

James – Life after Faith

James 1:18

“What’s God Got to Do With It?”

1. THE HEART OF GOD IN THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

A. What this means

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A. Our relationship with God

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1. Dr. Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, recently published a book entitled *The Disappearance of God*.

2. In the book, among other things, Dr. Mohler discusses the increasingly secular nature of the United States, where any mention of faith or God in the public square is taboo and forbidden.

3. In one chapter, he cites a case from 1995, where a District Court judge in Texas ruled against prayer at a graduation ceremony.

4. In that ruling, the judge said, “If any of you shall mention the name of Jesus or God...you will rue the day that you were born and will spend up to half a year in the Galveston jail.”ⁱ

5. There are many today who want to completely remove God from the conversation, saying, “What’s God got to do with it?”

6. But no matter how badly the secularists want to dismiss Him, there is one very important conversation that cannot be had without including God.

7. That conversation is the one that seeks to discover how a man’s sins can be forgiven, and how a man can be saved from the penalty he faces for those sins.

8. You cannot talk about the salvation of man without talking about God. What water is to the ocean; what sand is to the beach; what trees are to the forest; that is what God is to salvation.

9. In James 1:18, Brother James very clearly shows us what the prophet Jonah meant when he said, “*Salvation is of the LORD (2:9).*”

10. In this one verse, James points us to the work of God in saving sinners like us. Notice with me exactly what God has to do with our salvation. First of all, James points us to:

I. THE HEART OF GOD IN THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

1. The largest river in the world is the great Amazon river. It can be as wide as 120 miles, and its flow covers over 40% of South America.
2. If you were to trace that mighty river to its source, you would have to go up some 18,000 feet above sea level, to a little glacial stream on a mountain peak called *Nevado Mismi* in the Andes Mountains.
3. The stream of salvation has flowed to hundreds of millions of souls. Yet if you trace it back to its source, you will find it flowing from the heart and will of a sovereign God.
4. That is what James says in verse 18. "*Of his own will begat he us...*" Your salvation and mine originates with God.
5. Notice a couple of things we draw from this opening statement of verse 18. First of all, notice:

A. What this means

1. What exactly does it mean when James says that by God's own will he gave us a new life?
2. Notice that phrase, "*Of his own will...*" Those four words are all translated from a single Greek word.
3. The word literally means "to be willing". However, the word speaks of more than a desire, or a wish for something to happen.
4. The word speaks of a will that is accompanied by a plan. The root of this word speaks of a council, or a decision.
5. Think about that. What James is saying is that before you were willing to choose God, He willingly chose you.
6. Long before anyone had even considered your existence, God had, and according to His will, a plan was made to save you by grace and through the blood of Jesus.
7. In Ephesians 1:4, Paul says that God "*hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world...*"
8. Before God spun the earth into orbit, He had already thought of you, and willed your salvation as a part of His eternal plan.

9. Notice something else James reveals to us about the heart of God and the origin of salvation. When James says, “*Of his own will,*” consider not only what this means, but also:

B. What this magnifies

1. For God to choose us before we could even choose Him, and to plan for our salvation through the death of His Son, even before our sinful hearts began to beat, that is a testimony to His grace.

2. Some people are bothered by the thought that God chose us before the foundation of the world. They should not be.

3. A God who willed us to be saved before we were born is a God of remarkable and amazing grace!

4. Grace is unmerited favor. Grace is receiving what we do not deserve. How much more gracious can you be than to will and plan the salvation of a soul who is yet to be born?

5. In the blackness of pre-creation space, God saw that you and I would be born into a sinful race, and that we would willingly sin against Him and His Word.

6. Yet, in spite of the fact that we were not yet willing to repent, He was nonetheless willing to redeem. That’s amazing grace!

7. Several years ago I visited the country of Nicaragua. While there, they carried me to a little coastal village on the western side of that country.

8. We went there specifically so that I could see the Pacific Ocean. I have a picture on my computer of the shoreline from that village.

9. Now, when I say that I have seen the Pacific Ocean, that is really not a true statement. I have seen just a small portion of it, but I will never really see it all.

10. That is how it is with the grace of God. If someone tells you that they fully understand it, they really do not. They understand a part of it, but what makes it grace is how inconceivable it is!

11. James says our salvation originated in the heart and will of a sovereign God. That magnifies His grace!

12. Notice a second truth James gives us regarding God’s role in our salvation. Notice not only *the heart of God in the origin of salvation*, but notice also further that James points us to:

II. THE HAND OF GOD IN THE OPERATION OF SALVATION

1. Look again at verse 18. James says, *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth...”*
2. According to James, our salvation was not only conceived by the will of God, but it was also carried out by the work of God.
3. In other words, the operation – the way in which salvation moves from the mind of God to the heart of man – that operation is the work of God.
4. Notice what God does in bringing about His saving will in our lives. First of all, James reminds us of:

