

Studies in James

Lesson 5

Avoiding Sin and Its Consequences

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" **(Matthew 6:13)**
 - A. But, how does God answer that prayer?
 1. What does God do to KEEP us from temptations, especially those that occasionally overtake us – temptations that break down our resistance resulting in our being led into sin?
 2. Or, to put it another way, how does God DELIVER us from evil?
 - B. To answer that question, we need to turn to the Scriptures.
 1. Through the inspired Word, we're provided with a number of practical guidelines that will help us avoid being tempted to the extent that can no longer resist.
 2. Although we can never escape temptation, we can keep temptation from overpowering us to the point that we sin.
 - C. However, the Scriptures also tell us there are also two basic reasons why we still give into temptation so easily.

1. One reason is because we may be unfamiliar with the teachings in Scripture that provide us with the wisdom we need to handle temptation.
 2. The second reason why we give into temptation so easily is because we occasionally, and perhaps even deliberately, place ourselves into situations or circumstances where we will be tempted to sin.
- II. So, let's take a few minutes to consider ways of avoiding sin and its consequences?
- A. Although the Bible provides us with many guidelines for dealing with sin in our lives, perhaps we can distill these Biblical guidelines into four great truths.
1. If you're having problems dealing with sin you will probably find out WHY in this study.
 2. You'll probably discover that you're failing to apply one of more of these great principles.
 2. So, let's take a few moments to look at these truths about sin and its consequences by carefully examining them one by one.

BODY:

I. The first great truth we learn in dealing with sin and its consequences is:

"We reap what we sow."

A. **Galatians 6:7-8** – *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he that sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."*

1. There is an undisputable truth taught in this passage – if we sow the seeds we reap the fruit.

a. If we sow the pleasurable seeds of lust of the flesh, we will eventually reap the fruit of fornication or adultery, or an unwanted pregnancy, or an insatiable desire that may eventually lead to rape or incest, and ultimately will produce the fruit of disease and death.

b. If we sow the pleasurable seeds of escaping reality through drugs or alcohol, we will eventually reap the fruit of substance abuse, chemical and alcohol addiction, arrests for D-U-I, uncontrollable violence, the loss of our job then our home and finally our family, and ultimately reap the fruit of disease and death.

2. **Proverbs 22:8** – *"He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, and the rod of his anger will fail."*
 - a. It's a very simple equation. If we sow iniquity, we will reap sorrow!
 - b. We sow the seeds, we will ALWAYS reap the fruit!
3. But the reaping doesn't always come immediately. **Ecclesiastes 8:11** – *"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."*
 - a. Because we're not immediately punished for the evil we do, we're often lulled into a false sense of security.
 - (1). Since we weren't "struck by lightning" immediately after sinning, we think maybe we won't be struck at all.
 - (2). Or, to put it another way, the reaping may not IMMEDIATELY follow the sowing, but it WILL follow.
 - (3). Sometimes the end result of our folly isn't experienced for many months or even years.
 - b. But be sure of one thing – IT WILL COME.
 - (1). It is inescapable!

4. But eventually, the fruit of our folly will catch up with us. **Proverbs 17:12** – *"Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly."*
 - a. In the animal kingdom, there is nothing more fierce; no power more destructive; and no terror more swift than a mother bear robbed of her cubs.
 - b. The same thing is true of a fool who meets up with his folly.
 - (1). It will come with the same sudden, destructive, terror-filled swiftness of a mother bear robbed of her cubs.
 - c. So, always remember that we will reap what we sow, and even though the reaping may not come immediately, it will surely come, and probably with the sudden fierceness of a mother bear robber of her cubs.

- II. The second great truth we learn about dealing with sin and its consequences is: "The self-confident will fall."
 - A. **Proverbs 14:15-16** – *"The simple believes every word, but the prudent man considers well his steps. A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident."*
 1. The word "*simple*" in this passage refers to one who is inexperienced – someone who is naïve, or simple-minded.

- a. So, how do we avoid being naïve? How can we avoid falling into sin through our own simple-mindedness?
 - b. Solomon says, consider well your steps. In other words, make decisions cautiously, thinking about the end results.
2. One of the ways we become over-confident is by over-estimating our spiritual abilities and strengths. **Proverbs 16:2** – *"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits."*
- a. Sometimes we evaluate ourselves on the basis of, *"I'm not as bad as so-and-so."*
 - b. But the problem with this kind of thinking is that we don't see ourselves as the LORD sees us.
 - c. Since God is the ultimate judge, it doesn't really make any difference how we see ourselves.
 - (1). **1 Corinthians 4:4** – The apostle Paul put it this way: *"I'm not conscious of anything against myself, but He who judges me is the Lord."*
 - (2). Even Paul realized he could be doing things that were wrong, and not even be aware of it.

