

## Theological Foundations for Counseling Addicted Believers

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The prevailing secular wisdom regarding addiction teaches that addiction arises from a disease. Addiction recovery practitioners Pax and Chris Prentiss state that ever since the American Medical Association (AMA) declared alcoholism a disease in 1956, “the existing primary paradigm regarding alcoholism and addiction is not only that they are diseases, but they are incurable.”<sup>2</sup> Both the Scriptures and many secular researchers and practitioners in the field of addiction challenge this prevailing view.

Secular authors who have abandoned the disease model declare that the roots of addiction reside in the choices people make when life appears too overwhelming for their current level of coping skills. Stanton Peele teaches that “people become addicted to experiences that protect them from life challenges they can’t deal with.”<sup>3</sup> Neuroscientist Marc Lewis argues that “medicalization and the disease model have outlived their usefulness” and that only by realigning his life towards “personally derived, future-oriented goals” can an addict leave behind his dependencies on substances and experiences.<sup>4</sup> Researcher and professor of psychiatry Arnold M. Ludwig declares that “the alcoholic’s worst enemy is not the bottle or bad luck but his own mind.”<sup>5</sup> Such counter-cultural voices echo truth the Word of God already clearly proclaimed, but the Scriptures go much deeper.

While all addictions have physical effects, the greatest pull towards addiction springs from the sinful human heart, not the human body. Biblical counselors believe that an addicted believer fights a spiritual war. Edward T. Welch declares that “addictions are ultimately a disorder of worship. Will we worship ourselves and our own desires, or will we worship the true God?”<sup>6</sup> Mark E. Shaw, a certified biblical counselor and Master’s Level Addictions Professional (MLAP), also grounds addiction in the human heart.<sup>7</sup>

This article examines three passages of Scripture that lay a strong biblical foundation for approaching addictions. Many other Scripture passages inform a biblical view of life-dominating sins,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Alcoholism and Addiction Cure* (Los Angeles: Power, 2007), 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Addiction Proof Your Child* (New York: Three Rivers, 2007), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction is Not a Disease* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Understanding the Alcoholic’s Mind* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> *The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2008), xi.

but the following are crucial for understanding why biblical counselors reject the disease model of addiction and how the counselor charts the way forward to freedom from sin's slavery.

### *Romans 6:15–23: A New Master*

#### Introduction

In Romans 6 Paul provides important truths for helping believers make lasting and biblical change. In Romans 5 Paul teaches that believers no longer live in the realm of the law but in the realm of grace.<sup>8</sup> In chapter 6 he raises and answers two subsequent questions from his critics. After Paul addresses in 6:1–14 the first question: “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (v. 1), he raises in 6:15 the second of those questions: “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (ESV). Paul shows the fallacy of his critics’ second question by arguing in 6:16–23 that at conversion believers change masters. Living under a new master affects choices and outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Paul’s rebuttal to this second question has foundational implications and applications for working with addicts enslaved to the master of their lusts.<sup>10</sup>

#### Biblical Exegesis

##### *Second Question and Emphatic Answer (6:15)*

Leon Morris and Thomas R. Schreiner disagree about the importance of the verb tenses used in 6:15 in contrast to the tense of Paul’s first question in 6:1. Morris states that the aorist tense of *ἁμαρτήσωμεν* (“sin”) describes willing acts of sin in contrast to the present tense of *ἐπιμένωμεν* (“continue”) in 6:1, which “points to a continuing attitude.”<sup>11</sup> Schreiner disagrees, stating that the “aorist in verse 15 is constative and refers to sinning in general.”<sup>12</sup> Regardless, Paul’s emphatic response of *μὴ γένοιτο*—translated “by no means!”—declares that sin and grace are incompatible.

##### *Responding Question and Implication (6:16)*

Paul argues in 6:1–14 that believers must not continue in sin because of their death with Christ, but in 6:16 he argues from the slave and master metaphor. First, he reminds his audience that “whatever is the power to which you yield yourselves as slaves to obey it, you are the slaves of that

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 351–352.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985), 144.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw, 48, 139.

<sup>11</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 260.

