

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Who is to Blame?

James 1:13-18

Part Five

The theme of this epistle is tests of living faith. This epistle was written to help us know whether or not we are a part of God's family or not a part of God's family. It was written to help us know whether we are truly saved or not saved.

The very first test that we considered was the "Response to Trials" test. The proper response to trials is found in **VV. 2-12**. The proper response is perseverance. This means that we will continue to manifest a love for God even in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances. The improper response to trials is found in **VV. 13-18** and would be of course a lack of perseverance. This happens when we allow our natural, healthy, God given desires to be successfully baited and consequently finding ourselves succumbing to the lusts of the flesh.

If this happens we must not point the finger of blame at anyone or anything else other than our own lusts. If we do this we will ultimately implicate God for God is the one who is responsible for directly or indirectly bringing all that we experience into our lives. James is so concerned that we would do this he gives to us five different proofs to show that it is impossible to think that God could be in anyway involved in our moral failure.

The first proof is the NATURE OF EVIL. Look at **V. 13**, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He himself does not tempt anyone.**" What do we learn about evil in this verse? "**Evil cannot tempt God.**" Just as darkness cannot effect light evil cannot effect God. The Bible teaches us that God is perfectly separated from sin. Therefore evil cannot tempt God and neither will God tempt others to evil.

The second proof is the NATURE OF MAN. Look at **V. 14** "**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**" The world is full of traps and snares that have been baited by Satan. The nature of man is such that our natural healthy desires when baited can be stirred up to lust after that which is forbidden.

The third proof is the NATURE OF LUST. Look at **VV. 15-16**, "**Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**" Most people think of sin as a solitary act. But sin truly is a process which James illustrates by using the picture of childbirth. And nowhere in this process is God involved.

The fourth proof is the NATURE OF GOD. Look at **V. 17**, "**Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.**" The only source of good and perfect gifts is God. And God being good can only give good and perfect gifts. Any thought that God could be involved in any way in our evil choices is totally unthinkable.

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The fifth and final proof is the NATURE OF REGENERATION. Look at **V. 18**, “**In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.**” Last week we talked about the need for regeneration or in other words the need to be “**brought forth.**” And this was the thrust of Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in **John 3**. The Bible teaches us that because of Adam we have been born into sin. We are therefore at the time of our physical birth spiritually dead and unable to relate with God. If we are going to relate with God we need to be brought forth. We need to become spiritually alive. This was the Christ’s message to Nicodemus. And James expands on this theme for us in **V. 18**. In fact, James will give to us three very important truths related to the subject of regeneration.

Hopefully as we understand these basic truths we will be able to see the bigger spiritual picture of what is taking place all around us and will therefore not be so easily deceived and misled by the world, the flesh and the devil. **WHAT IS THE FIRST TRUTH THAT WE LEARN ABOUT REGENERATION IN V. 18?**

THE FIRST TRUTH IS THE CAUSE OF OUR REGENERATION. Let us read the very first phrase of **V. 18** “**In the exercise of His will He brought us forth.....**” Are we born again because we willed it so or because God willed it so? This verse is clearly teaching us that we are born again because God willed it so. Doesn’t this make sense?

Do you give God thanks for your salvation? Do you give God thanks that you have passed from death to life? Of course you do! And I do! Why? Because it would seem that within our hearts that we recognize that God was entirely responsible for it. And this is exactly what the scriptures teach us. Scripture teaches us that God orders and controls all things including human actions.

Genesis 45:8 records the statement of Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers I am sure you remember the story. Certainly on the surface you might say, “His brothers were responsible for Joseph ending up in Egypt. But what does this verse say as Joseph speaks with his brothers, “**Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.**” This control that God is exercising is not just isolated to Joseph but to other men as well.

Prov. 16:9 is a very familiar proverb and what does it say? “**The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.**” Men may think that they are in the driver’s seat but the truth is that God is. This is true of all men even to kings.

Prov. 21:1 says “**The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he wishes.**” Do we believe this? If you believe the Scriptures then you must believe this. And I rejoice in this. I rest in this. This truth is a source of great comfort for my life and for everyone who understands and embraces this truth.

And this truth extends even to spiritual birth. Some people will say, “Sure God chose us but He chose us because he saw something good in our lives.” This is not what the scriptures teach at all. We were not chosen because we deserved it. He chose us because of his own purpose and grace.

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Listen to **2 Tim. 1:9**, **“(He) has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, NOT ACCORDING TO OUR WORKS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE WHICH WAS GRANTED US IN CHRIST JESUS FROM ALL ETERNITY.”** You have done nothing to merit His choice of you, I have done nothing to merit His choice of me. His choice is based totally upon His own purpose and grace.

When I sing “Amazing Grace” I don’t sing, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a really bad guy who had a little goodness.” Or “a really bad guy who God knew deep down truly wanted to do His will.” No, this is not what I sing. I sing, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound who saved a wretch like me.” And when I sing the word “wretch” I mean wretch. I can see nothing in my life that would have moved God to have chosen me.

God in eternity chose who was going to pass from death to life but how is He going to make that choice manifest? This leads us to the second truth in **V. 18**.

THE MEANS OF OUR REGENERATION. How will we know if God has chosen us? We will know when we hear and respond to His truth.

