

God's Free Will in Salvation (James 1:18)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 28, 2009

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I was in the backyard weed-eating a few weeks ago when my wife called me to let me know there were some nicely dressed people at the front door wanting to talk to me. They had visited before when I wasn't home and began to talk to my wife about the end of the world and she tried to reason with them about who Jesus was (they had different views) and they left a copy of their newsletter called *Watchtower* with a feature article about what it means to be born again and how to be born again (quite a different understanding than what we'll see today).

They also wanted to talk with me about end times and for a little while I indulged them, but then I politely said: we can talk all about the 144,000 and paradise and the future kingdom, whichever title you give it or whichever one you hope to be in, but let's get to the most important question: how can sinful man be accepted by holy Jehovah God? What must one do to spend eternity with Him? His answer was that it's not those who say "Lord, Lord" about Jesus but those who do the will of the Father (Mt. 7) which he equated with the evangelism of the Great Commission of Mt. 28. Instantly my mind went to the only Scripture where Jesus Himself actually says "this is the will of my Father" where I had him turn – if it's not those who merely say "Lord" who go to heaven, but those who do the will of the Father, what is the will of the Father?

John 6:40 (NASB95) ***“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”***

I went back more than once to the Matthew 7 passage he began with, to point out that those people when they stood before God were saying "Look at what we have done in your name." It says many will do that, and it's clear by what they say that they were *trusting in what they had done* and they will be surprised when God says "Depart from me. I never knew you." Whether great works or great witnessing or great whatever it is, I pleaded with him, you can't trust at all in those things as getting you there, because those are the people who will hear: "I never knew you."

The key question: who or what causes our salvation, our spiritual birth, our spiritual life? Are we brought forth into God's family by *our witnessing*, by *our works*, or even by what *our will* decided?

James 1:18 (NASB95) ***In the exercise of His will He [God the Father from v. 17] brought us forth by the word of truth ...***

"brought forth" – same word in v. 15 paralleled with "give birth to" or in the KJV "begat," i.e., we became the child of God, a spiritual birth and life in this context, a rebirth or a regeneration.

The *New World Translation* does not substantially change the meaning: "Because He willed it, He brought us forth ..."

I intentionally didn't go to John 1:1 or other passages about Jesus that they are well-trained to argue about, I wanted to get right to the gospel issue and the sin issue and not just go in circles about the nature of Jesus, but more fundamentally, our *need* for Jesus and the nature of salvation being all of God and none of us at all.

The challenge with talking to cultists like Jehovah's Witnesses is they use Christian phraseology with different meanings. He told me salvation can not be earned by works, one can only be saved by God's grace, it's only by the shed blood of Christ, and that they don't do these things to get saved but because they are. Sounds pretty good, right? I said: "so you do believe you are saved?"

"Well ... I don't want to be arrogant ... I mean, I could fall away"

I said: "Wait a minute, you just told me it's because you *are* saved that you are doing this? ... Do you believe if you died today, you would go to heaven, or whatever you call it?"

"Well ... I think so and hope so" (basic gist: if I persevere to the end I'll be saved like the Bible says – isn't that in James 1:12?)

James 1:12 (NASB95) *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

So we must persevere, he said. He could affirm v. 18, that it's only by God and His grace that we *gain* salvation, but it was also clear that he believed we *maintain* salvation by what we do (ex: v. 12).

- It's true that those who truly love God will persevere, but in v. 12 it comes from a heart of love, not legalistic works
- as we've studied before, the meaning of that Greek word "approved" is not to make or produce something it's not yet, but it's to show the genuineness of what's already there

In fact an overarching theme of James is the character of true faith. In context, v. 12 completes the argument of 2-4: trials demonstrate and strengthen true faith, they don't destroy faith in a true child of God. True faith endures by God's enabling grace. Because it's not mere human willpower but we're kept saved by God's Will and God's Power, trials do not and cannot make or break true faith. Perseverance doesn't *make us* saved, it *manifests we are* saved.