<sup>12</sup> *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 329.

power which you obey.”<sup>13</sup> Paul repeats variants of “obey” (ὕπακοήν, ὑπακούετε, and ὑπακοῆς) to reinforce the slave-master imagery and “to counter a false libertinism.”<sup>14</sup> Second, Paul sets forth only two possible masters for the believer: sin or God. The Roman believers could present themselves as either slaves of sin (personified) or slaves of obedience (to God), with two divergent outcomes. Commentators disagree, however, about whether Paul uses the term δικαιοσύνη (“righteousness”) here to refer to right living, to initial justification, or to an eschatological end.

Though “death” most likely refers to eternal death, Moo rejects the idea that righteousness refers to a similar “eschatological verdict” since Paul does not usually use the term in this manner. He proposes that the word more likely refers to “‘moral’ righteousness, conduct pleasing to God.”<sup>15</sup> F. F. Bruce, however, sees righteousness as “justification.”<sup>16</sup> James Dunn calls for a blended position that does not force the word into any “particular dogmatic scheme.”<sup>17</sup> Paul presents his readers with the choices and their consequences: Choosing sin as their master brings ultimate death; choosing to obey God brings righteousness.

#### *Declaration of the New Position (6:17–18)*

Paul thanks God because the Roman believers had responded ἐκ καρδίας (“from the heart”) to the demands of the gospel. “From the heart” demonstrates a willing submission to the new master and removes any thought of cruelty in Paul’s slave imagery.<sup>18</sup> Scholars disagree, however, on the exact sense of τύπον διδαχῆς (“standard of teaching”). Colin G. Kruse sees Paul’s phraseology as unique and as a direct reference to the gospel.<sup>19</sup> Bruce expands the phrase’s content further to also include “the body of teaching which Paul elsewhere calls the ‘tradition’ or ‘the traditions.’”<sup>20</sup> Cranfield states that τύπον also includes submission of the believer to the molding process of the teaching.<sup>21</sup> Paul demands that these Roman believers give wholehearted obedience to God and his ways.

The passive voice of παραδίδωμι (“committed”) along with the active voice of ὑπηκούσατε (“obedient”) encompass both divine and human actions. Thus, Dunn comments, “The image is of

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<sup>13</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 322.

<sup>14</sup> Moo, 399.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce, 145.

<sup>17</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 342.

<sup>18</sup> James Moffatt, “The Interpretation of Romans 6:17–18,” *JBL* 48 (1929), 235.

<sup>19</sup> *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 281.

<sup>20</sup> *Romans*, 145.

<sup>21</sup> *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 324.

the rebellious slave whose desire to serve another master results in his being transferred to that master.”<sup>22</sup> Paul pictures in verses 16 and 17 the transfer of a slave to a new master.

*Exhortation (6:19–22)*

Paul admits that his analogy of slavery may at first seem “inadequate, unworthy and misleading as a way of speaking about a believer’s relation to δικαιοσύνη.”<sup>23</sup> He does not, however, apologize for the analogy since he continues to use it throughout the rest of the chapter.<sup>24</sup> Dunn comments that “weakness of the flesh” speaks not of a moral condition but of the limitations of human frailty and fallenness.<sup>25</sup> Paul employs the slave imagery to help readers overcome weaknesses in understanding.

By means of the aorist tenses of παρεστήσατε (“presented”) in verse 19, Paul contrasts the wholeheartedness that previously characterized service to sin with the wholeheartedness that must now characterize service to righteousness.<sup>26</sup> God himself enables this wholeheartedness, as the aorist passive tenses of ἐλευθερωθέντες (“have been set free”) and δουλωθέντες (“have become slaves”) indicate.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, unbelievers remain “deaf to God’s righteous demands and incapable of responding to them even were they to hear and respect them.”<sup>28</sup> They operate “free from righteousness” (6:20) and without divine enablement to do right.

“But now” (6:22) establishes the current situation of believers in contrast to the “for when” of their pre-conversion past in verses 20 and 21. The contrast looms so great that Bruce remarks, “Those who have been justified are now being sanctified; those who have no experience of present sanctification have no reason to suppose they have been justified.”<sup>29</sup> The phrases “slaves of sin” and “free from righteousness” parallel “free from sin” and “slaves of God.” “Fruit” bringing “shame” contrasts to “fruit” bringing “sanctification” in the same way that “death” contrasts to “eternal life.”<sup>30</sup> Paul calls believers “slaves of God” (6:22), thereby clarifying the full sense of the previous phrases: slaves “of obedience” (6:16), of “that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (6:17), and “of righteousness” (6:18, 19, 20).