Let us again look at **V. 18** **“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”** **“By the word of truth”** names the divine means used in our regeneration. Some suggest that “the word” primarily refers to Christ Himself, but the context does not suggest such a reference. Neither “word” nor “truth” has the article in the original. The passage in the greek literally reads, **“Having purposed He brought forth us by a word of truth.”** **The word of truth** would therefore be best understood as a message which proclaims truth. “

So we must ask ourselves what message of truth would James be referring to that would result in people passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. And certainly there is no question about what message that would be? It would be the gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of truth James is referring to. **FAITH IN THE GOSPEL IS THE MEANS GOD USES TO BRING DEAD MEN ALIVE.**

What does Paul say in **Romans 1:16**? **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** There are many very well intentioned people who are trying to assist the human condition as it relates to the world. There are those who are seeking to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bind up the wounds of the afflicted and all of these things are very good. And we as a church need to go about doing all of these things. But we need to understand that there is no greater good that we can do on behalf of the people of this world than to be preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

WHY? For the gospel is the **“... power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”** We may feed someone and they will be full and that is good. We may clothe someone and they will be protected and that is good. But if we present the gospel and people believe it, and if they will truly begin to live their lives in light of it they will be saved. They will go from being spiritually dead having no relationship with God and facing eternal damnation to becoming spiritually alive with all of its accompanying blessings.

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If I was to ask you what is the gospel? What is the message that needs to be believed if we are going to be saved? What would you say? I don't know what you might say but I know what Paul would say. Let us read **1 Cor. 15:1-4**, “**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, (2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** In these very few verses Paul records the gospel message and it is composed of two very important parts.

What must we believe? First of all, we must believe what the gospel says about the person of Jesus. How does Paul refer to Jesus? He refers to him as “**Christ.**” If we do not accept Jesus as the Christ, as the Jewish Messiah then we have rejected his person and we have rejected the gospel. Intrinsic in the gospel message is that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. In believing this, we must therefore embrace the OT teachings concerning the person of the Jewish Messiah.

What do we learn from the Old Testament? Certainly we know that He must be fully man because it was prophesied that he would be of the seed of David (2 Samuel 7).

But we also know that He must be fully divine. In **Isaiah 7:14** it says, “**Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name, “Emmanuel.”** Let me ask you a question. What is the meaning of “**Emmanuel.**” The answer is, “God with us.” Who is Jesus? He is the Jewish Messiah. He is the Christ. He is the infinite God-man. And if we are going to believe the gospel we must believe this.

But we must believe more than just His person, we must also believe what the gospel says about the work of Christ. This is the second focus of what Paul says in these verses, let's look again at the verses, “**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**”

Why are we born spiritually dead? We are born spiritually dead because according to **Romans 5:12** in Adam we all sinned. Sin is the problem. And Christ dealt with the sin problem in His death. At the cross He satisfied God's righteous demands against sin.

In **1 John 2:2** it says in referring to Jesus, “**And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.**”

When we look at the OT we know that one day the Jewish Messiah is going to establish an earthly kingdom. But we must not forget that the Jewish Messiah before this event would have to first of all take care of the sin problem.

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And this is exactly what we see in **Is. 53:4-6** when Isaiah gives us the following words concerning the Jewish Messiah, **“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. (5) But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. (6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”**

The gospel consists of truths concerning the person and work of Christ. When Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God died on the cross he opened a door which He wants us to go through. If we embrace these truths by faith desiring to live for the Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us we will pass from death to life.

What is the cause of salvation? God’s choice! What is the means that He uses to bring about the new birth? Faith in the Gospel message. There is more that we can learn about regeneration in this passage.

THE THIRD TRUTH IS PURPOSE OF OUR REGENERATION

Look again at **V. 18**, **“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”** What is the purpose of our new birth? The answer for James and his Jewish readers in the early days of the church would be, **“that they might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”**

The figure of “first fruits” is drawn from the Old Testament Law that designated the first portion of the harvest as belonging to God, that was to be offered to Him before the rest could be used for ordinary purposes (**Ex. 23:19, Lev. 23:9-11; Deut. 18:4**). James is communicating to these Jewish Christian readers something very powerful about what He desires and wants for their lives. The first fruits were not supposed to be the dregs but rather the choicest of the initial harvest. In instructing the nation of Israel in **Ex. 23:19** the Lord said, **“You shall bring the CHOICE first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God.”** God did not choose James and these fellow Jewish Christians in eternity past and cause them to be born again through the preaching of the gospel to lives characterized by improper and sinful responses to the situations they found themselves in but that they might be choice servants of God.

Now you can see why James offers the nature of regeneration as the fifth and final proof that God cannot be involved in our improper responses to difficult situations. It is contrary to his purpose in bringing from James and his readers from death to life. And certainly it is also contrary to His purpose in bringing us from death to life.

James by comparing, as it were, his readers with first fruits was not only encouraging them to be mindful of holiness but also encouraged them to be expectant of a future harvest of many more individuals who would put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

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CONCLUSION

Let us leave this congregation this morning with the mindset that we will not, through our own carelessness, transgress the laws of God. Let us commit ourselves to the study of His Word that we might know what in our lives is sin and what in our lives is not sin. When we are baited to indulge in our fleshly desires in any way that would violate what we know to be sin, let us purpose ourselves not to concentrate on the bait rather let us focus on the truth of God's Word. If we would sincerely ask the Lord for grace I know that you by his grace will be able to keep your natural, healthy, God given desires in check.

But if we fail to honor what I have just encouraged you to do, and you respond improperly to the outward circumstances of our lives, James is saying in the most powerful terms, we should not blame God. Why can't we blame God for our improper responses? Because of NATURE OF EVIL, THE NATURE OF MAN, THE NATURE OF LUST, THE NATURE OF GOD AND FINALLY THE NATURE OF REGENERATION. IF WE BLAME ANYONE IT MUST BE OURSELVES.