We don't believe like Arminian theology says that eternal life can be lost. We affirm here the historic doctrine of grace "perseverance of the saints." Some think it's better called "God's *preservation* of His saints." He keeps His sheep, His children, His elect to the end, and it's by His will and power, not ours (v. 18 "*of His own will*").

Romans 8:28 (NASB95) *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 [note those who love God are those who are called according to God's will / purpose] ... ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ...*

³³ *Who will bring a charge against God's elect? [another term for those God's will chose to predestine, call, justify in v. 30] God is the one who justifies [saves]; ... ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [the point of James is that no trials can keep those who truly love God from persevering – but ultimately it's because of God's love not our own] ... ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us [that's how we persevere – God's love ultimately]. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God ...*

That passage single-handedly demolishes any theology that teaches salvation is up to us and can be lost. Salvation is secure because: for all of God's own, all of it, is all of God, for all of the process.

If salvation was even in part up to us, we could lose it. I know I would lose it! Left to my own sinful heart, if what the Bible says about the sinful human heart is true (and it is), I would never seek God's salvation on God's terms and I could never keep salvation on any terms. But praise God for Romans 8, which says for God's elect whom He has predestinated, called, justified, glorified, they will overwhelmingly endure through God and His love, a love which is utterly unshakable and unbreakable by anything in the universe!

The JW at the door may say God's *grace starts* salvation but we finish it, and some in Christian churches may say that we start or initiate salvation (with some help?) and God keeps us saved, but the Bible teaches all of it from start to finish is all of God and it's because of His will and power within us we're able to persevere by His grace and strength. And one of many passages describing how we were brought forth to salvation and by whom is 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

Verse 18 will be our focus this morning. I want us to look first at the original meaning and context in the verses before, and then the broader context of other Scriptures, and then the application of this truth in the verses after v. 18 in overall flow of the book of James.

Let's start with the original context and relation to prior verses.

- In v. 13 James tells believers he's writing to not to think God tempts us to sin; God's will is not sin, it's salvation (v. 18)
- Man's will is in v. 14b ("his own desire" that causes sin) but v. 18 contrasts God's will that causes salvation
- Everything bad or sinful we have or do comes from within us (v. 14-15) everything good we have or do comes from above (v. 17) from our Heavenly Father. This is a key truth.
- Contrast deception (v. 16) with the Word of Truth (v. 18)
- v. 15 gives image of a mother that conceives while v. 17-18 use image of the Father who creates a new life that'll grow
- Both give birth to something: sin (v.15a) & salvation (v.18)
- Results: bring forth death (v. 15b) & bring forth life (v. 18)

¹⁷ *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights ...*

Is salvation a good thing or a perfect gift? Then it's from above, granted or given from the Father, if this verse is true. Is faith in Christ a good thing? So where is it from? It's from above before it could be in us, from the Father, if this is true and if what Jesus said in John 6:65 is true: "*no one can come to me unless it has been **granted him from the Father***" [or "given" KJV – Strong's says this is same base root as the word for given / gift in James 1:17].

So when Romans 3 says "*There is no one good, no not one, no one who seeks after God,*" that is a proper assessment of natural man. The reason some seek and are saved is not that there was some good inclination or insight or intuition in them that was not in others, it's not simply that a good choice originated from within them, it's not that *some things* from inside some fallen men's wills are good, while some other good things are from above, from God the Father ... No, *every good thing given is from above, from God!*

Eph 2:8-9 includes faith as part of the gift of God, not from our selves, so salvation is not the result of anything we do, no boasting.

The title "Father of Lights" in v. 17 is another way to speak of God as the creator of lights in Genesis 1, the One who said "let there be light" in a dark place where there was no light also did the same thing in our dark heart! Praise God! That's Paul's point in:

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NIV) *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts **to give us the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in **jars of clay** to show that **this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.***

God gets all the glory and we have nothing to boast about or take credit for in any part of salvation, start to finish. It's all of God

In v. 18 God does use *means* to bring this about. The verse says He does it "by the Word of truth." It's the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, it's God's Word that is living and active and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and can cut through to the innermost person's thoughts and intents of their heart. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word.

