God's Sovereignty and Human Temptation
Scripture: James 1
Code: BQ32511

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (James 1:13)

Just as it is common to man to be tempted, it is also common for him to blame someone or something else, not only for his being **tempted** but also for his succumbing to it. From the beginning, one of the chief characteristics of sin has been the propensity to pass off blame, and every parent knows that children are born with that very evident propensity.

When God confronted Adam with his sin in the Garden of Eden, Adam's reply was, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). When the Lord then asked Eve, "What is this you have done?" she replied, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (v. 13). Eve blamed Satan; much worse, Adam blamed God.

James clearly has no patience with a foolish fatalism by which a poor man blames his poverty for turning him into a thief and therefore justifies his stealing, or by which a drunk blames business or domestic problems and pressures for driving him to drink and therefore to the reckless driving that seriously injures or kills someone. Nor does he allow for the notion that "the devil made me do it."

Even more vehemently, James opposes the intolerable idea of blaming God, declaring, **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God." Let no one say** translates a present active imperative form of the verb *lego* (**Let … say**), coupled with the negative imperative *medeis* (**no man**). The idea is, "Let no person say to himself," that is, rationalize to himself, "that, **when he is tempted,** he is **being tempted by God."** The very idea is anathema.

By translates the preposition *apo,* which is sometimes rendered "of," or "from," and carries the connotations of remoteness, distance, and indirection. Another preposition (*hupo*), which is often translated with those same English words (by, of, from), denotes direct agency. What James is saying, therefore, is that no one should say that God is even *indirectly* responsible for temptation to evil. He is in no way and to no degree responsible, directly or indirectly, for our **being tempted.**

In his fierce opposition to the ungodly rationalization of blaming God for sending enticement to evil, James gives some strong proofs that He is not responsible for our temptations and even less responsible, if that were possible, for our succumbing to them in sin. He does so by explaining first,

the nature of evil.

Cannot be tempted translates the adjective *apeirastos,* which is used only here in the New Testament and carries the idea of being untemptable, without the capacity for temptation. It is the same as being invincible to assaults of evil. In other words, the nature of evil makes it inherently foreign to God (see discussion of v. 17). The two are mutually exclusive in the most complete and profound sense. God and evil exist in two distinct realms that never meet. He has no vulnerability to evil and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. He is aware of evil but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash.

That truth, made plain so often in Scripture about the only true and living God, is not found in other religions. Because they are man-made and demon-inspired, pagan gods always reflect the frailties and shortcomings of those who created them. The gods of Greek and Roman mythology, for instance, are extraordinarily immature, capricious, petty, and even wicked. They are depicted as having supernatural power, but without the supernatural wisdom or virtue that should correspond to such power. They not only themselves commit gross sins but induce their mortal subjects to sin and vice of every sort. Those supposed deities sin against and among themselves and they sin against the human beings over whom they exercise arbitrary, unjust, and immoral control. Because they have been spun out of fallen, corrupted minds, they cannot but manifest the fallen and corrupt characteristics of their sinful creators. A stream cannot rise higher than its source.

In the second book of Samuel, we read, “Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah’ ” (2 Sam. 24:1), a sinful act that betrayed confidence in the nation’s own military resources above God’s divine resources. God actually induced David, “a man after His own heart,” to sin. But in the parallel passage in Chronicles, the Word makes clear that it was “Satan [who] stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel” (1 Chron. 21:1). Just as God allowed Satan to afflict and tempt Job, He allowed him to tempt David.

In the testing of Jesus in the wilderness after forty days and nights of fasting, the difference between *peirasmos* as testing and as temptation can be seen clearly, the same distinction seen in this first chapter of James (between vv. 2–3, 12 and vv. 13–14). Matthew reports that “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). But the remainder of the account (vv. 2–11) makes clear that, whereas from Satan’s perspective, the experience was intended as temptation (inducement to sin), for Jesus the experience was a test, which He passed without the least wavering. Despite Satan’s clever use of God’s Word, he did not succeed even slightly in penetrating Jesus’ impregnability to sin.

To some Christians, Jesus’ instructions about prayer, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer, suggest that God can, if He wants, “lead us into temptation,” and that we should therefore earnestly beseech

Him instead to “deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). But the idea there is that we should ask our heavenly Father not to lead us into a testing of our faith that, because of our immaturity and weakness, could become unbearable temptation to evil. Reinforcing what James says at the end of James 1:13 (“He [God] Himself does not tempt anyone”), Paul assures believers that “no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). God allows the trials in which temptation can occur, not to solicit believers to sin, but to move them to greater endurance (cf. James 1:2–4).

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