

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James** 6- In the Exercise of His Will He Brought Us Forth

March 28, 2021

James 1:17-25

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.

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

To the Glory of God

Now, besides the Bible, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin is one of the greatest books about God ever written. It was first published in Latin in 1536 and later in French in 1541. *The Institutes* or just “*Institutes*” (as it became known) began as Calvin’s own understanding of the Bible itself and the Theology of the Reformation. But it evolved over the years to be one of the most influential Works ever produced about what it means to be a “Protestant” and a true Christian. Today, it is almost *unthinkable* that anyone in Leadership, who lays claim to be “Reformed” or a “Protestant” has NOT read what Calvin wrote. *The Institutes* deal with Issues like, “The Doctrine of the Church”; “The Sacraments”; “Justification by Faith Alone”; and “Christian Liberty”. And it unapologetically

attacks the Teachings of the “Roman religious System” and other groups that Calvin deemed to be “Unorthodox” or “Unbiblical”. I highly recommend that every believer read *The Institutes* along with the books of Luther and Augustine¹. They are truly Gifts to the Church and will help you in your Journey with Jesus.

Now the full Title that was placed on the cover of the 1536 edition reads,

The Institute of the Christian Religion, Containing almost the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever It is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation. A Work Very Well Worth Reading by All Persons Zealous for Piety, and Lately Published. A Preface to the Most Christian King of France, in Which this Book is Presented to Him as a Confession of Faith. Author, John Calvin, Of Noyon. Basel, MDXXXVI²

... they didn't have a Table of Contents in their books back then and so, their titles were quite long. But this Masterpiece begins with this sentence:

“Nearly all the Wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound Wisdom, consists of two parts: the Knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

... so, according to the man God used to bring Reformation to the Christian Church- “true Wisdom” consists of two parts:

1. The Knowledge of God
2. The Knowledge of Ourselves

So, according to Calvin- the Understanding of “Theology proper” (the “Study of; or the Science of; or the Knowledge of God Himself) and the Understanding of “Anthropology” (the Study of; or the Science of; or the Knowledge of Man) is where “true Wisdom” is found. So, “Who God is” and “Who we are” allows us to be wise. And both of these Subjects are *best* understood- by what the Scriptures reveal and by the Scriptures- alone.

Needless to say that I agree with Calvin and have said as much. I truly believe that one of the most glaring fallacies of the modern church is that the people really don't understand who God is and who they are. And it is that lack- that fuels many of the false Teachings that abound in our day. And that is why I spend so much time teaching those two aspects.

Now it is fairly obvious that the Knowledge of God is deep and

¹ At a minimum, I recommend that every believer read, “*The Bondage of the Will*” by Martin Luther and “*The City of God*” and “*Confessions*” by Augustine.

² McNeill 1960, p. 33.

profound; and difficult to comprehend and embrace. Because we can only know God- rightly- to the extent He has chosen to reveal Himself to us- through two Means:

1. The observation of the created Universe (the “*General Revelation*” of God)
2. The infallible Words of the Bible (the “*Specific or Special Revelation*” of God)

... but even at that- God has not chosen to reveal *everything* about Himself to us. And so, there are Qualities and Attributes and Characteristics about God- that remain unknown to us. And we will *never* know them- until we stand before Him and see Him as He is (**1John 3:2**).

But what is not commonly discussed- is that the Knowledge of Ourselves- is *just as* deep and *just as* profound. And in many ways- the Knowledge of Man is *just as* difficult to comprehend and hard to embrace- as God is. Indeed, the Knowledge of Man may even be *more* difficult- for two reasons:

1. Because a true Knowledge of Ourselves *assumes* a true Knowledge of God
2. Because we tend to think we actually know ourselves, when, in fact, the depths of our Condition are beyond our Comprehension- without the Help of God

Several hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the Prophet Jeremiah infallibly wrote,

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

Jeremiah said here that the human heart is MORE deceitful than, “**all else**”. And the phrase, “**all else**” means that there is NOTHING on this earth that is *more* deceitful than the human heart. Nothing else even comes close. And then Jeremiah said that the human heart is desperately “sick”. And the word that was translated here as “**sick**” is a Hebrew word (*anash*; Strongs #605), that means the human heart is: *woeful; incurable; in a weakened condition leading to death; or incurably wicked*. And this is *why* Jeremiah then asks a Question:

... Who can understand it?