We cannot save anyone, we don't need to try and figure out if someone was chosen to be saved in eternity past (thank goodness) but this should encourage us to read and explain God's Word with whoever we can even if we don't think they'll ever change and even if they show up on our doorstep with a different gospel! The power is in God's Word – God saves sinners, not us or any clever presentation, but God does so through His Word being declared.

This birth or life in v. 18 is not caused by anything man does or has within him, look at it again: it says God's will causes this but that's not to say we have no responsibility (Romans 10 comes after chapters 8-9 and are to be read in that sequence, not a truth to make evangelism cease, but a truth to motivate and mobilize passionate evangelistic heart as we see in Romans 10.).

The emphasis of James 1:18 in the original language is on this verb, this participle that speaks of God's will or choice as the effective cause of salvation through His Word. Participles in English usually have an "-ing" at the end, so a literal translation could be "**having** made His decision," emphasizing that God was acting freely, purposely and graciously. The fact that this verb is emphatically placed first in the Greek sentence makes His will / choice the prominent operator and cause of our regeneration.

NIV "**He chose** to give us birth"

NET "**By His sovereign plan** He gave us birth"

Amplified: "it was **of His own [free] will** that He gave us birth"

Many Christians think it's our own free will that must initiate our being born again, but if we seek just let the Scriptures speak and not subordinate them to how we like to think (our prior notions), the unmistakable emphasis of this text and dozens upon dozens of passages is on **God's free will** as the gracious foundation of our salvation, service, sanctification, and security

Someone may be thinking, "But what about all the verses that say we must believe?" Those are in the Bible, too, and every Christian of course believes that someone must believe in Christ truly to be truly saved and to truly be His born again children. That is equally true in Scripture:

John 1:12 *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*

So aha, you say, you can't just say this being born again is "of God" because saying we must believe means it's of our will, right?

¹³ *who were born, not of blood nor of **the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

That doesn't contradict the prior verse, all who became God's children did believe, but it does clarify that this birth ultimately is not of or from human origin (says it 3 ways), it's of and from God. The belief in v. 12 is genuine, but v. 13 is its genesis, its origin.

Remember: Man is responsible, God is sovereign. Anything bad or sinful we do we cannot blame God (James 1:13) but anything good in us or from us *is directly from God* (1:17), to Him all credit/glory must go.

James 1:18 also uses a word for being born / brought forth, and it's interesting that James 1:17 uses the phrase "from above" because that's the same Greek word in John 3:3, its most famous use:

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

*Footnote in every major translation: or "born from above"

It's the same Greek word as James 1:17 that says every good thing given is **from above** and that includes the new birth itself. Just think of the analogy of birth itself - a baby can't take credit!

There are different ways to describe the new birth and new nature

- my favorite: 2 Cor. 5:17 (*if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, new things come*)
- re-generation (we studied this in Titus 3 last year)
- new man (Eph. 4, Col. 3), new heart (Ezek. 36:26)
- quickened (Eph. 2 KJV, or “while you were dead, God made you alive”), i.e., spiritual resurrection

Different terms to describe those whom God’s will chose to save:

- Called
- Elect / Chosen
- Predestined

Sometimes it has the phrase “by the will of God” sometimes not. As I said earlier, I want to expand to the broader context of Scripture for this 2nd part of this message to God’s whole counsel.

Let’s say I was an expository preacher but I didn’t believe in election, or I would redefine it as our will being decisive, and God simply decides based on what we decide if He’s going to save us. What book am I going to teach on in a careful verse-by-verse manner, paying attention to what each phrase says and how it ties into immediate context and other places where the words are used, and how it fits into the argument of the letter? We’re already running into it in the opening chapter of James, so maybe we should pick another book that won’t be controversial.

