

Humpty Dumpty *Wasn't* Pushed

Bringing Faith Down To Earth—Part 3

James 1:13-18

Introduction

Not too long ago a group of Swedish researchers surprised the community when, after several years of research, they published their conclusion that sexual immorality was genetically influenced. They had isolated a gene which they believed influenced a man to cheat on his wife.

It was soon nicknamed the sin gene, it came to serve as supposed proof that people were helplessly wired for sin. One of the Swedish researchers said, “These findings shed light on the fact that all of our behaviors are influenced by nature.”

What he means is any idea of sinful behavior should be discarded in favor of an understanding of the evolutionary process. In other words, sin isn't our fault – we can't help it – it's in our genetic structure.

That's convenient, isn't it? Now you really can blame your parents. The reason I'm a mess is because of them – or someone else; which fits perfectly with the ever growing excuses of victimization.

Anything and anyone can be blamed for misbehaving – the *reason* someone commits a crime is because of the neighborhood they grew up in; the other people they grew up with; their education; their boss; their spouse; their children; the fact that they didn't have any money or because they had too much money; because they were so busy or, they were so bored . . . they are simply the victim of someone or something.

Illustrated perfectly by graffiti on a wall downtown Philadelphia that read, “Humpty Dumpty was pushed”. Never mind he shouldn't have been sitting up there on a wall to begin with.

The poet of that rhyme intended to illustrate the broken mess of humanity, personified by an egg – the symbol of life. And rather than accept responsibility, the average person today would say – that mess is somebody else's fault.

Somebody *pushed* me! Something made me do it.

And if nobody else is around to blame, you can always say what Flip Wilson made famous years ago, “The devil made me do it.”

Will Rogers, the homespun philosopher of the last century once remarked that there were only two periods in American history; “the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck.”

R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 44

But listen . . . in a very real way, we can trace the problem back to our parents, can't we. They didn't make us sin, but we act just like them when we do . . . we're just like Adam and Eve.

Both of them ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and God came along and demanded an explanation and Adam said, “Don't blame me! It was her fault.” And Eve said, “Don't blame me – it was the serpent's fault.”

And to this day, we are just like them – sinners all – and one of the hardest things for a sinner to do is

say, “I’m guilty . . . It was my fault . . . I’m the one who’s wrong!”

Gene A. Getz, *The Measure of a Christian: Studies in James 1* (Regal Books, 1983), p. 67

You see that characteristic every day when you get in your car to drive. You’re in the right hand lane but you need to turn left up ahead and so you see an opening and you floor it and swerve in front of the other car and then say to yourself, “Am I a good driver or what?” Never mind the coronary attack the man is having behind you . . . what’s his problem?

But let someone swerve in front of you and oh man. You’re back there livid – you’re speaking in tongues – hopefully no one can interpret them.

I was at an intersection the other day at a light – the second car in line; a woman was in front of me and when the light turned green she didn’t move. I don’t know what she was doing – maybe texting or something – so I tapped my horn; just a polite honk . . . she looked in her rear view mirror and honked back! She honked back at me?! Then she pulled straight ahead and as I turned right . . . well, I honked back. It wasn’t a honk if you love Jesus kind of honk . . . this had nothing to do with Jesus.

And then I had to go home and study the Book of James!

And the Book of James refers to maturity – growing up in the faith – more than any other New Testament author.

He wants to see our faith demonstrated in life – even at intersections.

So far, we’ve discovered that evidence of maturity is revealed by a passion to persevere when facing tribulation.

You don’t get to choose your crosses, but you do get to choose your responses, right?

And spiritual maturity stays put.

Now James will go on to say that a mark of maturity is not only a passion to persevere when facing tribulation, but a passion to stay pure when facing temptation.

In the past **11 verses**, James has delivered to us the truth about trouble . . . now in the next **6 verses** he is going to deliver to us the truth about temptation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, James is going to talk about that three letter word, sin. And he’s going to make sure we understand that the real problem is the middle letter - the letter I.

Notice **James chapter 1 and verse 13**. ***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. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.***

You might notice that James begins this discussion by assuming you will face temptation. He doesn’t say in **verse 13**, “if he is tempted”, but “when he is tempted.”

You’re going to face temptation every single day of your life. You’re going to be confronted by several thousand commercials every day, whether on billboards, television, newspaper, magazine, radio, internet, facebook, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, you name it.

