

Help From Our Good Father in Fighting Our Evil Within, Part 2 (James 1:14-17)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 21, 2009

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In the book by Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin*, he defines **deceive** as “to make someone believe that things are other than they are, so that he will do something he would never do otherwise.” Quoting from Samuel Clemens (not a theologian, better known as _____), in chapter 20 of *Huckleberry Finn*, he gives a memorable illustration where Huck in his travels meets two men who introduce themselves as ‘Duke of Bridgewater and the Dauphin himself, [who said he’s King] “Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette.” In one of their cons, the “Dauphin” takes Huck to a camp meeting, a preacher is whipping the crowd into a frenzy of emotional *Amens*, *glo-ory’s*, *hallelujahs* and tears.

Huck: ‘Well, the first I knowed the king got a-going, and you could hear him over everybody; and next he went a-charging up on to the platform, and the preacher he begged him to speak to the people, and he done it. He told them he was a pirate -- been a pirate for thirty years out in the Indian Ocean -- and his crew was thinned out considerable last spring in a fight, and he was home now to take out some fresh men, and thanks to goodness he'd been robbed last night and put ashore off of a steamboat without a cent, and he was glad of it; it was the blessedest thing that ever happened to him, because he was a changed man now, and happy for the first time in his life; and, poor as he was, he was going to start right off and work his way back to the Indian Ocean, and put in the rest of his life trying to turn the pirates into the true path; for he could do it better than anybody else, being acquainted with all pirate crews in that ocean; and though it would take him a long time to get there without money, he would get there anyway, and every time he convinced a pirate he would say to him, "Don't you thank me, don't you give me no credit; it all belongs to them dear people in Pokeville camp-meeting, natural brothers and benefactors of the race, and that dear preacher there, the truest friend a pirate ever had!"

And then he busted into tears, and so did everybody. Then somebody sings out, "Take up a collection for him, take up a collection!" Well, a half a dozen made a jump to do it, but somebody sings out, "Let him pass the hat around!" Then everybody said it, the preacher too.

So the king went all through the crowd with his hat swabbing his eyes, and blessing the people and praising them and thanking them for being so good to the poor pirates away off there; and every little while the prettiest kind of girls, with the tears running down their cheeks, would up and ask him would he let them kiss him for to remember him by; and he always done it; and some of them he hugged and kissed as many as five or six times -- and he was invited to stay a week; and everybody wanted him to live in their houses, and said they'd think it was an honor; but he said as this was the last day of the camp-meeting he couldn't do no good, and besides he was in a sweat to get to the Indian Ocean right off and go to work on the pirates.’

He was going to work alright -- on them! In cons, they made most money at the religious meetings. Nobody likes to be conned, and not only are Christians *not* immune to deception, they are special targets. *Spiritual* deception aims not just for pocketbooks but for people’s souls.

What may have been a silly story to us reading a fiction book is a serious danger in real life, and was a taking place in the hearts of the original readers of James, which is why he writes this text which was inspired by God with us in mind as well. Deception is Satan's oldest trick in this book, it has been taking place since Adam and Eve in the garden, and for their descendents, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree (or whatever fruit it was).

The focus of this passage is not the hucksters and tricksters *out there*, it's on the deceptive con-man *in here*, in each of our hearts. The con that James is talking about is an inside job, inside us.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

I want to come back to verse 17 in the 2nd half of this message but I want to start where we left off this morning. Both of the first 2 steps James describes in v. 14 (desire, deception) are fought on the battleground of our mind. It starts with desire or thoughts / feelings, which we can and must control by choosing what we allow our mind to dwell on (Phil 4:8).

Martin Luther writes of a young man who longed to get rid of his sinful thoughts. He was told, "you cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can certainly keep them from building a nest in your hair." ... Augustine declares, we cannot prevent trials and temptations from overtaking us, but with our prayer and our invocation of God's assistance we can stave off their victory over us.¹

Last weekend some from our church attended the Resolved Conference down in Palm Springs, with John Piper, John MacArthur, Steve Lawson, C. J. Mahaney, and Rick Holland. Their theme this year as sin, and Rick Holland opened it this way:

‘The greatest danger of warfare is always underestimating your enemy ... whether you know it or not, whether you realized it or not, you walked into this room in the middle of a massive war for your soul. Whether you realize it or not, you are in a war; captive by the enemy and unable to fight; OR on God's side ... engaged deeply in the fight ... the enemy is YOU ... you are your own worst enemy ...’