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<sup>22</sup> *Romans 1–8*, 344.

<sup>23</sup> Cranfield, 325.

<sup>24</sup> Moo, 404.

<sup>25</sup> *Romans 1–8*, 345.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, 265.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, 348.

<sup>28</sup> Moo, 406.

<sup>29</sup> *Romans*, 146.

<sup>30</sup> Moo, 407.

*Summary (6:23)*

The apostle closes chapter 6 with a bold reminder of the eternal consequences of temporal choices. Though *ὀψώνια* (“wages”) typically delineated payments to soldiers, the term had “broadened beyond that to denote, ‘salary, wages, allowance’ in general.”<sup>31</sup> Morris clarifies, however, that “eternal life is not a reward for services rendered.”<sup>32</sup> Since God can owe no man anything, God grants the believer a gift—eternal life. By contrast, serving sin yields a payoff of eternal death.

## Theological Implications

*Living Under Grace Means Obeying a New Master (6:15–17)*

Paul, by employing the slavery imagery and offering only two options, implies that no third alternative of man’s independence and autonomy exists.<sup>33</sup> Man must disavow himself of the idea that he can serve both Christ and sin simply because he does not live under the law. Kruse comments, “The idea that a believer can continue in sin because [he is] not under the law is tantamount to offering oneself as a slave to sin.”<sup>34</sup> Wholehearted obedience to the gospel transfers the believer out of the rule of sin and into the realm of a new master, with no third option and no neutral position (6:17).

Wholehearted obedience to God initiates the new relationship, and wholehearted obedience to God must characterize the new relationship (6:17). The analogy of slavery appropriately depicts that relationship because it expresses “the total belongingness, total obligation and total accountability which characterize the life under grace, with a vigour and vividness which no other image seems to equal.”<sup>35</sup> To Paul, “life under grace is still a life of obedience.”<sup>36</sup> To reinforce his point, Paul strategically uses variants of the word “obey” (6:16, 17) to answer his critics, who believed his teaching could inspire antinomianism. Ultimately, Paul insists that everyone obeys someone.

*Living Under the Old Master Produces Predictable Results (6:19–22)*

Believers under grace have entered a new relationship with new privileges and responsibilities. Moo comments that “in order to underscore further the seriousness of the choice between these masters, Paul specifies the consequences of the respective ‘slaveries’: death and righteousness.”<sup>37</sup> Paul contrasts life under the two masters by listing contrasting characteristics of a slave serving each of the two masters.

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<sup>31</sup> Cranfield, 349.

<sup>32</sup> *Romans*, 267.

<sup>33</sup> Cranfield, 321.

<sup>34</sup> *Romans*, 281.

<sup>35</sup> Cranfield, 321.

<sup>36</sup> Kruse, 280.

<sup>37</sup> Moo, 399.

Paul presents four characteristics of those who serve the master of sin. First, before salvation the Roman believers had given themselves over to impurity accompanied by an increasing lawlessness (6:19). They lived only for their lusts.<sup>38</sup> Second, in their pre-Christian state Roman believers experienced no restraining influence of righteousness (6:20). Morris remarks, “They saw no compulsion to do what was right.”<sup>39</sup> Third, during their life under sin, their evil evoked no shame (6:21)—a distinctive mark of the unbeliever, for “to be ashamed of one’s past evil ways is a vital element in sanctification.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, they would face the final judgment of God—eternal death (6:21).<sup>41</sup> The consequences of serving sin range from bondage to damnation.

*Living Under the New Master Produces Predictable Results (6:18–23)*

Paul describes the new master as righteousness personified (6:18). He advocates not a righteousness achieved through the law but a righteousness granted through conversion and lived out as the character of the new life. Righteousness lived out under the new master leads to true holiness (6:22)—something not possible under the law.

Righteousness, too, has several characteristics. First, under the new master believers can experience freedom from sin’s bondage (18). Kruse points out, “This is a paradoxical statement—set free to become slaves!”<sup>42</sup> Here Paul gives another reminder that everyone serves someone. Second, believers will reap the benefit of increasing sanctification (19, 22). Schreiner sees in these verses not a final state but the process of becoming holy, since increasing holiness stands in opposition to the process of increasing lawlessness.<sup>43</sup> Paul expects true believers to grow continually in Christlikeness under the new master—the end of which is “eternal life” (22–23).