And somewhere along the line somebody or something is going to advertise for you to buy into something you shouldn’t think; something you shouldn’t plan; something you shouldn’t see; something you shouldn’t say or something you shouldn’t do.

Every day you get out of bed you will face a test of integrity that will try to chip away at your character and holy passion and humility while you have every intention of reinforcing them.

Just like your children – especially when they’re little – they’re going to get up in the morning and almost immediately test you in some way. You see, they want to know if the boundaries moved sometime during the night . . . did anything change while we were sleeping. It was “no” yesterday . . . will it be “yes” today.

So also, temptation is going to come back again and again to see if the gates are still closed and if the windows are still locked and if the front door will remain closed to its advances.

It wants to find out if “no” turned into “maybe” into “I’ll think about it” into “sure, why not.”

Temptation will never leave you alone.

So, James doesn’t say, “Now if you happen to be tempted and really good Christians never are, here’s what to do.” No, James says, “You are going to be tempted and here’s how you’d better think if you want to pass the test.”

1. Don’t Play the Blame Game

The first thing you are not to do is play the blame game.

Notice again, *verse 13*, “***Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God.”***”

Now James is writing to Christians. No Christian would ever blame God, right?

Maybe not openly . . . but how many Christians would be tempted to say, “If God had given me a better job, I wouldn’t be so greedy; if God had intervened for me earlier, I wouldn’t be so angry; if God had just changed something about my heredity, my environment, my education, my income, my geography, my alma mater, I’d be a better person.

And we’ve become no more biblical in our thinking than researchers who believe sin is the fault of something other than our own sinful decision.

The truth is, we as fallen human beings are all predisposed to sin and no sin is beyond our capacity – because we are fallen sinners. “This is the way God made me” is another way of blaming God—which is exactly what Adam did, by the way.

God demanded an audience and Adam said, “The woman whom you gave me; she gave me from the tree.” Did you catch that? Lord, the woman you

gave me . . . I was doing just fine until you brought her into my life.”

He’s going to live with that for the next 900 years. I wonder how many burnt casseroles he ate?

And Eve said, “It was the serpent who deceived me.” Implication – you created the serpent too, didn’t you?

Adam and Eve stood in a united accusation that God was ultimately the problem.

And so do we. James says what he says here because he knows that the nature of mankind – God is ultimately either the chief object of our blessing or the chief object of our blame.

Are you blessing God today or blaming Him.

James goes on to say in *verse 13*, ***for God cannot be tempted by evil and he Himself does not tempt anyone.***

In other words, that God has nothing to do with tempting someone to sin.

In fact, James writes, God cannot be tempted by evil.

And immediately you have a question or two about that statement.

I thought Christ was ***tempted in all points as we are today, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)***.

He was.

But I thought Jesus was God incarnate. He is.

But Jesus was tempted for 40 days by the devil and, in fact, throughout his entire life. He was.

But it says here that God cannot be tempted. It does.

But if Jesus is God and Jesus was tempted, but here it says, God can’t be tempted . . . that raises some big questions. It does.

If you come back tonight at 6:00, Dr. Burggraff’s going to answer ‘em.

The words “cannot be tempted” translate apeirastos (ἀπειραστος) which is used only here in the New Testament and carries the idea of being without the capacity for temptation – in other words, when tempted, He doesn’t have anything within His nature to correspond to it, whereby He might be attracted to it; you could render it “invincible”. Literally understood, God is invincible to temptation.

John MacArthur, *James* (Moody Press, 1998), p. 47

As one author wrote, “God is aware of evil, but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a trash heap is unaffected by its stench.

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 47

The other question you might have is if Christ was unable to sin – not just that he wouldn’t sin, but that He couldn’t sin – which is what theologians call the impeccability of Christ – that Christ couldn’t sin – well, if that’s true, then how is Jesus able to sympathize as our High Priest when we go through temptation because He was tempted like we were?

Was He really?

Yes, He was.

You need to understand that Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man. He had two natures – a divine nature and a human nature. Not a sinful nature, but a human nature. He really was God incarnate and He really was a human being. He wasn’t faking either one.

The question is how did He meet temptation?

He met it as a man.

Wayne Grudem writes, “The divine nature of Jesus Christ could not be tempted – that is, it had nothing within it to be attracted to sin – but his human nature could be tempted and was clearly tempted.”

