

The New Birth

James 1:18

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.

Introduction:

Main Point: God cannot be blamed for our temptations because it would violate his very nature and character. He does not tempt anyone with evil nor can he be tempted by evil. We are the ones to blame for our temptations and our sin. It is the product of our fallen nature and evil desires. Our evil desire produces temptation that produces sin that produces death. God, however, is the opposite of that. His nature is good and produces good desires and out of his good desire he produces good and perfect gifts for his people. The climax of that argument for James is 1:18. *"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation."*

By way of introduction I want to make some connections for you to the context of James' argument so that we can be certain of what James intended this verse to mean to his recipients. Then I want to spend the bulk of this message talking about the implications of what this verse means to Christians of all ages, and particularly to us today.

Contextual flow:

- ***"Of his own will"***, serves as a contrast to our own will, which is born out of our own fallen nature, and produces evil desires. James teaches us that this is the cause of our temptations and subsequent bouts with sin, not God. The will is the product or outworking of desire. Our will for ourselves is to gratify the flesh, God's will is to produce good in us to gratify himself.
- *Out of his own will "he brought us forth"* - John MacArthur points out that *Brought ... forth* is from the same verb rendered "gives birth" in verse 15. In other words, God gave birth to us. We know from the context this is a metaphorical birth, not a reference to our physical creation. It is a reference to our spiritual rebirth unto eternal life. This is a reference to what we call *regeneration* or being *born again*, which is what we are going to discuss at length. The contrast is with the death that our desires and will produces. God's desire and will for us is to produce life, and that eternal.
- ***by the word of truth***, is a reference to how this process works. It is through hearing and believing the truth of divine revelation that we are born again. In general the truth of God is the entire Bible but, in the New Testament specifically it is often used in reference to the gospel message. In its context, James is contrasting God's means of giving new life through truth to evil's means of bringing forth death through lies and deceit. In verse 16 James warns his readers, ***"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."*** Why would James say this unless deception plays a vital role in our succumbing to temptation? The means by which we justify our sin and ultimate demise is through believing lies. "Did God really say?" is still resonating in the fallen conscience of every man, woman and child. When temptation arises, lies abound. When we begin to entertain them, we eventually begin to believe them. That is where our

desire conceives. Not Gods! God's desire for us is to bring forth life through exposing lies with his truth.

that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation. At first glance this can be a bit confusing. However, understanding Scripture's use of the word firstfruits can help us. The Old Testament idea of firstfruits involved an offering of the first and best fruits of a harvest. It was to be a portion of a harvest that is set apart and consecrated to God. It recognized him as the God of the harvest and demonstrated trust in him to provide for the remainder of the season. It was certainly an act of faith as it would seem smarter to store away the firstfruits in case the remainder of the harvest was lost to famine, drought, locust or other calamities (JM). In the New Testament, the word *firstfruits* often referred to first among converts or believers in general (2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 14:4; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15).

In light of how Scripture uses the idea of firstfruits, we can see that James is saying the purpose of God's gracious act of rebirthing his people through his word of truth is to demonstrate what he plans to do for all of creation. It can also be understood as a comment designated for James' original recipients as they were among the first generation of converts to Christianity, among which many more would follow. This would clearly be an encouragement for them to remain steadfast under their trials as they were serving as examples for future generations of converts.

Now let's look at what this verse implies regarding the salvation of mankind.

1. What is Regeneration?

Regeneration is the act of God whereby he causes a spiritually dead person to come to spiritual life through the inner working of his Holy Spirit.

- It is necessary for salvation. Man must be holy to have fellowship with God. Man is not holy but sinful. In man's sinful condition he is dead to God and cannot please God. Let's look at some passages that teach about these things.

The Need

John 3:1-8 *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*² *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*³ *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*⁴ *Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*⁵ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*⁶ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*⁷ *Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*⁸ *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

The Reason

Romans 3:10-18¹⁰ *as it is written:*

"None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *no one understands;*

no one seeks for God.
¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”
¹³ “Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”
¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”
¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Romans 5:5-8 ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Promise

Ezekiel 36:24-27 ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

In case your confused about what he is talking about, God gave us chapter 37.

