

Tempted or Tried?

Reference: James 1:12-18

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

James, in these verses, attempts to help us to better understand the difference between *temptation* and *testing*. He will demonstrate this by highlighting scripturally that the *source* of temptation is not the same as the source of testing. Nor is the *result* of temptation the same as the result of testing. James shows us that the difference between *testing* and *tempting* is fundamentally a difference of *intention* and *result*.

What James illustrates, in James 1, by stating “let no one when they are being tempted/tested say that God is tempting them”—is, let no one confuse the intentions of *God* with the intentions of the *devil*, nor anyone confuse the results of *righteousness* with the results of *evil*. James says that we are tempted when we are “drawn away and lured by our own lust (desires)”—here he is using fishing imagery. We are “baited” by our own lust (desires.) What many fail to realize, of course, is that there is a sharp hook embedded in that temptation. Once having “taken the bait,” they become hooked.

Consider the differences between temptation and testing:

I. Temptation is kick-started from our own sinful nature. Also, we know from Scripture that Satan is an active source of temptation—who takes advantage of our nature. Peter says that he prowls around like a hungry lion seeking those whom he can devour. Satan is no respecter of persons, he sought to tempt Jesus, how much more will he seek to tempt and deceive us. Therefore, we see that temptation comes from the devil (the fisherman) as he lures our sinful nature (the fish).

II. James categorically separates God from any association with temptation. God is not tempted, and He tempts no one else. This is one of facets of God’s holiness—He is utterly Good, there is no hint of evil or double mindedness in God. “There is no turning of shadow” or alteration in the divine nature.

God is utterly dependable—even more constant than the sun and the moon. However, God DOES test us. And this God does so that we will learn that His promises are for us, and they can be trusted.

A test, like the Israelites faced in the wilderness, forced them to rely on God’s promise of deliverance. God’s test of Abraham, in commanding him to sacrifice Isaac, forced Abraham to trust God’s promise that through Isaac all the nations would be blessed.

Testing may cause just as much or even more turmoil than temptation, but the intention and the result cannot be mistaken. God tests us so that we will rely on his promises, but our sinful nature and Satan tempt us to abandon or circumvent God's promises.

III. Temptation is usually something we *want* to do. It appeals to our immediate desires. Testing, in contrast, is usually something we find *difficult* to do. Testing requires a sacrifice of our immediate desires and impulses. Its focus is on long term values and goals. When we are in the moment of testing or temptation a qualifying question to ask ourselves is, "Do I feel myself wanting to do this?" If we do, likely we are dealing with a temptation. Our immediate desires spring up and we act on them without discretion.

IV. Temptation is focused on selfishness—usually bodily or emotionally—without reference to God. Testing, in contrast, forces us to depend on God and trust Him. Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones to bread. Bodily emphasis ends your hunger. But more important is the subtle implication, "You can't trust God to provide for your needs and wants, you are better off looking out for yourself." But we remember Jesus' response, a quote from Deuteronomy, "man does not live by bread alone, by human means alone, but by every word of God."

Temptation tries to capitalize on our weaknesses to our detriment. Testing exposes a weakness so it can be strengthened by God. Tempting and testing have in common that they expose a weakness. Temptation seeks to injure you through that weakness. Testing, in contrast, exposes a weakness to help us see our need of God's healing.

V. Every testing or temptation moment provides us with an either/or choice. Either we can seek to fulfill our needs and wants on our own, or we can choose to rely on God. This can be an uncomfortable moment, but we must choose.

VI. Temptation is a reactive cycle. Testing demands us to be proactive. We have to be deliberate in our spiritual lives. We don't grow spiritually the same way we grow physically. We have to cultivate our spiritual growth. We must learn the danger signs of temptation and flee. Flee from temptation, resist the devil and he will flee from you.

When we encounter divine ordained tests, we must recognize them for what they are. They are like open doorways for us to trust in God. To give in to temptation is natural, but to submit to testing is divine.

Conclusion: Temptation, if acted upon, leads to slavery to sin, spiritual immaturity, guilt and broken fellowship. Testing completed leads to godly freedom, spiritual maturity, and divine health. **The difference between temptation and testing is obvious by the results which they produce.**