

## God's Will in Salvation

*“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.”*

**James 1:18 NASB**

In this single verse the Holy Spirit conveys the **cause**, the **effect**, the **means**, and the **objective** for the salvation of all believers.

### **The Cause**

#### *In the exercise of His will*

Here we see the cause of our salvation- God by the exercise of His will. This verse informs us that it is by the exercise of the will of God that the elect are regenerated (*born again*). In the exercising of His will God acts individually and independently from the person brought forth. The Greek makes this evident as it says, “Of His own will He brought us forth...” God’s will alone was the cause. The new birth or being brought forth is not a cooperation of wills (God’s and the sinner’s). Furthermore, the language of this verse is emphatic *God exercises His will*. This communicates the uninfluenced nature of God’s will. There was nothing in the person regenerated that prompted or moved God’s will to regenerate the person. It is exclusively the exercise of God’s will that the verse communicates as the cause of salvation.

### **The Effect**

#### *He brought us forth*

The words *brought forth* come from a single Greek word translated *begat* in the KJV. The phrase *brought us forth* speaks to that truth Christ mentioned to Nicodemus in John 3:3 and 7, when He said to Nicodemus “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” A person must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God and according to verse 5 of John 3, unless a person is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Regarding the effect of God’s will we could say, John tells us of the **necessity** of being born again while James tells us the **cause** of being born again.

A comparison between James 1:15 and James 1:18 reveals that James is contrasting the new life of regeneration brought about by the will of God to death that is brought about by sin. The words *brought forth* (v. 18) and phrase *brings forth* (v. 15) are the same word in the Greek. Thus, by the exercise of God’s will a person is regenerated or receives new life in contrast to death that results from sin. Essentially, the **cause** of regeneration is the will of God and the **effect** of His will is regeneration or in other words giving new life in Christ.

### **The Means**

#### *by the word of truth,*

Now the basis on which God, Who is the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shifting shadow (James 1:17), births a sinful person into His righteous kingdom is none other than the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ on behalf of that person.

The phrase *by the word of truth* pertains specifically to the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of the Word of God is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12) and a similar phrase is used to

refer to all of God's Word as in 2 Timothy 2:15, however, it is the specific message of the Gospel of Christ that the Holy Spirit uses in the monergistic work of regeneration (Rm. 10:13-15).

The identification of this phrase as the Gospel as the means of regeneration is important because it reveals that God did not, without rhyme or reason just write-off the sins of the elect and then birth them into His kingdom. For God to have granted forgiveness without payment for sin would have been a violation of His own law; a law that demanded death for the violator (Ez. 18:4, 20; Rm. 6:23). Instead, God charged the sins of the elect to the account of His Son Who bore God's wrath and died in their place (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's righteousness (1 Jn. 2:1; 3:7), satisfied the righteous requirements of the law on behalf of those for whom He died (Rm. 8:1-4, 28-30; 1 Jn. 2:2). Therefore, on this basis alone, God is shown to be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ (Rm. 3:21-26).

In this we are able to see that the component of regeneration is an extension of the exercise of His will in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ's death was a necessary part of accomplishing the will of God in regenerating His people. Essentially then, the exercise of God's will in regeneration is not a capricious act but an exercise of the will of God in accord with that which He predetermined from before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:4). From this we are able to see why the phrase *the word of truth* used in James 1:18 pertains specifically to the Gospel. Colossians 1:5 makes an explicit identification of *the word of truth* as the Gospel,

*“...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel...”*

### **The Objective**

*so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures*

In verse 18 of James 1 we have seen the **cause** of regeneration (the exercise of the will of God), the **effect** (brought us forth-regeneration), and the **means** (by the word of truth-the Gospel). Now we come to the **objective**.

*“...so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”*

In the Old Testament the offering of the first of the harvest (first fruits) contained the first and best of the harvest. It was offered to God as a way of acknowledging the fact that all the produce belonged to God and was ultimately from Him. Being the first, it also was an indication of God's blessing on the rest of the crop that was to follow. Thus, the first fruits were set aside for God or consecrated to God to ascribe glory to Him for His provision.

In contrast to death which is the offspring of sin, Christians are the first fruits of the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow (v. 17). We are a testimony of His work in Christ to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, and 14 with the context of Eph. 1). Thus God's objective in salvation is His own glory.

Furthermore, as Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) believers are the first-fruits of the regeneration among God's *creatures* as indicated by the end of the phrase in James 1:18. In this sense therefore, as Christ's resurrection was a pledge to our resurrection, so

those regenerated by God are a pledge of the creation's restoration to its un-cursed condition. It could be that James is here alluding to that which Romans 8:18-22 specifically addresses.

*“<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.”*

Ultimately then, the objective of the exercise of God's will in regeneration is God's glory as stated in Romans 11:36,

*“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

### **The Practical Implications of God's Sovereign Will in Regeneration**

It is argued that the sovereign will of God in salvation is not biblical. Still, others who believe in the truth that God's will is sovereign in salvation actually argue that emphasizing the sovereign will of God in salvation should be avoided because: 1) It is not consistent with biblical practice to emphasize it and 2) It is not practical because it results in doubt in the Christian.

However, the sovereign will of God in salvation is certainly biblical for it is the Bible that declares it and that the Bible declares it often, as even a casual reading of the following verse references reveals, silences those who argue God's sovereign will in salvation should not be emphasized (James 1:18; Jn. 1:13; 3:3-8; Rm. 9:13-18; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Eph. 1:3-6; 2:1-10; Col. 1:13, 19-23; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:3). Take a few moments to read these verses and note their emphasis of God's sovereign will in salvation.

Consider the enormously positive practical implications of God's will being sovereign in salvation for every believer. Here are two that touch every facet of our lives:

1. If it wasn't for the sovereign grace of God no one would or could be saved (1 Cor. 2:14).
2. God's exercising of His will to save some is perfect (Jm. 1:17), thus,
  - a. God is not going to change His mind regarding those He saves. God does not change. This is to say that He is immutable (Mal. 3:6). Furthermore, God's will is matchless or unique in all areas. This is to say that God's will is inimitable. Unlike man, God is the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. His will is not fickle and neither is the exercise of it. On the contrary, the exercise of His will in regeneration is good and perfect (v. 17). No second thoughts with God!
  - b. God's will in saving each believer is good therefore, regardless of the immediate experiences within which believers may find themselves; they can be assured that God has their good in mind as He continues to work out His will in their lives (Romans 8:28).

Pastor David Martin