

MAINTAINING A HEART OF LOVE TO GOD

(James 1:18)

A message delivered by [Doug Van Meter](#) at [Brackenhurst Baptist Church](#) on Sunday evening, 2
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**Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind
of firstfruits of his creatures.**

(James 1:18)

Introduction

We ended our previous study by noting that the most powerful motivation for overcoming our sinful desires (which, if given their head, will result in spiritual death) is that of delighting in God. John Piper quotes Augustine, who said, “Grace is God giving to us sovereign joy in God that triumphs over joy in sin.” His point is self-evident: To the degree we are drawn to Christ, to that degree we are drawn away from sin and its allurements. In fact, James will tell us this again in chapter 4.

But having raised that issue I want to delve further into this truth as we return to James 1:13-18. We will focus primarily on the truth of James 1:18, in which we are exhorted to reflect upon the fact that God is for us. He is on our side always, even when we undergo trials. He is pulling for us to pass the test!

As we learned previously, behind every trial is the lurking possibility that we who profess to be believers will turn a test from God (which He wants us to pass) into a temptation in which we cave into sinful desires. By doing so we are led into deception which produces disobedience which culminates in spiritual death. And thus rather than persevering and being crowned with eternal life we may fail and end up having apostatised from Christ.

But a wonderful antidote to this failure is that of focusing on the Father of lights, who has blessed us with every good and perfect gift. Both what and how He gives is holy and thus for our benefit (v. 17). Yes, even when the house is robbed, the loved one is attacked, the job is lost and the character is slandered. But coupled to this is the reality of v. 18, in which we are reminded that God truly does love His children; so much so that He has determined to exercise His will to save them. And not only has he decreed and determined to save us from sin but He has determined that we will be consecrated to Him. Hence we are referred to as “firstfruits.”

Thus, with such a loving commitment to us, how could we ever envision that He would lead us to behave in a such a way that we would end up experiencing spiritual death? May it never be!

The net result of this saving relationship with the Father of lights is that sinful desires lose their power; at least to the degree that we find our joy in God. That is, the more that we are satisfied in God, the less we are hungry for that which does not ultimately satisfy. To state it in the inspired

words of Solomon, “The full [satisfied] soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Proverb 27:7).

Solomon is instructing us that our disposition is determined by our level of comfort or satisfaction. Mick Jagger “can’t get no satisfaction” because he is looking for it in the wrong places. If he was satisfied in God then all of the world’s honeycombs would be of no temptation to him. But of course Jagger merely sang about what we all experience at times. His complaint is representative of all who seek to be satisfied, to be full, outside the will of God.

All too often sinful responses to trying situations are the result of our being deceived that the poison of ungodly behaviour is a honeycomb. We deceive ourselves that satisfaction can be found in giving into the flesh; that fullness of life can be found by disregarding God’s Word. But once we get past the initial sweetness of a sinful response we feel the sickness of our soul as we sense our alienation from God coupled with the shame of offending our God and Father. When we lose our hunger for God, when we cease to be satisfied with Him, then truly every bitter thing is sweet. Our appetites lose all discernment. We are thus too easily and too cheaply satisfied. And make no mistake: Sin is a cheap and worthless substitute for the privilege of knowing God.

It is thus important that we work on reducing our appetite for sinful and selfish responses to sin by being so full of God that sin is less appetising.

Look at it this way: I would think that the worst time for grocery shopping is when you are hungry. As your stomach growls your sense of “I would like to eat that” increases, and so does the grocery bill! When you are hungry your flesh overtakes your mind and “every bitter thing is sweet.” But if you have a good meal before heading off to the Pick ’n Pay your soul may “loathe the honeycomb” as you rationally recognise that, actually, you don’t need those cholesterol-bloating crisps, biltong, ice cream, and meat pies.

By analogy, so it is with our relationship with God. When we truly are growing in our love for God we lose much of our appetite for a sinful, fleshly response to hard circumstances. Because our soul is satisfied with God we are less prone to seek to satisfy our flesh.

I recently received a text message on my cell phone which read, “Please join me for sundowners at Clifton [Beach] Sunday night at 18:00.” It was signed “Cath,” but had obviously been sent to the wrong number. I ignored it, but that Sunday afternoon I received another text message from Cath, again inviting me for sundowners at Clifton Beach that evening. I showed the message to my wife, who promptly sent a reply: “I think you have the wrong number. Besides, I would never let my husband join another woman for drinks on the beach.” Cath sent a message back apologising that she indeed had the wrong number.

