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A0710 – March 11, 2007 – Jas 1:16-18 – How Life Is Born

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James 1:16-18 Μὴ πλανᾶσθε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστίν, καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φῶτων, παρ' ᾧ οὐκ ἔστι παραλλαγή, ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα. Βουληθεὶς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας, εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀπαρχὴν τινα τῶν αὐτοῦ κτισμάτων. **(BYZ)**

James 1:16-18 Do not be being deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow cast from turning. Having willed He brought us forth *by* the word of truth for us to be a kind of firstfruit of His creatures. **(Authors Translation)**

James 1:16-18 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the

Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (NASB95)

Let's review verses 13-15. In verse 13, **Let nobody being tempted say "I am being tempted from God"**; When we are tempted it is often in a time of trial and since our trials come from God it may be tempting to think that our temptations also come from God. However, this would be an illogical HVP response to temptation. The proper DVP response to temptation is to claim full responsibility. We are the source of being tempted. We can't blame it on God, Satan, our environment, our circumstances, our childhood or anything else. We are solely to blame. The reason God cannot be blamed is because **God is not capable of being tempted from evil**. There is something in God's nature that renders Him incapable of being tempted from evil and that is the fact that He is "good" (v 17) and "He doesn't change" (v 17). If God were capable of being tempted this would cause an essential change in the nature of God. Aside on Christology (Heb 4:15). Therefore, **He tempts no one**. In verse 14 we find the true source of being tempted. **But each one is tempted from his own private desire being dragged out and enticed**. This is a fishing metaphor. The source of each of us being tempted is our own private desires or lusts. Our private desires are the deepest secrets that we don't want anyone to know about. This may be power lust, fame lust, popularity lust, sex lust, money lust, emotional lust, deception lust, blood-lust, material lust. These lusts start within us and someone or something solicits us, tries to **drag** us out and **entice** us. Verse 15, **When the desire has conceived it gives birth to sin; and when sin is full-grown it brings forth death**. This is a progression of life metaphor. Life begins at conception, is born, is full grown and then dies. **When the desire has conceived** is the point in time when you decide to sin. This **gives birth to sin** which is the point when you commit the sin. **When sin is full grown** (better than accomplished) is the time when you continually commit the sin. Finally **it brings forth death**, that is, physical death. So, what we learned was five mechanisms for dealing with the various stages of the progression. *First*, avoid temptation. Prevention #1. Three mechanisms: 1) pray not to be lead into temptation, 2) prevent stumbling blocks in yourself, and 3) practice godly living. *Second*, after temptation but before committing the sin. Prevention #2 response. Two mechanisms: 1) take flight and 2) go fight. These are the two methods the Lord Jesus Christ used. He never reached the third stage. *Third*, after

committing the sin. Immediate Correction. One mechanism: 1) confess the sin. *Fourth*, after continually committing the sin. Time-Lapse Correction. One mechanism: 1) repent of the sin. *Fifth*, the result of continually committing the sin. Divine Judgment. One mechanism: 1) physical death. This is the “sin unto death”. James’ main point is that we are responsible for giving birth to death.

Just as a right response to trials can result in growth to full spiritual maturity, so a wrong response to lust will result in decline to abject spiritual poverty and ultimately to death itself.ⁱ

Now he wants to turn to deal with the other side of the coin; we are responsible for bringing forth death but God is responsible for bringing forth life.

