

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12



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DON'T BE DECEIVED: THE ORIGIN OF SIN

By Andrew Dow

Where does sin come from? Religious people have answered this question in various ways. Does sin come from our inherent nature? Is it forced upon us by some supernatural or divine being? Is it our own personal failing? With various ideas abounding about the origin sin, it is evident that **“the father of lies”** (John 8:44) has done an excellent job of deceiving men.

James writes concerning this very thing: **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren”** (James 1:13–16).

False Ideas About The Origin of Sin

Some people, based on certain presuppositions, conclude that God causes man to sin. Calvinism is a clear example of this. Calvinists argue that if God is sovereign (i.e., in absolute control of everything), then he must have pre-selected those who would be saved and those who would be lost. This is the doctrine of predestination. While you seldom hear Calvinists say, *“I believe God causes man to sin,”* this is the only logical conclusion to their argument.

If God decided before I was born that I would be eternally lost in hell, then there is nothing I can do to change that fate. I am compelled to live this way by the will of God.

This seems to be the very problem that James is facing in our passage. **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone”** (1:13). James would go on to contrast this false idea with reality, **“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”** (1:17). God is not in the business of making his crowning creation fail. Rather, He **“desires all men to be saved”** (1 Tim 2:4).

While not specifically addressed by James, there are other false ideas concerning the origin of sin. Some want to blame the devil for all their problems. Comedian Flip Wilson once popularized the phrase, *“the devil made me do it.”* It’s true that the devil plays a role in our temptation: he is the devouring lion (1 Pet 5:8) and the great deceiver (Rev 12:9). However, even when given extraordinary power over an individual, he does not have the ability to force someone to sin against God (cf. Job 2:6, 10). The devil certainly encourages us to sin, but he does not cause us to act contrary to God’s law.

Still others will cast blame on other men. Perhaps family or friends influenced us to sin. Maybe peer-pressure became too great and we fell into sin. Some will say that we are all sinners due to Adam’s sin. Unfortunately, a day will come when God will declare to many, **“Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”** (Matt 7:23). On that day it won’t matter who caused your sin, God will judge you based on your own lawless deeds.

Where Does Sin Come From?

As was pointed out in the previous section, James is opposing the idea that God causes us to sin. In proving this point James doesn't merely assert the fact, but he goes on to explain where sin comes from! We can easily break James' explanation into three steps.

First, **“Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust”** (James 1:14). The word translated *“lust”* is defined by Thayer as *“desire, craving, longing”* (pg. 238). Human beings have strong desires, which can be both good and evil. Scripture acknowledges these cravings and describes them as **“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life”** (1 John 2:16). Desire is something we are born with; the problem arises when we are **“carried away and enticed”** by our desires (James 1:14). When trying to understand where sin comes from we must first acknowledge that sin is the result of our desires controlling us.

Second, when we allow our desires to take control of our lives we are setting ourselves up to (1) be tempted to sin, and (2) to fall into sin. We just noticed that temptation is the result of being **“carried away and enticed”** by our desires, but James goes on to write, **“Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin”** (James 1:15). The control that sin has over our lives is compared to a pregnancy. Just as a baby is always the result of conception, sin is always the result of giving into one's lusts.

Finally, **“when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death”** (James 1:15). Death is never a pleasant experience. It is unnatural and uncomfortable. Many avoid talking about death, but are shameless concerning sin (cf. Eph 5:12)? **“For**

the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Understand what sin will do to you if you let it into your life!

Personal Responsibility

If you read this article and only get one thing out of it, get this: *you are responsible for your own sins*. I think this is the point of James 1:13–16. James places responsibility squarely on the individual (1:14) and makes it clear that it is the individual’s responsibility to persevere (1:12).

Do you recognize your personal responsibility before God? **“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren”** (James 1:16). Have we been deceived into thinking that we’re not responsible for our sins against God? Have we convinced ourselves that we can indulge in our desires without consequence? If that’s the case, listen to James’ warning: don’t be deceived!

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AM LESSON: Is There Life After Sin?	PM LESSON: Does God Exist?
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“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)