- d. So, it's very foolish for us to evaluate our own spiritual standing before God – especially by comparing ourselves to others.
- e. And it's even more foolish to be simple-minded and naïve by failing to think about where our foolish decisions may eventually lead us.

III. The third great truth we learn about overcoming sin and its consequences is:
"We must give God our heart and our eyes."

A. **Proverbs 23:26-28** – *"My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. For a harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well. She also lies in wait as for a victim, and increases the unfaithful among men."*

- 1. Solomon describes the harlot as a *"deep pit"* and a *"narrow well."*
 - a. In other words, allowing ourselves to be seduced by the harlot or a wonton woman is like falling into a *"deep pit"* or a *"narrow well."*
 - b. And what distinguishes a *"deep pit"* and *"narrow well"* is the fact that the sides are so steep that there is simply no way we can climb back up.
 - (1). And so, we become hopelessly stuck in a situation from which we will NEVER be able to rescue ourselves.

2. The *"harlot,"* or the *"seductress"* can be ANYONE or ANYTHING that allures us away from our faithfulness and devotion to God.
 - a. It can be an ungodly relationship, or it can be an ungodly desire, an ungodly "aspiration" (fame, worldly attention, etc).
 - b. It can be ANYONE or ANYTHING that causes us to stumble and fall into the *"deep pit"* and *"narrow well"* of sin from which we can never rescue ourselves.
 3. Therefore, to prevent ourselves from being allured by this "harlot" ("seductress"), God says, *"...give Me your heart [mind], and let your eyes observe My ways."*
 - a. Where is your heart (mind)? What do your eyes observe?
- B. If you remember our last lesson, James vividly portrays Satan as the Master Angler – fishing for the souls of man and women by dangling bait before their eyes.
1. **James 1:14-15** – *"... 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."*
 - a. As we mentioned in that lesson, Satan knows what kind of bait we like – and he selects bait that will definitely appeal to us.
 - b. But, the GOOD news is: WE DON'T HAVE TO LOOK AT THE BAIT!

2. Is it any wonder that we sin?
 - a. We sin because we allow our minds to be filled with thoughts and lust, or because we allow our eyes to linger on things we KNOW are going to tempt us.
 - b. Then we suddenly find ourselves being tempted to sin.
 - c. Finally, when we eventually surrender to that temptation, we often say, "I just don't understand why I can't overcome this sin!"
3. Think about it. What enters your mind? And what do your eyes see?
4. Is it any wonder why you have problems overcoming lust and the desires of the flesh?
 - a. Is it any wonder why we have difficulty controlling our carnal nature?
5. And remember this – The heart (mind), and the eyes are never satisfied.
 - a. The eyes always wants to see more – They want to explore just a little further, a little deeper.
 - b. The mind always wants to imagine more – It wants to fanaticize more, to enlarge, amplify, to work up, to flesh out our desires.
 - c. They are NEVER SATISFIED with sin.

- C. Therefore we need to constantly guard our mind. **Proverbs 24:8-9** – *"He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men."*
1. Notice, the writer is not talking about those who DO evil, or those who PRACTICE sin – He's talking about those who "PLOT" to do evil.
 - a. The word "plot" means to "scheme, to develop a plan of strategy, to imagine, visualize, to see in one's mind's eye, to dream up, or fanaticize."
 2. Solomon urges us to not even allow ourselves to THINK about committing sin!
 - a. Why? The reason is simply that if we THINK about doing something LONG enough – WE'LL DO IT!
 - b. **Proverbs 23:7** – *"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."*
 3. **Mark 7:20-23** – Jesus said, *"What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

- a. Jesus says all these terrible sins come out of the heart (the mind) of a person.
 - b. But how did those thoughts get there in the first place?
 - (1). The Jewish religious leaders of the day thought a person became defiled by not washing their hands in a ceremonial way.
 - (2). But Jesus said, *"Do you not perceive that what enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because IT DOES NOT ENTER HIS HEART but his stomach..." (Mark 7:18-19)*
 - (3). We become DEFILED when we allow things to enter our heart – when we open our eyes and our minds to see things and think about things that are of a DEFILED NATURE!
4. **Proverbs 27:19** – *"As in water, face reveals face, so a man's heart reveals the man."*
- a. What does our heart reveal about us?
 - b. It all depends on what's in our heart.
 - c. And whatever is IN our heart is there because WE put it there.
 - d. Therefore, Solomon urges us to give our heart to God, and allow our eyes to observe God's ways.

