

James 1:16-18

I. My beloved brothers, do not be deceived (16)

“My beloved brothers” is a regular expression James uses to address his readers. He uses it so often, it may seem overkill, but James truly does think this about his readers. This phrase regularly introduces a new section as well as demonstrating James’s affection.

This does not necessarily mean someone was telling them falsehood, and they were being hoodwinked. It can just mean to be mistaken in one’s judgment. James doesn’t emphasize how they may have come into a false view, but rather he emphasizes that the false view is possible and it should be avoided.

II. All good gifts, and even our existence is from our gracious, perfect God (17-18)

A. Every good and perfect gift comes down from God, Who does not change (17)

1. Every good gift, and every perfect present is coming down from above – from the Father of lights (17a)

There are actually two words for “gift” used here and the word “every” is repeated with each. And therefore, I have translated literally “every good gift and every perfect present.” But since the two terms are virtually synonymous, most translations have “every good and perfect gift” “from above” is the same word used in John 3:3, 7 and typically translated “again” in those verses. But its use here gives evidence that the translation “born from above” is also legitimate in those verses.

“lights” likely refers to the heavenly bodies, such as the sun and moon. And therefore “father of lights” means something like “creator of the heavens” and is a reference to God’s greatness, power, and inexhaustible ability

2. With Him, there is no change or shifting shadow (17b)

“shifting shadow” is a reference to the movement of a shadow as the sun goes across the sky. In other words, it refers to change over time. God is the creator of the heavenly bodies, but He is not subject to their movement or change. He is the solid reference point that gives definition to every changing thing. Even in modern science, with the idea of general relativity, God can serve as the fixed point from which everything else has reference and meaning.

B. He brought us into being to be the firstfruits of His creation (18)

1. Because He chose, He brought us into being through the word of truth (18a-b)

a Reason: because He willed (18a)

James includes this proposition to make clear that our birth happened because God chose to do so. God was not compelled in any way.

b He gave us birth through the Word of Truth (18b)

“gave birth” is an infrequent word, used only in v. 15 of this chapter in all the rest of the New Testament. Outside of the New Testament it refers to literally giving birth to offspring. But here it is used figuratively to refer to bringing something into being, which did not exist before. This phrase could refer to God’s creation of the world. In this case, “the word of truth” would be God’s creative Word “let there be...” in Genesis 1. Or (more likely) it could refer to the new birth of individual Christians, and “the word of truth” is the Gospel by which people are born again.

2. Purpose: so that we would be a certain firstfruit of His creation (18c)

The “firstfruit” is a reference to the first portion of a harvest in the Old Testament. The firstfruit was a sign and guarantee of the full harvest, which would almost certainly come in. And (probably the connotation James is referencing) the firstfruit was given to God as his portion in order to honor Him.