

He Brought Us Forth by the Word of Truth

James 1:18

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. NASB

Here the brother of our Lord, James writes to exhort the church. In the context of James chapter 1, verse 18 is an appendage to his brief section of “temptation to sin,” v-13-18. Here is this little verse a set of very BIG truths. What is set forth here is a volume of truth concerning salvation. In the words of William Burkitt, “*These words are very expressive of four things, namely, of the efficient cause, the impulsive cause, the instrumental and the final cause of our regeneration.*” Indeed we see an expression of God’s work in the whole of salvation.

James 1:18 - 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. NASB

A. In the exercise of His will – Here James speaks to the very heart of regeneration and the very beginning of it, “*the will of God.*” This says Burkitt, is the **impulsive cause** of our regeneration. What began, motivated and moved forth our regeneration was “*the will of God.*” This theme is oft repeated in Scripture.

John 1:12-13 - 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** NASB

John 6:44 - 44 “**No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day. NASB

Romans 9:16 - 16 So then it **does not depend on the man who wills** or the man who runs, **but on God who has mercy.** NASB

Ephesians 2:4-6 - 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), NASB

Matthew 11:27 - 27 “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 - 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, **because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 And it was for this **He called you through our gospel,** that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

Learn then that salvation, specifically the very beginning of salvation in our life, begins as an act of the sovereign will of God. And even though He does use various means to bring this to pass, He is seen as the CAUSE of it and it is expressed in Scripture as “*the exercise of His will.*” God powerfully “*exercises His will*” in order to bring about the regeneration of His Holy Spirit. And it is because this is the “*exercising of God’s will,*” we call it the **impulsive cause**. It was the actual acting or action of impulse, that caused our regeneration, because He **willed** to regenerate. Another way to say this is at the right moment in time, God moved to regenerate the believer, by His Spirit, through the Word to make us New Creatures in Christ, and to activate all the subsequent results of salvation (see Ordo Salutis), either simultaneously or in the course of time

(which take place as a result of His regenerating work). Plainly said by James, *“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”*

B. He brought us forth – Here again is a plain statement about the One who did the work. **God** alone, He Himself is the **efficient cause** of this saving work. He is the author, the originator, the elector, the One who chooses to save us. He is the initiator of salvation first by election, then by the effective call and regeneration. And when He powerfully exercises His will to regenerate, *“He brings us forth”* from the grave, into the new birth. He *“calls us out of darkness(of sin and ignorance) into His marvelous light”* (1 Pet 2:9). Prior to this we are dead in transgressions sins, and blinded by the *“god of this world”* to the Gospel, unable and unwilling to believe and be saved.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 - 3 And even if **our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," **is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** NASB

Titus 3:5 - 5 **He 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.** NAS

1 Peter 1:3 - 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,

Ezekiel 11:19-20 - 19 "And **I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them.** And **I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,** 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Nicodemus thought he had to reenter his mother's womb to be born again, but he was wrong. This birth is not of the flesh: it is from above (John 3:1-7). It is the work of God. Just as we did not generate our own human birth, we cannot generate our own spiritual birth.

John 3:3-8 - 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, **but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**" NASB

See then that it is God Himself who acts powerfully *“in the exercise of His own will”* by the agency of the Spirit and the Word, *“He brings us forth.”* He takes the message of the Gospel and powerfully applies it to us, which gives us the ability to believe and repent (conversion) and so be saved (justification) and transformed into a child of God (adoption). All of this happens at God's initiating work of regeneration and this is why we say that He is the **efficient cause**. This is what James means, *“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”*

C. by the word of truth – Notice here that the instrument that God uses when He exercises His will to bring us forth is **“the word of truth.”** This is undoubtedly the Gospel, because it is by the means of the Gospel that any and all who are saved, were saved. It is the only and exclusive way to be saved, and this is the sum total of salvation which was accomplished in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (a past event), which is now offered and expressed to people by means of the good news of the Gospel. In the Gospel we are called to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of our sins. This belief upon Christ is for righteousness before God and the cancellation of the debt of our sins, which we owe to God. Since Christ Himself has carried out this righteousness, and paid the debt of sin by His life, and death upon the cross, he has therefore gained for us and in our place what we could never do, and He powerfully proved the effectiveness of His work by His resurrection from the dead. It is this Gospel message that James refers to in this verse as **“the word of truth,”** which **“brings us forth.”** It is the **instrumental cause** of our regeneration by the Spirit. **The Spirit powerfully applies the word to our dead ears and blind eyes** so that we are resurrected from the deadness and darkness of sin and **“brought forth”** into the life and light of the Kingdom of God.

1 Peter 1:3 - 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,

1 Peter 1:23 - 23 for you have **been born again** not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, **through the living and abiding word of God.** NASB

This is what Peter explains in verse 23. It is **“through the living and abiding word of God”** that we have been born again. The **“word”** is the **“seed”** of salvation which produces in us. And this we know from various other passages (ex. Tit 3:5), is applied by the Holy Spirit to form us into God’s New Creation in Christ (2 Cor5:17).

