

Regeneration

Introduction

We are going to jump back into our discussion about James and his letter to the believers of the first century. It has been a few weeks so let's go back a bit and bring everyone up to speed. James told his readers to consider it joy when they went through trials. In fact let's look at the passage.

James 1:2–4 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James encouraged us to persevere through trials....to remain steadfast.

James 1:12–15 (ESV) 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Blessed means much more than the mere happiness of a carefree life that has little conflict or trouble. It rather carries the idea of profound inner joy and satisfaction, a joy that only the Lord Himself is able to bestow on those who, for His sake and in His power, faithfully and patiently endure and conquer trials. Blessed means to be in the center of God's will for your life and to know it.

The only way you and I can actually persevere through trials is to be followers who never relinquish our confident trust in God. The true believer who places their full trust in God completes the trial and becomes the man or woman who has been approved (by passing the test with faith intact). The principle is simple, clear, and marvelously gracious: perseverance brings God's approval, and His approval brings the crown of life.

In other words, perseverance does not result in salvation and eternal life, but is itself the result and evidence of salvation and eternal life. We don't persevere through trials in order to be saved. We persevere through trials because we are already saved.

James clearly associates faithful perseverance under trial with genuine love for God, perseverance being one of the surest evidences of those who love Him. That phrase, in fact, is a biblical definition of a genuine believer—a person who truly loves God. John repeatedly connects love of God with genuine faith.

A genuine Christian is not someone who at one point in time made a profession of faith in Christ, but he is a person who demonstrates true faith by an ongoing love for God that cannot be damaged, much less destroyed, by troubles and afflictions, no matter how severe or long-lasting. Like obedience to God's will, love of Him is certain evidence of true faith.

In fact, it is through our perseverance that people see us best demonstrate our love for God.

There is a clear distinction that is evident to everyone between the person who goes through trials with unwavering faith and love of God compared to those who do not.

James 1:12–15 (ESV) 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

The person going through a trial without faith in God always looks for someone to blame. Just as it is common to man to be tempted, it is also common for him to blame someone or something else, not only for his being tempted but also for his succumbing to it. From the beginning, one of the chief characteristics of sin has been the propensity to pass off blame, and every parent knows that children are born with that very evident propensity.

Where did we all learn to do this? Adam

Genesis 3:11–12 (ESV) 12 The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

James clearly has no patience with a foolish fatalism by which a poor man blames his poverty for turning him into a thief and therefore justifies his stealing, or by which a drunk blames business or domestic problems and pressures for driving him to drink and therefore to the reckless driving that seriously injures or kills someone. Nor does he allow for the notion that “the devil made me do it.

What James is saying, therefore, is that no one should say that God is even indirectly responsible for temptation to evil. He is in no way and to no degree responsible, directly or indirectly, for our being tempted.

And yet without God the stages of trials are very clear...Desire.... Temptation.....
Choice... Sin... Death

We have discussed that it is our desire that drives the process of sin. We each have unique desires that make each of us susceptible to certain temptations. Satan cannot read your mind, but he has a long history of studying human behavior. He can predict what tempts you based on your prior sins. He just puts you in a situation where your desire leads you into temptation. That desire is unique to you but not unique to humans. Others, millions of them have fallen to the bait Satan offers....

Animals and fish are successfully lured to traps and hooks because the bait is too attractive for them to resist. It looks good and smells good, appealing strongly to their senses. Their desire for the bait is so intense that it causes them to lose caution and to overlook or ignore the trap or the hook until it is too late

We cannot blame Satan, his demons, ungodly people, or the world in general for our own sin. Even more certainly, we cannot blame God. The problem is not a tempter from without, but the traitor within....you are responsible....completely...totallyand

without question for your own sin. James says you are tempted when lured and enticed by...don't miss this...YOUR OWN DESIRE

Just as one type of bait or lure works well with one kind of fish but not with others, so one person's passion is another person's repulsion. It is therefore his own desires that each believer should be most concerned about, because those are where he is vulnerable to temptation. Our commonality is not in the particular desires but in the fact that we all have them, are susceptible to them, and have sole personal responsibility for responding to them.

You and I have God-given desires that we fulfill in God forbidden ways. You can't be saved from your sins if you don't own them. That is why God demands confession before repentance. We must soak in the weight of our sins in order to realize the magnitude of our selfish decisions and to agree with God about the damage we have caused.

Confession and Repentance must come is the reality of brokenness or they don't come at all. True surrender to Christ comes from gutted brokenness...someone who feels the weight of their sins and cries out in agreement with God that they need to be saved by Him.