.. or who can *comprehend*; or *explain*; or *discern* the human heart and

understand *why* we do what we do; or *why* we think what we think?

And then several hundreds of years *before* Jeremiah, God the Holy Spirit “moved” on David in **Psalm 19:12** to say,

Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.

...in other words, we *never* get to the bottom of our own Sinfulness.

So, if our Forgiveness depended on the full Knowledge of our Sins- we would all perish. Because no one fully grasps the extent of their own Sinfulness. Our Wickedness is much *deeper* and far *worse*- than anyone knows- or would be willing to admit. Our Transgressions against a holy God are so hideous as to earn (a thousand times over)- an Eternity in a Lake of Fire.

So, listen closely when people give their Testimony. You will hear them speak freely of certain Sins that God has wondrously rescued them from. And it is truly a beautiful thing to hear of what God has done for them. They will speak of being delivered from drugs or alcohol or violence and many other Sins that are now under the Blood of Jesus. And we thank God for His Goodness. But the Reality is that what God has saved them and us from- is infinitely *worse* than any of what is usually spoken. Because all of those things were but “symptoms” of a far *greater* and much *worse* Condition of the human heart- that *delighted* to hate God and rebel against Him. So, human beings are *much* worse than we know. And our Sins are *much more* hideous than we would like to think.

Now the reason this is important is because this means that the Grace that saved us; and the Mercy that re-wrote our lives- is infinitely *better*; and infinitely *greater*; and infinitely more *powerful* than we might normally think. Because the depth of our Sin- illustrates the Majesty of Grace. And this is *why* we need to listen to the Counsel from the Prophet Isaiah- when he said this in **Isaiah 51:1**:

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, Who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn And to the quarry from which you were dug.

Those, who are diligently pursuing Righteousness are always looking *up*- to the Top of the Mountain- to Jesus- the Author and Perfector of our Faith (**Hebrews 12:2**). And many times, we get discouraged as we look at how high the Mountain Top appears to be and how far away it seems. It almost seems to be hopeless that we could climb that high and go that far.

And so, periodically, Isaiah said we need to look back *down* the Mountain. And we need to remember where God has brought us from. And we need to look at the rock- out from which we were cut. And we need to gaze on the slime pit-

out from which we were dug. And by looking at where God first dealt with us- we will see how- *all by Himself*- God did a marvelous Work in us and for us- that is entirely unexplainable.

So, even though we are NOT as far up the Mountain as we would like- we can see very clearly that we are also NOT in the slime pit either. And even though we haven't reached the Top of the Mountain- by God's Grace- we are much farther up the Mountain than we realized.

But another reason it is important to realize that we are much more sinful than we might want to contemplate- is because it means we are NOT qualified to analyze or diagnose our own Condition. We will NEVER be able to give a fully accurate explanation of what is wrong with us or how to fix us. And so, we will either *minimize* certain aspects of our sinful Condition or leave them out altogether. And that is not true because we mean to grade ourselves "on a curve". No, we do this- because we are simply not able to see clearly all that is wrong with us. And so, any Diagnosis we make about ourselves will be *inadequate* at best and totally *irrelevant* at worst.

And this is one reason why God gave us the Bible. God put into the Words of the Bible the ability to divide between flesh and spirit and to discern our wicked hearts. Look at how the writer of **Hebrews** describes this from **Hebrews 4:12&13**:

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

So, the Bible gives us Help- so that we may know ourselves. The fact that we cannot *fully* know how sinful we are, does not mean we cannot know how *deeply* sinful we are. Because the Bible has a clear and devastating Message about the State of our own souls. And the reason it does- is so that we will know what we need; and so, we will shout for Joy when God provides it for us. And that is what James is talking about in the Passage that is before us today. Look again at what James said in verse 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.