Had I lived in Cape Town, I can honestly say that I still would not have been at Clifton Beach that evening. I can honestly say that I am satisfied, that my soul is full in my relationship with my wife, and therefore I loathe the honeycombs offered to me by this world. That is precisely James’ point in our text. When we understand God’s great love for us and what He did to save us, when our hearts are satisfied in the Father of lights, sin loses its appeal.

But now we must ask, how do we come to such a place in which our soul is satisfied with God? What is required? I trust that James 1:18 will help us to answer that question fruitfully.

As we saw last week, the way to pass the test and thus receive the crown of life is to avoid falsehood (v. 13), to accept the facts (vv. 14-16), and to adore the Father (vv. 17-18). Now, we return to this theme as we focus on v. 18.

If we will be satisfied with God (with the blessed result of overcoming temptation to sin) then we need to grow in our appreciation of how gracious God is (v. 17). The more that we see His lovingkindness the freer we will become from sin (Psalm 63:3-5). And, of course, this steadfast love of the Lord is seen in all of its fullness in the gospel. This is James' theme in v. 18. The more that we realise His amazing love, the more we will love Him (v. 12) and the less prone we will be to sin against Him. May God teach us this as we consider the truth of this text.

The Father's Initiative

James draws our attention to God's deliberate choice, which should amaze us and draw us to Him. It was "of his own will" that we were brought to the point of salvation.

In the verses immediately surrounding our text, James offered the picture of childbirth as an illustration of how we are often drawn to sin. Lust conceives sin and sin ultimately births death. James uses a similar picture in v. 18 to speak of God's sovereign action in our lives: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of life."

In the Greek language the first words of a sentence are the words that are meant to be emphasised. As in the English, the first words in the Greek text are "his own will." Thus, the emphasis regarding our salvation is upon what God has done, by His own will. He exercised a deliberate determination to save us. As Daniel Doriani states it, "God took counsel with Himself and resolved that he would not leave sinners in their plight." John draws our attention to this truth in the opening chapter of his Gospel:

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 1:10-13)

Later, when Jesus conversed with Nicodemus, He stated plainly, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). In speaking these words, the Lord was not giving a command, but stating a fact. Since we cannot initiate the new birth it is apparent that His statement was in fact a statement of fact rather than a command to be obeyed.

The only way that we can be born again is by God's sovereign choice. And is it not incredible that He chose to save us even though He knew all about us? Married couples choose to have children, but their choice becomes before they know what type of children they will have. God, on the other hand, knew exactly what He was getting—and there was nothing by which He was impressed—yet He still chose to save us!

Of course, children have a natural affinity to their parents, and in similar fashion those who are truly God's children love Him. In fact, their love for Him is far greater than their love for their own parents (Luke 14:26).

My point is simply this: The wonder of God's love should move us to be satisfied with Him. Hear the words of David:

Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.

(Psalm 63:3-5)

David could not get over God's grace, and the most important thing to him in life was God. There was nothing quite as important to him as God's lovingkindness. His joy was in the Lord his God, and would to God that we could echo his words in our own lives. I am afraid that we are often too easily satisfied with what the world offers. My desire is that I would be so satisfied with Christ that I can tread underfoot what the world offers, even if most consider the offer to be as sweet as a honeycomb.

To the degree that we understand what God has done to save us, to that degree will we be satisfied in Him. But in order for that happen, we must appreciate His character. He is the Father of lights: holy, holy, holy. We must understand our own condition: We deserve nothing but eternal wrath in the lake of fire. When we see God's character in relation to our condition, then we can grow in appreciation of God's conduct in conceiving us and giving us new life.

The Father's Impartation

James reminds us that the Father, by His own sovereign choice, gave us life. He "begat ... us with the word of truth." The instrument that He used to impart life to us was the Word of truth. And according to 2 Corinthians 6:7, Ephesians 1:13 and 2 Timothy 2:15, the Word of truth is the gospel of Christ.

What precisely does it mean to be begotten again? John MacArthur defines it as "a miracle of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of his soul is made holy." One proof that we have been born again is a new appetite. Before we were saved every bitter thing was sweet, but now our spiritual taste buds are more discerning. Now suddenly our appetite is to gather with God's people and to fellowship around His Word. Now we hate sin and find ourselves eagerly treading underfoot that which the world offers as sweet.