In addition to listing the consequences of life under each master, Paul hints at the “already, but not now” paradox of the Christian experience in verses 15–23.<sup>44</sup> In verse 23 he focuses on the “not now” but, nonetheless, inevitable consequences of life choices. Paul makes his final appeal to those who say that grace permits antinomianism.<sup>45</sup> People who serve sin will receive the wages for their service—eternal death. In contrast, people who belong to Christ and serve God with their members receive the gift of eternal life.

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<sup>38</sup> Morris, 265.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>40</sup> Cranfield, 328.

<sup>41</sup> Kruse, 285.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>43</sup> *Romans*, 338.

<sup>44</sup> Dunn, 335.

<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, 340–341.

## Application

Paul's teaching in Romans 6 relates directly to ministering to believers enslaved to life-dominating sins. This chapter of Scripture counters prevailing myths regarding addiction, which the general population and many within the Church believe. According to the truths Paul presents in Romans 6, Christians cannot view addiction as a disease or permanent.

Based upon the work of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on behalf of the believer, Paul destroys any argument that sin should passively reign in the believer's life. Instead, Paul presents a choice. He states, "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification" (Rom 6:19, ESV). Paul further teaches in 6:16 that choices to sin reveal the ruling master in a person's life: "You are slaves of the one whom you obey" (ESV).

Contemporary slogans in recovery circles promote the myth, "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic."<sup>46</sup> Throughout Romans 6 Paul presents the believer with contrasting choices. The believer does not have to continue in sin. The apostle makes the case in 6:17 that the believers in the church at Rome "who were once slaves of sin [had] become obedient from the heart" and had "become slaves of righteousness." Since living in sin must not characterize someone who belongs to Christ, God not only intends for the believer to enjoy freedom but also commands that the believer not continue in sin.<sup>47</sup> *Addiction arises, therefore, not from a disease but from "voluntary slavery" to the wrong master.*<sup>48</sup>

## *James 1:1–8: Tested Faith*

### Introduction

Mishandled trials and indulged lusts often precede addiction, and counselors have to address such trials and lusts with the enslaved believer.<sup>49</sup> In addition, ministering to enslaved believers generates many trials for the counselor as well since he must respond biblically to the challenges of helping a fellow believer to conquer his life-dominating sins. In chapter one of his epistle, James provides the necessary instruction for both the enslaved believer and the counselor to face trials and resist temptation biblically. *Addictions reveal that the believer has continually turned away from God during a trial and/or temptation.*

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<sup>46</sup> Ludwig, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Shaw, 26–29.

<sup>48</sup> Welch, 46.

<sup>49</sup> Ludwig, 12.

## Biblical Exegesis

*The Responsibilities and Results of Tested Faith (1:1–4)*

James writes to suffering people whom he calls in verse 1 the *diaspora*—the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (Jas 1:1, KJV). Kurt A. Richardson interprets “twelve tribes” metaphorically to mean “all the people of God” in Christ, including believing Gentiles.<sup>50</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker disagrees and argues, “We have no indication that [James] specifically refers to Gentile Christians anywhere in the epistle.”<sup>51</sup> Peter H. Davids believes that “the most natural way of reading this phrase is as an address to the true Israel (i.e. Jewish Christians) outside of Palestine (i.e. probably in Syria and Asia Minor).”<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Richardson finds in the term *diaspora* echoes of the exile judgments, which God sent upon OT Israel because of their infidelity to him. Richardson points to James’s admonition in 4:4 as evidence that at least some of the currently dispersed Jews were likewise estranged from God.<sup>53</sup>

The displacement of these Jews produced “trials . . . of various kinds” (*πειρασμοῖς . . . ποικίλοις*). Richardson,<sup>54</sup> Davids,<sup>55</sup> and Douglas J. Moo<sup>56</sup> all see persecution and oppression as key components in such trials. Moo interprets *πειρασμοῖς* (“trials”) as referring to external trials of persecution and hardship in verse 3, whereas he acknowledges that the term encompasses both external trials and internal temptations in verses 13–15.<sup>57</sup> James’s opening of his epistle with an exhortation for his audience to face trials in a particular way implies (1) that these dispersed saints faced painful opposition and hardship—which prompt inward challenges to sin—and (2) that James intended that his epistle help oppressed believers wisely handle trials.<sup>58</sup>

James begins his discussion of trials with an exhortation in verse 2 to “count it all joy.” Moo indicates that *πασ* in *πᾶσαν χαρὰν* (“all joy”) “suggests intensity (complete and unalloyed joy)” rooted in an expectation of a present-world wholeness that a right response to trials produces.<sup>59</sup> Davids ties this present joy to the “eschatological joy of those expecting the intervention of God in the end of

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<sup>50</sup> *James*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 29.

