

Ministry of Grace Church

James 1:16-27 - Speaker Notes

Introduction

Last time we were together, we found that James was talking about trials and temptations. In verse thirteen he told his readers:

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

He went on to inform us that the source of these temptations is our own desires which have gotten out of control. He then returned to his comments about God. Believing that God tempts us to sin is heresy and James wants to make a strong point of the fact that not only does God not tempt us, but He loves us and is the source of all good things for us.

When we go through trying times, it is easy to roam from God, to get "weary in well doing," to blame God, and to basically quit trying. James is encouraging us to hang in there during such times, not allowing ourselves to be led astray, because as brothers and sisters in Christ we are all loved by God.

This letter is clearly addressed to all of us who have been born again, who are loved by God. This *agapē* love has as its focus the good of the one who is loved. God wants the best for us. He is not a mean ogre who wants to trick us into sinning. After all, that breaks our fellowship with Him. He wants us to grow from our trials so that we will be more like His Son, Jesus.

James now goes on to warn us about deception. He says,

James 1:16

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

The word translated "deceived" is *planaō*, which means "to deceive," "to go astray," or "to wander." Some translations have this as, "Do not go astray." The problem with this is that in the Greek text, the word *planaō* is in the passive voice, indicating action that is done to the subject. So, "do not be led astray" is a better translation.

If we go back to the Garden of Eden, we find that Eve was deceived by Satan.

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:13)

And the coming antichrist will also be a deceiver.

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7)

Satan is not interested only in trying to cause Eve to sin, he is interested in causing every Christian to sin. He doesn't like it when we get saved, so he is constantly trying to get us to break our fellowship with the Father.

Do you believe that we are currently living in the Last Days? Well here's some evidence that we are. Shortly before Jesus was betrayed, his disciples asked him to tell them what would be the signs of the end of the age? He then proceeded to describe to them a series of signs that would indicate that His return was imminent. In this list, He started out by saying, "Watch out that no one deceives you." In other words, the most significant characteristic of the time just before Jesus returns will be deception. Satan and his world system are currently executing a war of deception against anything that is good and right.

Did you ever wonder why there is so much fake news today? Deception!

James 1:17-18

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. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

James now goes on to show us why God would never tempt us to do wrong. He says that it would be totally out of character for a loving God to entice us to sin. Every good act of giving and every perfect gift, he says, is from above. These gifts come down to us from our Heavenly Father. James calls Him the father of heavenly lights. In the world we live in today, with all the artificial lighting throughout any large city (or even medium sized or small cities for that matter), it's difficult to see how many stars are on display every night. However, if we get out in the wilderness, away from the city lights, we are amazed at just how many stars there really are. And then when the full moon comes out, we discover that it's not really that dark at all because of the light reflected from the moon.

In the first century, when this letter was written, people were far more aware of the changing phases of the moon. In fact, the moon became their de facto calendar. The phases of the moon became supremely important to them. For instance, the beginning of every month was marked by the new moon. Also, people were much more aware of the wandering stars which they called planets (from *planaō*, to wander). They recognized that in addition to wandering, these planets got brighter and dimmer throughout their wandering.

So, we see that James' reference to the changing heavenly lights is understandable. His point, however, is that our Heavenly Father does not change like the phases of the moon or the brightness of the wandering stars! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, if we understood how good and benevolent God is, we would understand that He could never be the source of our temptations, because He loves us and wants the best for us – He doesn't change!

As just one example of the goodness of God, James points out that it was His choice to give us birth. Of course, James is not talking about our physical birth. He is talking about our spiritual birth.

James 1:19-21

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore

lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Here we see a peculiarity of translating Greek into English. When a Greek verb appears in the command form it is almost always translated as “let ...” This does not mean to allow something to happen, it is a command to make something happen. So, this verse is not saying “allow every man to be swift to hear ...” It is a command for all of us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.”

Because God does not tempt us, gives us the most precious gift anyone could have (the gift of eternal life), and does not change, we are commanded to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. In other words, because God is the source of love and is the supreme example of a loving father, we should all be more loving to each other. We have all encountered people who have all the answers and are quick to point out faults in others. Being around people like this is not only exhausting, but also depressing. That’s not how Christians should be perceived by anyone.

In other words, what James is saying in this verse is: because of what God has done for us, we must all be promptly ready to listen intently to what He has to say to us. In addition we should not be in a hurry to express our own views. When we are talking, we cannot hear very well, either physiologically or mentally. If we are to learn what God has to teach us, we need to work hard on listening and even harder on not talking.

Finally, in this verse James says that we are to be “slow to wrath.” If we have truly received the perfect gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus, then we should be eager to learn and we should not be characterized by outbursts of anger. That is not to say that we should never get angry. After all, Jesus got angry when he chased the money changers out of the temple. But we are commanded to not sin when we do get angry:

"Be angry, and do not sin" ... (Ephesians 4:26)

What James is telling us, is that our lives should not be characterized by anger. But he doesn’t leave it there. He goes on to say that we should avoid anything that is morally filthy (filthy talking, filthy joking, filthy thinking) and we should avoid even the appearance of evil.

So far, James has been telling us what not to do. One of the problems with trying to live by the Ten Commandments (which Christians are never commanded to do) is the fact that it is a list of “Thou shalt not’s” The problem is that this causes us humans with sin natures to think about the things we’re not supposed to do. And – the more we think about them, the more we are inclined to do what we aren’t supposed to do.

So, to help us focus on the positive, James tells us to receive the Word. That is, we should be regularly exposed to, and internalize, what is written in the Bible. James refers to it as the “implanted” word. Before we were saved, the word of God had very little effect on us. It wasn’t until God implanted it in our heart that it had any effect on us. Once it was implanted, it produced an awareness of our sinfulness and our need for salvation.

