE ROOT OF TEMPTATION (James 1:13, 14)**

**Read James 1:13, 14. Why is it important that God does not tempt (lead into sin) anyone? Where does temptation start? How can this knowledge help us in our own struggle with sin?**

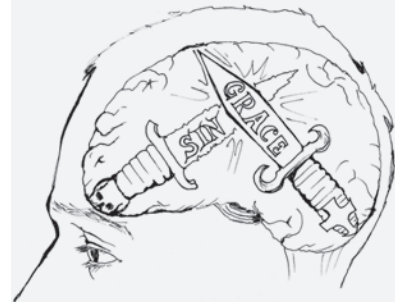
James stresses (points out; makes clear) that God is *not* the author of evil. And He is not the author of temptation either. Evil itself is the cause of temptation. According to these verses, the problem lies *within* us. So, this is the main reason it is so hard to fight against.

So, the battle against sin begins in the mind. As much as many people might not want to hear it, the truth is that we *choose* to sin. No one can force us (Romans 6:16–18). Sinful desires ever capture our attention. By using common hunting and fishing words, James 1:14 describes these inner desires. Our own desires pull and tempt us. And when we weaken to them, they finally hook and trap us.

**Read Ephesians 6:17; Psalm 119:11; and Luke 4:8. What common theme (idea; topic) is seen in these verses? How does that connect with the question of victory over temptation?**

In the verses in James, he clearly separates temptation from sin. Being tempted from within (inside) ourselves is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. The problem is not temptation itself but how we deal with it. Having a sinful nature is not sin. But letting that sinful nature control our thoughts and choices is. Because of this, we have the promises, found in God's Word, that offer us victory if we claim them for ourselves and accept them in faith.

**Think deeply about the idea that sin is *always* our own choice. (After all, if it were not our own choice, how could we be criticized for doing it?) What things can we do daily to help us keep from making the wrong choices?**



**The battle against sin begins in the mind.**



**Sin is always our own choice.**

## WHEN LUST (DESIRE) “GIVES BIRTH” TO SIN (James 1:15)



When a wrong desire is “fertilized,” sin grows like a baby in the womb.



Sin, like cancer, takes over and destroys its host.

### DEFINITIONS

1. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

**Read James 1:13–15 again. When does temptation become sin?**

Several Greek words are used in these verses to describe how sin begins. All of them are connected with giving birth. When a wrong desire is nurtured (“fertilized”), sin is “conceived [started],” like a baby in the womb. “When sin has grown up, it gives birth to death” (James 1:15, adapted from author’s own translation).

This picture is a strange puzzle. That is because the method that is supposed to give life leads only to death (compare<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:10–13). Sin, like cancer, takes over and destroys its host. We all know this, because we have all been ruined by sin. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.

**Read Genesis 3:1–6. Eve’s experience clearly shows the struggle with sin. What steps led her into sin?**

At its root (cause; start), sin begins with distrusting God. Satan used the same successful method when he deceived one-third of the angels (Revelation 12:4, 7–9). By this Satan raised doubts in Eve’s mind about God’s character (thoughts; feelings; actions) (Genesis 3:1–5). Going to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not sin, but taking and eating the fruit from the tree was. But wrong thoughts seem to have come to Eve before her sinful act (Genesis 3:6). She accepted Satan’s suggestions as her own.

Sin always begins in the mind. Like Eve, we may think about the “profits” (“good things”) of wrongdoing.

Often we wonder how it could happen. The answer is easy. We *let* it happen. Nobody forces us into sin.

“By serious prayer and living faith we can refuse to accept the attacks of Satan and keep our hearts pure from pollution.

“The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. However great the pressure is upon the soul, falling into sin is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to force any one to sin. The mind must be strong. The heart must remain firm. If so, desire cannot overcome reason. And sin cannot win over righteousness [right living].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “Christian Privileges [Rights] and Duties,” *Signs of the Times*, October 4, 1883.

**EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT  
(James 1:16, 17)**

Sin gives birth to death. But God is the Giver of life. He is the “Father of lights” (James 1:17). This speaks of the Creation (Genesis 1:14–18). God gives us birth to a new life. This is the greatest gift we can get “from above” (compare James 1:17 with John 3:3).

Paul speaks of salvation as the result of God’s grace<sup>2</sup> (Romans 3:23, 24; Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:9). In the same way, James 1:17 calls salvation a “gift.” And in the next verse James makes it clear that salvation (this new birth) is the result of God’s purpose and will (plan) for us. “God chose to give us new birth through the message of truth” (James 1:18, NIV). That is, God wants us to be saved. It was His will that we should have salvation and a new life in Him now and for all eternity. He decided this even before humanity was created.

**How does James’s example compare with the description by Paul and Peter of the new birth? Read Titus 3:5–7 and 1 Peter 1:23.**

Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James all connect salvation with the new birth. When God planned salvation, His purpose was to reconnect sinful and broken human beings with heaven. The separation was so big and so wide that no humans could have ever bridged it. It was only when the Word became man, Jesus, that heaven and earth reconnected. The inspired (God-breathed) Word (Jesus) (2 Timothy 3:16) alone is able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift.

