

LUST, TEMPTATION, SIN, AND JAS. 1: 12- 15

Jas.1:12-15

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Like every other passage in the Bible there is controversy among Bible students over Jas.1:12-15.
2. The controversy is over:
 - a. The meaning of the words “lust” and “temptation” as they are used in Jas.1:12-15.
 - b. Whether or not the lust, temptation and sin of Jas.1:12-15 can or do apply in any way to Jesus in his desire and temptations while in the flesh.
3. This controversy even involves brethren in Christ with some affirming that the word “lust” in V.14 mean “evil or sinful desire”, and other, of whom I am one, denying that it does.
4. This controversy also the Bible doctrine of man’s nature as well as the nature of Jesus as a man.
5. One advantage of controversy over any passage or Bible doctrine is that it results in closer and more diligent study of the passage or the doctrine, and results in greater learning and better insight into the matter over which there is controversy.
6. For this reason and with a desire to understand and to teach the truth taught therein we engage in this somewhat in depth study of “Lust, Temptation, Sin And Jas.1:12-15.”

II. DISCUSSION

A. FROM ITS BIBLE DEFINITION AND USE WE LEARN THAT “LUST” IS A NEUTRAL WORD.

1. Whether used in a good or a bad sense depends on the context.
2. This is something all too often not understood or overlooked.
3. The Calvinist definition of “lust” as “sinful” or “evil desire” or “resident, existing cravings for evil things,” which has largely influenced men’s thinking of it as ***always used in a bad sense***, is incorrect.
4. The English word “lust” comes from the Greek word EPITHUMIA (ep-ee-thoo-mee-ah) or from

EPITHUMEO (ep-ee-thoo-meh-o) (Strong, 1937,1939), and doesn't mean "sinful lust". It simply means:

- a. "To fix the desire upon; desire; craving; longing."
 - b. "A strong desire of any kind, the various kinds being frequently specified by some adjective." – Vine, III, 25.
5. "Lust" is a neutral word, and its use in a good or bad sense must be decided by the context or some qualifying adjective.
- a. It lust always meant that which is evil or sinful, then it would never need a qualifying adjective to identify it as sinful lust!
 - b. Thus lust or desire can be "good" and satisfied lawfully. Or it can be "bad" and satisfied unlawfully.
 - c. W.E. Vine, Arndt-Gengrich, A.T. Robertson and Albert Barnes all recognize that "lust" simply means "desire," in the definitions they give it, *even though their commentary on it may say otherwise.*
 - d. Albert Barnes, even though a Calvinist, noted that "lust" discussed in Jas.Ch.1 is a neutral word. He says, "The word 'lust' in this place...is not employed here in the narrow sense in which it is now commonly used, as denoting libidinousness (i.e. lascivious, wanton desires). – Barnes Notes, James, p.25.
6. The N.T. use of the word "lust" (epihumia) confirms that it is a neutral word that does not mean "sinful" or "evil lusts," or "inner corruption," or "evil propensity," in an of itself. As the following examples attest:
- a. The prodigal son lusted after (longer for) the swine's food, but there is no indication that his lust was sinful, but merely pitiable: "And he *would fain* (lusted, epithumei) have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: And no man gave unto him," Lk.15:16.
 - b. Lazareth lusted after the rich man's food, but not in an evil sense: "And desiring (lusting, epithumon) to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table...", Lk.16:21.

- c. Jesus spoke of the “lusts” of righteous men, “For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have *desired* (lusted, epithumson) to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them,” Mt.13:17.
 - (1) These lusts were not born of “inner corruption.”
 - (2) Nor ere they “sinful” or “evil”.
- d. Jesus affirmed that he himself had “lusts” as all men do, Lk.22:13: “And he said unto them, ‘with *desire* (lust, epithumia) I have *desired* (lusted, epithumnsa) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”
- e. Paul expressed his lusts or desires in his epistles, none of which were “evil” or from the “evil propensity” of his own heart.
 - (1) He wrote that he had a “desire (lust, epithumian) to depart to be Christ,” Phil.1:23.
 - (2) Again he wrote that he “endeavored...to see your face with great *desire* (lust, epithoemia),” 1Th.2:17.
 - (3) Once again, “And we desire (lust, epithumoumen) that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end,” Heb.6:11.
- f. Christians are commanded to lust after or desire God’s word: “This a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth (lusts after, epithumei) a good work,” 1Tim.3:1.