Now partition off just the first part of this verse that says,

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth ...

... and James infallibly says that we were “**brought forth**” *by and through* the “**exercise**” of God’s Will. So, we need to try to understand what James meant by writing two things:

1. Brought forth
2. Exercise

So, exactly what did James have in mind around the year 49AD, when he wrote that God “**brought us forth**”? Now keep in mind as we try to understand this- that James was a Jew. He was NOT a Gentile; He was NOT an American; He didn’t understand Capitalism; or a Constitutional Republic. James never drove a car or enjoyed air-conditioning or took an anti-biotic. If James needed bifocals- he was out of luck- because the Common Grace that gave us bifocals didn’t occur until God used Benjamin Franklin to invent them in the 18th Century.

Now what is amazing is that the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing and being used when James wrote this Epistle- even by believing Jews, who had trusted in Jesus. All the Dietary and Ceremonial parts of the Old Covenant- along with animal sacrifices were still ongoing- even though Jesus had fulfilled all of that. It would not be until around nineteen years later- when the unknown writer of the Epistle to the **Hebrews** penned his Book- sometime around 68AD- that believing Jews began to understand that they could *abandon* the Old Covenant when they embraced the New.

So, in his mind at that time- what did James have in mind when he said that God “**brought us forth**”- through the “**exercise**” of His Will? We have two hints that might help us:

1. The actual Greek word that James used
2. Verse 17- that says:

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.

... which tells us that to be “**brought forth**” has to do with a heavenly Gift that the “Father of Lights” has given to us. And that coincides with what James said was the Catalyst for bringing us forth:

In the exercise of His will ...

So, God has graciously given us a Gift by and through the “**exercise of His Will**”. And the giving of this Gift is what has “**brought us forth**”. Now the phrase, “**brought us forth**” comes from a Greek word (*apokueoe*; Strongs #616), that means: *to birth; or to begat; or to give life to*. So, James is saying here that through the “**exercise of His Will**”- God has birthed us; He has begat us; and He has given us Life. And that makes it clear that James was talking about the Miracle of the New Birth. So, this verse is about us being born again; or us receiving new, spiritual Life. And James said that we are born again; we are given this new, spiritual Life- by and through the “**exercise**” of God’s Will. Now the word that was translated here as, “**exercise**” has to do with what is the *Origination* or the *Causation* of our being born again. And James said it was God- *exercising* His Will; it was God *exerting* His Will; it was God *operating* His Will- that gave us this new, spiritual Life.

And this tells us at least two things:

1. We don’t “get” this new Life- we are “given” it
2. It is God’s Will to give this new Life to us

... so, let’s look at both of these

1. We Do Not “Get” This New Life- We are “Given” It

Right off the bat- the Bible doesn’t teach that human beings “do something” to “get”; or “acquire”; or “obtain” this new, spiritual Life. No, being born again is something that we NEED- *not* something we “do”. Listen to what Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:3**:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

... in other words, being “born again” is infinitely serious. Heaven and Hell are hanging in the balance. Jesus said that we will not “**see the Kingdom of God**” unless we are born again.

So, the Question is, “*Why*”? *Why* is being born again so necessary? *Why* isn’t some other Remedy sufficient, like “*turning over a new leaf*”; or “*applying our own will-power to improve our Morality*”; or “*some form of Self-discipline*”? And *why* didn’t God simply issue a “*Divine Decree*” that would pardon everyone?

Why did God Incarnate talk to Nicodemus about this radical, spiritual, supernatural, and miraculous Thing called, “*the New Birth*”; or what Theologians

call, “*Regeneration*”? First of all, we need to understand that what Jesus said in verse 3- was in response to what Nicodemus said to Jesus in verse 2:

"Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Now this actually sounds very complimentary. Nicodemus was giving Jesus Honor by saying this. And yet, instead of graciously receiving the Compliment- Jesus *immediately* responds to what Nicodemus said- by launching into the great spiritual NEED that Nicodemus himself had. I mean, Jesus never even thanked this Ruler of the Jews for the kind words.