IV. The fourth great fact about overcoming sin and its consequences is: "We have absolutely NO EXCUSE when we sin."

A. **1 Corinthians 10:13** – The apostle Paul says, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

1. This fact is very hard, if not impossible, for many to accept.
 - a. We want to blame someone or something (other than ourselves) for our sins.
2. When we surrender to some overpowering temptation, we might be tempted to think God failed us – HE didn't keep us from being tempted beyond what we were able to bear.

B. Therefore, the apostle Paul wants us to know that there are THREE important facts to remember about temptation.

1. First, *"No temptation has taken you, but such is COMMON to man."*
 - a. There is absolutely NOTHING UNIQUE about your problem.
 - (1). Others have gone through EXACTLY the same circumstances, and maybe even had it a little worse!
 - b. So, YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

2. Two, *"God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to resist."*
 - a. In other words, God LIMITS the power of Satan in tempting us.
 - (1). God knows our "breaking point" and won't allow Satan to tempt us BEYOND that point.
 3. And three, *"God will also provide a WAY TO ESCAPE."*
 - a. HOW God provides this "way of escape" is often the subject of controversy.
 - (1). We know He provides us with practical guidelines in scripture. If we follow these guidelines, we can escape the consequences of temptation – SIN.
 - (2). But perhaps you've also experienced times when your temptation was suddenly interrupted – a phone call, or the doorbell rings, or you run into another Christian, or you suddenly remember a passage of scripture, or maybe even find yourself humming a song from the song book.
 4. All this tells us one important thing about temptation – If we yield to temptation, we have absolutely NO EXCUSE WHATSOEVER!
- C. So, if God limits the power of Satan in tempting us, and if God provides us a way of escape, then WHY do we still sin?

1. **1 John 5:18** – *"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."*
2. John tells those who are born of God several important things about sin.
 - a. First, John says, *"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin..."*
 - (1). This does NOT mean that we never sin, NOR does it mean we CANNOT sin, or be GUILTY of sin. John already told us in chapter one that anyone who says he has not sinned is a liar.
 - (2). What this DOES mean is those who are born of God do not sin HABITUALLY, or CONTINUALLY. Sin doesn't characterize the LIFESTYLE of the child of God. We may SIN, but we don't LIVE in sin.
 - b. Second, John says, *"he who has been born of God keeps himself..."*
 - (1). This means WE take an ACTIVE role in keeping ourselves from sin. We KEEP OURSELVES!
 - (2). But, what do we KEEP ourselves FROM? To answer this, we need to look at the last part of the verse.
 - c. Finally, John says, *"the wicked one does not touch him."*

- (1). John says we need to keep ourselves from Satan being able to TOUCH US. In other words, we need to KEEP OUT OF HIS REACH.
 - (2). So, how do we keep Satan from reaching us? The answer is simply, STAY OUT OF HIS TERRITORY!
3. Homer Hailey once told the story about walking down a sidewalk near his home in Arizona, when a large dog lunged out of the shadows toward him.
- a. Bro. Hailey thought the dog was about to bite him, but then the dog came to the end of his chain.
 - b. That's when Bro. Hailey saw that the chain that was attached to the dog's collar was also attached to a wire that stretched between two trees.
 - c. The dog had a TERRITORY in which he could roam freely. He could go back and forth between the trees, and he could go toward the sidewalk as far as his chain would reach, but no further.
 - d. That's when Bro. Hailey realized how well this situation illustrated 1 John 5:18. As long as we stay out of Satan's backyard, he can't reach us. But the moment we get into HIS territory or domain, he will get us every time.

4. Satan simply CANNOT touch us AS LONG AS we stay out of his territory.
5. The reason we sin is because WE place OURSELVES in situations, or in places, or in the company of people, where we'll be enticed to sin in ways GREATER than we can bear.
 - a. We leave the safety of the SIDEWALK, and stroll right into Satan's BACKYARD!
 - b. So, when we eventually surrender to temptation – if we're REAL HONEST with ourselves – we'll admit we PUT OURSELVES in that situation.
 - c. God has does everything we need to resist temptation. But the reason we surrender to it, is because we PLACE OURSELVES in situations where it is beyond our ability to resist.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How are you dealing with sin and it's consequences?
 - A. Are you having problems overcoming temptation in your life?
 1. Have you deceived yourself – thinking you won't someday reap what you are now sowing?
 2. Have you become overconfident – thinking Satan can't get to you.

3. Are you not guarding your heart and your eyes?
 4. Have you concluded that it's really not your fault – that someone else is to blame for your sin? But in reality, you're actually putting yourself in situations where you find temptation irresistible?
- II. If you're doing any of these things, then you need to stop and consider the consequences:
- A. Not only will your sins keep you from having fellowship with God, it's possible to get to a point where you no longer care – where you become "past feeling."
 1. To keep this from happening to you, turn in genuine repentance to God, and allow the blood of Jesus Christ to wash away your sins.