

## **The Enemy Within – I Made Me Do It**

*13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

You have probably heard the story of the Trojan Horse. In the Aeneid, Virgil talks about the strategy that allowed the Greeks finally to enter the city of Troy and end the conflict. After a 10-year siege, the Greeks constructed a huge wooden horse, and hid a force of 30 men inside. The Greeks pretended to sail away, and the Trojans pulled the horse into their city as a victory trophy. That night the Greek force crept out of the horse and opened the gates for the rest of the Greek army, which had sailed back under cover of night. The Greek army entered and destroyed the city of Troy, decisively ending the war.

So the words Trojan horse have come to mean something on the inside, already within, that can cause defeat. For as long as we are on this side of Heaven, every believer has a Trojan horse within. Every believer has an enemy within that, if allowed, can bring defeat in the war against sin. That Trojan horse, if we don't understand how to deal with it, will bring repeated defeat every time we face a trial.

In our series in James, we recently focused on the truths of verses 13, 17 and 18: "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God" We saw that to rightly deal with temptations, we have to exonerate one Person every time: God. We do blame God for our strong desire to sin, or even for sinning, when we blame the people in our lives, when we blame the situations in our lives, when we blame God's Word. But we saw James give us an air-tight case why God is the innocent party when it comes to our sin: He has no desire to sin, He doesn't want to see anyone sin, what He gives is always like Himself – good and perfect, and what He has put into us is not sin, but the divine nature. He has put a bit of Himself into every believer.

So when we sin, God is not to blame. But then who is? When that person provokes us, isn't she the reason for my sin? When the situation seems to demand sin, so that it seemed impossible not to sin, isn't some of the blame to be placed there? When God's Word seems so impractical to carry out, and our idea is so obviously an improvement, surely we can lay some of the blame there?

James' answer is simple: do not be deceived. There is one person responsible for every sin we commit. There is one person guilty every time. There is one person who we must never exonerate, and must always implicate every time we sin. That person is self.

Here in verse 14 and 15, James gives us the real reason why we are tempted, and what the progress is from temptation to sin and its consequences. What we will see is that there are three stages to the internal process of temptation – from first sight, all the way to deathly consequence. If we are serious about the fight against sin in our lives, we have to exonerate God, and get serious about implicating this Trojan horse within.

### **I. Deceptive Desires: Inclination and Consideration**

*14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*

The word for tempted is in the passive, it is something done to each one. So we think, "Oh, great, it is someone else I can blame!" No, you are tempted by something in you. Something in you does a

this work: it draws you, and it entices you. The two words here are a metaphor from fishing. There is the enticing, luring the fish with the bright lure or the wriggly worm, and then once caught, dragging away, pulling forcefully. We are the fish drawn to that bright light or that wriggly worm, we are the fish who bite and then are dragged into sin.

So what is this thing which draws us and entices us and lures us into sin? Is it God? No. Is it other people? No. Is it our circumstances? No. Is it Satan himself? He might have a role, but he is not mentioned in this text.

The culprit, the one baiting us to sin, the piper playing his tune, the snake charmer drawing us in – is us. James says, each is drawn away by his own desires. Each one, James says, each individual, one at a time, is dragged and lured to sin by his own, personal lusts. We are the fish and the fisherman.

In fact, sin is so rooted in each of us that the word James uses here for 'own' is a Greek word that means unique. Our English word idiosyncratic is derived from it. It means that each individual has sinful desires unique to him. Not everyone is tempted in the same way. One man wrestles with covetousness his whole life, another doesn't battle. One couple have huge struggles with meanness and conflict, while another couple doesn't. But that couple that is so puzzled by the conflict in the marriage find they struggle with laziness and apathy. One person is strongly tempted by sexual perversions, while another never even feels allured by it. I am not blaming sin on DNA, I am reporting what James says – each man will be drawn away and enticed by his own, unique lusts.

Where do these come from? Hear the words of the Lord Jesus.

*18 So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 "because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" 20 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 "All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mar 7:18-23)*

No one introduces sin into us. As fallen beings, we carry in us the inclination towards evil. James may even be referencing an idea that the Jewish rabbis referred to as the *yetzer ha ra* = the evil inclination. You see this in Scriptures such as Genesis 6:5 – man's inclination is towards evil. Now the later rabbis taught that there was a good inclination and an evil inclination. James doesn't seem to say anything about a good inclination – he simply mentions in verse 18 that God has planted His own nature in us. Naturally, man has this evil inclination.