Salvation comes from a heart that is driven true brokenness before God....not from a moment of goosebump and chills driven by manipulated human emotion.

You sin because you have been lured and entice by your own desire. We are enticed by our own desire and God is going to make us own our response to that desire.

Even though we are saved, even though the Holy Spirit is in us...there is a battle going on in our minds as the Holy Spirit destroys what is left of our sinful flesh. Jesus knew this and He warned His disciples.

Matthew 26:40–41 (ESV) 40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus warned Peter just hours before Peter allowed his desires to lead to the sin of rejecting Jesus....was warned by Jesus that he must pray to not enter into temptation. Just like Peter, you and I are only moments away from allowing our flesh to lead us into temptation and sin.

So when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray....He included lead us not into temptation.

We pray that God will protect us from responding to our desires in a manner that distrusts Him. We commit sin for one reason...we are deceived into believing that we can fulfill your desires without God.

It is rooted in pride and selfishness. We think we can meet God given desires with your weak human efforts. So James tells us...essentially....don't be a fool.

James 1:16–18 (ESV) 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

In light of those sobering truths, James implores: Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Stop blaming other people, circumstances, or Satan for your temptations and sins, he is saying. Above all, do not blame God. Take full blame on yourselves, where it belongs. Realize that your enemy—your fallenness, your lusts, your weaknesses, your rationalizations, and your sins—are within and have to be dealt with from within.

If you are experiencing something in life that leads you into temptation....You put yourself in that predicament...You must do you. What I mean is that your sin is the consequence of your actions....nothing and no one else.

As soon as someone begins to blame some one else for their sins....you know that they are not surrendered fully to God. James tells us to not be that fool.

James 1:16–18 (ESV) 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

What comes from God is not sin, but only every good thing given and every perfect gift. The perfect, flawless, holy goodness of God results in His doing and giving only what reflects His perfect holiness and truth. His works reflect His character. Negatively, James is saying that, from temptation to execution, God has absolutely no responsibility for sin. Positively, he is saying that God has complete responsibility for every good thing, and that every perfect gift that exists has come down from above.

The implication of this passage is this: When we, as God's children, are so abundantly and continually showered with the most gracious, valuable, and satisfying blessings our heavenly Father can bestow, why should anything evil have the slightest attraction to us?

So the sin side of this equation is clearly stated by James. You did it to yourself. You are helpless to fix it yourself. Only God can save you from your sins. Only God can change your desires. Only God can destroy the old you and literally bring forth a new you.

That is where I want to spend the rest of our time today. We read in James certain verses that we love to quote and recite....Consider it Joy....Show me your works and I will know your faith.....James is very quotable...But sometimes we skip over the most incredible verses....

James told us that if we persevere through trials we will be complete and lacking nothing. And too quickly we tend to move on...So let's press pause here. ...Exactly how does that happen?

If I stay in a trail and complete it with my faith firmly in God...I suppose I will eventually build spiritual muscles....My faith will grow....but an improved me is still far from complete and lacking nothing. In fact, more days than I care to admit....I understand what Paul was telling the Romans.

Romans 3:10–12 (ESV) 10 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.”

Romans 3:13–18 (ESV) 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.”

I still have some of that in me. There are times in my life where I am not seeking God....There are days where I don't think I accomplish much good. Sometimes my mouth still deceives....I wrestle to allow God to kill that part of me which is still in me.

I know that I am not yet complete and lacking nothing. I come focus on my relationship with God hoping that my faith will grow and my Spirit will more easily overpower that part of me that is left over from my life of allowing Satan to lead.

Paul famously taught about the battle within. How there seems to be a war within Him....The Spirit of God against the Flesh of Man and Satan.

Romans 7:21–25 (ESV) 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Did you notice that Paul asked Who will deliver me from this body of death? He didn't say....Who will give me the strength to fix this on my own? or Who will teach me how to win this battle? No Paul was clear...if he was going to be delivered from his body of death....someone had to come save him....and this is Paul speaking...

Then he answers his question....if he is going to be saved from the flesh of death in him....Jesus is one who will do it for Him. Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord...He is our deliverer.

That is the condition of every sinful, unredeemed person, every person separated from God. Man's condition is by choice as well as by nature, as John explains:

John 3:19–21 (ESV) 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Because fallen man's problem is internal, the solution to his problem must be internal. There is no external ritual, ceremony, rite, profession, or action that can change his basic

evil nature. He cannot become righteous by trying to act righteously or talk righteously. He needs an entirely new heart, a new nature, a new being

He needs to be re-created, changed from his old nature of sin and death to a new nature of holiness and life, for without holiness, or sanctification, "no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

So we are delivered from our sinful nature by Christ and Christ alone. It is through trials that our faith is manifest and our foundation is revealed to us and to others. Now James turns to how we will become complete and lacking nothing....it is a process called regeneration....making something...or in this case someone....a completely new thing. The answer James tells us in this next verse.