<sup>52</sup> *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 64.

<sup>53</sup> *James*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>55</sup> *James*, 67.

<sup>56</sup> *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 50, 53.

<sup>57</sup> *James*, 53–54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–54.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54.



the age.”<sup>60</sup> Davids draws further attention to James’s future focus by noting that in 1:12 and 5:7–8 he continues the theme of the long view.<sup>61</sup> A right response to trials, therefore, produces both present and anticipated future joys.

In verse 3 James admonishes these suffering believers to consider their trials beneficial because they know (γινώσκοντες) that the testing of their faith develops endurance. The meaning of ὑπομονή (“steadfastness”) follows its etymology quite closely: “remain under.”<sup>62</sup> Moo comments that “the picture is of a person successfully carrying a heavy load for a long time.”<sup>63</sup> James admonishes his audience to embrace and pursue the virtue of endurance.

In verse 4 James states that endured trials produce maturity (τέλειοι) and completion (δλόκληροι).<sup>64</sup> The phrase τέλειοι καὶ δλόκληροι “implies a gradual process of adding virtue upon virtue until one is ‘not lacking anything.’”<sup>65</sup> Davids agrees that in this verse Paul emphasizes that God’s goal for the believer in the midst of trials consists of integrity and wholeness of Christian character.<sup>66</sup>

#### *The Necessity of Wisdom and Single-Minded Faith to Face Trials Well (1:5–8)*

James states in verse 5 that the believer must have wisdom from God to have the right perspective about the trial.<sup>67</sup> To those who ask, God gives wisdom (ἀπλῶς) “generously” (ESV) or “liberally” (KJV). James B. Adamson argues that “freely” renders the word better.<sup>68</sup> Moo builds a case from the OT, apocryphal wisdom literature, and the teachings of Jesus that ἀπλῶς implies “single intent.” Believers who ask for wisdom with a singleness of intent to obey God will find that God responds with a single intent to make sure the sincere believer receives what he seeks.<sup>69</sup>

According to verse 5 the believer must ask God for wisdom. James further admonishes in verse 6 that the tested believer must ask “in faith and with no doubting.” The compound term διακρινόμενος (“doubting”) describes a person who wavers between two thoughts or vacillates between two options.<sup>70</sup> Richardson describes the doubter as someone unsure about “what kind of

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<sup>60</sup> James, 68.

<sup>61</sup> James, 66.

<sup>62</sup> James, 55

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Kistemaker, 35.

<sup>65</sup> James, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Davids, 69.

<sup>67</sup> Kistemaker, 38.

<sup>68</sup> *The Epistle of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 56.

<sup>69</sup> James, 60.

<sup>70</sup> Kistemaker, 41.

God the believer serves.”<sup>71</sup> Adamson, however, says the word “describes a mind distracted by lusts and temptations.”<sup>72</sup> Verse 6 illustrates the internal war that rages within the man by likening the results of his doubts to the turbulent sea.

James continues the double-minded theme into verse 7. He speaks with disapproval of the doubter, calling him *ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος* (“that person”).<sup>73</sup> James also calls him *δίψυχος* (“double-souled”).<sup>74</sup> The double-minded man never commits himself to one position or another.<sup>75</sup> This man’s rejection of God and God’s wisdom disqualifies him to receive anything from God during his trial.<sup>76</sup> James warns in verse 8 that the wavering man remains “unstable in all his ways,” accentuating the fact that his doubts and missteps characterize his tumultuous life and are not mere occasional events.<sup>77</sup>

### Theological Implications

#### *God’s Disposition toward the Believer Undergoing Trials*

James does not present a doctrine of God as thoroughly as Paul, since James approaches his subject matter as “a practical pastor” and not a “theological genius.”<sup>78</sup> In these first several verses, however, James does teach two things about God that believers experiencing trials must know. First, in verse 5 James invites the pressured believer to “ask God” for wisdom, implying that God remains the only source of wisdom.<sup>79</sup> Second, James reveals something of God’s disposition toward his children in trouble. He assures believers that God willingly gives wisdom since he gives “without hesitation or mental reservation” and does not “criticize” the believer who asks for God’s perspective of his trial and how to respond to it.<sup>80</sup> God’s willingness “to impart wisdom to anyone who asks humbly” breeds hope in believers facing hard times.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> James, 66.