It is what Charles Simeon likened to carrying flammable material around in yourself. We have inclinations towards evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. And when a trial come along, these inward, fallen, evil desires begin tugging on us, luring us, calling on us to give in to these things. They beg us to place the spark of agreement, concession, and ignite those flammable desires into full blown fires of sin.

Now we can see why James tells us not to blame God or others.

The spouse that God gave me doesn't make me commit sinful anger. Sinful anger is in my heart. My spouse's action tested me, but the pull, the dragging, the bait was internal.

Working long hours with an attractive person from the opposite sex didn't introduce adultery into the cheating man's heart. Adultery was already there. The situation tested him, and his own desires

called him to give in to sin.

The overbearing boss didn't make me lie or exaggerate on the report. Lying and deceit were in the heart, and the boss was a test that brought that out of the heart.

You see, every trial, permitted by God, whether it is a relationship, whether it is a bodily infirmity, whether it is a trying circumstance that seems to make sin easy and obedience hard, whether it is distress, or trouble or calamity or relational conflict or poverty or wealth, all of it is simply the hot water in the tea-cup. What is already in the tea-bag of your heart is what comes out.

When you throw Jesus into the hot water of disciples that forsake Him, disciples that betray Him, leaders that abuse their powers, leaders that blaspheme Him, people who physically abuse Him, people who use their powers to murder Him, what comes out of Him? Forgiveness, patience, truth, compassion, love, and enduring in those responses.

Every trial from the outside is also a temptation on the inside. But God, others, and the world itself are not responsible for those internal tugging and pulling to sin. That's each one's own desires. I have to recognise that every sin I ever commit had a root in my heart. That's a result of being fallen. Paul explains some of the reason in Romans 7

*14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

*15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

*19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom 7:14-25)*

Here Paul describes his own struggle with sin. Now that Paul is redeemed, he has the divine nature in him. But his body is the part of him that is still unredeemed. That doesn't mean the body is evil. But the body is still soulish, and not spiritual. It is given to being 'natural' and not desiring the things of the Spirit. That includes your brain, your thinking, your psychology. It is infected by this old, soulish principle, inclined to sin. The mind and heart still have this old principle in them. We don't understand the intersection between body, soul, spirit, mind and brain, spiritual desires and bodily appetites. But it helps us to understand what is going on.

“The Christian life is already-and-not-yet: our spirits are born again but our bodies (including our psychology) remain unrenewed. How helpful it is to know that our struggle is not strange or unbiblical, but that God himself knows that our spirits are waging war with an unspiritual body, just as Paul lamented.” (Rick Phillips - <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2015/08/romans-7-and-the-psychikos-man.php>)

Now the thing about these desires is that we said they are deceptive. They are not simply desires, but James tells us they entice and drag away. They incline us towards what is wrong, promising us pleasure, happiness, fulfillment if we will give in. They are not neutral: these desires in us are trying to persuade us to please self and not God.

To stop the course of sin, to arrest the cycle of sin, to put the brakes on, is to stop listening to the persuasiveness of these desires. Initially, when you are tempted, there is simply the inclination. You have the desire, because you are not yet in your resurrection body. But then, where it begins to go

wrong is when we turn inclination into consideration. We listen to the argument of the deceptive desires. We give those deceptive desires a chance to get on stage and entertain us and make themselves even more appealing.

I believe it is at this moment that 1 Cor 10:13 describes a way of escape:

*13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1Co 10:13)*

The way of escape is to give no more space to considering the arguments of your deceptive desires. You flee from them. You count yourself dead to them in the cross of Christ. You give yourself no provision to sin, no occasion to the flesh. You take your thoughts captive, and call those deceptive desires lies. That's the way of escape.

But if we do not take the way of escape, James describes for us the second stage of sin.

## **II. Disobedience : Permission & Participation**

*15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;*

James is using sexual imagery – the desire or lust has gone on to act. The desire that you were inclined to, and considered, eventually, you give permission to. You allow that this desire should be pursued, and it quickly conceives and a child named sin is born. The desire, once incubated in the womb of your thoughts, eventually comes into the world in an act. Inclination, once given consideration, will become permission and then participation.

You get the sense from the imagery that once you allow the desire to come in, the rest is an inevitable chain of events.

We see a telling example of this in 2 Samuel.

*2 Samuel 11:1 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child." (2Sa 11:1-5)*

Samuel the author, by stating that David stayed at home at the time when kings go out to battle, is probably alerting us to the first problem. Idleness is the Devil's workshop, and David finds himself with too much time and too little accountability. He walks on the roof, and from his roof, undoubtedly higher than all the other roofs, he can see something which probably no one else with their lower rooftops could see. He sees a woman bathing.