Verse 16. This is a transitional verse. **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.** This is a command to James’ **beloved brethren** (1:16, 19; 2:5). They are **beloved** (*agapetos*) an adjective modifying the noun **brethren**. *agapetos* is exclusively used of people united in Christ. They are more than James’ fellow Jews; they are fellow believers of whom James is very fond. They could have been from the area of Jerusalem and well-known by James but now dispersed outside of the land of Israel (James 1:1). His message to them is **Do not be deceived**. The verb **be deceived** is a command. It is from the Greek word *planao* and means “to go astray” “to wander”. It was a word used by secular writers to refer to the movements of the planets. This whole section revolves around planetary metaphors. At one time men thought of planetary movement as disorderly, chaotic and here that idea is applied to James’ **beloved brethren**. They are not wander from the truth like the wandering planets. The command comes in the passive voice. The passive voice means the subject is being acted upon. The point is that someone or something is trying to deceive James’ beloved brethren into wandering from true doctrine and they are to resist. The whole concept of deception involves manipulation of the mind. It starts in the mind so the mind of the believer has to be transformed and renewed so we think God’s thoughts. Satan wants to manipulate the mind (e.g. Eve in the Garden). The particular teaching they are to resist is that God tempts us. “It is important that believers are not led astray concerning the true source of temptation and their responsibility to it. If believers fall, they must not blame God for it. While

God tests the faith of believers, He does not solicit them for evil...Each believer must take full responsibility for his decisions that led to his fall.”ⁱⁱ

Verse 17, rather than being the source of our temptations which leads to sin and ultimately death, God is the source of every good thing including our regenerate life. **Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.** The NASB begins with the phrase **Every good thing given** but it should be translated **Every good act of giving**. Two different Greek words are used in this verse for “gift”. The first word for gift is *dosis* and refers to the “act of giving”. It would point back to the idea of verse 5 where God gave wisdom to the one who asked in faith. Wisdom is the gift but God’s act of giving is the highlight of verse 5 and James’ point with this word *dosis*. The adjective *agathos* modifies the **act of giving**. James’ point is that **every good act of giving** comes from above. Certainly temptation is not an act God is involved in because falling prey to it results in death. You used to read in home insurance policies that if some “act of God” were to damage or destroy your home it would not be covered. What kinds of things are they talking about? Tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, cyclones and the like. For centuries it has been customary to blame such things on God. Is God to be blamed for these? No, God gives us good things like sunshine, rain, green grass, water, and air. Man has polluted these things but “God gives *good* gifts, my friend. God is *good*! You and I don’t really understand how good He is.”ⁱⁱⁱ We would like to think good things come from us but all our gifts are flawed in some way because we are flawed. The second word for **gift** is *dorema* and refers to “the thing given” “the gift itself”. For example, the gift in verse 5 was “wisdom”. James is saying that when God gives a gift it is **perfect**. The adjective **perfect** (*teleios*) means “complete”. Every gift from God is complete. His gifts never lack any necessary parts. They are **perfect**. One time I received a Christmas gift and it was a remote control car. Like most boys I was very excited and wanted to play with it immediately. But the box said, “Batteries not Included”. Friend, when God gives a gift it never comes without some vital part. God’s gifts are complete and perfect. You won’t need to add anything to it.

Where does **every good and perfect gift** come from? **from above** (*anōthen* – compound adverb *ano-* “from” and *-then* “above”). This Greek word is often substituted for “heaven” (*ouranos*). Thus, they come “from heaven above”.

They do not come from the earth beneath but from heaven above to earth beneath. From heaven they are **coming down from the Father of lights** who dwells in heaven. The participle **coming down** is in the present tense meaning “continual” action. **Perfect gifts** are continually streaming **down from the Father of lights**. The title **Father of lights** is used uniquely by James in the Bible but it is also found in “Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls”.^{iv} It is a name which signifies that God is the creator **of the lights** in the heavens. God created the **lights** on the fourth day of creation in Genesis 1:14-19 (i.e. sun, moon, stars). By virtue of creating them He is their **Father**. The Greek word for **lights** is *photon* from which we get the transliterated word “photon”. A photon is a package of light having the properties of both waves and particles. God is the creator of such phenomena that are studied by physicists. James uses this title of God as **the Father of lights** to set up his next metaphor with respect to His nature.