It is verses like this next one that we tend to just skip right over...and yet it is an incredible promise from an incredible God.

James 1:16–18 (ESV) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

You see.....our will...leads us to temptation sin and death....God's will brings us new life.

The new life that the Lord gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ is a godly, holy, Christ-like life. It is the life of God in the soul of man. By the new birth, a believer is re-created, given a completely new nature that has no part in sin or evil. Our own desires bring death (v. 15); the gift of God in Christ brings life.

Note how we are brought forth...by the Word of Truth. It is in trials that we not only understand the Word of Truth....but we hold on to it...we cling to it...we trust it...God's truth is our anchor...God's truth is our salvation....We may say that or sing it at church...but we experience our dependence upon it in trials.

God allows trials in our lives so that we will experience the power that comes from living out His truth and surrendering to Him when everything in us tells us to try to take control

The word that James uses here "brought forth" is the same word used to describe Jesus coming forth out of the tomb on Easter Sunday morning...

It is God announcing a new creation...and He does the same with us. God brings us forth by the word of truth....He makes us new...He creates a new Spiritual Child of God. James reminds us that just like Christ we too are firstfruits.

So God tells us that we are a first fruit....Something the world has not previously seen. A human fully empowered by the Holy Spirit. We because of God have been reborn spiritually. We are a new creation in Christ..The old is going and the new has come.

While you and I are trying to solve trials ourselves....looking for short cuts and being deceived....falling into the temptation that leads to our death....God is waiting on our surrender. God is not into temporary boluses of willpower to get you through trials. He is in the business of

creating a completely new you...with desires that align with His...and temptations that have no power over you compared to what you have experienced in Christ.

God does not make a new and improved version of you..He makes a completely new...spiritually born you. He regenerates you into a holy being...eternal...and full of God's Spirit...and He doesn't wait for your physical death....He does so immediately upon your confession, repentance and brokenness that comes from your latest trial.

This process of regeneration is an ongoing process. You will work out the struggle between your old flesh and the new you while you are on earth....much of the work being done is trials....It is through persevering in trials that the process of regeneration becomes more complete.

From the moment you are saved....God creates a new spiritual you. But for a while we are spiritual beings with the full potential and promise of God...living in a dying flesh body in a world spiraling to destruction.

Our flesh will die but we will not. We have been regenerated and will one day be perfect and complete lacking nothing. We get there by persevering in trials...but I want to dive a bit deeper....it turns out that we actually do nothing....we just trust God and keep surrendering. Turns out Regeneration is all His.

James 1:18 (ESV) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

This is the greatest promise to us in all of James' book. Yet it is a verse few commit to memory. In this short verse, James teaches us how we become perfect...

1. Who Does it?

I say it all the time...We surrender...God does everything else. He reveals the truth to you. He shows you your sin. He gives you the faith to believe. He convicts your heart and drives you to your knees. He brings salvation to you...you don't earn it...He brings you to brokenness and gives you the power to surrender. Then He begins the process of your regeneration. And it will be His to finish. You don't save yourselves and you do nothing to earn it. All you and I must do is surrender and allow God to do what God does.

The first thing that we must know is that God is the one...the only one who can and does regenerate us. He brings forth our new life...our spiritual rebirth.

He gave us truth. He showed us truth. He convicted us with truth. He gave us faith through His truth...and by His own will.....and nothing else....no human effort...nothing you did....He brings us forth in new life just like He raised Christ from His tomb.

1 Corinthians 15:22–23 (ESV) 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Through His sovereign will, God washes away sin, grants forgiveness, and plants new life—a completely new nature within each person who trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He even takes residence in that life through His indwelling Spirit

Ezekiel 36:25–27 (ESV) 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.

Not only theologically but logically, that is the only way life could be given to those who are dead. The dead have no awareness or understanding of sin, no desire to turn from it, and no power or resources to change if they wanted to. They do not, of course, even know that they are dead. Regeneration could only happen by the sovereign will and power of God, the Source and Giver of spiritual life.

John 1:11–13 (ESV) 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.

No child has ever been born into the world by its own will or plan. Its conception, gestation, and birth are completely out of its consciousness and control. It is merely the passive recipient of the will and action of its parents. Just as certainly, no person wills, much less creates, a new spiritual nature within himself.

