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## Bible Study

### Lessons on Spiritual Warfare from James 1:12-18

*“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 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. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 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 first-fruits of His creatures” (James 1:12-18).*

#### ***“The Devil Made Me Do It”<sup>1</sup>***

Mankind has been playing the “blame-game” since the beginning. When Adam and Eve hid from God, having disobeyed His command not to eat from the fruit of the tree, and when God asked if he had eaten from the tree, Adam replied, “The woman whom You gave [to be] with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate.” And when God asked Eve, she said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:11-13).

Until this day, man tries to blame God when temptations or tribulations befall him (isn’t it funny that we call natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes “Acts of God”?). Think about your everyday lives. When you get the results of an exam at school, if you did well, then you say, “I got an ‘A’.” But if you did poorly, then you say, “The teacher gave me an ‘F’!”

We refuse to take responsibilities for our own actions. I find the following story amusing: A woman went on a shopping spree and came home with a beautiful but expensive dress! Cautiously, she showed the lavish purchase to her husband. But when he heard the price, he threw up his hands in horror and asked, “How could you do it!?” “The devil made me do it,” she answered. “But,” her husband continued, “why didn’t you do as it tells you in the Bible and say, “Get thee behind me, Satan?” “I did,” she coyly replied, “and I heard him say to me, “It looks beautiful dear, even from behind.”

We all agree that our goal in this life is to realize the Kingdom of God within us and to come into a perfect union with our Lord Jesus Christ. But is the road to this union easy? Of course not. Satan is very jealous that God created us in His image and authority. Satan lost a relationship with God through his pride, so he wants to bring us down with him. In summary, we are in a battle. In this lesson, we want to talk about temptation and achieving victory in the spiritual warfare. This is a “back to basics” lesson on Spiritual Warfare.

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<sup>1</sup> Coniaris, Anthony M. Living Responsibly in an Age of Excuses: Whatever Happened to Moral Responsibility. Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing, 1999 (pages 40-41)

### ***Introduction to the Epistle of Saint James***

The author of this epistle is Saint James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, also known as the “brother” or kinsman of the Lord, and as James the Righteous or the Just.

Eusebius of Caesarea, in his famous work on the History of the Church, quotes a Jewish Christian named Hegesippus, who wrote accounts of the early church in Jerusalem (Book 2, chapter 23). We find a description of Saint James and his martyrdom.

Saint James is described as very ascetic: “holy from his birth; he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil<sup>2</sup>, and took no baths . . . often found on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s from his continually bending them in worship of God and beseeching forgiveness for the people.”

Saint James encountered a great tribulation in his martyrdom. The Jewish Scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem were concerned that people were “going astray” and following Jesus, so they asked Saint James to “set them straight” by going to the parapet of the temple and to address the people from there. Saint James confessed Christ as the Savior and convinced many. The Scribes and Pharisees, realizing their mistake, decided to go up and throw him down, so that the people would be frightened and not believe him. They did so and began to stone him, but in spite of his fall, he was still alive. He knelt in prayer saying, “I beseech Thee, Lord God and Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.” He was then clubbed to death.

One of Chapter 1’s themes of Saint James’ Epistle focuses on temptations and trials. Saint James is writing to people who were scattered abroad, who were subject to persecution, deception, economic injustice and poverty, apostasy, and divisions in the church. He writes this encouraging letter as one who has and would experience the same.

Today, we have other battles to face from our thoughts, from our past, and from the media; there are many sources of temptation.

What do we do when temptations face us and how can we be victorious in the spiritual battle against Satan and his forces?

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<sup>2</sup> People would anoint themselves with oil after bathing as a sign of joy and well-being

## **Satan's Tactics**

If you were the head coach of a football team and you were about to go against your biggest rival, what's the one thing that you would want to have in your hands before the big game? Definitely, the other team's playbook! You'd want to look at all their plays, their play names, their strategies, so that you can beat them at the punch.

It's the same situation in our spiritual life. If we want to know how to defeat Satan and his army in this warfare, we'd want to know the tricks he plays on us and his methods of deception.

However, Satan does not play the same tricks on everyone. It often depends on our spiritual state and our relationship with sin that determines the kind of games Satan will play with us.

Let us examine three states that we can be in when it comes to sin and what we can do to battle against sin in these states.

### #1. Remaining in the slavery of sin, having no thought of liberation from it

This is the person who continues an immoral and unchaste lifestyle, and either because he enjoys it or because he is ignorant, chooses to continue his sinful habits with no thought of being free from this sin. This is the most desperate situation, whereby the person needs to be exposed to the goodness of Christ's light urgently in order to see his wickedness.