Now some might say that Jesus was being rude here. But Jesus was perfectly sinless (**Hebrews 4:15**). And so, He wasn't being rude at all. Jesus loved Nicodemus- and Nicodemus was Lost- and Jesus knew that. But Jesus also knew something that many people in the modern church don't seem to know. Jesus knew that if He did not sovereignly *initiate* the *giving* of new, spiritual Life to Nicodemus- this man would *remain* Lost- forever. And that brings up the second Point:

2. It is God's Will to Give this New Life to Us

Now in addition to Nicodemus being Lost- there is evidence to suggest that he was also chosen by God for Salvation. But why do I say that? Because **John 19:38-40** says:

38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.
39 Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.
40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Now remember- when a person was crucified- the shame of that death sentence spread to his entire family. And nobody in the community would have anything to do with either the person who was killed on a Cross or his family. So, the fact that both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus helped with Jesus' dead Body- indicates that they were willing to bear the shame of Jesus' public Execution.

Now we can't prove this conclusively- but the fact that Nicodemus did this- tells us that he had heard Jesus back in **John 3** and, at some point after he had met

with Jesus- he was gifted with the Miracle of the New Birth- because there would have been no other reason for a “Ruler of the Jews” (**John 3:1**) to do this for a man, who had been condemned by the Jewish ruling Council.

Now keep in mind what James said in verse 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.

... so, Nicodemus and everyone else, who experiences the Miracle of the New Birth does so- NOT by the exercise of their own Choice; or their own Decision; or the exercise of their own Will-Power. That isn't what James said. James said by the “exercise of God's Will” we were born again or brought forth. So, again, the Question remains, “*Why does God have to do it this way*”? And the Answer to this Question lies in us understanding ourselves.

Most everyone in the modern church believes in the Fall. I've never met anyone, in almost 50 years of my journey with Jesus, who was in the Church, who denied the Fall. They freely admit that Adam sinned and that his Sin was very bad. And then they come to the Conclusion that Adam's Sin had the net effect of “separating us from God”. And this is true. Adam's Sin absolutely DID indeed separate us from God. But the Fall did much *more* than that.

So, the Problem with correctly understanding ourselves- is NOT that we believe in the Fall. Because most all people today already believe in the Fall. No, we must try to understand ALL that the Bible teaches about what it means to be “fallen”. And here is a hint: Being “fallen” means much MORE than simply our location (being “separated from God”).

Now remember *why* we need to understand ourselves *rightly* and *fully* and *biblically*. Because if what the Bible teaches about what it means for us to be “fallen” escapes us- then we simply will NOT understand WHY James said what he said in verse 18; and we will NOT understand WHY God Himself has to sovereignly give us the Miracle of the New Birth.

So, let's go through a quick Study of “Anthropology” this morning from the Scriptures and learn all that it means for us to be “fallen”.

The Divine Diagnosis: We are Spiritually Dead

Ephesians 2:1-3

**1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world,
according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now
working in the sons of disobedience.**

3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Now this is what is called in the Greek language- a “Universal Statement”. Paul is including every single human being, who is Lost, in what he says in these three verses. Now notice the words he used here:

... you were dead in your trespasses and sins

So, before anyone is born again- they are in a State called, “*Spiritual Deadness*”. Now please notice that Paul did NOT say that lost people are “*Spiritually Sick*”; or “*Spiritually Impaired*”; or that we were simply “*Separated from God*”. No, God the Holy Spirit “moved” on the Apostle to infallibly write that ALL lost people were “**dead**” in their trespasses and sins. So, as far as God Himself and the “things of the Spirit of God” are concerned- ALL lost people are, *spiritually* speaking- stone cold dead. There is NO spiritual Life in any Lost person. None. No Spark; no Glimmer; and no Essence. Lost people are dark and cold and deaf and blind and completely dead- in a spiritual sense.

