

# Good Desire and True Religion

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we are in the second week of our series on the book of James James is answering the question What does born-again life look like?

Or in other words, how does faith act? And last week we saw how faith acts one of the ways that faith in Christ makes action a particular type of action possible and Derek talked to us about how faith creates a situation where people can have joy in the midst of trials and This week I feel bad because This path the back half of James chapter one is so full Man it's so full James says so much with so little words. He's such an economist When it comes with those comes to words He explains in this passage the relation between temptation circumstances and morality He explains in this passage the human psyche the evolution of sin the nature of God the new birth how the gospel changes human action The role of silence in our lives the Christians relationship to the living word the relation between hearing God's word and seeing and acting God's word How the scripture relates to our identity perseverance in the Christian life what it means to be blessed the nature of true religion The nature of false religion the pursuit of holiness in the ministry of mercy So Buckle up you'll be here for a while. No, I'm just kidding What that means is that we have to leave a lot out And so when we're working and just bits of this passage tonight you're gonna say, but what about this?

What about this? What about this? How does this relate to this? You're skipping stuff? And that's true But it's a good thing because what it'll do is open up avenues of thought for all of us questions that need to be Asked over and over again, and I hope that's what it'll do The question that's that we're really looking at tonight the question. That's how does faith act is is Presupposed by a few questions, and these are the questions that we have to wrestle with What do you need to know? about yourself to become To have a faith that acts to have a faith that lives a practical faith. What do you need to know about yourself? second, what do you need to know about God and Third what do you need to know about true religion?

[ 2 : 33 ] So that's what we're gonna ask. What do you need to know about yourself? What do you need to know about God and what do you need to know about religion? To have a faith that acts and the answer is that James is giving us is you need to know something about the psyche or the psychology of sin You need to know that God is a shadowless God And you need to know True religion, okay, so we're gonna take those in turn the psyche of sin. What do you need to know about yourself?

What do you need to know about yourself? One of the questions that the commentators if you read any any books about James are constantly asking is is James a book of Proverbs or prose? So a lot of commentators will say that James is the proverbs of the New Testament If you've read through James, you'll see that sometimes James feels like a bunch of statements that are not related to one another So a bunch of wise sayings wisdom is at the center of what he's doing and it looks like it's a bunch of segments that aren't related They're like the Proverbs It's displaying for you brief snippets of what it means to be wise and you can see that in our passage tonight because We picked up in the middle of a paragraph if you have a Bible out in verse 13 Let no one say when he's when he is tempted. I'm being tempted by God now last week Derek ended on verse 12 Which has blessed as the man who remains steadfast under trial and this is one of the key places that scholars and commentators say is it Proverbs or prose?

Because between 12 verse 12 which says blessed are you under trial in verse 13? Which says don't let anybody say when they're tempted you're being tempted by God a lot of people say there's no connection here There's no connection between these verses. This is Proverbs. It's just a break. It's a new idea, right?

And the beautiful thing is that we don't have to choose. We don't have to choose this book is both Proverbs It's proverbial and it's prose It's a it's a book of the set of wisdom sayings That are connected and now one of the ways one ways you can see that is at the heart of our passage tonight And that's this that one when James said blesses bless the man who remains steadfast under trial And then in verse 13 says let no one say that he is when he is tempted that he's being tempted by God that the word trial And the word in verse 13 tempted are the same word in the Greek in the original language of the New Testament They're not different words. They're just a little bit different grammatical forms of the same word. You see it's not it He's it's not a new idea. He's built. He's building on something here And so we have to ask what does he mean by trial in verse 12 to understand what he means by temptation in verse 13 What does he mean by trial in verse 12? [ 5 : 16 ] Well, the word is the word pyrhasmon and What it means is it's it's it doesn't actually refer just to suffering So you might think when when he says count it all joy when you go under trials you think of course he means He means suffering means pain a Love to one dies you get fired from your job. He means something like that But actually the word refers to any circumstance Any new circumstance that comes into your life and one of the ways you can see that is because just before this in verses 9 and 10 He's talked about the trials of the rich and the trials of the poor And soon he's saying When you become rich when you win the lottery when you're when your relative dies and you and you get a boatload of cash That comes with a particular type of temptation Is your prosperity is also a circumstance that you can fall under sin or Or if you become poor if you lose your job if you get kicked out of your flat