Picking a gospel like John seems like a good place, right? It’s mostly historical narrative so won’t have all the doctrines of later epistles. How far can I get without grappling with this? 13 verses. By the time I get to John 6 or 15 or 17 it’s going to be really difficult (those are good to study further on this). So let’s try Acts.

Acts 1 (NASB95) ¹ *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,* ² *until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles **whom He had chosen** ...*

You can’t get past the second verse before you hit it. Many of you were with us in our Doctrines SS class a couple years ago (9-2007, I would encourage you if you want to study this further to get those notes) but one of the things I did that I’d never heard anyone else do before was just to simply survey how the NT books begin.

Acts 2:21 (NASB95) ²¹ *‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’ ...*

³⁷ *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”* ³⁸ *Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* ³⁹ *“For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will **call** to Himself.”*

Did God first pierce their heart? Yes. Did they have to repent? Yes. Did they have to call on the name of Jesus to be saved? Yes. Did those **God would call** to Himself receive the promised forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes. Will all God calls to Himself receive salvation, forgiveness, etc.? Yes. Peter can say “whoever calls on Jesus will be saved,” at the same time knowing those who do call *on* the Lord were called *by* the Lord to Himself.

- Like 1 John 4:19 “*we love Him because He first loved us*”
- Like Gal. 4:9 “*you have come to know God, or rather, to be known by God*”
- Like John 15:16 “*you did not choose me, but I chose you*”

That’s not to say man doesn’t choose or know or love or call on the Lord, but those verses do say God’s choice, knowing, loving, calling was the decisive initiating one, not ours. *Let’s try Romans.*

In my sermons as you know, I often have quotes from theologians and my sermon notes online often have a dozen or more footnotes, but for this message I intentionally am not quoting anyone other than God’s Word, I just want to read some Scripture verses, ok?

Romans 1:1 *Paul, a **slave** [note imagery] of Christ Jesus, **called** as an apostle* [you say, well “called” is just for a special service like an apostle, not a term for his Christian readers in general, right?]

... ⁶ *among whom **you also are the called** of Jesus Christ;*

So we’re not going to get very far into Romans, but that’s just because it’s Paul’s weighty doctrinal discourse, right? Let’s try Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1 ¹ *Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ **by the will of God**, and Sosthenes our brother,* ² *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling** ...* [NKJV “**called** to be saints”]

When you see the word “called” or “calling” used of human beings in the NT epistles, it always refers to a divine summons, effective call that secures what it calls for, not a mere general invitation.

Some Christians say, “well, I like to think ‘the called’ are everybody, that God calls and chooses everybody the same but it’s up to us and we can be “called / elect” of God but can veto Him. I can understand that and once tried to make that work, but I had to test how that theory holds up in Scriptures, like a few verses later:

²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness [clearly these are unbelievers in context],* ²⁴ *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God ...*

Clearly 2 groups here, those who reject and those who are called who see Christ as the power of God and wisdom of God. Now look at verses 26-28 and see if this text can be reconciled with the theory that God has called and chosen every human being ...

²⁶ For **consider your calling, brethren**, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble [you say, “I thought God chose every wise, mighty, noble, everyone?]; ²⁷ but **God has chosen the foolish things** of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things** of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the **base things** of the world and **the despised God has chosen, the things that are not** [you can’t get around 2 groups here and God intentionally chose to call some by His will / purpose], so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God ... [cf. v. 24]

All human boasting and human credit is annihilated, when you consider as this passage commands, the nature of who God usually calls and chooses. If the world was choosing its team, they would pick the rich and famous and strong and wise and mighty and noble with high self-esteem. God chooses the foolish, the weak, the based, the despised, the nobodies & nothings – congratulations!

