

James 1:18-21

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Verse 18: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” There is so much profound teaching in this one verse!

First, this verse clearly teaches that it is God’s will that men be saved. God is not some malevolent tyrant looking to punish people. While His divine justice demands that He punish evildoers, He does not take pleasure in doing so. Rather, He desires that all men turn to Him and be saved. See Eze. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9.

Second, this verse teaches that God begat us (past tense of “beget,” which means “to give birth to”). Thus, those who have been saved have been reborn. This truth is clearly taught in John 3:1-11 and involves being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

Third, the Word of Truth is involved in our rebirth as well. James 1:21 says that we have to receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save our souls. Romans 10:17 tells us how — by producing faith upon hearing the Word, and faith then producing obedience to the Gospel.

Fourth, this verse teaches that those who are saved are God’s first fruits. We might say that humanity in general composes God’s first fruits (in order of importance compared to animals — see Gen. 1:26), and those who are saved are the first fruits of humanity! Why? Because we have been redeemed, that is, “bought back” after having corrupted ourselves through sin (Rev. 14:4)!

Verse 19: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” In view of being born again by the Word of truth as God’s first fruits, knowledge of this fact ought to affect our attitudes in three ways: We must be 1) swift to hear, 2) slow to speak, and 3) slow to wrath. I have heard it said that God gave us two ears but only one mouth for a reason! In other words, it would be wise to do twice as much listening as we do talking, because we need to weigh our words heavily and realize the consequences of ill spoken words that can’t be taken back!

In view of where WE came from (sinner to saved), we need to be patient with those who are still lost, gently guiding them toward the Truth in hopes that they will obey it. When unsaved people act like unsaved people, this shouldn’t surprise us. It shouldn’t surprise us when they mistreat us or speak ill about us. We need to be careful how we handle such situations. Will we respond in wrath, making the situation even worse? Or will we respond with grace, seasoned with salt that we may know how to answer every man (Col. 4:6)?

Verse 20: “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If we respond with wrath, we are not showing the love, nor the righteousness, of God to the lost and dying world around us. Therefore, we must remember to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Verse 21: “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” James concludes this section imploring Christians to set aside all forms of filthiness and superfluity (or “abundance,” Strong’s) of naughtiness and meekly receive the Word that has the power to save our souls (see Rom. 1:16). Since James is speaking to people who are already Christians, what does this say about the relationship between the

Word and continued faithfulness/salvation? It says that continued study of it is critical to being in a continued saved state! How can we know how to continue to be faithful if we are not studying the Word?! See 2 Tim. 2:15.