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 539

The classic example was the temptation of Christ by the devil in the wilderness recorded in Luke chapter 4. For forty days, Christ went without food. Satan effectively said in one of his temptations, ‘Listen, I know you’ve emptied yourself of divine prerogative to live like a man

and not like God. Why not satisfy your hunger by using your divine power and nature for the benefit of your hungry human nature. Turn those stones into bread. Be a little self-serving . . . just once; what’s the harm in that . . . you’re hungry . . . hunger is a God given need – so meet the need in your own way.” And Jesus quoted scripture – effectively saying to the devil, “Life isn’t about satisfying our needs—life is about obeying the word of God.”

Jesus met temptation like we do.

He didn’t rest on His deity, He resisted in His humanity – and resisting by means of the spoken word of God. And so, three times Jesus was tempted and three times, Jesus quoted scripture from the Book of Deuteronomy to topple his opponent.

And so shall we.

James says, God is invincible to sin and secondly, God isn’t invisibly tempting people to sin. Notice the next phrase in *verse 13 – for God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone.*

It’s interesting to discover that the word test and the word tempt have the same root form in the Greek language. But here’s the difference. Satan tempts us to defeat us; God tests us to develop us.

You could translate it, “God never solicits anyone to do what is morally wrong.

D. Edmond Hiebert, *James* (BMH Books, 1992), p. 93

One Greek scholar explained, God permits the circumstances of temptation, but He never prompts anyone to sin. God will never deliberately lead you to commit sin, for that would be contrary to His ever present desire to have His [children] be conformed into the image of [His Son].

Spiros Zodhiates, *The Work of Faith* (AMG, 1981), p. 65

God does not prompt you to yield to temptation, in fact, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God provides a way to escape it (*I Corinthians 10:13*) So if God doesn’t set the believer up with temptation . . . and we can’t blame even the devil

when we choose to sin . . . how does sin have such power and pull in our lives?

James says, “I’m glad you asked . . . here’s how sin works.”

James will unmask three ingredients as he exposes the truth about temptation and sin:

a. The first ingredient is desire

Verse 14. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

The word for lust is the word for a strong desire toward any [forbidden] object.

Cleon L. Rogers Jr. & Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1998), p. 554

What might be missed is the implication of the first part of this verse – it happens to be absolutely revolutionary in understanding sin.

James writes, “But each one is tempted.” The original language literally means, “each one of is uniquely tempted”; you could better understand what James is saying if you amplify the English translation of **verse 14** to read, “Each person is individually and uniquely tempted when they are enticed by their own individual desires.”

What that means is stunning news. Temptation for you will be uniquely different than anyone else.

Though we are all *predisposed* to sin, because we are all *fallen*, depraved sinners, with Adam’s sin nature; someone in here will resonate uniquely with one type of temptation, while another would hardly stumble at it, even if it knocked daily on the door of his heart.

You say, Stephen you sound like a Swedish researcher who says we’re simply wired for certain sinful behavior. Not entirely.

While I would agree that we are uniquely created with an individual – you could even call it a genetic bent – a personality and temperament that resonates with certain sin, we cannot excuse our sinful behavior because of it. We simply cannot commit a sin and then say, “That’s the way I am!”

Just because Solomon was predisposed to loving women didn’t mean he was anything less than sinful in his collection of wives.

In other words, a person can be uniquely drawn to struggling with alcoholism, or gambling, or pornography, or adultery, or homosexuality, or gluttony and on and on – but here’s the difference; that doesn’t change what God considers sinful behavior.

God’s standard remains the same for everyone – no matter how you’re wired, no matter what your personality is, no matter what your temperament is like.

But this is important to understand because of the way you will face temptation. The world, the flesh and the devil – which by the way have done their homework – know which way you bend.

One author put it this way – we know that professional football teams spend a lot of time studying their opponents’ game film, looking for weaknesses and tendencies they can exploit. Players will study films of their individual opponents, looking for that little advantage they can use in their upcoming game. Let me tell you something, this author writes, Satan has “game film” on you and me . . . he is aware of our weaknesses. He has learned [over time] our tendencies to sin. So he knows that if he can re-create the temptation that led us into sin before, there is a great chance we will fall for it again.

Tony Evans, *The Perfect Christian* (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 22

And here’s how James says it happens – **verse 14 again. He is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**

James uses words that come right out of the hunting experience.

“Carried away” means to be lured by the scent of meat in a trap; the word **“enticed”** refers to bait on a line, used by a fisherman.

