

"SAVED BY GOD FOREVER"

JAMES 1:18

James was a master of word pictures. In his pastoral letter to his beloved sheep he paints a picture of God's love and our responses. He describes the morbid darkness of death that oozes from the unbridled lusts of fallen human flesh. Then from that utter blackness he sweeps our gaze upwards and contrasts that old life dominated by lust with our new life coming down in perfection from the Father of the universe, unwavering and un-eclipsed He shines with the Light of Life into our hearts. In essence James tells us listen to the darkness within and you will reap a harvest of sin and death. But open your heart to the Father of lights and He will implant His unending truth and life within your soul.

God has always told man a new heart is needed to get to heaven. The Lord rejects our first birth because nothing natural can go to heaven, only the supernatural can. All of Adam's children must have a second birth to fit them for heaven. The Lord consistently used the denial of the firstborn situations to show this: Cain (1st born) rejected for Abel (2nd born), or Ishmael (1st born) rejected for Isaac (2nd born), or Esau (1st born) rejected for Jacob (2nd born) or how about Reuben (1st born) rejected for Judah (2nd born).

Now with that overview let's dive into v. 18 this morning. Would you follow along as I read it? James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

We can see four major aspects of our salvation in this verse:

1. THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION: "Of His own will " it is God's work in us by His gracious initiative! Eden, Noah, Abraham, John 6
2. THE DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION: "He brought us forth" new heart & spirit, leads triumph, opened eyes, titus 3:5
3. THE DIVINE PROCESS OF SALVATION: "by the word of truth"
4. THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF SALVATION: "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures"

First we need to consider THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION: "Of His own will " it is God's work in us by His gracious initiative!

God has always been the initiator of salvation. What happened in Eden (Genesis 3) when Adam and Eve chose to turn from God into sin? The Lord came looking for them. God is the seeker of the lost ones. He initiates the process. We just hide like we have been since our first parent tried to hide their sin from God?

How about when the earth was so full of sin that it grieved God's heart (Genesis 6) that He ever created mankind. What did He do? He looked and graciously saved Noah. Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord".

How about pagan, moon worshiping Ur? God looked down (Genesis 11-12) and found one upon whom He set His affection. He called out to Abram and initiated a relationship. And Abraham responded. How you say does God do this? Is it us who seek Him or He seeks us or what?

To see the Lord's explanation look to the life of Jesus in John 6. With numberless crowds trampling upon one another to get near Jesus we find the Lord explaining true salvation.

John 6: 37-44 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.39 "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.40 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." 41 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."42 And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. NKJV

Now to understand the divine perspective of salvation we need to look for a moment at Ephesians 1:11-12. "having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we ... should be to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:11, 12b)

- GOD PREDESTINES: The Scriptures teach that Christians are what we are because God chose to make us like Christ before anything was created. From eternity past He declared that every, elect sinner deserving only of death—who trusted in His Son would be made as righteous as the One in whom they put their trust. Paul states this clearly, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (v. 4).
- GOD EMPOWERS: God works all things after the counsel of His will. Works is from ενεργεω, from which we get such English words as energy, energetic, and energize. "For I am confident of this very thing," Paul declared, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). "We can trust God to finish what He starts. He has planned the way for all who come to Christ to receive all the power necessary to come to their spiritual completion. So God not only plans but also works out His plan.

- **GOD GETS ALL THE CREDIT:** The Word of God always presents salvation from God's side, so He will get all the credit. In our man-centered society, God's wanting all the credit for salvation seems inappropriate. This is only because we lack complete awareness of His greatness, holiness, and glory. All the marvels of salvation are designed to be "to the praise of His glory".

THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE: "to the end that we who were first to hope in Christ ... In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed," (Ephesians 1:12a, 13a).

- Paul also portrays salvation from our own human perspective. This reminds us of the tension between God's sovereignty and man's will that is consistently spoken of in the Bible. This tension can never be reconciled because of our limited and imperfect knowledge. Listen to some wise words one pastor wrote: "*As¹ with all the other antinomies and paradoxes in God's Word, our responsibility is to believe both sides of them without reservation, just as they are revealed. We know the truths are in perfect accord in God's mind, and that knowledge should satisfy us.*" Someone has pictured the divine and human sides of salvation in this way: When you look toward heaven you see a sign that reads, "Whosoever will may come," and after you enter heaven you look back to that same sign and read on the other side, "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." Although we may never understand God's reasons for giving us such humanly irreconcilable truths, it should prompt us all the more to thank and praise Him for them. The utter incomprehensibility of such an incredible plan should prompt our hearts to overflow in adoration and worship. These truths are another evidence that the Scriptures are from God, and not just man's ideas.