It’s not that there’s *not any* from other groups, but ... *not many*. God intentionally chooses most of us from the most unlikely and unglamorous. The text is most unflattering. This may not boost our self-esteem but God does it that way so that there’s no question as to the source of salvation and no debate as to where the glory goes.

2 Corinthians 1:21 *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God* (NIV “God makes us and you stand firm”) – next verse speaks of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee

In v. 1 Paul again affirms that he is an apostle / sent one of Christ Jesus not by his own will, but “by the will of God.” The next book explains how graphically and radically Paul learned this truth that man doesn’t take the first step and then God the rest. It’s all of God.

Galatians 1 ¹³ *For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood* ...

In v. 1 “Paul an apostle (not from men nor through men but through Jesus ...)” [NKJV/NAS “nor through the agency of man”]

Eph. 1 adds that God’s choice goes farther back than the womb:

⁴ just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would 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 ...**

¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will ...** [v. 1 also has Paul’s trademark “by the will of God”]

Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began** a good work in you **will perfect it until the day of Christ***

We could never be faithful to complete salvation if it were up to us for any part, but we can have confidence that **God** will be faithful to complete just as it was God who began this good work in us. He started it and will finish it – even our believing was from above.

²⁹ *For to you **it has been granted** for Christ’s sake, **not only to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake,*

Part of what has been granted to us is to believe.

Colossians 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ **by the will of God ...***²⁹ *For this purpose also **I labor** [man’s effort] **striving according to His power, which mightily works within me** [God’s power]*

1 Thess. 1:4 “... *knowing, brethren beloved by God, **His choice of you***; [NKJV “your election by God”, ESV “He has chosen you”]

2 Thess. 1:11 “*To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of **your calling ...***”

1 Timothy 1¹⁴ *and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant [the mercy he was shown in v. 13 while still a blaspheming persecutor], with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.*¹⁵ *It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.***

Jesus didn’t just come into the world just *to try to save* sinners, He actually saved actual sinners! And Paul’s conversion wasn’t Paul’s initiative. Paul didn’t think something good within him simply made a better choice for Jesus than other sinners; he knew he was the worst of sinners, the chief of sinners and *God had to seek Paul out* on that Damascus road by God’s abounding astounding grace!

2 Tim 1:9 ... *who has saved us and **called us** with a holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity***

NIV: “*God ... called us ... not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose ... before the beginning of time*”

God’s calling of us was not because of anything we had done or would do apart from His sovereign grace in eternity past! Wow!

Titus 1¹ *Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those **chosen of God** [most translations have “elect of God”] ...² *in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago* [NKJV “before time began” !]*

I trust you get the drift. You can turn back to James, but I wanted you to see that if you study God's Word it's hard to find a book in the N.T. that you can get past its first page (much less first few verses!) without encountering this language; this was no minor doctrine or hidden by scripture writers. Even little 1 chapter epistles like Jude have such language, 2 & 3rd John both use term "elect."

You can resist this all you want, but unless you gloss over and skip over verses or ignore them or just quickly explain them away because of your pre-conceived ideas, you're going to keep bumping into this truth. I don't feel any obligation to try and come up with some clever analogies at this point to explain all of the questions you might have about how this intersects with other truths, even if I could, my words don't have any power. I can only point you to God's Word which has the power and pray that you will understand God's power more (and that God would grow my understanding too as I certainly don't have everything figured out!)

I promised we would end this message with the application in the original context and following verses in the flow of James 1.

The second half of v. 18 has an overall goal: "that we should be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." The first half of v. 18 is clear as to whose will caused our new birth, but the second half of the verse is not as clear to some who study it. You can read various discussions about what the end of the verse means. Does it mean Jews who were first saved on Pentecost feast day and the harvest would include Gentiles soon? Or is it believers in general who are the first fruits of a regeneration that will include all creation, new heavens and new earth? Either way the basic idea is clear: this new birth his readers received from God was the first of more to come. In OT times the first fruits was a portion set aside for the Lord, and you brought it to the Lord to acknowledge all of the harvest was His and to trust and pray the Lord of the harvest for more to come.