I was following it live on the Internet and at the end of the first session he recommended this book I'm about to quote from by John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (edited by Justin Taylor). It's a faithful editing and updating of 3 works by Owen published in the mid-1600s, *Mortification of Sin*; *Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*; and *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin* (all 3 strike the heart of our passage).

The introduction (p. 27) really sums up well what we've seen in the past couple messages in James: 'Sin moves by drawing the mind away from God, enticing the affections and twisting desires and paralyzing the will, thus stunting any real Christian growth ... "Your enemy is not only *upon* you ... but it is *in* you also.'

Part of understanding the battle against sin is seeing that the enemy, so to speak, is not only external, but internal, which is why Christians often have conflicting desires within them. Most Christians seem unaware of or apathetic about the sin that remains in them, but whether they recognize it or not there is a “living coal continually in their houses,” which, if not properly attended to, will catch their home on fire.’²

It’s been said that Rome did not fall to some outside conqueror; Rome fell from within because it was honeycombed with sin.

Pogo: We have met the enemy, and he is us.

James said it this way: *Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire.* i.e., don’t be reeled in.

The first 2 steps of sin are inward, and we saw before that verse 14 uses fishing and hunting terms. It starts with desire (step 1), and then there is an object of desire, a lure or a bait that deceives us (step 2) and draws us toward sin with the goal of hooking us and capturing us in the net. Once we are entangled and entrapped in this net or web of temptation, step 3 takes place (disobedience – sin in attitude or action or both). It doesn’t become a sin when the outward act is done, that is the result of what already was a sin within, as Jesus explained it in Matthew 5.

James 1:15 says it this way: *then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin ...*

What are some biblical remedies to help us not be deceived at this stage of the game. It’s far better not to let the man get to first or second base, but if he’s already on 3rd base, what can you do to stop him from stealing home and scoring further?

One way to get him out before the end of v. 15 is to know the opponent, don’t be ignorant of his schemes, and how he likes to lead off on the base and try and gain as much ground as he can.

Also, stick to God’s game plan and follow the rules and how you have been trained. James 1:12 has a contrast: trials/temptations -> endure -> life. Verses 14-15 has a different results: desire -> enticed (rather than endure) -> death. Choice: endure and live [like Job, cf. Jas 5:11] or curse God and die [as Job’s wife told him to].

The end result of v. 15 is death, if it can have its way, or at least our spiritual self-destruction, seeking to make us spiritually useless

Enticement and entrapment go together as desire and deception go together. The language of James could refer to a fisherman’s net or a hunter’s snare, a hidden trap to attract then capture an animal.

All of us have what Hebrews 12 calls, sins that so easily entangle us, and we need to be throwing those off so that we can run with endurance the Christian race fixing our eyes on Jesus.

2 Tim 2:26: “...*they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*”

Last week we looked at a number of Scriptures with similar language of sin conceived that is birthed in actions of disobedience on the road to destruction (step 4). Notice again the deception.

Isaiah 59:4-5 (ESV) ... *they speak lies, they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.* ⁵ *They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.*

Rabbis: "Evil concupiscence is at the beginning like the thread of a spider's web; afterwards it is like a cart rope." *Sanhedrin*, fol. 99

A deadly web has been spun. Sin ensnares, entangles, and binds. And like spiders, sin reproduces. Sin is fruitful and multiplies, and what started with one is soon many, all over the place. Webs of black widows are strategically placed where you travel that are barely visible to the eye, entrapping and wrapping up unsuspecting victims to inflict sin's poison and to consume all caught in its net.

But this gruesome image is not some outside predator eating us alive, it's an inside predator, *our sin*, eating us from the inside out. Sin is not just some force *out there* – it's *in here*, in my heart and yours, and the blame and responsibility is in us, not outside us.

Walter Scott: "Oh! what a tangled web we weave When first we practise to deceive!"