And then Paul goes into what this “Spiritual Deadness” looks like:

in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

So, six things. All Lost people have these six things in common with each other. Paul said:

1. [They ALL] **walked according to the course of this world**
2. [They ALL walked] **according to the prince of the power of the air**
3. [They ALL were] **of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience**
4. [They ALL]... **lived in the lusts of our flesh**
5. [They ALL] **indulg[ed] the desires of the flesh and of the mind**
6. [They ALL] **were by nature children of wrath**

Now the word, “**walked**” here has to do with how we live our normal, daily lives. And the way that Lost people live their daily lives- is “**according to**”; or “in accord with” two things:

1. **the course of this world**
2. **the prince of the power of the air**

Notice that there is NO desire to love Jesus and to joyfully strive to obey Him. No, ALL Lost people live “in accord with” satan (the prince of the power of the air) and the rebellious, fallen *World System* that was created by and is *dominated* by this prince.

And when Paul said that ALL Lost people are “OF” **the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience**- he is referring to satan himself. And to be “OF” satan means: We are born of him. We belong to him. And we are part of him. So, as Lost people- we are entirely a “Child of satan”.

Then Paul said that ALL Lost people: **live[d] in the lusts of our flesh**- meaning we are cruelly *driven* by our fleshly Lusts. So, instead of being graciously “led” by God the Spirit- ALL Lost people are slaves to their Lusts.

And this is why ALL Lost people: **indulg[ed] the desires of the flesh and of the [carnal, unconverted] mind**. So, Lost people may have the ability to *temporarily* resist the Lusts of the Flesh- but there is NO long- term Victory over what their unconverted Flesh craves- unless they have been born again.

Now what is the Summary Statement that Paul gives here that sums up all that he has taught in this Passage? He said that ALL Lost people are:

... by nature children of wrath ...

Now the phrase, “**by Nature**” that the Apostle uses here has to do with what is “normal” and “natural” as a Fallen human being. So, it is absolutely Normal; and it is perfectly Natural for ALL Lost people to be a “child of Wrath”- meaning that ALL Lost people exist- CONSTANTLY- underneath the Wrath of God. And nobody has to teach them to do this. They are, “by nature” children of Wrath- meaning there is NOT a single second; of a single minute; of a single hour; of a single day- that a LOST person exists in any other Condition other than under the Wrath of God. This is what it means to be “Fallen”.

And the Question that arises is: “*How do people, who have these Characteristics, ever get to a place of being saved and of loving Jesus and of striving to obey Him?*” There is NOTHING in people like this that would allow them to EVER repent and trust in Jesus. NOTHING exists in them that they could capitalize on that would ever bring them to Jesus. And this is

WHY Jesus said that ALL Lost people need to be “born again”. Because without FIRST giving people like this- new, spiritual Life- they are doomed.

Another single verse that describe the Horror of what it means to be “Fallen” is where the Apostle Paul said this in **1Corinthians 2:14**:

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Now the phrase, a “**natural man**” has to do ONLY with Lost people. So, these are NOT saved people, who are simply NOT being “spiritual”. No to be a “**natural man**” is to be Lost. Now look at what the Apostle Paul said about these Lost people. Paul said he:

... does not accept the things of the Spirit of God ...

Now the word, “**accept**” here has to do with: *believing; or trusting; or embracing something*. Well, what is it that Lost people do NOT believe in? What is it that they don’t trust in; or embrace; or accept?

... the things of the Spirit of God ...

... which is ANYTHING pertaining to God- *including* the Bible and Salvation. But WHY don’t Lost people “accept” the things of the Spirit of God? Paul said,

... for [because] they are foolishness to him...

