

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

¹⁷Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above^a, coming down from the Father of lights^b, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow^c. ¹⁸In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth^d, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures^e.^f

^a **1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above.** Already James has given us a lesson in theology. He has told us that God answers prayer, gives wisdom generously (without finding fault), rewards those who love Him, cannot be tempted and gives every good and perfect gift. He is about to tell us that God never changes and that he sovereignly chooses his children and brings them to birth.

^b **1:17 coming down from the Father of lights.** This is not a phrase used in the New Testament, but “father of...” is an expression that means the same as “origin of...” For instance, in Genesis 4:20 Jabal was called “father of all who dwell in tents and have livestock” and his brother Jubal (v. 21) was called “father of all who play the lyre and pipe.” These men were the first to develop their trade. As the Father of lights, our God is revealed as the source of creation itself.

^c **1:17 with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.** The terms “variation” and “shifting shadow” are unique to this verse in the New Testament. Both were used for describing astronomy, which fits the context of James. The heavenly bodies change. God does not. Be thankful. Change in him could spell destruction for his people, as he spoke through Malachi (3:6): “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

James here corrects the dualistic notion that God hands out treats with one hand and poison with the other. Not only is there no hint of evil in Him, He doesn't even have an evil counterpart. Satan is the exact opposite of Michael the archangel, not God. God alone is the unrivaled One who dwells in inapproachable light. He has no “dark side.”

^d **1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.** Note that there are two kinds of conception and birth mentioned in this passage. The first is the evil conception—almost a spiritual rape by our own desires—that gives birth to sin and eventually death. The second birth is the result of the planting of the seed of the gospel. This second birth is the consequence of God's eternal plan. See again the writing style of James, introducing the idea of the conception and birth of sin and then following up with the new birth of the people of God. Maybe James does not unfold every aspect of the atoning work of Christ on the cross, but he does give us a view of regeneration that coincides with the works of the other apostles. See other Scripture that speaks of this birth: John 1:10-13; 3:1-15; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 23-24; 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1-4. This new birth, unlike the common teaching, is the result of God's choice, not man's. We who are quick to ask, “What about the free will of man?” should be quicker to ask, “What about the free will of God?” Regeneration (the new birth) does not come as the reward of faith but rather produces saving faith.

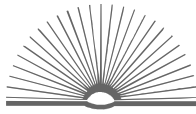
^e **1:18 so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.** The picture is the beginning of the harvest. God is the farmer. We are his crop. God's chosen people are referred to as “first fruits to God and to the Lamb” in Revelation 14:4. In Romans 16:5 Paul calls Epaphroditus, the first convert to Christ in Asia, the “firstfruits of Asia” and the household of Stephanas from Corinth the “first fruits of Achaia.”

^f **1:17-18** The wife of the prophet Hosea took Hosea's gifts and gave them to her lovers (implied in Hosea 2:8). The people of God do the same thing when they assume their possessions are their own to offer their substitute gods. Before you spend God's gifts, remember this:

James 1.17-18
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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1. You are a manager of what is not yours.
 2. You enjoy things because God made you to enjoy them.
 3. Your “free will” needs to bow to God’s free will.
 4. You are his work.

The “bottom line” in verses 17-18 is this reminder: If it’s bad, it’s your fault; if it’s good, it’s God’s. It reveals that (as Ephesians 2:10 says) we were created for better things than we do by nature. This section of the letter shows vividly the contrast between the living God and man. Unless man has the knowledge of how far short he has fallen of God’s perfect character, he will never see his need of a Savior. Here is one more place where James is teaching us about grace. We have evil desires; He does not. We have a “dark side”; He does not. We change; He does not. He is the giver of good gifts. He is the Father of lights. He is immutable. He is the giver of the new birth.

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