Job 18:8 (NASB95) "*For he is thrown into the net by his own feet, And he steps on the webbing.*"

Sin is like Delilah to Samson, binding even the strongest man:

Judges 16:13-21 (NASB95) ¹³ *Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be **bound**." And he said to her, "If you **weave** the seven locks of my hair with the **web** [and fasten it with a pin, then **I will become weak** and be like any other man." ¹⁴ So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and **wove them into the web**] ... [When she later talked him into giving up his true secret as a Nazarite v. 19 says while he slept] **his strength left him.** ²⁰ She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But **he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.** ²¹ Then the Philistines **seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.***

What a sad illustration of James 1. If you think you're strong, take heed lest you fall. In our relaxation and foolishness if we allow ourselves to be seduced like Samson was, sin like Delilah will weave us into its web and cut off whatever strength source we had. Power will leave us as we sleep instead of keeping up our spiritual duties. And we won't be able to free ourselves as we think we can. If the Lord departs in our thinking, and if we continue to dally with Delilah, sin will seize us, blind us, bind us, chain us, imprison us like an army of Philistines, wanting us to be their slave till death.

This leads to Step 4 – Destruction

v. 15 “... and sin when it is accomplished, brings forth death.”

Turn to Proverbs 4. Much of the book of Proverbs exhorts a young man to keep his way pure by keeping his life according to God’s Word, specifically God’s wisdom. The end of Proverbs 4 really addresses each of the first 3 steps:

- desires within (our heart)
- deception (deceitfulness)
- disobedience (a life deviating from God’s path)

Proverbs 4 (NASB95) ²³ *Watch over **your heart** with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.* ²⁴ *Put away from you a **deceitful** mouth And put devious speech far from you.* ²⁵ *Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed **straight in front of you.*** ²⁶ *Watch the path of **your feet** And all your ways will be established.* ²⁷ *Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.*

Now chapters 5-7 really develop further the progression from the enticing entangling snares of sin that lead to destruction and how to avoid the end of this process

Proverbs 5 (NASB95) ¹ *My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding;* ² *That you may observe discretion And your lips may reserve knowledge.* ³ *For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech;* ⁴ *But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword.* ⁵ ***Her feet go down to death, Her steps take hold of Sheol [i.e. the grave].***

... ⁸ ***Keep your way far from her And do not go near the door of her house,*** ⁹ *Or you will give your vigor to others And your years to the cruel one;*

... ¹¹ ***And you groan at your final end, When your flesh and your body are consumed***

... ²² *His own iniquities will **capture** the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin.* ²³ *He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.*

6:2 *If you have been **snared** with the words of your mouth, Have been **caught** with the words of your mouth,* ³ *Do this then, my son, and **deliver** yourself ...*

⁵ ***Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hunter’s hand And like a bird from the hand of the fowler ...***

²⁵ ***Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you ...*** ²⁷ ***Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned?*** ²⁸ ***Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? ...***

³² *The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; **He who would destroy himself does it.*** ³³ *Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out.*

7:21 *With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him.* ²² *Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,* ²³ *Until **an arrow** pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that **it will cost him his life.*** ²⁴ *Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth.* ²⁵ ***Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths.***

²⁶ *For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain.* ²⁷ *Her house is the way to Sheol, **Descending to the chambers of death.***

Scripture spends much of these 3 chapters calling our attention to the consequences of sin when it runs this full course.

But I want to end on a good note! What better way to end this Father's Day then to focus on God the Father as verse 17 does? "Father of lights" was a Jewish way to refer to God as the creator and faithful sustainer of the lights in the heavens (sun, moon, stars), as described in the first page of the Hebrew Scripture. Jews in the scattered 12 tribes that James writes to would daily repeat the *Shema* with this benediction before it: 'Blessed be the Lord our God who hath formed the lights.'³

God is the Father who brought forth the heavenly lights and He has authority and charge over them, and He faithfully governs them and all things in the universe. The original Jewish readers from the 12 tribes dispersed abroad may have thought of this verse here:

Jer. 31:35 *Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for **light** by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for **light** by night ...* ³⁶ *"If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever."* ³⁷ *Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.* ³⁸ *"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt ...*

The end of James 1:17 can be translated several different ways:

- God has no "shadow due to change" (ESV)
- "who does not change like shifting shadows" (NIV)
- "no ... slightest hint of change" (NET)
- "no ... shadow of turning" (KJV / NKJV)

Great is Thy faithfulness, **O God my Father;**
 There is **no shadow of turning with Thee;**
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
 As Thou hast been, **Thou forever will be.**
 ... **All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;**
 Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

James 1:17 (NKJV) 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.*

The lights in the heavens may appear to change or shift or vary in intensity, and as the earth turns there are shadows, eclipses, and we experience darkness for a time, but God is always light, all good all the time, immutable, unchanging, faithful, constant, trustworthy.