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Now that we have received the Word of God, what do we do with it? We have to do something with it, otherwise we are being self-deceived. James says that we need to be doers of the word. But what does that mean? James teaches us this truth by means of a parable. It is about a man looking at himself in the mirror. But, James says, as soon as he turns away from the mirror, he forgets what he saw. He forgets what he looked like.

Our mirror is the Word of God. As we read the Word, we are looking at ourselves and learning what kind of person we are, as well as what kind of person we should be. But if we don't read the Bible regularly and don't take it to heart by doing what it says we should be doing, we are walking away from who we need to be. But – if we are continually in the word and continue to do the things the Holy Spirit reveals to us through the Word, James says that we will be blessed in what we do.

James 1:26-27

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James now gives us an example of what he means by being a doer of the work. If a person thinks himself to be religious but is not careful about what comes out of his mouth, his religion is useless. The word “religious” refers to any kind of worship activity that venerates a god. In this case, James is referring to the activity of worshipping *Yahweh* as the only true God. True worship is not just a set of actions performed by the believer. It includes a submission and obedience to the lordship of God. If we truly worship our God, then our lives will be affected, and we will behave in a manner that is consistent with our faith. So, James is telling us that just claiming to be a Christian is not enough, we have to live the life that we profess. That's being a doer of the work.

He now gives us an example of what true religion looks like. Pride is totally inconsistent with faith in Christ. Pride comes from comparing ourselves with others and when we see someone in humbling or humiliating circumstances, we tend to think, “Boy am I glad that I'm not like that person.” That sounds like the Pharisee in Luke chapter 18, doesn't it?

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. (Luke 18:11)

Last time we talked about the fact that God has elevated those of us in humbling circumstances. So, if fatherless and widows have a special place in God's heart, then they ought also to have a special place in our hearts.

James tells us that true religion is demonstrated by us visiting the orphans and widows in their trouble. He doesn't just mean that we should go and spend a few minutes with them,

although that might be just exactly what they need. He means that we should look upon them with mercy, favor, and kind regard. The bottom line is that we should treat them like they are God's most favored ones, not like His outcasts. And – we need to put our feelings into action!

Now, lest we try to move on too quickly, note what James' final word is about true religion. It is to keep oneself unspotted from the world. That doesn't mean that we are to separate ourselves from the world and be isolated from it. Remember that we should be "In the world, but not of the world." We should look and act differently than the unsaved in all that we say and do. But we should do so in a manner that attracts people to Christianity instead of acting in a manner that drives them away.

So what?

The greatest gift that anyone can ever receive is the gift of eternal life. God offers it to all who believe in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the innocent blood that paid for all our sins. Our God is a loving God who desires to give good things to those who love Him and who willingly submit to His authority over their lives. He didn't have to give us eternal life. He did so simply because He wanted to. James refers to the process He chose to accomplish this gift as the "implanting of the word." This word and the offer of salvation that it contains can't be forced on anyone. It must be received freely with no expectation of ever having to repay it. Not only does this gift assure us of what we will receive, eternal life in heaven with our Savior; it also assures us of what we will avoid, eternal suffering in the Lake of Fire.

What an amazing gift. Even as I say that I am struck by how insufficient the word "amazing" is in this context. How ungrateful we would be to receive such a gift and not give back something in return. But what can we give God that He doesn't already have? He is almighty. That means that He can do anything He wants. The problem arises in that what He really wants is something that isn't forced on us. He wants us to worship Him. But more than that, He wants us to submit to His will. In other words, He wants willing servants. He wants servants who will seek Him out and submit to His will. And - He wants to reward us. As it says in the book of Hebrews:

... he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

How many Christians are there today who have accepted that gift from God but have never given anything in return. That seems rather selfish, but it seems to be the way that some Christians treat their Heavenly Father. It's sort of like the person that James talks about. You know, the person who looks in the mirror and sees himself or herself and then goes away and lives his or her life however he or she wants to. I know people like that and I'm sure that you do too. We even have family members who have made a confession of faith, but looking at the way they live, totally ignoring the God who gave his all for them, you have to wonder if they are really saved at all.

We don't know and we won't know until we arrive in glory and look around to see if they're there. Many of these people think they're saved and - maybe they are. But, when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ at the end of our life, we will receive rewards for the things we've done for Him. Everything we do while on the earth will be tested to see if it

is worthy of a reward. Some people will enter eternity with a wealth of rewards. I think that's what our Lord meant when He said:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20)

And

each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)

Those who get saved and then live for themselves will still enter heaven, but they may walk around with the smell of smoke clinging to them.

The other thing that we can do to show God how grateful we are that He saved us, is to be religious. What I mean is that by practicing our religion, we are examples to the world of what our God is like. Let me explain. James closed this chapter with the following statement:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

Do you know of anyone who doesn't have a family around them? Of course you do! But most of us can't say what it is that these people need the most. Have you ever asked them?

"But it's uncomfortable for me to talk to people that I don't know very well." I don't think that Jesus complained about being uncomfortable when He offered Himself on the cross. What He did wasn't just uncomfortable, it was painful! Not just physically painful. He didn't want to do it, but that was what the Father wanted Him to do. Here's what Jesus prayed in the garden just before he was arrested as He was considering the torture He was about to go through.

saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." (Luke 22:42)

And - remember what He said just before He died?

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matthew 27:46)

Jesus suffered emotional agony because he was separated from the Father for three hours. This was the first time they had been separated since time began.

Keep in mind that He suffered for your sake. What are you doing for Him?

Let's pray.