

James 1:16-18

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/jas/jas-1/james-116-18/>

James concludes his emphasis on suffering well, remaining humble, and overcoming temptation by directing his readers to the nature of God.

James bridges his conversation with a simple exhortation to *not be deceived*. In our conversations we might say something like, “Wake up!” A major emphasis of James is to be truth-telling and truth-living rather than being misled by falsehood. James is making clear that there is fork in the road of life. On the one hand, we can choose the path of wisdom, which is to choose a perspective that views circumstances as opportunities to grow our faith, and therefore to rejoice in them. Taking this road leads to a consequence that is life. On the other hand, we can choose the path of sin, and choose a perspective that fulfilling our own lust is in our best interest. This leads to a consequence of sin, and the result of sin is death.

Of course our flesh does not promise us death. Rather it deceives, and promises us life. Which is why James exhorts *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*. The flesh will tell us “Give in to these pleasures, that is the true reward of life.” But that is a lie. The true consequence of following sin, and the flesh, is nothing other than death (James 1:15).

The truth is that *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above*. Nothing the lust of our flesh can offer us is a *good thing*. Nothing the lust of the flesh can offer us is a *perfect gift*. Nothing the flesh or world can offer can compare with the good things that are *coming down from the Father of lights*. These good things are always the same. They do not vary with times or seasons, because with God *there is no variation or shifting shadow*. God is always the same (Hebrews 13:8).

In particular, by addressing the letter’s recipients here as *beloved brethren*, James is reemphasizing that this truth is for *brethren*, fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. These fellow believers are also described as ‘beloved,’ which emphasizes God’s love for each of His children.

All that James has instructed up to this point means that we can be confident in these matters because of the nature of God. This includes the priority of seeing suffering as a reason to rejoice (because it is an opportunity for spiritual growth), choosing humility in one’s earthly situation, and the importance of avoiding sin. James exhorts *Do not be deceived*, but instead believe the truth concerning the *Father of lights*. It is this unchanging Father who is the source of *every good thing given and every perfect gift*.

By saying *every perfect gift*, James makes clear that God, and only God, can give a *gift* that truly fulfills our deepest longings. The word translated *perfect* is “teleios” which has the idea of fulfillment, completion or the end of an era. In this context, it fits to consider “teleios” as a completely fulfilling gift, since the overall topic in Chapter 1 deals with what perspective to choose in life about what is truly beneficial.

God is described by James as the giver of all good things. Good things from the Father are framed as coming *from above* (heaven, the residence of God) then *coming down* to the earth (the residence of living humans). By implication, the *good* that the Father gives emanates from His very nature. Connecting to the local context, these *good gifts* must include the good conclusions that stem from the growth we can gain through trials. This growth is what results in the greatest rewards of life (James 1:12). Further, these *good gifts* must also be intertwined with deepening humility and denying temptation, both of which are character traits developed through circumstantial challenges (James 1:9-12).

James also describes God as the *Father of lights*, which underscores a separation of good and evil. Paul affirms this picture when recounting his own commission from the Lord's words to him on the road to Damascus,

“...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”
(Acts 26:18)

The picture of the *Father of lights* is expanded to highlight His purity by contrasting it with shadows. While these shadows may be a reference to a solar eclipse or the movement of the sun around the earth, the basic picture is that shadows tend to move as the source of light moves. In God's case, He is a complete and unwavering source of light that creates no movement of shadows. In this sense, He is the source of truth and all that is good in a complete, pure, and unshifting influence.

Since this is the case with God, James takes his point to a glorious height by bringing it to the salvation of all who believe. In contrast with the birth of sin and of death (James 1:15), the Father brings us forth as His own children, not by any other means in Himself or in those who believe, but by His own will. James says this is delivered by the *word of truth*, which underscores the simple nature of the gospel. We hear the truth of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to remedy our sin problem, and then we believe. In this way we are born into His family, or as described elsewhere, we are adopted as His children (Ephesians 15).

James asserts that *In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth*. Just as creation was brought forth by God's word, so we as new creations in Christ are *brought forth by the word of truth* (Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14). Having been born *in truth*, it makes sense for us to live in reality, which is to choose humility. Jesus is the Word of God, and it is by His power that we have been made new creations.

James asserts that God purposed to give us a new birth *so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures*. The *first fruits* were the first of the crops of a new harvest. As fresh produce after a long winter, these *first fruits* would be especially precious. The Old Testament prescribes a feast of First Fruits (Exodus 23:16). Israel was told to bring of their *first fruits* as an offering to the Lord (Exodus 23:19). Jesus is called the *first fruits* of those who will be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20). Just as the *first fruits* of the harvest is the first of many, so

Jesus is the first of many who will be resurrected, as resurrection is a promise to all who believe (1 Corinthians 15:16, 23).

In this usage of *first fruits*, James assigns this designation to his readers, who are believers in the first century. With this, James expresses the expectation that there will be many more in the future who will also believe in Jesus, and become His children, *brought forth by the word of truth*. Now James can begin to emphasize the next step for the *beloved brethren*, to hear truth, believe it, and act accordingly.

Biblical Text

¹⁶ **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.** ¹⁷ **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.** ¹⁸ **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.**