B. LUSTS OR DESIRES ARE A NATURAL PART OF HUMAN NATURE WHICH GOD GIVES ALL MEN.

1. Albert Barnes, even though a Calvinist, commenting on Jas.1:14, recognizes this fact. He wrote: “The word ‘lust’ in this place...means *desire* in general; an earnest wish for anything... It seems here to be used with reference to the original propensities of our nature – the desires implanted in us, which

are a stimulus to employment – as the desire of knowledge, of food, of power, of sensual gratifications; and the idea is, that a man may be *drawn along* by these *beyond* the prescribed limits of indulgence, and in the pursuit of objects that are forbidden. He does not stop at the point at which the law requires him to stop, and is therefore guilty of *transgression*. This is the source of all sin. The original propensity *may not be wrong*, but may be perfectly harmless – as in the case of the desire of food, etc. Nay, it may furnish a most desirable stimulus to action; for how could the human powers be called forth, if it were not for this? The error, the fault, the sin, is, not restraining the indulgence where we are *commanded* to do it, either in regard to the *objects* sought, or in regard to the *degree* of indulgence.” (Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes On The N.T., James, Peter, John, Jude, p.25.

2. God-given desires or lusts as a part of human nature – or natural lusts – are not sinful in and of themselves. Examples:
 - a. Men have a God-given natural lust or desire for knowledge they can fulfill or satisfy naturally and lawfully.
 - (1) Jesus, in Mt.13:17, spoke of this kind of desire for knowledge, “...many prophets and righteous men have *desired* (lusted) to see those things which ye see...and to hear those things which ye hear...”
 - b. Men have God-given natural lust or desire for food, Lk.15:16 (Prodigal Son); Lk.16:21 (Lazareth).
 - c. There is natural lust or desire for power or authority in the exercise of responsibility in God-ordained offices, 1Tim.3:1 (elders or bishops); Rom.13:1-5 (civil rulership),
 - d. Men have God-given natural sexual lusts or desires to be lawfully satisfied in the God-given and God-defined marriage relationship, 1Cor.7:2-5,8,9; Heb.13:4.

C. MAN’S GOD-GIVEN NATURAL LUSTS OR DESIRES ARE HOLY WHICH CAN AND MUST BE CONTROLLED IN HARMONY WITH GOD’S REVEALED WILL FOR MAN.

1. Along with the natural lusts or desires which are holy and God-given, God has given all man the ability to contain and control

- them in overcoming temptation and avoiding sin, even though tempted, 1Cor.10:12,13; Cf. 1Cor.15:34 1Jno.2:1; Jas.1:12.
2. Note what Paul said about himself and to other Christians in recognition of the responsibility to control one's self.
 - a. About himself he said, 1Cor.9:27.
 - b. To other Christians he said, Rom.6:1,2,12-15; 1Cor.7:2-5 1Cor.10:6-13.
 3. Note what Peter said, 1Pet.1:14-16; 2:1,2; 2Pet.3:14.
 4. Some Bible examples of men who controlled their desires under very difficult and dangerous situations in recognition of and in harmony with God's requirements.
 - a. Joseph, Gen.39:1-9.
 - b. Daniel, 1:8.
 - c. Job 2:10.
 5. Man is going to be tempted, but man does not have to yield to temptation and sin, nor does he sin because of some "resident, evil cravings, or inner corruptions, always existing within his heart, or evil propensity" or "sinful nature" with which he is born or which he possesses which is beyond his control.
 6. Furthermore, Jesus, as a man, as God in the flesh, had these natural fleshly desires, which caused or allowed him to be tempted to sin, but which he perfectly controlled and never sinned, not even one time!

D. WITH THIS BACKGROUND STUDY OF "LUST", WE NOW RAISE THE QUESTION, WHAT KIND OF TEMPTATIONS AND LUSTS ARE DESCRIBED IN JAS.1:12-14?

1. Does the word "lust" of V.14 refer to "natural lusts", "natural desires", or "evil desires"?
2. Some Bible scholars define the word "lust" in Jas.1:14 as "strong desire of any kind," "to have a desire for, long for," "desire, craving, longing," thus recognizing it as a neutral word, and then in their commentary on it indicate that it is there used in a bad sense.
3. Most Calvinist commentators say it is used in a "bad" sense in Jas.1:14, and means that in man's heart there is a "resident, evil desire" or an "inner corruption," ever existing in man's heart, which, of course, would be sinful even before any overt act of sin is committed by being drawn away, enticed, whereby sin is

brought forth that brings forth death, as further described in Vv.14,15.