Wayne Grudem writes in his Systematic Theology in the section on Regeneration - Regeneration Is Totally a Work of God - *What is the connection between effective calling and regeneration? As we will see later in this chapter, Scripture indicates that regeneration must come before we can respond to effective calling with saving faith. Therefore we can say that regeneration comes before the result of effective calling (our faith). But it is more difficult to specify the exact relationship in time between regeneration and the human proclamation of the gospel through which God works in effective calling. At least two passages suggest that God regenerates us at the same time as he speaks to us in effective calling: Peter says, “You have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.... That word is the good news which was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23,25). And James says, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (James 1:18 NIV). **As the gospel comes to us, God speaks through it to summon us to himself (effective calling) and to give us new spiritual life (regeneration) so that we are enabled to respond in faith. Effective calling is thus God the Father speaking powerfully to us and regeneration is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit working powerfully in us to make us alive.** These two things must have happened simultaneously as Peter was preaching the gospel to the household of Cornelius, for while he was still preaching “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). (from Systematic Theology, Copyright © 1994 by Wayne Grudem. All rights reserved.)*

This is what James means, **“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”**

D. so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures – Here now it is clearly implied that “*among His creatures*” we are the “*first fruits.*” Now this is no small thing. This is to say that we are that first part of the long anticipated harvest, that first and longest of meals after a long summer of hard work. Indeed “*among His creatures,*” Christians are the highest and finest of all of God’s works. This is because He has planted His very nature within us and fashioned after His own likeness. When the process of sanctification is completed, we will be in all His holiness, immortal, imperishable and perfectly fitted to abide in His holy presence, forever and ever.

1 John 3:2 - 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, **when He appears, we shall be like Him**, because we shall see Him just as He is. NASB

Romans 8:30 - 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, **these He also glorified**. NASB

Ephesians 4:22-24 - 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, **which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**. NASB

Colossians 3:9-10 - 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on **the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** NASB

Burkitt comments... “*The final cause of our new birth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures, that is, of his new creatures, the chief among his creatures; the first-fruits were the best of every kind to be offered to God, and were given as God's peculiar right and portion; thus the new creature is God's peculiar portion taken out of mankind, which being consecrated to God by a new begetting, they ought to serve him with a new spirit, new thankfulness, as lying under the highest obligations unto new obedience.*”

Learn here that Christians are the great work of God in redemption, and the objective He sought to accomplish in the great work of the Savior. It is to fashion after His own glorious image and to plant, grow, and blossom His own glorious nature in us, so that the final beauty reflects the very beauty of God’s own character and nature. This is the **final cause** of our regeneration.

Q & A

For Further Reading and Study:

Regeneration

http://www.heavenlight.org/salvation/Regeneration_2007.pdf

Sovereign Election – What does the Bible say?

The Bible plainly declares that God chooses who will be saved. This is called “*election*” and refers to God’s electing certain individuals to salvation and that this happened before He ever created the world. This is taught in many places in the Bible.

John 15:16 - 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. NASB

Ephesians 1:3-6 - 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. NASB

Titus 1:1-2 - 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, NASB

2 Timothy 2:10 - 10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. NASB

2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. NASB

1 Peter 1:1-2 - 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. NASB

Matthew 11:27 - 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

This teaching in the Bible is closely related to the idea of “*predestination*”, another concept clearly presented in the Bible. In fact, “*predestination*” is a Biblical word which refers to the fact that God has set the destiny of His chosen people from before the beginning of time. This is presented in many places in Scripture.

Acts 13:48 - 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. NASB

Romans 8:28-30 - 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. NASB

Romans 9:22-25 - 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, **which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us, whom He also called**, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. NASB

For Further reading on Sovereign Election:

http://www.heavenslight.org/salvation/Sovereign_Election.pdf

"The Order of Salvation"

Various theologians have given specific terms to a number of these events, and have often listed them in a specific order in which they believe that they occur in our lives. Such a list of the events in which God applies salvation to us is called the order of salvation and is sometimes referred to by a Latin phrase, *ordo salutis* which simply means "order of salvation." Before discussing any of these elements in the application of salvation to our lives, we can give a complete list here of the elements that will be treated in the following chapters:

1. Election (God's choice of people to be saved)
2. The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
3. Regeneration (being born again)
4. Conversion (faith and repentance)
5. Justification (right legal standing)
6. Adoption (membership in God's family)
7. Sanctification (right conduct of life)
8. Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
9. Death (going to be with the Lord)
10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

We should note here that items 2-6 and part of 7 are all involved in "becoming a Christian." Numbers 7 and 8 work themselves out in this life, number 9 occurs at the end of this life, and number 10 occurs when Christ returns.

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