Adversity is also a circumstance where you can fall fall under sin What what James means by the world word trial in verse 12 is the outer test Sorry the outer test any circumstance Any circumstance that comes into your life anything and everything So then when we come to verse 13 when he uses but don't say that God is the one that's tempting you what does he mean?

He's he's referring to a corresponding Inner temptation that gives rise when you experience outer objective trials You see what he's saying every circumstance in your life every single circumstance there are objects money power all sorts of things that these are outer tests that give rise to an inner temptation The inner temptation creeps up from inside of you when you when you're placed in particular circumstances every circumstance comes with its own possible temptation That's what he's saying You know, let me illustrate it like this Well, let me say this before I illustrate it in verse 14 what is he saying is at the base of those inner temptations?

Look at me look with me at verse 14 He says each person is tempted Inner temptation when he is lured and enticed by his own desires So he's saying at the heart of all sin at the base of every temptation is not something outside of you But it's something inside of you. You see Now there are a number of you who are Lawyers or accountants or other stuff like investment bankers or and I know many of you have had to take exams To get certifications in your job, right? So continue on Accountants particularly is like 12 or 15 exams or something like that that you have to take now if you go take that exam and You totally bomb it You I mean you utterly fail it right You might You might you might find yourself in a circumstance where you want to come and you want to say look To the institution that gave it to you to the to the guy that wrote the exam I would have never failed this exam if you wouldn't have given me an exam

You see I would I wouldn't have done poorly except for the fact that you felt like you needed to test me Right now if you're honest with yourself If you're honest with yourself, what do you know the real reason why you failed the exam?

[ 8 : 52 ] The it's not the exam fault that what did the exam do the exam exposed you see the exam to uncovered something about you That you were that you were ignorant That you were ignorant about something about whatever was on the exam you see they it's not the exam's what the exam exposed you and The distinction that James is making for us is that there's a difference between the Circumstance of sin and the cause of sin you see The circumstance of sin is not the cause of sin there are all sorts of circumstances in your life and these are trials These are tests, but they don't cause you to soon no matter what it is outside of you It's not it's not the fault of the object It's it's your fault is what he's saying it's our fault. It's my fault Circumstances don't cause you to sin you only sin he's saying When you when you want to You only sin when you want to Sin is a product of your utmost desires you see

Now this distinction between the circumstance of sin and the cause of sin Sets James up to give the most sophisticated Psychology of sin that's ever been produced The most sophisticated psychology

of sin right here in the first century in a very ancient place Where did where does bad behavior come from?

That's the root. Where does bad behavior come from and People whose fault is it? Who's fault is it now James is offering you something here that you don't get in any of the extremes of Current visions in our current culture about where bad behavior comes from So the the most prominent way our culture views the source of bad behavior the route of bad behavior is We would call the late modern collective way of thinking about it and it's it's simply this you know this you've seen this That a person when a person behaves badly They do it because they're a product of their environment Right it comes from two places it comes from nature and nurture right so Their their biology tends them in a particular direction a particular type of way of acting badly and then their environment the way They were brought up the way they were raised and so I mean statistics will show much of this that If you grow if a person grows up in a very broken home, it's very it's more likely that they're going to create a broken home

They're going to make bad decisions in life and create a broken home Right this is that this is the what where does bad behavior come from it comes entirely from your environment entirely from From nature and nurture your biology and how you were raised This this idea we could call it is the most progressive idea of saying Because ultimately ultimately if you get on the road far enough it makes you say it's not the person's fault They're a product of nature and nurture They behave badly because of how they were raised So that's what that's one extreme the other extreme that we see in our culture The more conservative extreme that the way that our tradition probably tends more towards is to say the total opposite Sin is never anybody's fault, but your fault Bad behavior doesn't come from any place else for but from you So the first approach is completely collective bad behaviors are product of collective environments The second approach is completely individual bad behavior comes from nobody but the single individual person you see

The two extremes James psychology of sin Is that both are true James cuts he diagonalizes it. He says you can't have one or the other you have to take both You have to take both You have to take both at the Now how does he do it? How does he do it?