The natural man, sinful man, not only cannot make such a change in himself, but, apart from God's revelation, he cannot even know that he needs such a change. To the contrary, if he thinks he needs change at all, he underestimates what he really needs and presumes he can make it satisfactorily by himself.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV) 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Before we leave this verse...note the last thing God promises...I will put my Spirit in you...I will cause you to walk in my statutes...my truth...and I will cause you to be careful to obey my rules.

Desire...temptation....sin....death belongs to Satan and those who follow Him.....

Regeneration...is God doing everything for us....bringing us to new life and causing us to walk in His truth.

2. What is it?

James 1:18 (ESV) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

He brought us forth (1:18b) Brought ... forth is from the same verb rendered “gives birth” in verse 15. In regeneration, God gives birth to a new spiritual life. Regeneration is a miracle of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of his soul is made holy. This is the new birth, being born again

In Christ believers actually “become partakers of the divine nature”

2 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV) 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

The new birth is unseen by any human eye but is able to be experienced by any human heart that turns to God through faith in Christ. It is evidenced in a transformed life.

John 10:10 (ESV) 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:27–28 (ESV) 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Regeneration is the supernatural process whereby God rebirths us into new spiritual beings.

3. How does it happen?

James 1:18 (ESV) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

by the word of truth, (1:18c) By the word of truth could be rendered literally “by the truth’s word,” that is, by the Word of God, by Scripture. Believers are born again, regenerated, by the power of God’s Word.

Paul uses the phrase *logō aletheias* (word of truth) several times. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, he speaks of commending himself as a servant of God “in the word of truth, in the power of God” (2 Cor. 6:7). He reminded believers in Colossae of “the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:5); and admonishes his beloved Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In its broadest sense, therefore, the word of truth is the whole of God’s Word, and in its more restricted sense is the gospel, as Paul also clearly states in Ephesians: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13).

“For this reason,” Paul wrote the church at Thessalonica, “we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not

as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

In his letter to Titus, he presented the same truth in these words: "[God] 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" (Titus 3:5).

Speaking of the church as a whole, he explained to believers at Ephesus that Christ "gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:25–26).

"How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" Paul asks rhetorically. "[And] how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:14, 17). Regeneration occurs when God sovereignly acknowledges a person's belief of the gospel—that is, belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—and credits him with the full righteousness of His Son (2 Cor. 5:21).

As Peter explains, "You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23–25; cf. Isa. 40:6–8).

You and I become Spiritually reborn when God washes us, cleanses us, and allows His truth to wash over us and permeate every cell in our body.

We not only become people who know about God's truth....we become people who are literally born into it. His truth becomes the very essence of our being.

Believers mature and it becomes almost impossible to separate their thoughts, actions, and essence from the Truth of God's Word. Spiritually reborn we become like Christ.

John 1:1–4 (ESV) 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Jesus is the word...the truth of God manifested in the flesh...so that we could see it. His life was so aligned with God's truth that you could not separate it from Him. He is the Word...God's truth...incarnate.

John 1:14 (ESV) 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

4. Why is it done?

James 1:18 (ESV) 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

so that we would be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. (1:18d)

Finally, James explains why God regenerates those who place their trust in Jesus Christ. Although salvation is the greatest possible blessing a human being can receive, its primary purpose is not to benefit man but to fulfill God's sovereign purpose of believers becoming, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

The first fruits were the first and best of the crops that were harvested and were usually an indicator of what the rest of the crop would be like. A farmer would be inclined to take that early harvest and store it away in case the rest was lost to drought, locusts, or other calamities. But the Lord required that it was to be that first and best which was offered to Him.

When James writes we, he is applying the term to the believers of that time, perhaps especially Jewish believers who were the first of the harvest of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were the first of many more to come in the spiritual harvest God was beginning

Believers are the first installment on God's new creation that is to come

Closing

It is through trials that God allows the supernatural to happen in our lives. It is in the trials where we learn to persevere and keep our focus on the promises of God. It is in the trials where we see the promises of God come into our reality. It is in the trials where we learn to depend upon the truth of God's Word...It is in the trials where we see the power of God's Word manifested in our lives and in the lives of those around us...and it is in the trails of life that we begin and continue to allow the process of regeneration to mold and shape us into God's first fruit.

Without trials in our lives....we never experience our full and total dependence upon God. We never see the miraculous as God's truth is manifested. When you begin to understand the value of what God is doing during those difficult times...You can....like James...embrace a very real truth.

James 1:2-4 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Yes...we will count it all joy....God your will be done...on earth as it is in heaven....and in our lives....our regenerated lives in your truth. Let's pray.