In short, God implemented what He initiated, and He did so through the truth of the gospel. And the impartation of spiritual life leads to an impartation of love for God. It is often far too easy for us to be satisfied only with doctrinal truth. Of course, we do not want to underestimate the importance of doctrinal truth, but we should never be content with doctrine alone. Our satisfaction must be in God (part of which is loving truth, of course), for that is one evidence of true spiritual life.

The new birth causes us to cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). The word "Abba" is a tender Aramaic word, most closely associated with the English term "Daddy." I enjoy it when my children call me "Dad" or "Daddy." Some parents are happy to let their children address them by their name, but I like hearing my children address me as "Dad," for it highlights the intimacy of the relationship between them and me. So too do God's children address Him as "Abba" because there exists an intimate relationship between Him and them. We don't deserve it, but we belong to Him

nevertheless, and thus we adore Him. And when we contemplate so great salvation we are increasingly satisfied with our Saviour.

Though there is a natural affection on behalf of God's children toward Him, there ever exists the need for us to increase in this affection. And how do we do so? By meditating and reflecting on the good news of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, by fellowship, by prayer and by reading. We must treasure the new birth and thus the One who secured it for us.

Think about it: The Father forsook the Son because He would not forsake those whom He had chosen to save! "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" cried Jesus (Matthew 27:46). There are numerous interrelated theological answers to that question, but one of the most encouraging is that He forsook His Son because He would not forsake His elect! Think on that, and it will surely help your love for and satisfaction in God.

Let us never lose sight of the glory of this gift. When the world throws temptation our way let us look to the Father of lights. Let us be satisfied in Him to such a degree that we will tread underfoot the rubbish that masquerades as honeycombs.

The Father's Intention

Why did the Father grant us new life? In order "that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." The firstfruits, biblically speaking, were the firstborn of men and animals, as well as the first crops to be harvested, which were consecrated to God. Several Old Testament texts speak of the firstfruits (cf. Exodus 23:16-19; 34:19-26; Leviticus 2:12; Numbers 15:20-21; Deuteronomy 18:4). When you consider the overall Old Testament teaching regarding the firstfruits, three things stand out.

1. The firstfruits were consecrated to God;
2. The firstfruits were always the best; and
3. The firstfruits were an annual confession that God had supplied the year's bounty, and that He would be faithful to His covenant people for yet another year.

Believers are "a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." As firstfruits, we are consecrated (special) to God. As firstfruits we are (by His grace) the best of the best. And as firstfruits, we look to God's faithfulness in our own lives and come away with great hope and conviction that there is more to come!

James did not want his readers to lose sight of how special they were to God. In a unique way believers are consecrated to Him. We do not always *feel* special, but God's objective Word tells us that we *are* special to Him.

Just as firstfruits were God's promise in the Old Testament that He would take care of His people for another year, so us being firstfruits gives great comfort that God will take care of us. He will provide everything we need for life and godliness.

Josh Harris has written about a disease that has affected our age: "What is affluenza? Affluenza is a nifty little word that some clever sociologist created by mixing two different words together. The word affluence means having a great deal of money. Influenza is a highly contagious disease. And

when you mash the two you get ‘affluenza’ which is a useful word for describing the problems generated by a rich consumer culture that has an endless hunger for more and more stuff. Affluenza is the disease of greed. It’s the materialistic mindset that says that getting more money and possessions for yourself is the ultimate aim of life. Affluenza is the spirit of our age and it has infected us all.”

The cure for affluenza is satisfaction in God. And the path to satisfaction is a realisation that we are special objects of the Father’s love, and are notably holy. Until we come to this realisation we will never be satisfied, but once this realisation has struck us we will soon be done with the quest to fill our lives with all sorts of worldly honeycombs.

The believers to whom James wrote had been scattered abroad. In contemporary terminology, they had emigrated. But not simply because of a high crime rate or inflated petrol prices; they had emigrated because of direct, deliberate persecution against them. And yet James writes to them in the midst of such terrible persecution and encourages them that they can indeed have joy in the midst of their trials. And how could they experience this joy? By realising afresh that God was their Father. He had saved them and would sustain them.

Conclusion

As we face the trials of life we can respond in one of two ways. First, we can count it all joy as we look to the Father and find our satisfaction in Him. Second, we can cave into our sinful desires and to allow ourselves to be deceived. The end of the second alternative is spiritual death.

Why should we choose death when the crown of life is freely available? Let us find our satisfaction in God and thus, in our trials, count it all joy.

AMEN