[ 12 : 54 ] He says that in verse 14 at the core of sin The base of what sin is he uses the word desire desire desire gives rise to sin Now what's desire desire is the answer to the question what do you want?

What do you want what do you wish for? That's what it means to desire. What do you want? What do you wish for? And you know some of you right now you want chocolate cake Right some of you want the sermon to be over That's a true story Some of you want to sleep in tomorrow not go to work. That's probably all of us And that that's that word desire meaning I want chocolate cake I want to sleep in I want the sermon to be over That there's a specific Greek word for that and it appears 61 times in the New Testament Desires all over the New Testament But that's not the word that's here Oh, it's a different word It's James has attached a little bitty Oh gosh, I'm just going blank. What do you call the thing that goes before word?

Not a pronoun, but Prefix thank you a prefix He's terrible. He's attached to a little prefix to the front of this word desire the little prefix epi So he's saying it's not just desires that make you sin, but it's epi desires Now what's the difference? What's the difference and epi epi literally is the prefix that means before So it literally says these are the desires before your desires And this word desires not in the plural is in the singular so it's literally the desire before desires You see see the difference It's not I want chocolate cake. I want to sleep in I want the sermon to be over. It's something that comes is anteceded to all of those things It's a deep it's something deeper down That causes sin a deeper down aspect of your personality What is it what's an epi desire?

It's this You desire to have a spouse perhaps Epi desire Is I want to be known and loved You see Your desire to have a spouse is flowing out of something in other words and it's flowing out of the deeper desire the diaper that is I want to be known and loved You see the difference in desire and epi desire Look there are two things to learn here There are two things to learn the first is that epi desires the epi desire that James talking about isn't isn't going after individual things It's not going after individual objects like cakes and jobs and spouses and Circumstances whatever's out there in front of you in circumstances. It's the ultimate desire to be fulfilled It's the ultimate desire to be to be ultimately happy To have joy One of the ways to illustrate this is that Blaise Pascal the great French mathematician and theologian

You don't see those two put together much anymore He He He talked about this idea in his famous book called the Ponce which just means thoughts And he talked about the desire that someone has for death And today we call that suicide You'll see here in this quote I'm about to read the difference between the epi desire and the desire There's a desire in this quote for suicide but there's an epi desire and see if you see it All men seek all people seek happiness This is without exception whatever different means someone employs they all tend to the same end of happiness Happiness is the motive of every action of every human being even of those who desire to commit suicide You see what he's saying? You can have a bad desire pursue a bad object like death Suicide But underneath that he's saying there's actually an epi desire An epi desire that originally was good and that's the desire to have happiness

[ 17 : 14 ] You see suicide he's saying is a route is a route to end the misery of the possibility of a future happiness The second thing to see about this is this Sin in other words is not just rule-breaking Did you think so?

