

The Buck Stops Here

In 1945, Harry S. Truman became the 33rd President of the United States. When he did, he put a placard on his desk. Anybody know what it said? It said, “The buck stops here.” What does he mean by that?

What he means is that the responsibility for everything that happens in his White House—everything that happens during his presidency—falls on him. He has to make the final decision on everything. He can't blame a staffer. He can't say, “Well, I didn't know about it.” He can't say, “It was the last administration,” or, “It's the American people,” or, “It's the times we live in.” No—he said, “The buck stops with me.” I'm going to take responsibility for the job that you've entrusted to me.

What I've found is that people don't like to take responsibility. You know, like how many times you get hit by a car, and the driver just runs off? Drives away? You're like, “What kind of freak show drives away when you hit another car? Have you no decency?” Get out, give us your information. But that's commonplace, right? We don't want to take responsibility.

Actually, instead of taking responsibility, people would rather be the victim. “It's not my fault that this is happening, right?” And because it's not my fault, there's nothing left for me to do. “You're the one who made the mistake. You're the one who did it. I'm not responsible at all, so you have to fix it.”

And what happens when I pass the buck—when I say, “I'm not responsible”—is I'm asking *you* to fix it. Because you're the one, and I'm not taking responsibility. But it never gets fixed, because the other person doesn't think they did anything wrong either. They're not taking responsibility either.

See, if I own the blame for my sin—if I own what I've done—then I have to deal with it.

Blame Shifting and Personal Responsibility

There's a famous atheist—you might remember him—Bertrand Russell. Anybody know that name? He was asked one time, “So, I know you don't believe in God. I know you're an atheist. But if, when you die, you're wrong—and there is a God—and you stand before God, what are you going to say to Him?”

And Bertrand Russell said, “I'm going to ask Him why He took such pains to hide Himself.”

What? *Why did you take such pains to hide yourself?* I'm not going to take responsibility—I already have my excuse built in for when I meet God. “It's not my fault, God. It's your fault for not showing Yourself clearly to me.”

And here we are, all in church. God *has* shown Himself clearly to us. I go outside, I look at the trees, and I'm like—how can you miss this? I look at the human body that lasts for eighty years on Coca-Cola and Snickers bars. We can't create anything that runs for that long! I can't even get a refrigerator from LG that lasts more than three months. And it's not running on Snickers bars and Coke!

There is definitely an intelligent designer. There is definitely a God. But we can't be blaming God for the things we do. We like to shift blame in our spiritual life too. "Well, it's not my fault, right? I don't believe because my parents didn't believe. It's not my fault—my parents weren't good Christians. They didn't love God. They didn't put it into me. If they would have drilled that into me—if they had drilled Jesus into me—then I'd be a Christian."

That's the excuse. But then the same person from the same family says, "Well, my parents *did* drill it into me—and that's why I don't love God." There's an excuse either way you look at it. "Oh, I don't believe in God because the church—somebody was mean to me one day. Somebody gave me the stink-eye. Those people in the church? They're all fake."

We might blame people in the church, but eventually it always gets back to God. We always get back to Him, right? "It's not me that's wrong—it's Your fault, God, because You made me this way. You created me this way."

"It's not my fault I cheated on my wife—you created me with all these desires for lots of women." "It's not my fault I cheated on my taxes—you made me smart enough to avoid getting caught." "It's not my fault I'm addicted to pornography—you created me with a strong sex drive and allowed the internet to exist." "It's not my fault I'm a homosexual—you created me with these desires." And so, the world sings this rallying cry to a holy God—the same cry sung by Lady Gaga: *I was born this way*.

Blame it on God, right?

Blaming God Is Not New

And this isn't just a modern strategy. If you think, "Well, this is just how we are today,"—no. No, no, no. This is how it's always been. This is how it was all the way back in the Old Testament. Go all the way back to *Genesis chapter 3*. Adam and Eve are in the garden, and they willfully disobey God. They're confronted—and watch what it says:

"But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9)

Right? They've just disobeyed God, and He says, "Where are you?" Adam answers, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." God says, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Now, the correct answer would be, “Yes.” Right? That’s the right answer. But that’s not what we get.

*“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”
(Genesis 3:12)*

And then it goes to the woman.

*“What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”
(Genesis 3:13)*

So who is the woman blaming? The serpent. Who is Adam blaming? The woman—partially. But who is he really blaming? God. Because he says, “*The woman You put here with me...*” In other words, “God, if You hadn’t put her here, I wouldn’t have disobeyed.” Right? Here’s Adam’s excuse: “I was just walking around one day. Then all of a sudden I blacked out. And when I woke up—I was married to her. I didn’t even know her. And she’s a bad influence.”