God's first recorded words are "let there be light" (Gen. 1:5) and God's very nature is light / good not evil (1 John 1:5 "*God is light and in Him is **no darkness at all***").

With God, there is no dark side like the moon or “dark side of the force.” There is no evil in God. v.13 of our text makes clear that temptation to evil isn’t *from* God and can’t be blamed *on* God though trials come from Him (v. 2).

(like we sing in another hymn: “every joy or trial cometh from above ...”)

**There’s a difference in affirming God’s sovereignty in all things (giving *and* taking) and blaming God:

*Job 1:21 The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*²² *Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

God is sovereign. Man is responsible. God allows trial / temptation but he is never the author of temptation or sin. The Father analogy has been developed this way: ‘No good earthly father would deliberately seduce his child into sin trying to make him or her fall. However every good father will deliberately allow his child to enter situations in life in which the child must make moral choices. We realize that sending a child to school or into the community, at the proper age, is good for a child because it matures him or her. Likewise God grows us up by allowing certain experiences to assail us, though He Himself ... gives good gifts to His children’⁴

The fact that God is sovereign over all things as our faithful Father is the basis for the great promise that He’s faithful in not allowing us to be tempted beyond we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13).

IVP NT Commentary: ‘The association of God with *heavenly lights* is an image of his exalted glory and power. The dissociation of God from *shifting shadows* is a declaration of his immutability. Both images are designed to give us assurance that we may rely upon him confidently. James wants his readers to cling to the certainty of God’s unchanging love in their suffering ...

James intends the force of these truths to accumulate with impact on our actual beliefs about God. Especially in times of trial, is your image of God one of exalted authority, trustworthy constancy and unfailing generosity? ... he wants his suffering readers to be able to apply it in their trials. They need to believe this fundamental truth: in the midst of the trials, God has good gifts for them.

Second, *the action of the good gifts* is one of *coming down*. The implied application of this fact is that we are to look up! With the allusion to far-off heavenly bodies James evokes an image of looking up to receive something wondrous, in order that we may anticipate God’s good gifts instead of looking only at the hardship of our circumstances. John Bunyan said, “Temptation provokes me to look upward to God.”

MacArthur: ‘The implication of this passage is this: When we, as God’s children, are so abundantly and continually showered with the most gracious, valuable, and satisfying blessings our heavenly Father can bestow, why should anything evil have the slightest attraction to us?’⁵

Notice v. 17 says all good things are from above. But so many of us, whenever we need something, look horizontally to men about us instead of looking to God above us.

I read of a Hebrew Christian (like the original readers of James), ‘bedridden for over 15 years ... innumerable operations. The fact that he is living at all ... a miracle. It is, however, a life of deep affliction and suffering which he leads. And [this friend of his wrote] every letter he writes to me has this triplet at the top:

*Look to self and be depressed,
Look to others and be distressed,
Look to Jesus and be blessed.*

Here is a man who is certainly in need of the goodness of God, but where does he look for it? Not around him, not inside him, but above him and thus and only [there] is God’s purpose in his life made perfect.⁶

Having a right and high view of God is so critical. God is good, God is sovereign, God is faithful. Look to Him for what is truly good and satisfying, don’t look to anything less or anything else.

Manton: ‘Note the importance of the matter. The mistake is so dangerous that James is all the more earnest. **Don’t be deceived.** Note that errors about the nature of God are very dangerous. There is nothing more natural to us than to have wrong thoughts about God, and nothing is more dangerous. All behavior depends on keeping the glory of God unstained in your understanding. You see in Romans 1:23–24 that they “exchanged the glory of ... God” and then “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts.” ... Wrong thoughts about God harm the spirit and make people lose their sense and their desire for piety. Do not let the glory of God be tarnished in your thoughts; abhor whatever comes into your mind or may be suggested by other people if it tends to eclipse the divine glory in your thinking.⁷

¹*Luther's works, vol. 42 : Devotional Writings I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 73.

² Justin Taylor, ed., *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, Crossway Books, p. 27.

³ Alfred Edersheim *Sketches of Jewish Life* p. 269.

⁴ *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible.*

⁵ John MacArthur, J. (1998). *James*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, p. 54.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *James*.

⁷ Thomas Manton (1995). *James*. Previously published in Nottingham, England in 1994. The Crossway classic commentaries (Jas 1:17). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.