Now her beauty was not sinful. Nor was his accidental sight of her sinful. But upon seeing her, the adultery and fornication in his heart began tugging at him to turn a look into a gaze. Right there was the door of escape. He could have done what Noah's sons did – turn one's back on the nakedness of another.

And from consideration, he gave himself permission to keep looking.

But now that sin was already conceived, it called for more. Looking was not enough. So he actually

involves his staff, and asks them about her.

You can hear in their response a kind of warning to David: she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite. And Uriah was one of David's choice men. Here was another door of escape. But David had already given himself moral permission to get this far, and now desire had conceived and it was birthing sin.

So he fetches her. Whether this was willing on her part, or a kind of power rape, where she was too intimidated to refuse, we can't say for sure. It was absolutely clear adultery on David's part.

Probably each of us has the shameful experience of having allowed a desire to grow until it manifested in ugly, spiteful conflict, words said which we wish we had never said, an act of anger or violence that seems so extreme looking back, an act of impurity that stains our conscience. We do not want the end result, just like the couple that sins sexually did not want a pregnancy out of it. That's why the image of the unexpected pregnancy is so apt. You don't want to go where sin will take you, but if you begin, by giving those deceptive desires a chance, it will take you there. "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." James says, prevention is better than cure!

*14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Rom 13:14)*

Because the final stage of sin is another kind of child.

### **III. Death - Habitation and Identification**

*and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

The Bible says, once sin has occurred, and if sin is allowed to grow and run its course, and become fully formed, it also produces a child. And that child is death.

The grandchild of deceptive desire is death. Deceptive desires, if we give them consideration, and then permission and participation, will turn into death.

What does it mean, when sin is fully formed? Well, we can go further than one sin. We can keep sinning, until we make a habit of the evil. Once we have made a habit of the evil, we begin to identify with the evil. It feels like part of us. We say, "This is just who I am! I was born this way! This is my personality! This is my orientation! This is my temperament!" So now we have come to be in a kind of union with sin, defining our very selves by it.

This is one of the huge problems with sinful music and sinful entertainment. Once someone has given themselves moral permission to watch or listen to it, they obviously participate in it by watching it or listening to it. But as they do so, a desensitisation occurs, where it become habitual. Pretty soon, they identify themselves with it. "This is my music! How dare you judge me! This is my style of entertainment! How dare you criticise!" And now that you have identified yourself with that entertainment or that way of life, you and it are the same thing. An attack on it is an attack on you. You can't separate yourself from the sin anymore – it is part of you, and if people criticise it, they are maliciously, hatefully attacking you.

Finally then, the identification turns into legitimisation. You legitimise it, call it good and right, feel no pang of conscience for doing it, and actually invert the values. Now people who say its wrong are the evil ones.

*20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)*

But just like you cannot escape the law of gravity, you cannot escape that sin brings death. Physically, it brings our bodies to an end and has brought the curse to the world. Spiritually, it brings man to eternal separation from the Author of life.

This is why Lady Wisdom says in Proverbs 8

*34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors.  
35 For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the LORD; 36 But he who sins against me  
wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death." (Pro 8:34-36)*

James is telling us that when the external trials come, we will also experience internal temptation. When we do, blaming will short-circuit the whole process. Blaming will prevent you from growing and enduring in right responses. The things external to you, the people, the circumstances never lead you to sin. What leads you to sin is your own fallen desires.

The trials are an opportunity to reveal those things, bring them up, and mortify them. Trials will dredge up the evil, so that we can weaken it, mortify it, turn from it, and replace it with Christlikeness.

So this is what we do: when trials come, we will experience an enticement and a pull. That's not God or others, that's me. Those are deceptive desires calling on me to please self and sin. At that very moment I must admit that these are coming out of me. They are sinful and they are my desires. I can actually be thankful for the insight to see what is in my heart. I can be thankful to see what my unique deceptive desire are.

But I must not listen to their siren song. Don't bring the Trojan horse deeper into the city. I must give them no consideration. I turn from them. I flee. I confess they are evil, even before they have a hold on me. I do not give them any consideration, or permission, nor do I participate in them, for I know where they will go, and I don't want to go there. I don't want the unplanned pregnancy of sin and the unplanned pregnancy of death. So I do what Joseph did in the arms of the adulterous wife of Potiphar: I flee. I put off deceptive desires. I put on Christlike desires. And I keep obeying, even under pressure, I endure in those responses, until they shape my character.

That's why I believe one day we will say the words of Joseph to Satan: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." You sought to make us fall and destroy ourselves, but God meant to show us our sin, so that we could repent of it and use the work of Christ to defeat it.