

## Whose Fault Is My Sin?

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More than anything else the Jews anticipated, believed in, and waited for Messiah. His coming, which every Jew hoped would be in their lifetime, would mean everything to them. But they, like us, are a bit more convinced and convicted of the weight and importance of their theology, and of their commitment to it, when having it or holding or being committed to it is doesn't make any personal demands of them.

When he came, not in the exact manner as they'd been led to believe he would by over zealous rabbis, they made this unexpected discovery: to receive him and follow him came with a price tag—one that was high enough that a lot of them decided their theology wasn't all that important after all and the Messiah's coming, well, it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, either. Better yet, they'd just decide that he wasn't the Messiah after all...for the most part. But there were some, a remnant, that were able by God's grace to look through the haze and prejudice of religious nonsense and see the truth—Messiah had come. It was real. Jesus was the one they had long waited for. True, he hadn't come in the manner the rabbis and their traditions had taught, but the rabbis were wrong often enough about a lot of other things, so it presented them with no serious problems. The Messiah had come. His name was Jesus. And they would follow him with all their heart, soul and mind. Their joy knew no bounds.

They never expected the reaction. Sure, they'd had disagreements with the rabbis before, but overall theirs was a genuine religion and would see the light, but even if that weren't the case, the furthest thought from their mind was that their own religion would turn on them with fury and vengeance for doing what they had been taught would be their greatest single privilege—knowing, believing in, and following Messiah.

Their boundless joy would turn to paralyzing fear as they were forced to flee their homes to stay alive. Remember, the reason that James wrote this book was to remind the sizable number of Jewish people that had become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and had, therefore, converted to Christianity and were being harassed by their fellow Jews for apostasy as well as by the Roman government for insurrection, not to allow the bad things they were going through to cause them to doubt their newfound faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Because temptation can have that effect on people.

I think James anticipated the response that some of these displaced Christians might have to being fired, arrested, having their property confiscated, being physically punished, and even killed—Sin! *God should have left us alone—we were better off before.* Sounds a little like the accusations the liberated Israelites presented to Moses twenty centuries before.

It's nothing new to me—blaming God (whether you use those exact words or not) for putting more in front of me than is fair or reasonable, and expecting me not to sin in responding.

- It's not a sin to be confused about things we don't understand.

- **It's not a sin to be angry (1 Peter 5:6-7).**
- **But it is a sin to accuse God for my temptation.**
- **And it is a sin to blame God when I fall victim to sin in response.**

Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his book *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, argues against the notion that *bad things* are redemptive, or at least against the position that God is in any way purposefully involved in causing or even allowing bad things to happen to us in order to teach us things we would otherwise never learn. He makes the statement that he has seen people emerge from severe hardship stronger and better, but far more often he sees people emerge from pain and grief that are just beaten up, deflated, sad and resigned to their misery.

Maybe so... I don't know that I would argue the point. But I would argue that it could be different if those people, in spite of their very real and genuine pain, suffering, and grief, chose to respond to their plight differently.

### **James 1:13-18**

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup>but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup>Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. <sup>17</sup>Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup>He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

## **God Will Never Tempt You To Sin**

### **James 1:13**

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

You can write this down and never have to wonder about it again. There will never be an occasion where you or I sin that God had anything to do with. I'm not saying it's the last thing on his mind. I'm saying it's not on his mind at all, because it's not possible that it can even be in his mind.

It would be like me trying to recite from memory a poem I'd never read, written in an alphabet I've never seen and a language I do not know by a person of whom I've never heard—impossible! It just can't happen. It's not in there.

But it's easy to make that assumption, or at least not to believe so clearly that it's false, if we don't have the facts sorted out.

- **Every trial has within it an element of temptation.**
  - Every test of our faith comes with an opportunity to respond sinfully.
  - It also comes with an opportunity to respond obediently.
- **Every temptation has within it an element of trial.**

- Every temptation has to be yielded to.
- Or every temptation has to be resisted.

But the two are not the same. God wants us to know this about him; his aim and interest is never to entice us to do anything that would be harmful or hurtful to us or anyone else. He can't even be a part of tempting you to sin (verse 13b).

### **ILLUSTRATION**

You know that your kids will be enticed to make poor choices on the first day you ever dropped them off at school. But you still let them go to school, in fact, you make them go to school, even though you know they're going to be tempted to do things and say things you don't want them to do.

But you aren't tempting them to do them...their classmates are. You've told them as often as you can, and more times than they want to hear about it, how they should behave. And you're going to check up on them. The teacher will send notes home if they don't. And there's the parent/teacher meeting to deal with, too.

It's all designed for your kid's good even though it doesn't always feel good or fun or fair. What does sound and feel good and fun and fair are the things your classmates entice you that you know you shouldn't do.

So, if you're a kid, you do them—don't blame your parents for the results. They don't want you to do those things. In fact they're doing all they can to keep you from doing them, except keep you locked up at home. I've often wondered if every bad seed that's ever sprouted wasn't sewn during recess...

There's a more benign point to consider, too. You want to play football, and your parents, in spite of knowing you may get hurt, let you. Suppose you break your ankle. It's really no one's fault; it's just the result of playing football, and it happens thousands of time every day. They didn't want you to break your ankle, but they allowed you the freedom and enjoyment of life knowing it was a risk, which they could only have prevented by, again, keeping you locked up at home. The answer, of course, is simple—don't have kids. Because if you do, you open yourself to the vulnerability of knowing that to have life is to face risk—you just never know...

God wants kids...lots of kids (verse 18). And he wants only good things for us—in fact everything good that's ever touched us is a result of God's goodness and his desire to do good toward us (verse 17).

So he created a world where we're free to live, to enjoy life and experience all of it's legitimate flavors and textures.