The first century Jewish Christians were the first sheaves of the gospel harvest and the earnest of what would yet be reaped. As the first ripe samples of that harvest, they proclaimed the new order of spiritual things that God was bringing upon the world scene.

One thing is clear: God has a goal in mind for those that His will has brought forth and called and chosen ... He has a purpose and it's not to sit around and do nothing, to be "the frozen chosen." We are part of a harvest and if God saves people through the Word of truth as this verse says, we need to not only pray to the Lord of the harvest, but be laborers in His fields, telling the gospel. James will not tolerate any passive theologians, as will become very clear in the weeks ahead – if understanding the truths in the many verses we just read doesn't motivate you to want to serve such a merciful and glorious Savior, you haven't understood them.

But let me close with how I closed the conversation with the JW at my door: "Are you trusting in your works like the people in Matthew 7? It's not that they were saved, and fell away, they were trusting in the wrong thing, so they never truly were saved. Jesus said to them 'I never knew you,' not 'I used to know you but now I don't anymore.'" He said that was a good point, and I hope he is still considering those words and I hope you will, too. Do you truly know the Lord and does He truly know you? If you're trusting in anything other than Christ, trust Him today.

If you are saved, give God all the credit and glory and praise. The closest parallel to James 1:18 is 2 Thess. 2:13 – listen to it: ¹³ *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because **from the beginning God chose you to be saved*** [“Some manuscripts *because God chose you as his first fruits*”] ... ¹⁴ **He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ¹⁵ *So then, brothers, **stand firm and hold to the teachings** we passed on to you ... (NIV)*

We stand firm and persevere by God’s Almighty power, not ours. There is an end for what God planned in the beginning, that we might share in the glory of the gospel, and that the rock-solid truth of these deep doctrines would help us be deeply rooted so that we can stand firm. If the Word of truth has the power to save us that we experienced in v. 18, the only appropriate response is in v. 22: *be a doer of the Word* (not a debater of the words we have read).

If you disagree with these verses, talk to God about it. Seriously, prayerfully, carefully study His Word humbly willing to submit to whatever it says rather than trying to find some verse to argue about or to find 1 verse that you think explains away dozens of other verses. Don’t be quick to debate, but rather take time to dwell on this, digest these verses slowly and humbly.

Most importantly, read the next verse. Immediate application:
Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger
Look also at the end of v. 21 “... *in humility receive the Word.*”

What better consideration in context to be humble 2 verses later than realizing even your new birth, your salvation was all of God! When you grasp *how gracious* God was in saving you, what better motivation to continually humbly receive the Word implanted in you and to be a doer and not just a hearer of it! Some people who don’t believe salvation is all of God and caused by His will, when you teach on this they’ll say, “that makes me angry when people talk about predestination ...” – but note that here the whole point and flow of v. 18-20 is that this truth should put an end to anger!

How can we be angry at those who sin against us when we realize the only reason we are saved and even reading this text is because life and grace was given to us by God as an act of His will! We didn’t cause our own birth physically, and by analogy, we didn’t cause our own birth spiritually. God brought us forth, we were the helpless infants, the passive little ones utterly dependent on someone outside ourselves for us to be born or to live at all (a frequent OT image for God’s people Israel). This truth should bring us down in humility and up in praise. And this should give us great security to know that a God wiser than us and bigger than we can fully fathom, a God this sovereign and this loving, this God is in fact able to work all things together for good, including factors that involve the sinful wills of sinful people. Take comfort in such control - nothing can separate a true child from the love of God! You may sin against your good Father, but that doesn’t change His status as your Father or your status as His child. Hallelujah!

If we have received undeserved grace by God’s choosing and we now have His nature and life within us, how can we not choose to give grace as well to those who don’t deserve it? James has a very practical end and aim in mind with these doctrines in the rest of chapter 1. We’ll see that in future weeks.