While James does not speak directly of Satan doing the baiting of the hook, he does speak of Satan’s involvement in the provoking of sinful behavior in chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Dan G. McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James* (Baker Academic, 2009), p.

107

Just don't overlook the fact that we provide Satan with everything necessary to fall into the trap.

It's our lusts . . . it's our desires . . . he just baits a hook with the right environment or the right encounter or the right visual aid or the right setting or the right frustration or the right moment of discouragement or need or longing . . . he uses that to add to the lure . . . to increase the scent . . . to catch your eye with the movement of the bait on the hook that whispers to the desire you already carry in your heart.

The idea is to hide the trap, but expose the bait; to disguise the hook and it look like something other than an instrument of capture and certain death.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature: James* (Victor Books, 1979), p. 38

No fish ever swam around in the lake looking for hooks. That one looks like pure stainless steel I think I'll bite that one.

No, they swim around looking for a meal. The genius of Satan and the world and the flesh is to disguise the hook and get you to believe all you're getting is a free meal and it's going to taste wonderful.

And before you know it, you're hooked . . . you're caught in the trap.

Like the little boy whose mother caught him eating the cookies she had just baked and set out on the counter. She walked in as he was putting one in his mouth and she said, "I thought I told you not to eat those cookies until after supper." The boy responded, "Well, I just got up on the chair to smell the cookies, and my teeth got caught."

Evans, p. 22

That's the second ingredient – the first is desire, the second is disobedience.

b. The second ingredient is disobedience

James writes in *verse 15*. ***Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin.***

In other words, when the fish bites – when he acts upon the lure – when his will is set in motion to

fulfill his desire – James writes, that's when sin occurs.

James actually changes his illustration from the hunt to a hospital delivery room.

James personifies the progression of temptation turning into sin: desire is attracted to and finally decides to run away with disobedience . . . desire conceives by disobedience and then has a child; and the child's name is sin.

When your will connects with your desire and you choose to think or act in disobedience, that ends up giving birth to sin.

You say, but it didn't look like sin:

- it looked like popularity;
- it looked like personal satisfaction;
- it looked like being able to be me;
- it looked like true love;
- it looked like a way to get out of debt;
- it looked like relief from pressure;
- it looked like the next move up the ladder;
- it looked like a logical step to take;
- it looked like being appreciated;
- it looked like fun;
- it just looked good!

When I was tempted, I bit into the bait. This is when fantasy turns into reality

In fact, James warns us that there's more trouble ahead if sin isn't dealt with decisively.

You'll move from desire to disobedience to death.

c. The third ingredient is death

James goes on to write in *verse 15*. ***When sin is accomplished – that is, it reaches maturity – it brings forth death.***

James indicates that this sin is kept – it's cherished – it's followed and all the while it matures, bringing one form of destruction after another.

James isn't just talking about physical death – because sinners can live a very long time before

ultimately dying. James isn't talking about spiritual death because Christians sin.

I believe he's talking about a death-like existence. This is the self-destruction of David who wrote that he was literally being consumed by his unrepentant heart and life.

He wrote in *Psalm 32*, "***When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.***"

The warning is intended to cover every form of disintegration – it could be despair, disease, depression, loss of relationships and all that is truly honorable and dear.

Hiebert, p. 95

Even though sin brings relief or applause or friendship or pleasure, James says, it's temporary . . . it ultimately leads to death.

Sexual sin is probably as illustrative as any. What looked like pleasure has led to a myriad of diseases. I visited one country in Africa where the majority of its population is now infected with AIDS. One church leader said that in spite of that, among the youth, their favorite game is to form a line of girls and the boys go down the line and choose their partner for the night. That country is going to have most of its population wiped out in less than 20 years. And what about America . . . we're much more sophisticated than that, right? Yet, here in our own country, syphilis, gonorrhea, and a host of other diseases strike some fifteen million Americans every year, with a new infection on average occurring every forty-five seconds. And these diseases can bring with them pain, blindness, infertility, brain damage and insanity.

John Phillips, *Exploring The Epistle of James* (Kregel, 2004), p. 46

Remember that old saying,

- Sin will take you further than you wanted to go;
- And sin will cost you more than you wanted to pay;
- Sin will keep you longer than you wanted to stay.

James has delivered the truth about trouble and he has also held nothing back as he delivers the truth about temptation.

James began this section by effectively saying, "Don't play the blame game."

It's our desires that bait the hook; it's our disobedience that bites the hook.