Sin is not just rule-breaking Sin is not just breaking the Ten Commandments It's something much much more and much deeper than that Much deeper you see rule-breaking involves knowing the rules And what James is doing is he's reaching underneath your intellect You see he's saying sin doesn't start in your intellect It doesn't start in you thinking I know the rule and I know I'm not going to do it I'm not going to obey it it doesn't start there It goes somewhere it starts long before you ever even know the rules You see he's saying it starts deeper down the way the Bible talks about it is that rule-breaking starts in your head But sin creeps up from the heart Sin starts from a motive that exists long before you ever know the rules or break the rules And you can see this in the way Paul distinguishes the law and the gospel Paul says it's not as if when I confront the law and I see myself exposed before the law

I read the Ten Commandments and I know and I see who I truly am It's not as if I can turn towards the law and say finally finally now I'm a sinner Because I've read the rules No the rules that came out of sin The rules that came much later in life did nothing but expose who you already were You see sin is not just about rule-breaking it's about something much much deeper than that You sin because you want to That's what James is saying Now James completely confirms for us then the conservative way of thinking about bad behavior Where does bad behavior come from? It comes from you It's your fault it's my fault He's affirming that Absolutely it's your fault There's nobody guilty but you That's the first thing He affirms the conservative narrative But there's another thing The second thing How does desire become sin?

How does it become sin? Now did you catch the metaphor? It's kind of difficult on the first time you read it Let me read it again Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin And sin when it's fully grown brings forth death Now did you catch the metaphor there?

The metaphor that each person is tempted when he's lured and enticed That desire then conceives And then it gives birth to death And then it conceives And then it gives birth And then it grows up And then it becomes that Do you see what he's saying?

[ 20 : 20 ] The movement from desire to sin is a sexual encounter That's the metaphor he's using He's using a very similar word to the Proverbs chapter 5 When it talks about Lady Folly coming in as the seductress In other words These fundamental desires for fulfillment and happiness Are seduced by objects of desire And then that seduction becomes a conception In other words it's saying The metaphor is that someone, your desire goes to bed with evil And then it gives birth It gives birth in action You actually do something And that doing something is sin But wait, it doesn't end there Did you catch the rest?

Did you catch the rest? Then sin grows up It gives birth and then it grows up And out comes death Do you see what he's saying? Do you see what he's saying?

The conservative narrative is absolutely true It's your fault It's my fault, we're guilty And the progressive narrative You see what he's saying? When you sin It gives birth and it grows up Into death You see this is exactly what happened in Genesis 3 Eve had an ultimate epi-desire to become God She ate of the fruit And the action of sin gave birth to curse The curse of death You see what he's saying?

He's saying that when you sin it affects everything It grows up out of you It's like casting a shadow And ultimately that shadow reaches and reaches and reaches Until there's utter darkness of death It affects everybody Family Person-to-person relationship Your relationship to every object in the

world It's all affected You see they're both It's your fault And you're a product of your environment This is why in the Old Testament God can talk about bearing down On the sons, the iniquity of the fathers You see, sin casts a shadow And it's not just a shadow that's on you It affects everyone and everything that you touch It's nature, it's nurture, and it's your fault That's what James is saying You see the sophistication?

How modern a psychology of sin How sophisticated Now Look At the base of who you are Your epi-desires, your utmost desires The desire below all your desires To be happy, to be fulfilled, to be satisfied James is not saying that these are bad One of the ways we know this is because This very verb is spoken of God Almost 52 times throughout the scriptures God desires This isn't bad It's not bad to have- You see what he's saying?

[ 23 : 17 ] Tim Keller puts it this way Sin Is not wanting bad things Is not wanting bad things But wanting things Badly Sin is not wanting- It's not just wanting bad things But it's wanting things badly It's letting your epi-desires for happiness, fulfillment, and joy Be placed upon an object That can't hold It's idolatry It's idolatry It's wanting something so Badly That you make it evil That James is not coming down on living with desire He's coming down on letting desire become idolatry Now, this is at the base This is at the core of all human sin What do we do about it?

Secondly, what do we do about it? What can be done about this? And his answer for us is that you have to see the nature of God You have to see the nature of God if you want to change You have to see the nature of God Now, look, many- There have been so many philosophers in the past that have seen this This idea That sin, bad behavior, ultimately is something that comes up from our desires And there have been all sorts of ways to deal with it What do you do about it?

