

ABOUT SPIRITUAL DEATH AND NEW BIRTH
JAMES 1:13-18
September 29th, 2013

It's the end of September, which means that show-season is here again. Ah yes, at both the Adelaide and Melbourne shows, no doubt, someone will discover that milk doesn't come from cardboard cartons or pvc containers. Now you might smile but for a completely citified child, they would have no idea where milk really does come from—unless they'd done a unit on it at school or have a relative living in the country.

In his general letter, James now turns to the question of origins—where does sin come from, how does Spiritual birth into new life with God come about?

Remember, he's writing to Christians facing various tests. He realises that all genuine believers will be "blessed" and "endure" those "tests" and receive the "crown of life" which God "has Promised" v12.

However, there would be those who would occasionally "stumble" and fall into acts of disobedience—sometimes grievous betrayals of the Lord under pressure.

There would always be those family-members and others associated with the believers who would remain captivated by sin and James wanted to explain about what was taking place whenever anyone sins.

He now debunks the myth that sin is glamorous and describes it in terms of the old proverb as

(1) The Way To Death v13-15.

He describes the process of surrendering to sin's influence in terms of a path to destruction—the way to death for which the human individual is personally and entirely responsible. No excuse such as 'the devil made me do it' will be acceptable.

[A] The Seed is Sown - the first step. Temptation is entertained. The thought, the idea, the desire, the longing, the craving for whatever it is is suggested v13:

"When tempted, no-one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone".

That's such an important sentence to understand and accept!

All people, including the most zealous Christians, are tempted to sin, no question about that. James realistically writes "whenever" someone is tempted".

Temptations come to all of us! They came to the "man Christ Jesus".

Jesus never surrendered to them whilst we often do:

"we have (a high priest) who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."
(Hebrews 4 v15)

God is not the author of the temptation to sin. If it isn't acceptable to blame Satan by saying 'the devil made me do it' it's certainly never acceptable to claim 'God tempted me'!

Satan or those under his influence may play on our inclinations, but sin comes from within us not from God!

Temptation is not sin! Jesus was tested in the desert and stood firm, perfectly and withstood each and every temptation. We, too, can stand firm and endure against temptations strongly, but will stumble

from time to time.

Yes, the Lord is all-Powerful but never Wilfully sends temptations to us with the intention that we sin. God is not the author of sin!

God Himself cannot be tempted to do evil –the encounter with Satan as recorded in Job 1 shows this.

[B] The Seed is Watered - the second step. The thoughts, the desires etc are not rejected out of hand but encouraged some more as v14 explains:

"but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

Ah that's it, you see "dragged away and *enticed*" the sinful idea captures the imagination and the emotions and so the poor sinner is hooked—it can all happen in an instant of time when a temptation strikes, or it can develop over time like a slow fire!

The important thing to note is that the person thoroughly embraces the idea and it becomes their own.

The forsaking of good leads to bad rather like the embracing of godliness leads to right living.

[C] The Seed Ripens - the final step. Having been sown and watered it matures to full control v15:

"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

So there it is, the three-step process surrounding each act of sin. So can a genuine Christian still sin? Yes of course but we have the Lord Jesus' Blood to cleanse us from its consequences and His Spirit living within to Empower us to not yield to those temptations which come against us. We will not become sinless in this life but we can expect to sin less.

The ordinary person, without God's Holy Spirit, is to be prayed for with compassion so that:

"God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." [2 Timothy 2 v25-26].

James was writing at a time when many in the Gentile world thought either that the All-Powerful God had a good and bad nature or that there was a good and bad god. So he has taken time to clearly explain about the origin of sin and how we can identify its pull and—with the help of God's Spirit now in Christ—Resist it:

*"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.
For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." [Romans 6 v13-14].*

James now wants to focus their attention away from the Way To Death and on

(2) The Gift Of Life v16-18.

[A] Guaranteed by God's Unchangeable Character v17:

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Everything we have that is not sinful comes as a good gift from God, our life, the ability to work, to eat, food, friendships, the ability to communicate: "every good and perfect gift" originates with the Lord Who has Created and maintains the sun and the moon and is Lord over night and day and does not change.

He is thoroughly dependable, always trustworthy, that's our God. He Guarantees the Gifts He Gives.

[B] Freely Given by way of His Word v18:

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

James is obviously referring here to the way these believers became Christians, to their re-creation in Christ, to their new-birth in Him. Given all the trials/tests these Christians were continuing to face, James didn't want them to forget the great privilege they had in naming the Name of Jesus with reverence and Truth.

It is by God's Choice they have come to belong to His forever-family. His Truth-filled Word has brought them as Christ's harvest-crop under the new Kingdom-Rule of Christ which God has created.

These are truly beautiful and strong pictures of in-gathering which the readers would understand, pointing to the *new heavens and new earth* in which only righteousness will dwell.