We do not deserve this gift. But our “Father of lights” loves us so much that He gives us “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17, NKJV). The best of all gifts is Jesus and the new birth that He offers.

**What are the gifts you have been given “from above”? Why is it so important to think deeply about them? What happens when we do not?**

**DEFINITIONS**

2. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

## SLOW TO SPEAK (James 1:19, 20)

**Read James 1:19, 20. What important point is he making there?**

God's Word (the Bible) is powerful. But so are human words. How often have we spoken words that we wish we could take back? We may know how hurtful wrong words are. And we may know how destructive our anger can be. Knowing these things may help us get ourselves under control. Left to ourselves, we can never really change. That is why we need to listen more to God and let Him work in us.

“When every other voice is kept quiet, and when we wait quietly before Him, the silence of the soul makes the voice of God clear. He commands us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 58.

On the other hand, problems arise when we stop listening to God *and* to one another. In the home, at work, or in the church, arguments follow when listening stops. When that happens, talking begins to get heated, and anger builds. This downhill slide of sinful communication can never lead to the righteousness (holy life; goodness) of God.

That is why James shows the difference between God's righteousness and human anger. As long as we act or speak on what comes up from our sinful nature, the creative power of God's Word is blocked. And our own unhelpful or even hurtful words arise instead. James is warning us to be careful with what we say. This is because he has told us about what our “Father of lights” does for us by the gift of a new life.

**What do Proverbs 15:1; Isaiah 50:4; Ephesians 4:29; Ephesians 5:4; and Colossians 4:6 teach about words?**

**Think about the last time someone hurt you with his or her words. How deeply hurt you felt should show you just how powerful words can be, either for good or bad. What can you do to help keep your words under control? Why is it so important to *think* before you speak?**

## SAVED BY RECEIVING (James 1:21)

**Read James 1:21. What part does the “word” have in what James is saying?**

This verse closes all that has been said so far about faith and salvation. It is a plea (request) to us to put away all sin and to separate ourselves from evil. The command “put away” (RSV) is used seven out of nine times in the New Testament for separating from evil habits. (See Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22, 25; Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Peter 2:1.) It can also mean the taking off of clothing (Acts 7:58). Therefore, it could be referring to the taking off of our “filthy rags” of sin (compare Isaiah 64:6). In fact, the word *filthiness* (RSV, [dirtiness]) is found in James for the “filthy [dirty] clothes” of the poor, which are much different from the sparkling clean clothing of the rich (James 2:2, NKJV). Like Jesus, James complains about humans being so concerned with how their clothes look. Meanwhile, God is most concerned with the condition of our hearts.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *filthy* (*ryparos*) is used in only one place, Zechariah 3:3, 4. These verses show Joshua, the high priest, representing sinful Israel. God *takes away* the high priest’s filthy garments (clothes) and puts on him a clean robe. This is an example of Israel’s forgiveness and cleansing.

This scene is very different from the popular Christian picture you may know of Jesus putting a clean white robe over the sinner’s dirty clothes. Who would do this in real life? Nobody puts clean clothes over dirty ones. In the same way, in Zechariah, the filthy clothes are removed before the clean robe is put on. This does not mean that we must be without sin before we can be clothed in Christ’s righteousness. If that were true, who could be saved? It also does not mean that we cannot be saved or return to Jesus if we fall back into sin. Instead, it means that we must fully surrender to Him. We need to choose to die daily to our old sinful ways and let Him create us into His image (likeness). Christ’s perfect robe of righteousness will then cover us.

**Read again James 1:21. How deeply are you trying to practice what it says in your life? What does it mean to “engraft [join]” the Word into your heart? And how can you do it?**



**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read about sin and the power to change in Ellen G. White, “Repentance [Sorrow for Sin],” *Steps to Christ*, pages 23–36. Then make a short list of the key points.

“The plan of salvation includes our complete recovery [cure] from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the sorrowful soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil. And He has arranged for the Holy Spirit to be given to every person who repents, to keep him from sinning.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 311.

“If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ. Tell of His goodness. Do every duty that you see. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart. Do everything you can in your power to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces [holy thoughts and feelings] of the Spirit will become ripe in your character. Your faith will grow, your beliefs become stronger, your love be made perfect. More and more you will be the same as Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 67, 68.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about how real the power of words is. Why are words so powerful? How can language be easily controlled? How often is *how* we say or write something more important than *what* we say or write?
- ② Of all the gifts that you have been given “from above,” which is the greatest gift? Why?
- ③ Read over James 1:12–21. What is the important message there? What hope and promises are there for us?
- ④ Lust (desire) “gives birth” to sin. Then sin brings forth death. Why do we not have the victories that should be ours? What are the ways in which we make excuses for sin? Why is that always a dangerous mind game to play?
- ⑤ Read the last Ellen G. White quote found above. What important counsel (advice) is found there, especially for those who might be weakening in faith?