There's been all sorts of ways But the two kind of extremes, the two most common That both appeared in the ancient world and appeared today in the modern world The first is the stoic The stoic way And the stoic way says this If desire is our ultimate problem Then the answer is that you get rid of desires You get rid of desires altogether There was a guy that lived about the same time as Jesus named Epictetus And he had this whole book called The Discipline of Desires And he said Let the cardinal virtue of self-control come over you Discipline all your passions, all your desires Do not let desire have an effect on your action You don't act according to what you want But according to what you rationally conclude to be the correct way Now, a lot of people in different Christian traditions in the past have adopted this approach And what they've done is concluded that the only way to protect ourselves from letting our desires run wild Is to separate Separate from society, separate from the world See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, right?

It's to completely separate Right? But this is impossible This is impossible You can't walk out of your door without being confronted with objects of desire You can't, there's no way This is not a possible route The other opposite route from the stoic route To deny all your desires To say desires are a bad thing And what's not, that's especially prominent in modern society is hedonism What does hedonism say?

Hedonism says the total opposite Don't deny your desires Your desires are your identity Your desires define exactly who you are Don't ever deny your desires Because if you do, you're denying who you really are Let your desire flow Pursue the pleasures you want to pursue Right?

[ 26 : 30 ] It doesn't matter if this is in pertains to sexual ethics or economics Or social ethics or anything You are what you want And this is the opposite extreme But the Christian way The Christian way It says no to both The Christian way says no to both It's not stoic James, nowhere in the scriptures are you told to get rid of passion To get rid of desire Fifty-one times in the New Testament The word desire, wish, or will is coupled with the subject God God desires You see The problem is not having desires God has desires Nor do you go the modern way The individualistic way Embrace desires exactly as they are Completely unchanged Paul says In Galatians 5.17 The flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit So the Bible both recognizes that there are bad desires There's a bad way of desire But that desire itself, having desires, good So what is James asking us to do?

What is James asking us to do? He's asking you to see this That the promise of the gospel Is to change your desires The promise of the gospel is not to get rid of your desires But to change your desires Now at the beginning of the great book The Bible says The Bible says At the beginning of the great book The Institutes of the Christian Religion By John Calvin He writes that I do not know myself until I know God And I do not know God until I know myself And that's exactly what James is getting at me What he's telling us here Is that if you want to change your desires If you want to

know who you truly are If you want to be exposed in order to be rebuilt You have to see God in order to see yourself And you have to see yourself who you truly are In order to see God And he does it in two ways The first way if you see as he says Let no one say when he is tempted I am being tempted by God For God cannot be tempted with evil And he himself tempts no one Now this is a confusing passage

But what's he saying? He's saying whenever you're tempted Don't say that God is the tempter Why? Because God cannot by nature tempt anyone Why?

Well because God desires but he only desires the good And so God can never come down And make people desire evil, desire sin God is not the author of sin He is not the author of evil desires That's against God's nature This is who God is He can never desire anything but the good So he wants you to see God's nature The second thing that God's nature is That he can't be tempted because he only desires the good The second thing he wants you to see about God Is that he is the shadowless God He is the father of lights He is not the father of shadows Now look at me in verse 16 In following Do not be deceived my beloved brothers Every good gift and every perfect gift Is from above Coming down from the father of lights With whom there is no variation Or shadow due to change Now What does he mean by this?

James has a geocentric view Of the world Just like all the biblical writers did And what he is saying here Geocentric meaning the earth Not the sun is at the center of the universe What he is saying here is that God Is the creator of the great luminaries The sun, the stars, the moon He is the creator of all these things And that What it looks like The phenomenon of looking up into the sky During the day and watching the sun If you don't do anything all day And just watch the sun What does it look like it does It looks like it moves, doesn't it It moves across the skyline And as it moves across the skyline And it starts to reach the outer edge of the skyline It starts to create a shadow It starts to cast a shadow Over the edge of the land You see what he is saying Don't suppose that God Cast shadows What does that mean It means that the sun Is constantly changing

