

## No More Excuses James 1:13-15

It is human nature to shift blame. When life gets tough and we succumb to sin, it can be so tempting to blame God. But James will not allow it. God does not tempt us for God cannot be tempted by sin. Temptation comes not from God, but from within us, from the sinful desires that are innate to us. They lure us towards sin, and when we take the bait, sin reaps pain and destruction in our lives. But we can escape this pattern of sin and destruction IF we will take responsibility. Own up to your sin, or it will own you!

### **UPI News story about unusual explanations given to MetLife auto insurance company by their policyholders after they had car accidents...**

- An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished.
- The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.
- As I reached an intersection, a hedge sprang up, obscuring my vision.
- The telephone pole was approaching fast. I attempted to swerve out of its path when it struck my front end.
- I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment.

### **We all make excuses.**

- Maybe not as audacious as these
- But when confronted with our own mistakes/failures/sin – we're quick to look around for someone else to blame

### **That's human nature – to shift the blame off of ourselves**

### **That tendency goes all the way back to the dawn of human history...**

- Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit – God shows up – what do they say?
- read Gen 3:12-13
- They shift the blame
  - o Eve a little more straightforward
  - o Adam a lot more audacious!
    - Blames Eve AND GOD!!
    - "I wouldn't be in this mess if you'd given me a better wife."

### **Rather than own up to his sin, Adam blamed God for it.**

### **That's exactly what the audience of the book of James was tempted to do – to blame God for their sin**

- **Review:**
  - o 1:2-4 – they are experiencing trials
    - 2 in particular: persecution and poverty
  - o God allowed these trials for a good reason: growth & reward
- **But as is so often the case, hardships can become an excuse for sin**
  - o Sin offered an escape from the trial, even if only for a moment
  - o Their hardships had become an excuse for a wide variety of sins
    - favoritism, hoarding wealth, lashing out with cruel words, giving into pride and selfishness

- **Confronted with those sins, they look for someone else to blame...**
- **Who better to blame than God, who allowed these painful trials?!!**
  - o "I wouldn't have given into sin if God had just given me a little bit easier life"
    - "a less stressful job... more understanding wife... more obedient kids.."
  - o "He's holding out on me – It's His fault!"

**James knew that when we sin, we would be tempted to make excuses, to blame God for giving us a life that made sin desirable.**

#### **But James won't allow that**

- will not allow excuses
- this morning: confronts our tendency to shift blame
- because we will never grow as followers of Christ until we own up to our sin

And that's really my big idea for you this morning: ***You will never overcome your sin until you own up to your sin.***

- until you acknowledge that it's your fault

**James will help us do exactly that by proving that our sin is not God's fault, it's our fault.**

He begins with who's not to blame...

#### **Don't Blame God**

- Read 1:13
- **James tells us 2 things about God...**
- **1) God is untemptable – can't be tempted by sin**
  - o never attracted by sin
  - o absolutely no sin that is in any way appealing or alluring to God
  - o **What James is getting at is what the Bible calls God's "Holiness"**
    - Isa 6:3
    - Holy = absolutely, unchangeably separate & distinct from Creation & sin
      - for you math & science folks: like matter to antimatter
      - absolute opposites – cannot coexist together
  - o **John gives us a great metaphor for this... read 1 John 1:5**
    - light & darkness
    - by definition, can't coexist in the same place
    - bring them together, which one wins? Light!
    - darkness can't exist in presence of light just as sin can't exist in presence of God
  - o So God is not tempted by sin – He cannot sin – not in His range of options.
- **2) God does not tempt us to sin**
  - o Critical distinction: distinguish between a "test" and a "temptation"
    - same word in Greek – use context to determine meaning
    - when translated:
      - "test" = a challenge designed to grow us & bring us honor
      - "temptation" = an enticement designed to ensnare us in sin
    - test is meant for good; temptation is meant for evil
  - o **God DOES "test" His people**
    - Gives us challenging situations designed to grow us and bring us honor



- Humanity / human society / the culture you live within
- **and the #1 source: us – from within us**
  - THAT’S THE POINT OF THIS PASSAGE!!
  - James doesn’t worry about Satan or the world here
    - they do tempt us – but not primary source
  - We are – we tempt ourselves – we’re responsible...

Now James gets to who is to blame for our sin: us...