Now the word that was translated here as “**foolishness**” has nothing to do with what is funny or light-hearted like a Comedy. No, this word comes from a Greek word that means: *Something so utterly ridiculous and preposterous as to merit nothing but scorn and rejection*. That is how ALL Lost people see the Bible and Salvation and everything else that pertains to the Spirit of God- as being so utterly preposterous that it merits NOTHING but scorn and ridicule. And why do Lost people see the things of the Spirit of God like that? Because that is part and parcel to what it means to be “fallen”.

Now the phrase, “**does not**” involves Volition. Paul said that Lost people, “Do NOT”; they make a conscious Decision NOT to accept the things of the Spirit of God. And that is bad enough. But now look at what Paul says next:

... and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Here, the inspired Word of the living God says that All Lost people CAN'T do something. And this word (*dunamai*) involves Ability or Power. Well, what is it that Lost people DON'T have the Ability or Power to do?

... understand them ...

Lost people CAN'T understand the things of the Spirit of God. Now the word, “**understand**” means MORE than simply comprehending something-*intellectually*. This word has to do with *admiring*; or *appreciating*; or *valuing*; or *loving* the things of the Spirit of God. The Bible says that Lost people don't have either the Ability nor the Power to do this. But why don't they? Because they are “fallen”.

So, in addition to “separating us from God”- being “fallen” also has to do with NOT having the Power or the Ability to admire; or appreciate; or value; or love the things of the Spirit of God. Again, the Question is: “*How do people, who have these Characteristics, ever get to a place of being saved and of loving Jesus and of striving to obey Him?*”

I pray that now- what James said begins to make more sense. Because ALL Lost people are in this Condition. And so, unless God moves on us FIRST- to give us this new, spiritual Life- we have no Hope.

Now there is one more single verse we need to look at. And this verse is way back in **Genesis**. And it was written soon after Adam sinned- and it is probably the best “Summary Statement” in the entire Bible about what it means to be “fallen”. So, let's look at **Genesis 6:5**:

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Here Moses was “moved” by the very same Holy Spirit that dealt with Paul to tell us what being “fallen” looks like. And when Moses wrote,

... the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth ...

... the word, “**great**” here comes from a Hebrew word that has to do with being “Pervasive or ‘All-encompassing’”. So, there was NO area of human existence-*anywhere on the earth*- where the Wickedness of fallen Man was NOT pervasive- or did not dominate. And that is terrible. But it is the *last* phrase of this verse that

is actually the most damning. So, in addition to every area of human existence being dominated by the Wickedness of Man- Moses also said,

... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually

Now look at three words Moses wrote:

- Every
- Only
- Continually

... because these are words that will box us in- very quickly. It is simply not possible to get around these words. They include every single human on earth.

And what Moses wrote means that not *some* of the intent of their hearts- but EVERY intent of the fallen human heart was Evil. And Moses infallibly said that every single one of the intents of their hearts was ONLY Evil! So, there were NO “Good intentions” in them. None. ALL of the intentions of the human heart- after the Fall- was ONLY Evil! It was nothing but Evil. And that is a horrible indictment. But it gets even worse. Because then Moses said that ALL these Intentions of the fallen human heart were Evil- CONTINUALLY! All the time!

And this means that ALL of the intentions of the human heart were NEVER pure; they were NEVER God-honoring; they were NEVER holy or godly. No, ALL of the heart-intentions were ONLY Evil- and they were ONLY Evil- all the time!

And that means there is NO capacity for Good in the nature of the fallen human being- in a God- honoring way. None. There is NOTHING internal in the fallen human heart that would allow anyone to EVER become godly or holy or God- honoring- in, by, or through something they do for themselves. All of that was lost in the Fall. So, All Lost people are “ALL Evil- All the time”. And again, I ask the Question: “*How do people, who have these Characteristics, ever get to a place of being saved and of loving Jesus and of striving to obey Him?*” Jesus said we MUST be born again. We MUST have the Gift of this new, spiritual Life- or NOBODY will be saved!