- But sin has ravaged that world.
  - As a result God's children sometimes make wrong choices—we sin.
  - Sometimes we will be in the wrong place at the right time and, through no fault of our own or, sometimes, anyone else's, bad things happen to us.

- God’s promise is that in this sin ravaged world where we’re left to try and discover some of it’s intended bliss, that when, either through our choices or the choices of others, and even when through no direct choice that anyone has made, things go bad, he can still bring about a lifetime of joy and happiness for you.
  - But you’ll have to settle one thing...
  - He never has had anything to do with any sin that’s ever touched your life.
- **Temptation is malevolent and premeditated and is designed to make you fall.**
- **Trials are benign and pre-ordained and are designed to help you stand.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree or disagree that temptations and trials, while they share certain characteristics, are fundamentally different? Agree Disagree
2. Have you ever felt the temptation to blame God for something bad that happened in your life? Yes No
3. If you have, can you talk about it, **briefly**, in your small group?

## Every Sin I’ve Ever Committed Is My Fault

Verse 14 hits us all pretty hard with a reality shot—It’s not God’s fault when I sin, and it’s not the fault of others. *Must be the devil*. Well, he’s not mentioned here. Maybe you’ve heard this...

To err is human...  
And to deny it is too.

- **Every temptation you’ve ever faced is a result of your desire to do wrong.**

### James 1:14

Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

### ILLUSTRATION

I don’t go fishing too often—not since about 1985 in fact—and I’m absolutely no good at it. But I do understand the concept...It’s a jerk on one end of the line waiting for a jerk on the other.

Seriously, I know... It’s all about deceit, and I don’t mean lying to your wife about how much you paid for your boat—although I have a great story about that, or to your friends about how big the one was the got away, but I do have a story about that too. It’s about fooling the fish, tricking the fish, lying to the fish, out-thinking the fish, or, in other words, baiting the fish into thinking he/she’s going to *get a*

bite to eat when in fact the goal is for the fish to be the bite to eat. The fish thinks it's going to get to eat when in fact it's going to get eaten.

That moment of success when you fool the fish, when it's finally convinced your lure is really a ready made meal, and it takes the bait and runs—that is the word *enticed* in verse 14. It's the word the ancient Greeks used to describe baiting a fish in order to catch it.

So here we go, every sin that you have ever committed is the result of you being deceived by the promise that sinful tendencies give you...

- *If you did \_\_\_\_\_ you'd feel a lot better.*
- *If you had \_\_\_\_\_ you'd be happier.*
- *If you looked at \_\_\_\_\_ you'd enjoy yourself more.*
- *If you said \_\_\_\_\_ you'd feel vindicated.*

Here's the trick; it hardly ever works...the first time. But what does a fisherman do? He keeps casting, over and over and over. If he doesn't get a bite, he comes back another day when the weather's better. He changes the kind of line he's using so the fish can't see it. He gets a better rod so he can feel the slightest tug. He throws every lure, worm, jig, and spinner in his tackle box; all designed to *entice* the fish, to get his attention, to whet his appetite, and if he hangs around long enough, a good fisherman will have him in the live well...for a while. Then he'll kill him and eat him, or hang him on the wall and brag about it.

- **Every time you yield to temptation you sin.**

When desire flirts with enticement the will gets impregnated by temptation and the insidious offspring, in every case, is sin.

### **James 1:15a-16**

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin....

<sup>16</sup>Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

- Temptation is unavoidable.
  - Temptation is not sinful.
  - Temptation is not entirely uncontrollable.
  - Temptation can be resisted through knowledge and discipline.
  - Temptation will lead to sin in every case otherwise.
- **Every time you sin you lose a bit more of the life God wants you to have.**

### **James 1:15b**

...and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

No one can embrace sin without paying a price. Eventually that cost will be extremely high...

- Small, seemingly innocent lies, eventually become a dark lifestyle of deception.
- Personal indiscretion, subtle liberties, and private indulgence that no one else will ever know about will eventually rob you of all self-respect and breed such insecurity in your slowly parched soul that it will hound you until your dying day; and it will do it in ways that you might never connect with anything you've ever done...but it's there.

**Sin will always:**

- Take you further than you wanted to go...
- Cost you more than you wanted to pay...
- And give you less than you ever imagined.

**ILLUSTRATION**

So often as people age the joy of living is lost. I wouldn't pretend to know all the reasons why, but I know this much—it doesn't happen to everyone, and health and money issues don't tell the tale (Pappy's line—"I ain't got nuthin', I don't want nuthin'. And I've made arrangements to do without it!"). I've wondered if a lot of it isn't simply the toll that sin exacts over the years.

Just like arthritis can misshape your hands and make them unusable, sin can distort your life and twist it into something that the rest of us don't even recognize as living.

**Proverbs 6:27**

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without...being burned?

The answer, of course, is no.

**Only Good & All That's Good Comes From God**

**James 1:16-17**

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. <sup>17</sup>Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James instructs us: don't ever be misled into thinking that God is behind anything that has to do with sin (verse 16). It can't happen. When the heat's on...you're going to need to know this, because it can be hard to believe when life just doesn't make sense.

On the contrary, God is behind only those things that are pure and good, and if there's anything in my life that's genuinely good, James tells me to remember, it's a gift from God. Further more, it's the way he always does things—always. He never changes (verse 17).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When it really matters, how hard is it for you to admit it when you're wrong?  
Pick one: Not hard at all    Pretty hard    Don't know I've never done it
2. How hard is it to resist blaming someone else for your sinful behavior?  
Pick one: Very hard    Fairly hard    Don't know I've never resisted it
3. If sin leads to death, and if only good comes from God, what is the greatest deception we face?