with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. This speaks of the nature of God as unchanging. The metaphor with planetary movements is a little unclear in the NASB so I’ve translated it **with whom there is no variation or shadow cast from turning**. This is because He doesn’t vary and He doesn’t turn so He doesn’t cast dark shadows (1 John 1:5). This is a very difficult passage to translate but again James is picking up a truth and explaining it by nature. James is contrasting the created **lights** with the Creator of the lights. Apparently these Greek words were used in the 1st century of the movements and changes of the sun, moon and stars. The sun, moon and stars have variation and cast moving shadows as they rotate. But with God **there is no variation or shadow cast from turning**. His character is perfectly stable. He, not the stars, is the fixed reference point for all trust, direction and measurement. Therefore, what God sends down from heaven is invariably good. It always conforms to His character which never changes. The attribute of God we are describing is called “immutability” (from the Latin *immutabilis* “not able to change”). This attribute refers to God’s nature as unchanging and not to everything God says in His word (Gen 6:6, 7; Exod 32:12-14; Amos 7:3, 6). The Lord has and does change His mind in response to prayer! However, whatever God says is consistent with His character. In some situations there may be multiple things God could say or do that would be consistent with His character. By this we come to grasp something important about God: that He is able to do anything consistent with His character. The point here is that God’s nature is immutable. His

nature is perfectly stable unlike the stars which vary and cast shadows as they turn. Because He does not vary or turn He does not cast darkness but light (1 John 1:5). All that comes from Him is good.

Verse 18 gives an illustration of one of the **perfect gifts** coming down from Him. **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.** This is another difficult section to translate but the teaching is clear. First, **in the exercise of His will** is one word in the Greek, *boulomai* and is possibly a divine passive. A divine passive means God is the agent even though unnamed. Literally the phrase should be translated, **Having willed He brought us forth.** In other words, **His will** is the source of us being **brought forth.** **He brought us forth** (*apokueo*) is an aorist voice which is “point of fact”. It is a “point of fact” that **He brought us forth.** The aorist denotes a point action. These believer were brought forth at a point in time and never need to be brought forth again. The truth being taught here is that God “regenerates”. The Greek word for “regenerate” is *palingenesia* and means “again, to be born” or “born again (Matt 19:28; Tit 3:5). Your first birth is physical birth and your second birth is your spiritual birth. When a baby is born he is point of fact a part of that family and nothing can sever that family connection. When a person is born again he is point of fact a part of God’s family and nothing can ever sever that family connection. The Arminian says that once we are born again we can lose it if we commit some heinous sin but the Bible says once you’ve been born of God you have everlasting life. These Jewish believers had experienced the greatest gift of all; they were born into the family of God and had everlasting life. We should never doubt this through the rest of the book. Many commentators go terribly wrong when they mistakenly assume that some of them were not a part of the family of God when James says “point of fact” they are. James is not concerned with whether they are a part of God’s family, he is certain of that. He is rather concerned with their readiness for the judgment seat of Christ (James 1:12; 2:13; 3:1; 5:9) and their possessions when they enter the Messianic Kingdom (James 2:5). Practical Christian living will prepare them to be ready for the judgment seat of Christ so they will enjoy an abundant entrance into that Kingdom (cf 2 Peter 1:4-11).

The verb **brought forth** (*apokueo*) is the key verb which links the idea of verses 13-15 with the idea of verses 17-18. The verb means “from pregnant”,

that is, “the delivery of that with which one has been pregnant” or simply the action of giving birth “to give birth”. James’ point in verses 13-15 is that it is our sin that gives birth to death but it is God’s will that gives birth to life. This is a great illustration of the truth that **every good gift and every perfect gift...is coming down from the Father of lights**. To bring us **forth** speaks of regeneration. Regeneration is the new birth and God is the sole source of the new birth. When we are born of water we are born spiritually dead but when we believe in Christ we are born again (John 3:1ff) and made spiritually alive (Eph 2:5). In fact, in Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:3). The word “again” is *another* and means “from above”. It is the same word used in verse 17 of the origin of every perfect gift. “Every perfect gift comes from above” and regeneration is a perfect gift that comes from above.