3. But a careful analysis of the text reveals that Jas.1:12-15 denies this showing it to be completely false.
 - a. In the first place, V.12 declares that man can endure temptation; that he can be tempted without yielding to it; that he will be blessed with “the crown of life” for doing so.
 - (1) If “sinful desire” or “evil desire” or “inner corruption” is “resident” in man’s heart, he is already tried and found guilty of sin before he faces temptation of any kind.
 - b. Moreover, the lust referred to in Jas.1:14,15 are not sinful, and no sin exist, until one is “drawn away” by it “and enticed” and when that “lust hath conceived.”
 - (1) Then, and only then, “it bringeth forth sin,” which “bringeth forth death.”
 - c. If lust in Jas.1:14,15 means “resident, sinful lust” or “inner corruption” which all mere men have in the heart, even before being tempted to sin as per Jas.1:14, then the passage should read something like this: “But every (sinful) man is tempted (“temptation equals inner corruption that is easily touched and then succumbs to the enticement”) when he is drawn away of his own lust (“the evil propensity, or natural tendency, of his own heart” or “inner corruption”) and enticed. Then when (sinful) lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin (or more sin in addition to that which was in the heart all along): and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (although, every man is already dead from the sinful lust or inner corruption within him).”
4. The position which says the “lust” of Jas.1:14 is “sinful lust” has several glaring problems and erroneous consequences concerning the nature of man. (These consequences are there even though men may not accept the consequences of their doctrine.)
 - a. One: The process described in Jas.1:14,15 is: first, “temptation”; second, “drawn away”; third, “lust conceived”; fourth, “sin”; fifth, “death.”

- (1) No sin at the point of temptation. Cf. V.12. It is not sin to be tempted. Sin comes only when one yields to the temptation.
 - (a) Arizona preacher in 1958 said that “to be tempted is to sin.”
 - (b) Another preacher defined temptation as, or that which, “equals inner corruption that is easily touched and then succumbs to the enticement”, and as “the resident, existing cravings for evil things.” – Maurice Barnett, “Clarification: ‘Sinlessness’” Gospel Anchor, June 1991, Vol. XVII, No.10, p.5 (169).
 - (2) Sin came only after being drawn away, enticed, with lust have been conceived and bringing forth the sin.
 - (3) But their erroneous position says men are sinners before they are even tempted to sin; that the man described in Jas.1:14 has already set his heart to sin when the opportunity arises; that “lust” in Jas. 1:14 means “evil cravings” ...that would respond to some opportunity to fulfill that longing in the act of sin.
 - (a) This, of course, is what the Calvinist believes – that men sin because they are inherently corrupt, i.e., they begin as a sinner with “resident, sinful lusts” in the heart.
 - (4) Any position that says men are sinners before they are tempted to sin is contrary to the whole tenor of Bible teaching.
 - (5) Such a position makes God the author of men’s sins, since God is the author (creator) of the nature of man.
 - (6) This position or view is obviously falsely assumed and is a perversion of Jas.1:12-15.
- b. Two: The logical consequence of the “sinful lust” position on Jas.1:14, is that all men are dead in sin *even before* they have been “drawn away” and *before* “lust” hath conceived” (and) “bringeth forth sin” and “death.”

- (1) For if men have “resident, inner corruption, evil propensity, sinful or evil lusts” in their heart before they even face temptation, as this position claims, then they are already corrupt, evil and sinful, and are already “drawn away” by their evil desires, and are already dead in sin.

E. WHY HAS JAS.1:14,15 BECOME SO CONTROVERSIAL AMONG BRETHREN IN CHRIST?

(Because of a false view of the meaning of “lust” in Jas.1:14 some brethren have adopted and insisting upon similar to, in fact, almost identical to the Calvinistic view of it. Proof of this charge is as follows:--

1. 1st, The common Calvinist view of Jas.1:14 and of how and why men are tempted begins with a false view of the meaning of lust as mentioned in V.14.
 - a. Adam Clark, Methodist Commentator, with Calvinistic thinking, declared his view in the following words: “...when he is drawn away of his own lusts – when giving way to the evil propensity (i.e., the natural tendency) of his own heart...”
 - (1) Thus Clark says “lust” in Jas.1:14 is man’s own “evil tendency”; “evil inclination” or “evil bias resident” in his own heart.
 - b. Robert Frew, Calvinist editor, seeking to correct Albert Barnes’ view of lust in Jas.1:14, said: “And this passage in James seems at once to fix down on EPITHUMIA (“lust”, ejd, ep-ee-thoo-mee-ah) the sense of evil or corrupt desire ...without doubt, the apostle traces the whole evil of temptation...to the sinful desires of the human heart.
 - c. The Calvinistic view is due to their doctrine of inherit total depravity, their idea of the inherited sinful nature of man which he never loses.
2. Regretably, some gospel preachers in recent years are teaching the same false idea concerning “lust” in Jas.1:14; they are even quoting Calvinistic sources in support of their views.