<sup>72</sup> James, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Moo, James, 62.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid..

<sup>75</sup> David P. Nystrom, James, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 53.

<sup>76</sup> Davids, 75.

<sup>77</sup> Moo, James, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>79</sup> Kistemaker, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Davids, 73.

<sup>81</sup> Kistemaker, 38.

*God's Intentions for the Believer Undergoing Trials*

In the opening verses of his epistle, James teaches that the believer's encounter with trials can work to benefit the believer. God intends that trials, rightly understood through wisdom, will produce endurance. Endurance subsequently becomes the means to the ultimate end of increasing maturity and integrity.<sup>82</sup> Believers who see trials through God's eyes and therefore know the end of God's refining process can experience joy now and anticipate an even greater joy in the future.<sup>83</sup>

*Man's Responsibilities when Undergoing Trials*

Believers wishing to experience God's intended end of greater Christlikeness in the midst of trials must respond to them with God-dependence—the essence of faith. Adamson summarizes the believer's responsibility as the “simple act of coming to Jesus with some need in complete confidence that He can and will deal with it.”<sup>84</sup> The believer must turn to God for help and then must respond in obedience. James qualifies, however, that the petitioner must not come to God double-minded. Rather, he must come with a single mind to flourish in the trial and must avoid distraction “by lusts and temptations.”<sup>85</sup> He cannot pray to God for wisdom in one moment yet in the next moment turn his back on God and indulge his lusts.<sup>86</sup>

## Applications

Addictions often begin with a wrongly handled trial and/or a temptation.<sup>87</sup> James 1:2–8 teaches several important principles that apply to working with enslaved believers.<sup>88</sup> Biblical counselors cannot teach them such truths just once, however. The triggers of an enslaved believer's temptations set off deeply entrenched, almost automatic sin patterns that lead him back into his old ways. People counseling enslaved believers must commit themselves to providing much repetition and much accountability to encourage endurance. Shaw reminds enslaved believers that “God views self-control and discipline as skills that can be developed and improved over time because of His power working in you.”<sup>89</sup> The disciple-maker must help establish new patterns of thinking, loving, and acting, as James later discusses in 1:21–25.

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<sup>82</sup> Nystrom, 49–50.

<sup>83</sup> Richardson, 58.

<sup>84</sup> *James*, 57.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>86</sup> Kistemaker, 40.

<sup>87</sup> Peele, 11.

<sup>88</sup> Shaw, 93.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

In addition, people counseling enslaved believers must see that their ministry to them generates trials for the counselor's own spiritual life. Paul David Tripp acknowledges that "God sends people my way, not only so that they will change, but so that I will too."<sup>90</sup> The counselor must develop the same forward-looking anticipation of joy and the same endurance and resulting Christlikeness that he desires for his counselee.

*Both the Enslaved Believer and the Counselor Need Wisdom*

Both the believer struggling with a life-dominating sin and the counselor must heed James's call to see all of life from God's perspective. Therefore, both must continually beg God for wisdom with the single-minded eye of faith that looks to God for answers and provisions for the journey. James forcefully warns that the double-minded man—whether enslaved believer or counselor—will receive nothing from the Lord. Jay E. Adams observes that "too many counseling failures are the result of the lack of discipline in the life of a counselor."<sup>91</sup> Working with enslaved believers proves as much of a "testing of . . . faith" for the counselor as overcoming a life-dominating sin for his enslaved counselee.

*Both the Enslaved Believer and the Counselor Need Endurance*

A believer habituated to sin has willingly and repeatedly disobeyed God to find immediate pleasure. The pleasure consists of either a sensual gratification—a counterfeit joy—or the relief from some sort of suffering—a counterfeit peace. James teaches that the believer, indeed, can experience joy, but his joy will be the internal gratification of knowing he pleased God with his choices.