It sounds like a really bad story from Vegas, doesn’t it? “If You hadn’t given me this woman, I wouldn’t have disobeyed.”

It’s Never God’s Fault

So, here’s what James is going to do as we dive in. He wants to make it **crystal clear** that it’s *never* God’s fault when you sin. And here’s why that’s important.

First, we don’t want to dishonor or misrepresent the glory and character of who God is. We don’t want to put a stain on His reputation. But secondly—and this is key—if we don’t own our failures, if we don’t own our sin and say, “This is my sin; I’m the one responsible for it,” then we just keep making excuses, and we *never deal* with the reality of our sinfulness.

And so—why are so many people not coming to Christ? Why do so many people reject Him? Because they don’t want to take responsibility. They don’t want to admit that they need a Savior. So, here’s what the passage says—watch this:

“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)

Okay, let me break this down a little, because it might be confusing.

Back in the last passage, we read about *trials*. And now here in verse 13, we read about being *tempted*. In Greek, the word for *trial* and the word for *temptation* is actually the **same word**. That’s important.

So, what James is doing here is making a distinction. Because we, as people, will start to say, “Well, if trials and temptations are the same word, and God allows trials, then maybe He’s also tempting us to sin. So, isn’t that God’s fault?”

And James says—no. That’s not what’s happening.

Here’s the clarification:

*“Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.”
(James 1:14)*

So, watch this. A trial comes into my life—something hard, something painful. That trial is not, in itself, a temptation. It’s a painful or difficult situation. Maybe I lose my job. Maybe I don’t have money for food. Maybe I’m dealing with a terrible illness. That is a *trial*. But it is not yet a temptation.

It becomes a temptation when, in the middle of that hard thing, my *own evil desires* rise up and start to look for escape or satisfaction outside of God’s will.

James says that temptation comes from **inside**—from our own sinful desires. Not from God. Not from Satan. Not from our parents.

Temptation happens because we have a sin nature, and when we’re in a trial, our evil desires look for opportunity in that situation.

The temptation doesn’t come from outside—it comes from within.

The Progression of Sin

So, James lays out the progression—from trial, to temptation, to sin, to death.

“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:15)

Now he’s using pregnancy language here. He’s saying that desire conceives. It gives birth to something. And what is that something? Sin. And that sin grows up, and eventually it leads to death.

So, let’s talk about *desire*. What is desire? It’s a feeling. It’s a want. Right?

You’re a single guy. You see a girl across the hall—her name’s Julie. That feeling? That pull? That’s desire.

Now, that desire can go different ways. You can have good desires. You can have godly desires. Or you can have evil ones.

Her being there isn't the temptation. The temptation isn't that she showed up. The temptation is that *within me*, I have evil desires that want to take that situation and use it for sin. I'm tempted by *my own* evil desires.

Now, trials can produce all kinds of desires in us. One desire might be that I want to grow. I want this trial to produce perseverance, like we talked about last week. That's a *good* desire. That's a godly desire. I want to finish the race. I want to endure.

I want to stay steadfast and not sin against You, God. That's the kind of desire that brings joy—because it confirms, “Yes! I’m one of God’s children. I’m persevering to the end.” But because we have a sin nature, we also have *evil* desires.

And here's what happens: in our minds, those desires begin to spin. We deceive ourselves. I know this not just from Scripture, but from personal experience. The desire pops up, and we know—“I shouldn't do this. I shouldn't think this way.” But then we start spinning it. Rationalizing it.

“Well, this desire is okay.” Or, “It's not that big of a deal.” Or, “The consequences aren't that serious.” Or, “It's not my fault—it's God's fault. It's someone else's fault.”

And once you do that—once you *entertain* that desire—it conceives. And what does it conceive? A bouncing baby sin, Right? A bouncing baby sin is born, and it's like, “Oh, look how cute it is.” No. No, it's not. You commit the act. You sin.

And now here's the problem: if you don't repent—if you don't seek forgiveness through Christ—that sin starts to grow. It gets stronger. It gets more controlling. And eventually, it will keep you from standing firm in God.

It will lead you to reject Him. That sin leads to *death*. So, that's the full progression—from a trial, to evil desire, to sin, to death.

God Cannot Be the Source of Sin

So, let's stamp this really clearly in your brain: **God can never cause sin.** Why?

Because *God is wholly separate from evil*. There is no evil in Him. None. He has *no evil desires*. He can't be dragged away or enticed, because there is nothing in Him to tempt or corrupt Him. He is completely pure and perfect in His being.

That's why James says what he says—God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. So, you might ask, “Well, wait a minute. If Jesus is God, and God can't be tempted, then how do you explain what happened in the wilderness with Satan?”