A. The miracle performed

1. James says that motivated only by His will, God did something. He *“begat us.”*
2. Here James goes back to the kind of language he was using earlier in the chapter – the language of procreation and pregnancy.
3. The word “begat” speaks of the creation of a life. It is translated from the word that was used to speak of a pregnancy.
4. James says that God willed our salvation, and then brought it to pass by giving birth to us. This is what Jesus was talking about in John 3, when He told Nicodemus, *“Ye must be born again.”*
5. Make no mistake about it, Christianity is not simply belonging to a religious club, or adhering to a set of dogmas and doctrines.
6. True Christianity means that our old life ends, and by the miracle of regeneration, we are born again to a brand-new life in Christ.
7. These days, everybody seems to be going green. As usual, the government is even getting involved. As of October 1st, it is illegal in the state of North Carolina to simply throw away a plastic bottle. Plastic bottles can no longer be disposed of in landfills. They must be recycled.
8. While I’m sure God has nothing against recycling; that is not how He saves us from sin. God does not merely recycle our old lives, or reform our old lives. He miraculously gives us a new life altogether.
9. Notice something else about the hand of God in salvation. Notice not only the miracle performed, but notice also further:

B. The message proclaimed

1. Look again at James' words in verse 18. He says, "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth...*"
2. James says that the miracle of the new birth is performed "*with the word of truth.*"
3. In other words, the power to perform the miracle of being born again is found in the "word of truth." What is James talking about? It must be the message of the gospel.
5. In Ephesians 1:13, we find those two phrases together. Paul talks about, "*...the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...*"
4. Again, Paul says in Romans 1:16, "*...I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...*"
5. The message proclaimed in the gospel – the message of Jesus and His death and resurrection – that message is the power behind the miracle of our salvation.
6. Understanding this, where do both the miracle and the message of salvation come from? They both come from God!
7. For a man to claim any responsibility for his own salvation would be like a minnow taking credit for the ocean in which he swims.
8. On October 12th, we will celebrate Columbus Day, in honor of the day that Christopher Columbus discovered America.
9. The reality is that Columbus did not create America, he just ran into it with his ship. Columbus landed in the New World, but he did not create it.
10. In much the same way, your ship may have landed on the saving grace of God, but God created the shore, the sea, and the ship in which you have sailed.
11. As James continues to point us to God's work in salvation, notice a third truth we find in this great verse. Notice not only *the heart of God in the origin of salvation*, and *the hand of God in the operation of salvation*, but notice also finally, James points us to:

III. THE HOPE OF GOD IN THE OBJECTIVE OF SALVATION

1. Look at how James concludes verse 18. He tells us that God willed and worked to bring about our salvation, "*...that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*"

2. If you have been wondering, “Where do I fit into salvation’s picture,” this is it.
3. James says that God saved us so that we would be “...a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”
4. That word “firstfruits” refers back to the Old Testament and a particular type of offering that God commanded His people to bring to Him.
5. Leviticus 23:10 says, “*Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:*”
6. In light of this reference to the firstfruits that James makes in verse 18, we are reminded of God’s objective – or what He intends to accomplish - through our salvation.
7. Notice first of all, the objective of our salvation has to do with:

A. Our relationship to God

1. The Lord made it clear in the Old Testament that the first and finest of whatever the people raised or produced was to be given back as an offering to Him. That is the principle behind the firstfruits.
2. In Numbers 18:12, we read about, “*All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD...*”
3. The idea behind this firstfruit offering was that the first part of whatever the people had belonged to the Lord. They were to give it back to Him as an offering.
4. When James describes the believer as “a kind of firstfruit” he is reminding us that once we have been saved, we belong to the Lord.
5. In I Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul says, “*...ye are not your own...For ye are bought with a price...*”
6. Your life is not your own to do with as you please. If you are saved, your life is a purchased possession of God.
7. When you check into a hotel, you are given the privilege of using one of their rooms. The hotel expects you to relax and enjoy your room.

8. However, you don't have the right to repaint the room, or change the curtains, or replace the furniture. Nor would you think of doing those things, because you understand that while it *is* your room, it is really *not* your room.

9. If you are a Christian, you have been given the privilege of new-life, and while it is yours, the truth is that your life actually belongs to God.

10. Notice something else about the objective of salvation illustrated in this principle of firstfruits. They not only speak to us of our relationship to God, but also of:

B. Our responsibility to God

1. One thing that is important to remember is that the firstfruits that James is referring to in verse 18 were an offering.

2. They were something that belonged to God, but the people were responsible to bring and offer to Him.

3. In much the same way, if you have been saved, then your life belongs to God, but you are responsible for offering your life back to Him.

4. That is what Paul is getting at in Romans 12:1, when he says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*"

5. When God saved you, He did all the work, and He did all that work with the objective in mind that out of heart of gratitude and praise, you would turn around and offer yourself back to Him.

6. A person who sees salvation as a license to live like hell without going there knows nothing of true salvation. True salvation carries with it a responsibility to the God whose grace has saved.

7. Isaac Watts put it best in the last stanza of his greatest hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. He said:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That would a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

8. May we never forget that we are His firstfruits. We belong to Him, and must willingly give ourselves to Him who saved us by His grace.

1. The question before us is, "What's God got to do with our salvation?" The simple answer is: everything.
2. From the concept to the completion, from God's heart to God's heaven, salvation is all of God and all of grace.
3. That fact ought to stir our hearts to give ourselves completely to Jesus, and see that the objective of our salvation is fulfilled.
4. A salvation that is all of God is worthy of all we have.

ⁱ Mohler, R. Albert, The Disappearance of God, (Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, 2009), p. 172