Yet, because we are fallen- not only do we NOT have the Power or the Ability to make this happen by our own Choice or Decision or Act of our Will- we CAN’T even WANT it! We lost the ability and the power to pray to God to help us; or to even desire to be rescued from our fallen Condition. Truly, this is what Paul meant when he said, we were:

... dead in your trespasses and sins

... and that means that our Problem is NOT a lack of Information. Our Problem is also NOT a lack of Commandment. So, we don't need more Rules; or more Commandments; or more Laws. No, we need spiritual Life. We are lifeless. We are spiritually Dead. And until we get that new, spiritual Life- all the Commandments in the world will not change us. And as a result of having NO spiritual Life:

- We CAN'T hear the Gospel
- We CAN'T believe the Gospel
- We CAN'T see the Glory of God in Jesus Christ
- We CAN'T love God
- We CAN'T want God
- We CAN'T value God
- We CAN'T admire or delight in God
- We CAN'T repent
- We CAN'T comprehend our great NEED for God

So, what is the Remedy? We need new, spiritual Life. Yet, in our Lost and Fallen Condition- we can neither fully comprehend our NEED for this spiritual Life nor can we even *want* it.

So, without a Sovereign Act of God- in graciously and mercifully gifting to us – this new, spiritual Life- NOBODY would ever be convicted of their Lost Condition; NOBODY would ever repent; and NOBODY would ever be saved. So, what we desperately NEED- we CAN'T want; or ask for; or provide for ourselves. And this is why God has to sovereignly give us this Gift of spiritual Life- BEFORE we ask for it and BEFORE we even know we NEED it.

And this is the sovereign Act of God- whereby God- all by Himself- CAUSES us to experience the Miracle of the New Birth. The Apostle Peter said,

1Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

... and this is why the Apostle Paul said

1Corinthians 1:30b

... **by His doing you are in Christ Jesus ...**

... showing that we were born again- NOT by an Act of our Will- but “by His [God’s] doing. And then Paul also said,

Ephesians 2:4-7

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Now look closely again at verse 5:

even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

So, while being “Spiritually Dead” made it impossible for us to initiate our own Salvation- God was NOT hindered by our Impossibility. And look how God fixed this Problem:

[He] made us alive together with Christ...

God “**made us alive**”- which is simply another way of understanding what the New Birth is: the sovereign Gift of new, spiritual Life. And this is why James said,

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth ...

Now, in spite of all this biblical Proof- some would still argue that fallen human beings initiate their own Salvation. And this is why, at the beginning, I told you that we **MUST** have a correct and full and biblical understanding about ourselves (*Anthropology*)- if we are to see Grace as being Magnificent; and NOT attempt to rob God of the Glory that **ONLY** belongs to Him.

So, my response to those who would try to put themselves ahead of God and *continue* to object to the Sovereignty of God in Salvation is this:

- If God is as Sovereign as the Bible says He is
- If Man is as Fallen as the Bible says he is

- If God is to receive ALL Glory for Salvation
- If no Man may boast at what he did for himself to affect his own Salvation

... then being Born Again MUST be a Sovereign Act of God that has NOTHING to do with ANYTHING we do; or pray; or want; or ask.

Now it is true that AFTER we are born again- we now have:

- Eyes that can see the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus
- Ears that can hear the sound of Amazing Grace in the Gospel
- A Heart that is both willing and able to believe and trust in Jesus
- A Mind that can comprehend the Word of God
- A Desire to be near God and to please God and to obey God
- A Craving to pursue Holiness on purpose
- The Power to persevere through EVERY Trial to the End
- The Ability to suffer joyfully for the Glory of God
- The Gift of delighting in God being glorified
- A Joy that is full in submitting to God
- A Determination to find the zenith of our own Happiness in being a bond-slave of Jesus

... which means that everything that the Fall took from us- God will restore in us, through the Miracle of the New Birth- and MORE! But we first have to be given this new, spiritual Life.

Now there is so much more to be said about why the New Birth is necessary- but that is enough for today. So, I conclude by going back to the amazingly hope-filled Words of **James 1:18**:

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.