The means through which regeneration takes place is **the word of truth**. This is the same truth taught by Peter in **1 Peter 1:23** “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.” Here, **the word of truth** refers to “the gospel”. God determined that the means through which He would regenerate men would be by the gospel. Since the word is enduring the life which is begat by means of the word is enduring (1 Peter 1:22-25). That’s eternal security. But if someone does not hear the gospel he cannot be regenerated. No one will get to heaven who has not heard and believed the gospel. Thus arises the vital importance of the missionary and prayer. Jesus said, “to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38). It is vital that we pray for God to send out missionaries. If we don’t they won’t be sent out and that means people won’t hear the gospel and that means they won’t be able to believe and be regenerated by God. So, God uses means to bring about His regenerative activity and it’s all tied up with **the word of truth**. Let’s turn to Romans 10:14-15 to see how this works.

Romans 10:14-15 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent?

Can we all agree that there is a sequence of means here? One thing has to happen before another. Now, in this context Paul is not concerned directly with regeneration. We already know from many passages that regeneration occurs at the moment of faith in Christ. Paul's concern is with calling on the Lord for sanctification-deliverance, that is, a Christian calling on the Lord in time of trouble so the Lord will deliver him from some immediate danger but we can still use the sequence here to understand how God uses means to bring about faith which results in His regenerating activity. So, Paul is reviewing the sequence of steps that have to take place before a Christian can call on the name of the Lord for sanctification-deliverance. What's the first thing that has to happen in this sequence?

- (1) the preacher must be sent
- (2) the preacher must preach the message
- (3) the gospel message must be heard
- (4) the person must believe

The point is that God uses means to bring about faith which results in His work of regeneration and there is an order or sequence of things that lead to regeneration. Sending, preaching, hearing and then believing. God's word is a mighty sword and without it a person can't be regenerated. God regenerates by His word. Thus, regeneration does not precede faith. In the Bible faith always precedes regeneration (Acts 16:31).

Now, what is the result of God's regenerative activity towards these Jewish believers? They became **a kind of first-fruits among His creatures**. This could be *purpose* or *result*. In other words, either God's purpose was to make them a kind of **firstfruits** or the result of God's regeneration was that they became a kind of firstfruits. The latter is more plausible. As a result of God's regeneration these Jewish believers became a kind of **firstfruits**. The concept of **firstfruits** means the first of more to come in the future. It was used of the first fruits to come to fruition. It was a guarantee that more would come, an abundant harvest was coming. Since this book was written so early in Christian history (~36-44AD) to Jewish believers he calls them the **firstfruits**. They are the surety of more to come later, from among both the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10). Ultimately this may look to the future regeneration of the Jewish nation at the end of the Great Tribulation. By way

of regeneration they have become **His creatures**. The Greek word for **creatures** (*ktisma*) is from the same word for “creation” and emphasizes the results of God’s creative activity of regeneration. In other words, the same power, wisdom and goodness God used in creating the universe is used to regenerate **His creatures** (Gen 1:1, 21, 27). **His creatures** refer to all Jews and Gentiles who believe and so these Jewish believers, being the first, are singled out as the **firstfruits** among **His creatures**. This fits with the Book of Acts which presents the Jewish Pentecost in Acts 2. They were the first who believed in Christ and were regenerated by God’s creative activity. At that time they became new “creations”. As Paul said, “...if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation [*ktisis*^v]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Certainly James has made his point that we give birth to death but God gives birth to life. His illustration of God’s goodness demonstrated in regenerating us is certainly ample evidence that every good act of giving and every perfect gift comes down from God in heaven and is complete, lacking in nothing. Therefore we add nothing to it in any respect. It is not the result of cooperation with the human will or in response to or in conjunction with human works but solely a creative act of God.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

ⁱ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:822). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of James*, 227.

ⁱⁱⁱ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (5:637). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

^{iv} Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of James*, 228.

^v The Greek word used in 2 Cor 5:17 by Paul is *ktisis* and refers to “the act of creating” (i.e. creation) while the Greek word used in James 1:18 by James is *ktisma* and refers to “the result of creating” (i.e. creature).

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