**Satan's Tactic:** Darken the person more and more by spiritual blindness, trying to keep from his consciousness every good thought that might help him realize the poisoned condition of his life. He seeks to remove thoughts which could lead to repentance and the path of virtue. Satan replaces good thoughts with sinful and perverted thoughts and leads that person to opportunities to commit these sins and greater sins. The person basically gets sucked into a cycle or a vortex.

**How to fight against it:** 1) As soon as a good thought or the suggestion of one comes to you, calling you from darkness to light, pay attention to it and immediately accept it. 2) When you start to get a glimpse of this light, you will immediately find all your sins exposed; quickly shout out, "Help me, O Lord God, help me quickly and do not let me remain in this sinful darkness." 3) Find someone who can help you and lead you to freedom, 4) Never cease asking for mercy from the Lord, 5) Realize that victory and triumph over the enemy can never be obtained by delaying, but only a quick reminder of truth, goodness, and righteousness.

#2. Under the slavery of sin, who wish to be free, but do nothing to obtain freedom  
Even after we realize how dangerous and evil our sinful is, it is still very difficult to escape the devil's trickery

**Satan's Tactic:** He whispers in your ear, "Later. Tomorrow. You can change later. You can do good tomorrow." So, many youth especially fall into this trap, and say, "I want to do good and I do not want to sin, but I am still young and there is time to repent." Or they may say, "After I finish high school or college, then there will be more time to serve and to do good."

**How to fight against it:** With all determination and energy, we have to say, "Right now! At this very moment and no later. I shall repent now instead of tomorrow! For, today is in my hands, but who knows what tomorrow will bring. Even if God were to grant me tomorrow and after, how can I be sure that I will still have this good thought urging me?" Let's say we were sick, and someone offered us medicine as the cure, would we foolishly say, "Wait! Let me be sick a little longer!" Of course not. But those who delay the work of salvation are in a spiritual sickness that doesn't just lead to physical death like a bodily illness, but to an eternal life completely separated from God.

#3. Freed from the chains of sin, and who have acquired virtues, but who once again fall into sin

**Satan's Tactic:** He now desires to bring this righteous person to ruin. Saint John Chrysostom pictures arrows attacking the person from all sides: 1) Arrows from above are suggestions that we do spiritual work above our present abilities, 2) Arrows from below are suggestions to reduce or even completely abandon all spiritual labors, through self-pity, carelessness, and thoughtlessness, 3) Arrows come from the right when, in connection with some righteous undertaking, the devil and his allies lead us into temptation and danger of downfall, 4) Arrows come from the left when those enemies present concrete temptations to draw us toward sin, 5) Arrows come from the front when the devil and his agents tempt and disturb us by thoughts of what is to come, 6) Arrows come from the rear when our enemies tempt us with memories of past acts and events.

**How to Fight Against It: Apply the Four Weapons toward Victory**

1. Do not rely on yourself in the spiritual warfare
  - a. Remember that we can do nothing on our own, but that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us.
  - b. This is the true mark of humility. It was Satan's lack of humility that led to his downfall, so this is a great weapon that works against him. In humbling ourselves, God work in us to defeat all temptations and to help us overcome all tribulations
  - c. One of the signs that we are relying on ourselves is that when and if we call, we start beating ourselves up saying, "How could I do that? How could I let myself?" This is a sign that we've relied on ourselves. Instead, we should

pray, “Lord, I am weak. Help me to overcome any temptation that comes against me.”

- d. We don't to use our weakness as an excuse to continue sinning. But we want to realize our weakness, in order to depend more wholly on God.
2. Bear always in your heart a perfect and all-daring trust in God alone
  - a. One way to develop trust in God is to remember the good things that God has done both for us personally in our own lives and also how he has dealt with His people throughout history: both in the Old Testament through the New Testament, in the age of the apostles and the martyrs and the defenders of faith.
    - i. For example, some psalms mention God delivering Moses and Israel from Egypt as a source of hope and thanksgiving.
  - b. Get to know God and you will realize that He is a God that you can trust who will never let His children down but will always work for good to those who love Him.
3. Strive without ceasing
  - a. Even if we fall, we must get up right away and keep trying
4. Remain constantly in prayer
  - a. Arrow Prayers, like the Jesus Prayer

**Glory is due to our God unto the age of all ages. Amen.**