The Example

Titus 3:3-7 ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

2. Who is Responsible?

James said it was of God's own will that he rebirthed us. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied that it would be God who would do all those things in us by His Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians that it was God who

made them alive together with Christ and even emphasized to them it was by grace and not by their works or efforts lest the boast (Eph. 2:4ff). In Acts Luke says that it was the Lord who added to the number of believers day by day those that were being saved (Acts 2:47). 1 Peter 1:3 says "He has caused us to be born again."

John 1:11-13 ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Is it man? NO!

3. How is it Accomplished?

James taught us that the rebirth or regeneration happens by the word of Truth; the Bible or more specifically the gospel.

Romans 10:10-15 ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

An Example

Ephesians 1:13 ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

4. When Does it Happen?

Are we caused to be born again by the will of God and then start believing or do we start believing and then God causes us to be born again?

- Jesus told Nicodemus, "unless one is born again he cannot enter or see the kingdom of God" (Jn.3). Is entering and seeing the kingdom of God synonymous with believing?
- Ephesians 2 says we were dead and then God made us alive. Can a spiritually dead person believe?
- If we were responsible to believe first who would believe according to Romans 3:10-18?

Why does it matter if we believe first or if we have to be born again to believe? Is this just a "which came first, the chicken or the egg" type of debate?

5. What is the purpose?

The purpose for our rebirth makes this issue matter. James says the purpose for our salvation is "that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." What is he saying? Whether you think he talking about the first generation of believers representing generations to come or believers in general as the

first of a redeemed creation, he is certainly saying our rebirth testifies to God's plan of redemption. It's all about him.

Ez. 36:22&32 "It is not for your sake that I will act, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God, but for the sake of my holy name"

We are saved for God's glory; therefore it is imperative that he receives all the credit from start to finish. He is the author and finisher, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). If we found a way to break through our sinful nature and cause ourselves to believe, then we would have reason to boast and sovereign grace would be nullified. That is why the Scriptures are so adamant that we do not believe for a second there is any work that can justify our souls.

6. What is Man's Role?

Yes, we believe and are saved. Yes, man must turn from sin and trust in God to be saved. No man has ever been saved who did not believe in the Lord Jesus according to the gospel. Yes, we make a decision to trust and follow Jesus. Yes, we call out in desperate prayer, "I am a sinner and I need to be saved by the blood of Jesus." So, how then do we reconcile that with all that we have learned thus far?

Regeneration comes before that belief. The Holy Spirit causes our hearts of stone to be replaced with hearts of flesh that become able to believe and love God. Jesus said no one can come to him unless the Father draws them (Jn. 6:44). He also says that no one who does come to him will be cast out but will be saved (Jn. 6:37). God draws through the preaching of the Word of Truth, which I am doing right now and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, which I pray is happening as we speak.

Conclusion:

If you believe what you have heard, come. If you know you are a sinner in need of God's grace, come. If your heart that has been set against the things of God has been made soft and sensitive, come. If you want to be saved, come. These are the evidences of regeneration. Do not think your coming is saving you. Do not think your choice or decision is saving you. Nothing but the blood of Jesus on the cross and its application to you by the Holy Spirit is saving you. Give God the glory!

CG Discussion Questions

1. Can you summarize James' main point of verse 18 as it pertains to his argument recorded in verses 13-18? **God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and not evil temptations. The greatest of all the good and perfect gifts is the regeneration he gave us in Christ when we heard the gospel and believed.**
2. Discuss what each of these aspects of verse 18 contrast in verses 13-18.
 - *Of his own will* – **contrasts our evil desires with God's good desire**
 - *he brought us forth* (gave birth to us) **contrasts our evil desires giving birth to sin and death with God's good desire that leads to eternal life**
 - *by the word of truth* – **The gospel is the means by which God brings us new life whereas lies and deceit is how the devil brings forth sin and death**
3. Can you define *regeneration* in your own words?
4. Who is responsible for regeneration?
5. What role does man play in salvation?
6. Why does it matter that the Scriptures give full credit to God for man's salvation?
7. Did anyone in here trust Christ for the first time this morning? **If so, please get their email so we can make contact with them and encourage them in their new faith.**