... and there are two ways to respond to this Statement:

1. Theoretical and Impersonal
2. Personal and Urgent

The first one says, “*How can this be?*” while the other one says: “*God brought me here today! God spoke in these inspired Texts to me today. And God’s Mercy and Love and Grace seem desperately needed and beautiful to me today. And God has done something in me today. He has brought me here; and He has awakened*

me; and He has softened me; and He has opened me. And that MUST be the New Birth!”

And this is the Mystery of God’s Sovereignty in Salvation. How does the Miracle of new, spiritual Life happen? By a Sovereign Act of God, yes! But the Bible also teaches that God uses various “MEANS” through which He sovereignly works. So, the Miracle of the New Birth happens- it is graciously given to us- BY the Spirit; and it is given to us- THROUGH the Word. So, what did James say was the “Means” that God used to sovereignly give us this new, spiritual Life? He said it was,

... by the word of truth ...

So, the New Birth- the beginning of the entire Christian Life- is a Miracle of the Word. And I suggest to you that the 40 biblical writers intended that the Nouns and Verbs and Adjectives and Adverbs and Prepositional Phrases they were moved to write down- would act as a “Means” to give us that Miracle of New Life.

So, it’s not surprising, then, that if the lifelong Drama of the Christian Life *began* by the Word - with the Miracle of new, spiritual Life- then *everything else* that pleases God; and *everything else* that counts for Eternity also comes by the Word- through that supernatural Work- because you’re already alive!

So, how are we born again? And one of the most crucial answers to that Question is given right here in **James 1:18a**:

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth ...

And the phrase “**brought us forth**” is a reference to being created or produced or born. And the reference is NOT to our *first* creation or our natural birth, but to our *new* creation or *new* birth. And we can see this because of how James says it happens, namely,

... by the word of truth

... which is a reference to the Gospel (**Colossians 1:5; Ephesians 1:13; 2Timothy 2:15**).

So, James is saying that our *second* Birth- our *new* Creation in Christ, happened “**by the word of truth**,” when we were given the ability to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now look quickly at verse 21:

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Now I don't have time to finish this today- and next week- I'm going to preach about the Resurrection. But two weeks from today- I'll finish this by getting into how verse 21 ties in with verse 18 in the Miracle of our New Birth. But suffice it to say that the Command in verse 21 *assumes* that the Word has already been *implanted*. And it has! That is what happened in verse 18:

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth ...

So, we were spiritually Dead. We had no place for the Word of God in us. We did not desire it or love it. Jesus said of the leaders who were trying to kill Him:

John 8:37

I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

... so, the Word of Truth was NOT implanted in them.

But please be careful how you take this. Because those Leaders knew their Bibles better than anyone in this Church. These people studied the Old Testament their entire lives. Yet the Word of God **“found no place in them.”** It was not implanted in them! How tragic to be so close to the Truth and yet so far away!

Now this means that before we are born again, our hearts were full of other things that push out the Word of God. We are like people who are so stuffed with candy between meals that when the feast is offered- we are not hungry. In fact, our stomach turns at the thought of eating another bite. This is how unregenerate people feel about the real meaning of God's Word. They feel no need for it. So, it has no place in them. It's not implanted in them.

So, James says in verse 18- that the Way God sovereignly CAUSES the New Birth is BY the Word of God- the Gospel. The Holy Spirit carries the preached Word into our dead hearts and CAUSES new Life to allow us to see the Truth and the Beauty of Jesus- like we never have. And BY the Word of Truth- God sovereignly gifts us with new, spiritual Life.

But verse 21 says that this Word didn't come and go. It was **“implanted”**. It took root. It is in us and is now part of us. And this is an amazing Miracle- seeing as how we are really nothing but creatures of the dirt. And James says that this implanted word **“is able to save your souls.”** So, please don't ever underestimate the Power and the Importance of the Word of God. Because James said,

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth ...

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.