The second thing James says, effectively, is:

2. Take off the blinders

Verse 16. Do not be deceived my beloved brethren.

The word deceived means to allow lust to blur your thinking so that you forsake the truth to follow a lie.

Charles R. Swindoll, *James: Practical and Authentic Living* (Insight for Living, 1991), p. 36

Wake up to the truth.

This is an imperative – another exclamation point from James, but in the present tense. He's literally saying, "Stop being deceived."

He's writing to Christians no less. Be aware – this is how temptation works . . . stay alert . . . don't be blindsided . . . keep your eyes open!

It's late September, which means for us, the mice have returned. That 25 acre field behind our house where cattle craze is the perfect place for mice to build their summer homes. But winter is coming and that means they believe they can move into ours. So this past Friday I went to Lowe's and bought mouse traps. You know why I bought them? Because I knew I'd be preaching on this text and I wanted an illustration. More importantly, my wife showed me the bag of pancake mix that I had used only a few days earlier, now had two jagged holes in the bottom of the bag. These mice want my pancakes.

So this is serious. I went and bought not one, but three different ways to get rid of mice. Poison in pouches, the traditional wooden mouse trap and a brand new mouse trap – describe?

Now, if I could bring all the mice into my living room that are thinking about moving in – and seat them all – I’d show them this brand new mouse trap I’ve bought. I’d tell them how it worked. I’d show them how dangerous it was.

And then I’d tell them how serious I was and that they ought to stop trying to live in my house – I might even use power point and put up the principles: houses are for humans, pancakes are for people. I’m sure they’d appreciate the alliteration.

Then I’d tell them that if they stay out in the cold they’re going to die and if they come into my house they’re going to die and it’s all the same to me . . . how’s that for heartless.

Sorry . . . end of discussion . . . and all the mice go trembling away without an ounce of hope for the future.

Fortunately, God doesn’t talk to you and me like I’d talk to mice if I had the chance.

Well, the first part would sound the same – here’s the trap; here’s how it works; here’s how dangerous it is; you’d better be careful because it can do serious damage.

But then God opens the door and says, “Listen, I’ve got hope for you . . . I’ve actually got something better for you than what temptation offers.

3. Focus on the truth

I want you to literally remember and revel in two things – in fact, keep them in front of you . . . if you do, you’ll be less likely to stick your head into a trap or bite into a hook.

- **First, revel in the goodness of God**

Notice *verse 17*. ***Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.***

The truth is, when we’re in the grip of temptation, we forget the promise of God to provide for us what is truly good.

Temptation says, “Eat the fruit . . . you’ll be better off . . . God’s holding out on you . . . why wait . . . this is everything you’ve been looking for.”

James reminds us, “God is committed to giving us what is truly good.” If it comes from Him, it is never a trap . . . it’s not death, but life.

You can trust Him.

In fact, notice the next phrase of *verse 17*. ***“with Whom is no variation or shifting shadow.”***

James is referring to the shadows cast by the movements of the earth, the sun, the moon. James is saying, “God is the Father of lights – that is, He is the creator of the lights in the heavens, but they aren’t always available – there are still times when you have no light.

But with God, there is no variation – there is never a shadow – there is no turning – that is, He never turns away from you – ***In Him***, John wrote, ***there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)***

God does not have a dark side . . . He doesn’t change . . . you can depend on His character to give you what is good and what is right.

Not only are we given hope and joy as we revel in the goodness of God, James says we should also revel in the grace of God.

- **Revel in the grace of God**

He writes in *verse 18*. ***In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.***

James is referring to our spiritual birth, by the will of God, through the word of truth – which is the gospel of Christ.

The figure of begin first fruits is drawn from the Old Testament law which designated the first portion of the harvest as belonging to God – it was offered to Him as an offering of praise and the rest of the harvest could be used for ordinary

purposes.
Hiebert, p. 104

In other words, you're not ordinary. You are much more than a mouse or a fish. You are an offering to God as His special possession. You belong to the One True and Living God:

- Who will never change toward you
- Who is trustworthy
- Who will provide for you what is good
- Who redeemed you for Himself
- Who is worthy of all our loyalty and our love

Stop chasing worms on baited hooks . . . you belong to the Creator, Redeemer, who offers goodness and mercy and life.

James is challenging us to start living up to who we are.

So, when facing trials . . . be passionate about persevering.

When facing temptation . . . be passionate about purity.

Our gracious redeeming God deserves nothing less than our all.

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