

Why Fish Don't Bite

Introduction. The brother of Jesus presents one of the most dramatic descriptions of man's oldest problem: sin. James 1:14 defines temptation with the analogy of being "lured" by the enticement of bait, as a fisherman does to catch fish. While James does not ignore Satan, he emphasizes individual responsibility. One is tempted by his own evil desire. James personifies a person's sinful desire and identifies it, rather than some external person or object, as the efficient cause of temptation.

However, in James's teaching, Satan is the fisherman and we are the fish. He dangles the bait before us, intent on drawing us in by our lusts and pride (cp. 1 John 2:16), and consequently separate us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). If we "bite" (take the bait), we have yielded our will to the devil's scheme and have sinned. Make no mistake, Satan is a skilled fisherman (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:3), and the worst option for us is take him lightly. Satan fishes for souls and all of his catches are big. He does not "catch and release".

While I am not an expert on catching fish, I do know something about how not to catch them, and, since we are Satan's desired "catch," please consider the following as it relates to resisting temptation.

I. Fish Don't Bite When The Bait Has No Allure

- A. Successful fishing requires the knowledge of the right bait to attract the desired catch. Fish will not bite what they do not like, and neither will we take the devil's bait if we are not "hungry" for it. Satan works in conjunction with what we desire. This speaks to the need for meticulously guarding our hearts (Proverbs 4:23). Spiritually speaking, our hearts (the inner man with intellect, emotions, will, conscience) determines what we desire or hunger for (Matthew 6:21), therefore we had better guard what enters it (Ezra 7:10; Philippians 4:8).
- B. Being carnal or spiritual (cp. 1 Corinthians 3:1, 3) necessitates a mindset toward either "the flesh" (Satan's devices) or "the Spirit" (God's truth, Romans 8:5-9), and speaks to the "abundance" in our hearts (Matthew 12:34-35).
- C. Possessing free will, we can resist the devil (James 4:7) or refuse to take his bait. We are responsible for the leanings within our hearts, and how they "play out" in our conduct. Satan's bait is not irresistible; the "I'm only human" excuse does not wash. To the contrary, Daniel "purposed in his heart not to defile himself" (Daniel 1:8), and with God's help he did not. Also, Moses, by an empowering faith from the heart, resisted "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Likewise, our hearts must be set on the spiritual (Colossians 3:1-2), that we may "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). We will not take Satan's bait if we are "hungering and thirsting after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6).

II. Fish Don't Bite When Conditions Are Unfavorable

- A. Successful fishing depends on having favorable conditions in which the fish are inclined to bite. If it is too windy, too hot, too cold, the water too shallow or too deep, weather fronts moving in, etc., fish do not bite. As targets of Satan, we are less vulnerable to his bait, depending on our surroundings. Therefore, it is

imperative that we not “give place” to the devil (Ephesians 4:27; cp. Romans 13:14). For example, carnal provisions are made by running with the wrong crowds (1 Corinthians 15:33) and going to the wrong places (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Such carelessness places one in compromising circumstances which will set you up to take the devil’s bait.

B. He who puts on the Lord Jesus in gospel obedience structures his life by faith (Galatians 2:20; 3:26-27). He will “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). He will do all he can to control his conditions so as to not yield to the lure of the devil. God helps us in times of temptation by providing a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), which we must seek and pursue. How does God provide a way of escape?

1. The power of God’s word.

a) It will fortify us against our adversary. When tempted, Jesus exemplified the power to resist by recalling the written word (Matthew 4:4, 6-7).

b) Faith originates and grows through exposure to God’s word (Acts 20:32; Romans 10:17), and by such faith we overcome the world (1 John 5:4). Diligence in the proper study of Scripture is essential to overcome Satan and be approved of God (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 2:15).

2. The power of prayer.

a) The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16-17). Prayer is the heart’s desire expressed to God (Romans 10:1). True prayer has to be made in faith which never doubts God but trusts Him to hear and answer according to His will (James 1:5-7; 1 John 5:14-15).

b) Jesus taught us to pray for deliverance from temptation (Matthew 6:13). Christians make supplications to God for wisdom and strength to overcome (Matthew 26:41). In a parable of the Lord, He taught us to “always pray and not to faint” (i.e. to lose heart spiritually, Luke 18:1.; cp. 2 Corinthians 4:16). If we do not “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), we are ill-equipped to resist the devil’s bait.

3. The power of a good influence.

a) Jesus taught that a good influence has power (Matthew 5:16). Later, when Peter denied the Lord would be crucified, Jesus responded sternly (Matthew 16:22-23). The Lord acknowledged the true source of Peter’s rebuke when He called him “Satan” (cp. John 8:44; Acts 5:3). He said Peter was a “stumbling block” to Him by minding “the things of men” (comprising Satan’s world or realm of control, 1 John 2:15-17).

b) It is interesting in light of the above (and the other problems Peter had, Matthew 17:4; 26:74), that he accompanied the Lord to Gethsemane to “watch and pray” that he enter not into temptation (Matthew 26:40-41). Do not be “deceived” about your friends (1 Corinthians 15:33). Their power of influence will either come from God or Satan, to help or hinder your pursuit of Heaven.

III. Fish Don’t Bite When They Flee

A. A good fisherman does not attract attention to himself lest he scare the fish away. He is crafty and stays hidden to allow the bait to deceive. Satan is “the

deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He lies (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44), and charms by pretending to be what he is not (Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

- B. One does not resist the devil by seeing how close he can approach him, as if to stare him down until he departs. To the contrary, God’s word instructs us to “flee” the devil’s advances. Joseph fled from the immoral advances of his master’s wife (Genesis 39:12). Paul commanded the Corinthians to “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18), and “flee from idolatry” (10:14). In like manner, Paul instructed Timothy to “flee these things” (i.e. the love of money and all the sins associated with it, 1 Timothy 6:9-11), and also, to “flee youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22).

Conclusion. It is arrogant of us not to take Satan seriously, and thus to conclude we are beyond his reach (1 Corinthians 10:12). Certain temptations are particularly dangerous because of our personal weaknesses, and Satan zeros in on this (cp. Judas' Iscariot's love for money, John 12:6; 13:2). Consequently, in some circumstances we are vulnerable, and it should strike fear to our very core, as stated by Solomon (Proverbs 23:1-2). The devil will never stop fishing for us, and we cannot make it easy for him (1 Peter 5:9).