James's use of the word "endurance" means that the desired result of spiritual flourishing in the trial will come in time—not immediately. The believer must repent of and surrender his demand to have what he wants now. Moo compares the internal strengthening of the believer's heart during trials to the physical strengthening of a person's muscles when he repeatedly exercises himself against some form of resistance.<sup>92</sup> Since an enslaved believer battling his sin will face the temptation to indulge countless times a day, he must also repent and surrender countless times a day. God will strengthen him in the process over time. Again, the same admonitions apply to the counselor, who must surrender his desires to have results on his timetable as well. Both the enslaved believer and the counselor must learn to endure patiently.

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<sup>90</sup> *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 146.

<sup>91</sup> *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 39.

<sup>92</sup> *James*, 55.

*James 1:12–15: Two Ways of Handling Trials and Temptations*

## Introduction

James teaches at the beginning of his epistle that God-dependent faith and wisdom constitute the means for enduring a trial (1:2–4). He returns to that theme in verse 12 by reintroducing variations of the terms “trial,” “persevere,” and “test.”<sup>93</sup> His summary of his previous discussion (verse 12) provides the introduction to the verses 13–15.<sup>94</sup> In verses 14–15 James provides “one of the most penetrating discussions of the nature of temptation in the whole Bible.”<sup>95</sup> Biblical counselors must know the principles of this discussion well in order to work effectively with those who often struggle with overwhelming temptations.

## Exegesis

*The Blessedness of Trials Rightly Handled (1:12)*

Nystrom comments that James uses *μακάριος* (“blessed”) in the tradition of the OT prophets and the wisdom teachings, which imply both present blessedness and future fulfillment.<sup>96</sup> The reward includes a promised “crown of life.” Nystrom states that *ζωῆς* (“life”) points to the present experience of a “life lived in the will of God” with its resulting joys, as well as the culmination of eternal life.<sup>97</sup>

God grants the crown to those who show themselves approved and “accepted” (*δόκιμος*) because they passed the test by remaining faithful to God throughout the trial.<sup>98</sup> They remained faithful because they loved God. Richardson comments that “obedience through love is the nature of right relationship with God.”<sup>99</sup> The winner’s crown (*στέφανος*) belongs to those who pass the test because devotion to God motivates their endurance.

*The Answer to Blaming God for Temptations (1:13)*

James warns that believers must not blame God for temptation. Commentators debate the meaning of “God cannot be tempted with evil.” Davids prefers “God ought not to be tested by evil persons,” as Israel tested God in the wilderness.<sup>100</sup> Moo disagrees, however, and commends the

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<sup>93</sup> Moo, *James*, 69.

<sup>94</sup> Kistemaker, 46.

<sup>95</sup> Richardson, 78.

<sup>96</sup> *James*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>98</sup> Kistemaker, 47.

<sup>99</sup> *James*, 76.

<sup>100</sup> *James*, 82.

traditional view that nothing evil resides within God to make him susceptible to evil.<sup>101</sup> Richardson embraces the traditional interpretation as well and takes James’s statement as the basis of James’s conclusion that since no evil exists within God and since God cannot be moved by evil, he certainly would not induce any man to evil.<sup>102</sup> In contrast to the idea that God originates evil, in verses 14–15 James places the responsibility for temptation upon the person who chooses to yield to his sinful lusts.

*The Tragic Result of Trials Wrongly Handled (1:14–15)<sup>103</sup>*

James explains that the path of disintegration begins when a man’s own desires lure and entice him to sin. Though ἐπιθυμία (“desires”) can prove morally neutral or evil, James uses it here in the latter sense of “any human longing for what God has prohibited.”<sup>104</sup> Nystrom explains that a “personal desire born of self-interest” creates the inborn sinful vulnerability to the enticements of evil.<sup>105</sup>

While Adamson acknowledges that both present passive participles of ἐξελκω (“lured”) and δελεάζω (“enticed”) may allude to a fishing metaphor,<sup>106</sup> he asserts that James uses the first in a sense not used elsewhere in Scripture to mean “attracted,” perhaps alluding to OT imagery of a harlot’s seduction.<sup>107</sup> Davids argues for mixed metaphors of fishing—“enticed by a hook and drawn out”—and hunting—“attracted to a trap by delicious bait.”<sup>108</sup> Moo explains that the combination of words represent, rather, a “dead” metaphor for fishing that had so lost its precision that even though James reverses the normal actions of fishing (“enticed” then “drawn away”), the audience understood their message of entrapment.<sup>109</sup>