So what can we conclude?

- God never ask us to choose between the mysteries connected to His divine sovereignty and man's responsibility because they both are a part of God's plan and He has designed them. These two truths do not compete; they cooperate. The fact that we cannot fully understand how they work together does not deny the fact that they do. When a man asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Spurgeon replied: "I never try to reconcile friends!" But the main thrust of this chapter is clear: Israel's rejection of Christ does not deny the faithfulness of God. Romans 9 does not negate Romans 8. God is still faithful, righteous, just, and gracious, and He can be depended on to accomplish His purposes and keep His promises.²

Second, THE DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION: "He brought us forth". The gospel produces a tremendous change in us who believe it. God gives us a new heart & spirit, He leads us in triumph, He opens our eyes, titus 3:5

Third: THE DIVINE PROCESS OF SALVATION: "by the word of truth" James was instructed by the Holy Spirit to use the term "Word of Truth" for our salvation. This is a

¹ MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Ephesians, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

² Wiersbe, Warren W., *Ehesians: The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

powerful picture. In six usages among the New Testament books there is depth in every use.

1. A HOLY LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: John 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.
2. A VICTORIOUS LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: 2 Corinthians 6:7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,
3. A CONFIDENT LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,
4. A SECURE LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: Colossians 1:5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,
5. A HEALTHY LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: 2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. "cutting straight" (orthotomounta) is a surgical word and speaks of sinful ways (godless chatter) as if they were gangrenous or cancerous tissue that must be cut away
6. A GENUINE LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

FALSE FAITH vs. TRUE FAITH

Peter uses some vivid illustrations from life to portray the true birth from above and the false birth from beneath. The fakes in Second Peter had *knowledge* of salvation and could use the language of the church, but they lacked that true saving experience with the Lord. They had been exposed to the gospel and even received the Word of God (2 Peter 2:21), but then they turned away from it. What really happened was: *they never trusted Christ and became His sheep*. Peter compares them to pigs and dogs, not sheep of Christ. In the 1st century dogs were not pampered pets! The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs" because a dog was nothing but a filthy scavenger who lived on garbage! It was hardly a title of respect and endearment!

Spiritual fakes can point to "an experience," but it was a *false* experience. Satan is the counterfeiter. The Scriptures say that Satan has:

1. a false gospel (Gal. 1:6–9),
2. proclaimed by false ministers (2 Cor. 11:13–15),
3. leading false Christians (2 Cor. 11:26—"in perils among false brethren").

Remember Christ's Parable of the Tares? Jesus taught that Satan plants his counterfeits ("the children of the wicked one") wherever God plants true believers (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43).

What kind of "experience" did these false teachers have? To use Peter's vivid images, the pig was washed on the outside, but remained a pig; the dog was "cleaned up" on the

inside, but remained a dog. The pig *looked* better and the dog *felt* better, but neither one had been changed. They each had the same old nature, not a new one.

When Peter notes both animals returned to the old life, he is explaining it merely was part of their nature. When we raised a couple of pigs in New England we quickly learned pigs stay clean only a short time before they race to the nearest mudhole. There's nothing wrong with a pig for acting like a pig because it has a pig's nature. The first time you see *a sheep* heading for the mudhole, be concerned!

When I was growing up my parents raised hunting dogs (German short hairs and Weimeraners). I soon observed some had the habit of eating what dogs should not eat, and then regurgitating somewhere in our yard. But that was not all. They would then return to the scene of the crime and start all over again! Apparently dogs have been doing this for centuries, for Solomon mentioned it in Proverbs 26:11 As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly. This is the text that Peter quoted.

Think about what God is trying to say. A sick dog feels better after emptying its contaminated stomach, *but it remains a dog*. "Having an experience" did not change the dog's nature. Instead it only confirms the "dog nature". Why? If the dog came back and (just like a dog) lapped up his own vomit it is only confirming that it is genuine dog. It is a disgusting picture, but that is exactly the response Peter wanted to produce.

Have you ever met people who have told you about their "spiritual experiences," but in their description there is no evidence of the supernatural reception of a new nature. Fakes are like the sow, some of them were cleaned up on the outside. Fakes can be like the dog, some of them were cleaned up temporarily on the inside and actually felt better. But by God's standard, the Word of truth, they have never become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). They tragically only thought they were free from the wickedness of their sins, in reality they were still in total, damnable bondage to an old sinful nature.