[ 30 : 43 ] It's moving all day long God doesn't move God doesn't cast shadows He doesn't go across the tip of the horizon He doesn't change He is changeless That's what he is saying You see put the two together God's nature is that he only desires the good He does not desire sun And God cannot be changed He does not move He cannot be changed He is completely unlike you You desire one thing one day One thing the next You see what he is saying He is drawing you to see That before him you are not like this You vary You waver He is asking you to stand In Isaiah chapter 6 Before the throne room and say Amongst the people of unclean lips I change I falter I do not have the nature of God That's the distinction he is drawing Now finally How do you become something different

How do you become something different Very briefly just a couple minutes How to bend and broken Epidesires Become something else And the answer is in verse 18 Now before I read verse 18 In closing Martin Luther the great Reformation theologian That kind of started the Reformation He said that the book of James Is the epistle of straw he called it By which he meant It's like the last straw That breaks the camel's back In other words he is saying James teaches nothing but works righteousness Luther wanted to rip Did you know that Martin Luther Wanted to rip the book of James Out of his Bible and he did He called it the epistle of works righteousness There is no gospel in it And he was completely wrong Martin Luther he was completely wrong About this And we see it in verse 18 Read verse 18 with me Of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth That we should be a kind of first Fruits of his creatures Now oh my This is what he is saying You can translate it this way By his own desires He rebirthed you or us By the word of truth By his desire He rebirthed you By the word of truth What's the word of truth What's the word of truth You see it in verse 18 It's like the first straw That you see it in verse 18 What's the word of truth You see it The word of truth In the book of John At the very beginning John says in the beginning was the word And the word became flesh Who was God This very word this lagos Is the way he is the truth He is the life You see what he is talking about here By God's own desires Against four people whose desires were completely bent He gave you rebirth by the lagos

The word of truth The God man That's what he is saying The God man Look How do you get your desires to change How do you become new How do you become whole How does faith act The God who could not be tempted by nature Became the God who was tempted in every way as we are Except without sin You see The God who could not change The shadowless God Who could not be affected by the shadows of the sun He put himself by choice Under the ultimate shadow The

shadow of the curse You see on the cross The ultimate shadow came over Jesus Total death Total death Total death You see what he is saying He became death Precisely at the point Where humans cast their ugliest shadow of sin Of misplaced desires He bore it on his body The God who is ultimate happiness Ultimate joy Whose epitome desire cannot be bent He cannot be made sad He cannot ever be unfulfilled He became a God man Who for the joy set before him Let all the joy be sucked out of him He became everything we could never be A human who was tempted Yet without sin You see why he wants you to see the nature of God And then see the gospel He wants you to look at the nature of God The unchanging, untemptable God And then look at you And then look at the God man Who became just like you But never succumbed to temptation Chalmers, we'll close with this quote Thomas Chalmers, the great Scottish preacher Preached a great famous sermon That most of you have probably come across At some point in your life Called the explosive power of a new affection And he asked the question [ 36 : 01 ] How do people change? How do you get new desires? How do you get desires for Jesus Christ That make you act differently? And this is what he said There's only two ways a person Can overcome a deep desire For the evil things of this world Either by overcoming the desires of the heart By their own will power By leaving behind this world And going behind a closed door and hiding By avoiding all circumstances of temptation And by avoiding all circumstances of temptation That's one way Or by setting in front of their face Another object Even God himself As a more worthy object Of their desire If you want to stop wanting the things That lead to death in your life You have to want Jesus more Now, that's an introduction The rest of the book of James Is how you start to act And how you start to act And how you start to act The rest of the book of James Is how you start to inculcate New desires in action

Let's pray Father, we thank you for the book of James And him teaching us something Of how faith acts We ask now Oh, that you would cultivate a new desire in us The desire to have Jesus himself To see the beautiful face of Christ More than the things of this world And that would begin to shape a little bit Of who we are In Jesus' name Amen.