



Your Biggest Enemy

What Causes Most of Your Problems?

Have you ever been shaken by how off you were on your evaluation? When I was a kid, I played in my first competitive basketball game at the Boy's Club. It was in fact the first time I ever stepped in a gym. I was ecstatic when I scored my first basket ever. I grabbed a rebound and threw the basketball up to the rim and surprisingly it went through the basket. My heart pounded with joy at what I had done until everyone on my team started yelling furiously at me. The players on the other team seemed extremely happy. I was stunned to discover that the first basket I made in my life was actually for the other team. I had shot at the other team's basket. One of the frequent plotlines in movies is when you mistakenly are convinced one character is the villain and it turns out to be someone completely different. You know who the murderer is and then you are wrong. Romantic comedies often have this same twist. The main character falls in love but it turns out that was not who she should have chosen. One of my wife's favorite movies is "While You Were Sleeping" and in it the lead character falls in love with someone she has watched from a distance who winds up in a coma. However, she eventually realizes that he is not who she really loves but it is the fellow's brother who is much nicer and really does love her, unlike his brother.

It is probably the case that you have at some time been completely wrong about something or someone and found it tough to accept. James the brother of Jesus makes a profound observation that is critical to understanding ourselves. **When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.** (James 1: 13-15 NIV) One of the questions we often ask of ourselves, and God is, "Why did I do that?" There are times when we don't have a logical explanation for our behavior. I imagine David wondering why he chose to have an affair with Bathsheba when he already had plenty of beautiful wives and could have chosen the loveliest of all the unmarried women of Israel for his own. Did Moses ever wonder why he struck the rock when God told him to speak to it the time the people of Israel complained about their lack of water? Could Paul ever have wondered why he was so evil to persecute the church before he met Christ? Anyone with a conscience lives with regrets and wonders why they did some of their worst deeds.

We would like to say that we just weren't thinking when we did what we later found reprehensible. I find it ironically amusing when someone does something really wrong and gets caught but states rather inane, "That wasn't me." It is as if there is somehow a real you and a pseudo you that makes you look bad. It is the you from the multiverse who swore, lied, blew up in anger or had an affair. Adam and Eve famously blamed others for their sin and we have been doing the same ever since. James understands the psychology of wrongdoing and clears up some misconceptions we might have. First, he insists that God is never the reason why you did something bad. **When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;** (James 1: 13 NIV) We may not use this as an excuse but there are those who do. They argue that because God is Lord over all, they could not have sinned unless God somehow did it through them. Literally you are told that God is never tempted by evil because it cannot happen. He is incapable of being tempted. The term is "apeirastos", which means incapable of being tried

or put to the test by evil. God is constantly, never endingly not able to be tempted to do wrong. Because that is the case, He has no evil in Him with which to lure someone else into doing what is evil. The expression, "You can't draw blood out of a turnip" is true when it comes to the Lord. He cannot be prodded into doing what is wrong and because He has no wrong in Him, He has no way of trying to get someone else to do what is wrong or evil.

After James clears up that misconception, he then explains the psychological mechanism for the evil we do. It is pretty straightforward and clear. **...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.** (James 1: 14 NIV) Here is the progression of sin, of evil actions. It starts totally with you. There is no outside force making it come about. It is no enemy who drags you along. Satan is given no responsibility for any of your wrongdoing. Whatever evil you do, whatever wrong action you take, it starts with what is in you, what is translated as evil desire. The Greek word is "epithumia" and simply means desire but in the Bible describes the longing for what is wrong or forbidden. We all have this in us, and it is either strong or weak in you depending on how you respond to it. Epithumia is that wanting in you that pushes you to sin. It is a desire for something, anything that is wrong...wrong and you know it is wrong. We all have it. We all face it. The question is, "What will we do about it?" There is no mention here of how we got this desire or why it is there. We simply have epithumia and must face it. The problem is not so much that we have epithumia, although of course that is bad for us, the problem is when we let it drag us away and entice us or as it could be translated, entrap us.

It is up to us not to let that happen. We must fight this at all costs, not letting our evil desire get the best of us. The progression from lust to sin and then death is clearly articulated by James. **Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.** (James 1: 15 NIV) This is a critical revelation to grasp. The imagery is profound. That epithumia within you, the desire for what is wrong, when nurtured, when protected and given life in your heart fathers a child, sin. After sin develops in you, it gives birth to death. So here we have the progression of evil deeds, of sin. It starts with a desire, something inside you. That desire produces sin, which comes out of you. Sin results in death, which comes to you. Within you is desire. Out of you goes sin. To you death comes.

There is more here though. James does not point out like Paul does that we gain death from our sin. **For the wages of sin is death...** (Romans 6: 23a NIV) What we get for sinning is death. That is the outcome of it for us. Here though is the extension of what James is saying. When you sin, sin goes out of you and gives birth to death. Death is what our sin brings to the world. Everywhere it is the bearer of death. The accumulated mass of sin is death. It is the sum of your sins, death. Sin is not just a simple mistake of yours and you simply move on from it. Sin, every act flowing out of your lust, your epithumia, makes the world worse, brings ruin to it. We put on masks to keep Covid from getting out of us and hurting others. Why? Because we care about them. We also wear masks, so Covid won't come to us. Sin is far worse than Covid. What will you do to protect your part of the world from sin? It is an important question. Every person is hurt by sin some way or another. It damages families, schools, businesses, and organizations. When you let your lust, your epithumia have its way, you hurt this world every time. If sin did not matter much, why did Jesus not just wave off the sin of the woman caught in adultery. He said He did not condemn her. Yet, He insisted. **"Go now and leave your life of sin."** (John 8: 11 NIV) Why? It is because sin makes the world worse for everyone!

Romans 6: 23 ends with the most beautiful promise you will ever hear. **...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 6: 23b NIV) When Jesus died on the Cross, He took your sin from you and your sin was crucified with Him. When sin gets taken, so does death. You have eternal life because God is kind to you, He is merciful. You earned death for your sin. You bring death to the world by sinning. By gift, by loving kindness, Christ takes your sin out of you and one day you will see just how wonderful that is. Until then, hate any sin that comes out of you like God hates sin, and love Christ because He is in every way your Savior and the God who loves you beyond your comprehension.