According to 2 Peter 2:20, these fakes "escaped the pollutions of the world." This biblical word describes only an exterior kind of defilement. God says that those who are genuinely born again have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through [because of] lust" (2 Peter 1:4). The Bible word for "corruption" speaks of deep and internal defilement: it is no less than the cancer of sin decaying the soul. True born again children of God have received a new nature, a divine nature. This becomes evident through new and different appetites and desires. They have been transformed from the inside out. They have been reborn from the Satan's earthly kingdom of spiritual pigs and dogs into heavenly kingdom of God's sheep!

Can you imagine the indescribable terror of the person who thinks they are headed to heaven, only to discover that, in the end, they are condemned to Hell! Now we can see the depth of Peter's appeal in 2 Peter 1:10—"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." In other words, "Has your spiritual experience been genuine?" This morning there are many people in our churches who have never truly been born again, but who are convinced that they are saved and going to heaven! They have had "an experience," and perhaps look better (like the sow) and

feel better (like the dog), but they have not been *made better* as "partakers of the divine nature."

"THE WAY OF PEACE" ³

The following story was told by Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951) traveled for more than 50 years as a home missionary, evangelist and Bible teacher. He was pastor of Moody Memorial Church, a visiting professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and the author of more than 60 books and pamphlets. He writes--the story related by Dr. J. H. Jowett of the conversion of Dr. Charles Berry has often been told, but will bear repeating.

Dr. Berry was one of the first of the so-called New Theology men, who preached salvation by character rather than by the atoning blood of Christ, salvation by ethical culture rather than by personal faith in the Lord Jesus, salvation by reformation rather than by regeneration. Popular, eloquent and personally pleasing, he attracted large audiences, who hung upon his words and depended upon him as their spiritual mentor.

But a great change was seen in his preaching, which resulted from a new experience with God, which revolutionized his thinking. In telling his friend Dr. Jowett about it, he said that late one stormy night, as he was preparing to retire, the doorbell rang. When he went down and opened the door, there stood a poorly dressed young woman who asked if he was the minister. Upon being assured that he was, she begged him to go with her at once to get her mother in.

He thought that she meant that her poor mother was out in the storm and the darkness in an intoxicated condition; so he demurred, saying he could hardly be expected to go out and get her mother in and suggested that she see a policeman who might give the help required.

The girl explained that her mother was not drunk and added, "You must come with me. My mother is dying, and she is afraid to die. She wants to go to heaven, but she doesn't know how to get in." I told her I'd get a preacher to take her in.

"Do come, Sir, and get my mother in."

He now understood that the dying woman needed someone who could show her the way of salvation, but he hesitated, thinking it was hardly a case for him. He urged the girl to go to a missionary living near the wretched locality in which she lived. But she refused. She insisted she wanted a real minister and begged him to go with her. "Do come, sir. I want you to get my mother in before it's too late. Please, sir, do come with me."

At last he consented to go, and the girl led the way to one of the worst sections of the city. In this miserable neighborhood she took him into a tenement house and up a rickety flight of stairs to a poverty-stricken room. Downstairs many men and women were drinking and carousing, and the air resounded with horrid oaths and vile language.

³ Harry A. Ironside, @ 1940 American Tract Society, Garland, Texas

The minister found the poor woman lying on a miserable makeshift of a bed, evidently near to death.

"I've brought him!" exclaimed the daughter. "I've got the minister from the big church where the swells go. He'll get you in, Mother. Just do what he says."

"What can I do for you, my poor woman?" he inquired as kindly as he could.

"Why, sir, I'm dying, and I want you to get me into heaven. I've been a great sinner, and I don't know how to get in."

The minister began to speak of the necessity of a good life, of building a noble character, and how goodness always paid in the end.

"You don't understand, sir!" she cried. "That won't do! I'm dying and I've lived a bad life. It's too late for me. Oh, can't you get me in?"

He tried again and gave some good advice and endeavored to comfort her by expressing the hope that all would be well if she would only seek to lead a Christian life.

"That won't do!" she exclaimed. "I'm a poor sinner! I've no time to lead a Christian life. I'm dying and I want to go in. Oh, can't you tell me how I may get into heaven?"

Dr. Berry did not know what to say or how to comfort her. At last he thought, "Why not tell her what my mother used to tell me? Why not give her some of the simple texts and Gospel stories I learned as a child?"

With this in mind he began to repeat some of the precious Gospel verses telling of God's love for sinners and of the Savior who had died to redeem. The woman listened eagerly. "That's it! That ought to get me in, shouldn't it! Did he die for sinners? Then that should get me in."

Stirred to the depths of his own being he told the story of the cross as he had not preached it for years. Like a thirsty soul, she drank in the living water. Finally, he knelt and prayed with her.

She trusted Christ for herself. Her fears were allayed and she entered into peace.

"Jowett," said Dr. Berry years afterward, "I helped get her in that night, and while I was helping to get her in, I got myself in also!"