James describes in verse 15 the path and the result of that entrapment. Davids presents a contrasting chain of actions of two different paths: ἐπιθυμία-ἁμαρτία-θάνατος (lust—sin—death) as opposed to πειρασμός-δόκιμος (by ὑπομονή)-ζωή” (trial—approved by endurance—life).<sup>110</sup> The apostle draws the imagery of the destructive path from the concept of pregnancy (συλλαβοῦσα). Adamson comments that “the grammar behind ‘having conceived gives birth’ recalls the Hebrew construction rendered ‘she conceived and bore’ (Gen. 4:1, etc.).”<sup>111</sup> When the enticed man’s will mates

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<sup>101</sup> James, 73.

<sup>102</sup> James, 79.

<sup>103</sup> For how these principles are utilized in a simplified counseling model for working with enslaved believers, see Jim Berg, *Help! I’m Addicted*, Lifeline Mini-books (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2020).

<sup>104</sup> Moo, James, 74.

<sup>105</sup> James, 73.

<sup>106</sup> James, 71.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>108</sup> James, 84.

<sup>109</sup> James, 75.

<sup>110</sup> James, 85.

<sup>111</sup> James, 73.

with his desires, the union produces a sin. Furthermore, Nystrom notes that “sin, when mature, is a fixed habit” and finally produces death.<sup>112</sup>

### Theological Implications

#### *God Desires the Tempted Person to Endure the Trial So That God Can Reward Him*

James outlines a pathway to increased maturity through the trial in verses 1–8 and expands upon that pathway even further in verses 21–25. These detailed explanations for victory along with God’s promise of reward for enduring trials until their end (verse 12) all testify that God desires the successful endurance of trials and temptations for his people. Adams remarks that “God looks to the outcome, what the trial is designed to do.”<sup>113</sup> God sets before the believer the promise of a victor’s crown for faithful endurance motivated by love for him (verse 12).

#### *The Path to Destruction is Both Predictable and Preventable*

James, in contrast to those who would blame God for temptation, places “the responsibility for temptation and sin squarely on the shoulders of each human being.”<sup>114</sup> James in his first chapter sets forth a series of contrasts: “double-mindedness and single-mindedness; complete in sin and complete in spiritual maturity; doubt and faith; death and true life.”<sup>115</sup> These contrasting approaches to trials and the end results testify that God offers the believer choices and that such choices have predictable but preventable ends.

### Application

Biblical counselors must keep in mind that an enslaved believer’s choice to endure the trial or resist the temptation out of love for God while single-heartedly begging God for wisdom will produce in that believer endurance and, ultimately, a maturing character (1:2–5). A tempted and deceived believer choosing to indulge his lusts will remain enslaved to sin and eventually will self-destruct (1:14–15). The themes of James 1 must become the common themes of those working with believers overcome by life-dominating sins and stubborn habits.

### *Summary*

These foundational passages in Romans 6 and James 1 provide a basic understanding of God’s perspective for the believer’s struggle with his sin. Romans 6 undergirds the first principle that *addiction arises not from a disease but from slavery to the wrong master*. Enslaved believers must not think of themselves

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<sup>112</sup> James, 75.

<sup>113</sup> Jay E. Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 1997), 19–20.

<sup>114</sup> Moo, James, 75.

<sup>115</sup> Nystrom, 74.

as sentenced to a lifetime of bondage. They, like the Romans Paul addressed, must “become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which [they] were committed” (6:17, ESV). Instead of living as “slaves of sin” (6:20), they can become “slaves of God” (6:22).

James contrasts for the believer two ways of living and two resulting ends. The believer can “be lured and enticed by his own desires” (1:14) with its result of “death” when the sin becomes “fully grown” (1:15). On the other hand, the tempted believer can wisely endure the trial and temptation with a single-minded heart of faith (1:5–6). The result for him will end in the promised “crown of life” because his obedience in the trial showed his love for God rather than for his own pleasures (1:12). Thus, James teaches a second principle that applies to enslaved believers: *Addiction reveals that the believer has continually turned away from God during a trial and/or temptation.* Biblical counselors must teach enslaved believers that they must turn towards God in repentance and dependence in order to find the wisdom and strength they must have to persevere and stand approved before God (1:12).