### Accept Responsibility

- Read 1:14-15
- James walks us through the process of temptation
  - like CSI – crime happens – they investigate. Who did it? How?
- James investigates our sin. Who is responsible? How did it happen? What’s the result?
- **His investigation reveals a precise and seemingly unbreakable chain of events...**
- **1) Step 1: we are tempted**
  - with what? **“lust”**
    - *epithymia* – “desire”
    - can be morally neutral – desires of any kind
    - but usually refers to immoral desires = “lust”
      - “lust”: we think of sexual lust
      - but word is much broader...
    - = **any desire for what God has prohibited**
  - **source of these lust: us!**
    - notice: “by his own lust”
    - Not from Satan, not from the world, from within us
    - James is getting at what theologians call our **“Depravity”**
      - our inward and innate bent towards sin
    - Rom 7:21-23
      - Paul as a believer
      - Wants to obey God, but tempted by sin living within him
      - = the sin nature – our natural bent towards sin
      - sin tempts from within – I’m my own worst enemy!!
  - **Our sin nature (lust inside of us) “entices” us**
    - fishing metaphor
    - fly fishing this summer – first time – did great! but can’t take credit
      - guide tied fly, told me where to cast, how to reel it in
      - fish couldn’t resist because bait was designed perfectly to entice them
    - That’s how our sin nature works: part of us – know how to entice us
      - Strikes when we’re most vulnerable
      - Appeals to strongest desires & feelings
  - **BUT, crucial to recognize – at this point, we’ve not yet sinned!**
    - Until you take the bait, you haven’t sinned
    - God does not hold us responsible for our temptations
      - Can’t control what tempts you
      - Can make stupid decisions: put ourselves in path of temptation
      - But if you’re trying to walk with God & temptation strikes...
        - ....you’ve not sinned... as long as you don’t take the bait
  - If you do take the bait – that leads to 2<sup>nd</sup> link in chain of events...

- **2) Step 2: we give in and sin is born**
  - o language of conception and birth
  - o Lust “conceives” sin the moment we give in to it
  - o Now what is “sin” according to James?
    - **read 2:9** – anything we think, say, or do that violates God’s commands
    - **read 4:17** – even more comprehensive
  - o **Sin = anything that violates God’s will, whether active or passive, whether thought, word, or deed.**
  - o Once sin is born, if we allow that sin to mature, it leads to step 3...
  
- **3) Step 3: sin grows up and death is born**
  - o “accomplished” = fully grown – mature & ready to have babies of its own!
  - o What is the offspring of sin? Death.
    - notice contrast:
      - v12: endurance completed brings us the crown of life
      - v15: sin completed brings death
    - **What does James mean by “death”?**
      - Many different uses in scripture
      - Only other use in James... read 5:20
      - 5:20 = literal physical death
        - o “save his soul” just means “save his life”
        - o you get a sense of that from v15 – read 5:15
    - idea of sin leading literally to the death is right from the Old Testament
      - Ezek 18:26-27
      - Not about heaven or hell – about how to preserve this life
      - sin leads towards premature physical death
      - easy to prove: drugs, alcohol, stealing, premarital sex – risky!
    - Sin is inherently risky – it can kill you, literally!
  - o **But that’s not always the case**
    - the righteous don’t always live longer than the wicked
    - sin doesn’t always kill you, or we’d all be dead!!
  - o **Was James mistaken?**
  - o **No – just revealing most extreme consequence for a believer**
    - remember: writing to believers – read James 2:1
    - through faith in Christ, we’ve received eternal life we can never lose
    - so why not enjoy sin!!!???
    - A: because it can still kill you!
  - o **That’s the most extreme consequence, but not the only consequence...**
    - brings shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2:12-13)
    - makes our lives worthless (2:14-26)
    - leads to conflict; robs us of peace (3:13-4:4)
    - puts us under God’s discipline (4:4)
    - can lead to physical illness (5:15)
  - o **Believers ARE free from the penalty of sin, BUT NOT the consequences of it**

As the men go back to prepare communion...

End by answering most important question: how do we avoid sin & death?

1) Best way to avoid it: Don’t take the bait!

- **Stop the chain of events before it starts**
- **Homework: Read Proverbs 7:6-23**
  - o Same chain of events
  - o Notice where the young man goes wrong... his first step towards temptation!
- **That's James point: if you don't want death... then don't take the bait.**
  - o When you see the bait – swim the other way!
- **God doesn't want us to endure temptation – He wants us to flee from it**
  - o memorize 1 Cor 10:13
  - o what has God given you? A way of escape!! Not strength to play with temptation
- **Practical steps:**
  - o limit access to tempting situations (times, places, technology, people, media)
  - o do things that help you escape (Quiet Time, good sleep, exercise, etc)

If we fail to apply this best advice... there is a way to escape the seemingly unbreakable chain...

## 2) You can get off the hook through confession!

- define confession
  - o **to agree with God about your sin**
  - o acknowledge that it's wrong and commit to turn away from it
- read 1 John 1:9
- results:
  - o confession doesn't erase all the consequences of our sin
    - if you abuse alcohol – confession doesn't suddenly heal your liver!
  - o but it does restore our fellowship with God
    - as believers, we will always be children of God
    - but sin estranges us from our heavenly Father
    - confession removes that barrier our sin created
    - restores our access to His power and blessings
- So there is always hope, always a new day to walk with the Lord