

# James

## THE CHOICE OF FAITH

### 1:16-18

*“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures” (1:16-18).*

The year 1983 must have been a very strange one for the German people. During that year were celebrated the birthdays of two men of important historical significance even though they had two entirely different philosophies of life. That year marked the five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth and the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx. Marx is the father of socialism. Its development led to the imprisonment of the human spirit (and often the body) of many people. Luther, a leader in the Reformation Movement, led the people to religious freedom from medieval Catholicism.

In our world, we plainly see two different ideologies at work. The power of the prince of darkness often savagely seduces people into the slavery of sin. But the gospel of Jesus Christ sets men free through His blood. One works for the downfall of man, while the other works for the saving of man.

James knows that we will be faced with a decision between these two competing lifestyles. Through inspiration, he knows which one is best. He is trying to impress upon us the right decision. He wants us to make the choice of faith.

### **THE CHOICE TO RESIST DECEPTION (1:16)**

James helps us in the decision we make by warning us not to be deceived (1:16). Immediately we ask, “Be deceived about what?” Two things could be listed from the previous verses: the purpose of outward trials (1:2-4) and the source of inward temptation (1:13-15). But it would seem that James is pointing ahead to what he is about to say. This warning about being deceived is often used in Scripture as an introduction to a significant idea (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 6:7, 8).

One of the significant ideas that must be realized from this text is that it is “beloved brethren” who are warned about being deceived. Satan will work harder to deceive a believer than anyone else. Christians can make wrong decisions—they can be deceived.

### **THE CHOICE TO RECOGNIZE GOD’S GOODNESS (1:17)**

We should not be deceived into believing that succumbing to temptation, following after Satan, will turn into something good for us. We can know this because, “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow” (1:17) We also ought to realize that this emphasizes James’ earlier point. Since God gives only good things, He cannot give destructive temptation as was pointed out in verse 13. What God gives is marked by kindness and helpfulness.

Often man, being full of what he can do, attempts to leave God out of the picture. He will drive many miles to see the beauty of the rose gardens of Tyler, Texas; the bluebonnets of the Texas Hill Country; the azaleas of Muskogee, Oklahoma, or the foliage in the Ozark Mountains; but he does not seem to realize that there would not be one bloom, blossom, or leaf without God.

Some may stretch this text too far by differentiating between the “good” gifts and the “perfect” gifts. They view the “good” gifts as those gifts which all people share (food, air, water, etc.), and the “perfect” gifts as those blessings which are given to those who are in Christ. While this differentiation may be true about the “gifts” God gives, it would seem to be beyond the point that James is making here. James wants us to see that God’s nature prohibits Him from being involved in temptation (1:13, 17). Furthermore, God is the only giver who gives good and perfect gifts (1:17). He does not try to set us up for a fall, blessing us one day and tempting us the next, He “does not change like shifting shadows” (1:17; NIV) but constantly offers us that which is good and perfect. It is to be imprinted on our minds that when we choose God we have chosen that which is best.

### THE CHOICE TO REMEMBER GOD’S GRACE (1:18)

To reinforce the point that is being made, James tells what God has already done for us. Surely his reasoning must be, when they remember what God has already done for them, their decision to choose the course of faith will be made easier.

James lists three actions God has taken for the obedient believer (1:18).

First, “He chose” (NIV)—The KJV may be a little more expressive where it says, “of his own will.” God made up His mind, and when everything was ready, began the process to save man (Galatians 4:4, 5). It has always been God’s intention to offer salvation to all men (Ephesians 1:4, 5; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 11:28). God had no compelling reason to save man except that He made up His mind and offered salvation.

Second, He “brought us forth by the word of truth.” Without any doubt, James is speaking of the “new birth” (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). This is the time when an old man cursed by sin is buried

into the death of Jesus and is raised (born) a new man (Romans 6:4). The agent that moves us toward, and teaches us about, this new birth is the “word of truth.” William Barclay quite simply says, “The ‘word of truth’ is the gospel; . . .”<sup>1</sup> This statement coincides with what Scripture tells us (Romans 1:16; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23).

Third, He did all this “that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.” The first two phrases point to the third one. A Christian is a kind of “first fruit” of everything that God created. The “first fruits” were offered during the Passover (Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 26:2) because they were the very best. This Old Testament concept was carried into the New Testament, and the expression is used quite often (1 Corinthians 15:20; 16:15; Revelation 14:4). The expression, as it is used in James, seems to carry with it a double meaning. First, it says that the Christian is the very best of all God’s creation. Second, it indicates that more fruit will follow.

### CONCLUSION

When we are confronted by the temptations of the devil, let us remember what God has already done for us. We were “chosen” to be “born again” that we might be first of all His creation.

—Bill Hooten

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), 63.

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### *The Goodness of God*

“God has given some gifts to the whole human race, from which no one is excluded.”

Seneca

“In all His dispensations God is at work for our good. In prosperity He tries our gratitude; in mediocrity, our contentment; in misfortune, our submission; in darkness, our faith; under temptation, our steadfastness; and at all times, our obedience and trust in Him.”

“Even as you can’t outrun God when you dodge His will, it is equally impossible to outrun His care when you are in His will.”

Cal Guy