- a. One gospel preacher writing on Jas.1:12-15 used both Adam Clark and Robert Frew, Calvinistic scholars, in support of this view.
 - b. Some brethren have said men – all men – sin because they have “inner corruption”, and say “ ‘temptation’...in Jas.1:13-15...refers to appeals to perform evil that start with the lust that resides within a person. With James, in these verses, temptation equals inner corruption that is easily touched and then succumbs to the enticement...” (Maurice Barnett, “Clarification: ‘Sinlessness’” Gospel Anchor, June 1991, Vol. XVII, No.10, p.5 [169])
 - c. The same gospel preacher once again said, “James says that temptation involves the resident, existing cravings for evil things plus being drawn away and allured.” “These lusts for evil things already existed in the heart before any opportunity for the act of sin appeared” (Maurice Barnett, “Jesus And James 1:13-15,” Gospel Anchor, Dec.1991, Vol. XVIII, No.4, p.10 (70)).
 - d. Again, “ ‘lusts’ in Jas.1:14 means ‘evil cravings’...that would respond to some opportunity to fulfill that longing in the act of sin.” – Barnett, Gospel Anchor, Dec.1991.
3. Some Bible texts examined which these brethren offer as proof of their falsely assumed position on the meaning of “lust” in Jas.1:14.
- a. 1Cor.10:6, which says, “...we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”
 - (1) These brethren claim the lust of 1Cor.10:6 is the same kind of lust as that of Jas.1:14.
 - (2) This can’t be because 1Cor.10:6 specifies “evil things” as the object of their “lust”.
 - (3) But Jas.1:14 does not.
 - b. 2Tim.4:3 and 2Pet.3:3 are also offered as proof.
 - (1) Both of these texts obviously describe individuals already yielded to “lust” and sinning.
 - (2) While Jas.1:13,14 refer to individuals being tempted to sin, not to those already guilty of sin before being tempted.
 - c. Why do men try to insert into Jas.1:14 such words as “evil propensity,” “evil lust”, “corrupt desire” or “sinful lust”?

- (1) Calvinists do it because they begin with the false assumption that men have a “*sinful nature*” with which they are born and never lose; that they are “inherently sinful” by nature.
- (2) They men sin because their nature is inherently evil and corrupt by nature, by birth.
- d. But why are some gospel preacher now taking the position that the nature of man is evil, sinful and corrupt?
 - (1) Not because they believe he is born with a sinful. In fact, they deny that.
 - (2) In spite of this:
 - (a) They use the same terms as the Calvinist commentators to support their position.
 - (b) They often cite Calvinist commentators to support their position.
 - (3) They do this because they often claim that man has an “acquired sinful nature.”
 - (4) And they do it because they are unduly influenced by the poisoned wells of the Protestant Calvinist commentators they have drunk from too long and without discretion.

III. CONCLUSION

1. Men are not so constituted by Almighty God that they inherently have “resident, inner corruption or sinful lusts,” Gen.1:31; Eccl.7:29; Mt.18:4; 19:14; 1Cor.15:34; 1Jno.2:1.
2. All men have the same common lusts or desires and fact common temptations, 1Cor.10:13. Men can face and endure temptation, Jas.1:12.
3. While all men “have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23), they are without excuse for their sin (Rom.1:18-20, and God is perfectly just in condemning men why they do give in to lust and temptation and commit sin (Psa.51:4; Rom.3:4; 2Th.1:6-10)
4. Brother Whiteside cuts to the heart of the argument concerning man’s nature in his comments on Rom.8:3, where he addresses both the nature of men, the nature of Christ in the flesh, and the problem of sin.

- a. Commenting on Rom.8:3 he said, “And thus in his flesh he condemned sin. Formerly sin reigned as master, and held the sinner in captivity. When a person accepts Christ, sin as his master is destroyed – blotted out... He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. Human flesh is not sinful in and of itself; if so the flesh of Jesus was sinful. But some commentators seek to evade this by stressing the word ‘likeness.’ His flesh, they say, was not sinful, but was like sinful flesh! But he was man (1Tim.2:5), and frequently spoke of himself as the Son of man. He, therefore, had in his nature all that the word ‘man’ implies. ‘Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same’ (Heb.2:14). ‘Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren’ (Heb.2:17). If his brethren were born sinful and he was not, then he was not like them in all things. But as Jesus was made in all things like his brethren and was without sin, it shows conclusively that sin is not a part of man’s nature. When Adam and Eve were first created, they had all that belongs to human nature. Sin came into their lives as a foreign elements. Sin is no more a part of your nature than dust in your eye is a part of the nature of your eye. Because the desires, appetites, and passions of the flesh so often lead to sin, flesh is called sinful. But we should remember always that fleshly desires lead to sin only when the mind, or heart, purposes to gratify the flesh in an unlawful way.”
5. This latter thought expressed by Bro. Whiteside is exactly what Jas.1:14,15 teaches!