Let's look at that.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” (Matthew 4:1–3)

And what does Jesus say?

“It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

He’s quoting *Deuteronomy*. And I think that for those forty days in the desert, Jesus was likely meditating on *Deuteronomy*—preparing Himself with Scripture, ready to battle temptation. And that’s how we fight temptation too. With Scripture. With truth.

Now here’s the question: *Was Jesus actually tempted?*

From the devil’s point of view—yes. He was tempting Him. He was putting things in front of Him to try to get Him to fall. But from *God’s* point of view, *no*. Jesus was not tempted in the way that we are tempted. Why? Because there was *no evil in Him*. There was *nothing inside Him* that could respond to evil. He didn’t have evil desires. He is holy. He is pure. He is God. And so, while Satan tried to tempt Him, there was no foothold—no evil desire within Jesus to respond to sin. That’s why He couldn’t fall. That’s why He didn’t sin.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation?

Now some of you might be thinking, “Wait a second, Dustin. In the Lord’s Prayer, it says, ‘*Lead us not into temptation.*’ So doesn’t that mean God might lead us into it unless we ask Him not to?” That’s a fair question.

But here’s the answer: **No**, that’s *not* what it means. When we pray “*lead us not into temptation,*” we’re not saying, “God, please don’t try to make me sin.” Because we already know—*God doesn’t do that*. What we are praying is this: “God, please don’t lead me into a situation where the temptation would overwhelm me. Don’t let me fall into something I can’t handle. Keep me away from the edge.” We’re asking God to lead us into places and circumstances where we can **endure**, not collapse.

And here’s the biblical promise for that:

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”
(1 Corinthians 10:13)

So, God is faithful. When temptation comes, He always gives you a **way out**. There is always an escape route. You are *never* trapped. You are *never* abandoned.

God wants you to endure. He wants you to persevere. We talked about that at the beginning—perseverance is the goal.

So again: God doesn't cause evil. He doesn't cause sin. Why? Because **God is good**.

God Is Always Good

God is good—all the time. Right? He's not sometimes good. He's not having a bad day. There's never a moment when God is like, "Oops, I messed up," or "I slipped into evil for a second." That never happens. He is good *all the time*.

James goes on and says:

"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

(James 1:16–17)

So, what does that mean? It means that God isn't giving you evil. He's not giving you sin. He's not trying to trap you. Everything that comes from Him is **good**. Everything is **perfect**. Everything is **beneficial**. Why? Because **He is good**. And He doesn't have anything else to give you.

That phrase, "*Father of the heavenly lights*," is talking about the Creator—the one who made the sun, the moon, the stars. Now think about this: during the day, you can't see the moon. At night, you can't see the sun. But that doesn't mean they're not there. The sun is still shining, even if the earth has turned and you're in the dark. James says God doesn't shift like that. *He doesn't cast shadows*. You are never on the dark side of God's goodness. There is *never* a time when His goodness is hidden from you. It's always there. There is *no shadow* when it comes to His nature. There is no moment when God is inconsistent. He is always good, always faithful, always trustworthy.

So, the idea that somehow God is tempting you to do evil? That it's God's fault you sinned? That's blasphemy. That's a total distortion of who He is.

Life Comes Through the Word of Truth

James finishes this passage with a beautiful contrast:

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created."

(James 1:18)

Now earlier, James talked about how *desire* gives birth to *sin*, and *sin*, when fully grown, gives birth to *death*. But here—God gives birth to something very different. **Life**. He gives us new birth—not through sin, but through *the word of truth*. Through the message of the Gospel. Through the truth of who He is and who we are in light of Him.

So, think about the difference: Your *own evil desires* drag you away. You lie to yourself. You rationalize. You blame others. That leads to sin. And sin leads to death. But **God's desire**—His *choice*—is not evil. His choice is to give you *life*. He gives you His truth. He gives you the Gospel. He gives you His Spirit. He gives you every good and perfect gift.

Why? Because He is full of *goodness* and *nothing else*. And yet we still try to satisfy ourselves by chasing our own evil desires. Think about the logic of that. God has *everything good* laid out before us. Everything that satisfies. And we trade it for a cheap counterfeit. We lie to ourselves about what's good and what's not.

But God says, “I have something better. I have the *truth*. I have life.”

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, God, we accept Your good and perfect gifts. And we reject our own evil desires. We take responsibility for our own sinful desires—and they *are* personal. My evil desires aren't the same as the evil desires of the person next to me. God, they are *mine*. I own them. And I'm sorry. I repent. God, I pray that You would help us to see Your *goodness* in everything You do—and to seek our *joy* and our *happiness* in You, our Creator and our God. In Jesus' name—Amen.