

James 1:16–18 (NASB 2020)

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers *and sisters*. ¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

- 1) The phrase “Do not be deceived” is an imperative (Command).
- 2) An argument can be made here that the Greek is really indicating “Stop being deceived.”
- 3) We can also expand this forward and backward in the text.
 - a) Stop being deceived about the source of temptations.
 - i) Temptations come from within ourselves!
 - b) Stop being deceived about the source of all good things.
 - i) Good things come from God!
- 4) James uses an interesting phrase here to describe God.

“... the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”
- 5) “Father of lights” is an ancient Jewish title for God, referring to Him as Creator.
- 6) The two Greek words translated SHIFTING and SHADOW are only used here and nowhere else in the New Testament.
- 7) The phrase “*or shifting shadow*” can be literally “or turning shadow.”
- 8) “Shifting or turning” has the meaning of “*darkening caused by turning*.”
- 9) One translation I read makes it somewhat clearer

17 ... with whom there is no variation *or shadow from change*.⁶
- 10) Having said all that James is painting a word picture here.
 - a) God is unchangeable (immutable) whereas things He created do change.
 - b) This does not mean that God will not change His mind.
 - c) It does not mean that He will not get angry or have other emotions.
 - d) IT DOES MEAN – His love and care for us, his creation, will last for all eternity.
- 11) This is where we left off last time...
- 12) The other interesting wording here in verse 17 is “every perfect gift.”
- 13) Have you ever considered the fact that nothing ever comes from God that is not perfect?

⁶ A. K. M. Adam, [*James: A Handbook on the Greek Text*](#), ed. Martin M. Culy, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 17.

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14) At first thought, this seems really easy to claim as absolute truth – **and it is.**

15) However, do we always consider God's gifts perfect?

What about prayers that are not answered as we wanted them to be?

What about unanswered prayers?

Are there any other things we might struggle with calling them “from God and Perfect?”

How do we deal with these things that are so hard to accept and yet must be “perfect” because they come from God?

16) So, finishing with verse 18 we read...

¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

17) Another interesting verse that deserves some thought.

18) “In exercise of His will” is simply indicating that this is a deliberate act on the part of God.

19) In fact, one translation gives...

¹⁸ Deliberating, he brought us forth by a word of truth, so that we might be a sort of first fruits of his creations. ⁶

20) If we consider the **word of truth** to be the gospel (this is most likely the proper interpretation) then the **“brought forth”** or **“gave us birth by”** refers to our salvation – our new birth as believers.

- a) This then is an absolute example of a “perfect gift.”
- b) We are firstfruits because we are a new creation – we are no longer sinners separated from God – we are God’s children – free from blemish by His grace that sustains us.
- c) The whole idea – the overarching theme of this letter – is how we are to live as firstfruits in a fallen world.
- d) Living as firstfruits is being examples of God’s goodness.
- e) We are to be role models of what He can do in our lives when we allow Him to.
 - i) That of course means showing forth the fruit of the Spirit as seen in Gal 5:22.
- f) It is wonderful to be considered firstfruits by God but it is also a challenge to live as a firstfruits example!

James 1:19–21 (NASB 2020)

¹⁹ **You know this**, my beloved brothers *and sisters*. Now everyone **must be** quick to hear, slow to speak, *and* slow to anger; ²⁰ for a man’s anger does not bring about the

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righteousness of God.²¹ Therefore, ridding *yourselves* of all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

- 1) As I studied this passage, I ran across an old expression which I had heard in a different form in the past but it is so true and so appropriate here.

Two ears are given to us, the rabbis observe, but only one tongue: the ears are open and exposed, whereas the tongue is walled in behind the teeth.⁷

- 2) As always, we have a way of taking what God did on purpose to help us and turning it to something else.
 - a) Most of us use the tongue twice as much as we should and the ears half as much.
 - b) One other obvious facet of this is that when our mouth is engaged – we are talking – we tend to hear our own voice and not that of anyone who may be trying to speak to us.
- 3) There are actually two imperatives (commands) in this verse 19.
 - a) Although it may not seem so by most translations, the opening phrase “*You know this*” or in the NIV “**take note of this**,” is a command.
 - b) The BHGNT translates it “*Be certain*”.
 - c) The other verb here that is an imperative is translated as “*must be*.”
- 4) The point in all that is to say this is not just a suggestion of a better way for us to be in conversations – it is THE way we MUST be in conversations!
- 5) When we consider these three traits separately, they are good on their own.
 - a) I can’t think of a situation in which, regardless of the topic or conditions that it would NOT be good to be quick to hear, slow to speak, *and* slow to anger.
- 6) However, here, James definitely ties them together.
 - a) Indeed, this may be another progression of sorts.
 - b) Violating any one of these traits in the chain can lead to or be anger – that of course is the BAD result.
- 7) James makes that clear when he tells us that our “anger does not bring about the righteousness of God.”

What are some things that anger does that causes it “not to bring about the righteousness of God”?

- a) There are several reasons this is true:
 - i) Anger many if not most times leads to hurtful words.
 - ii) Anger makes us unable to stand up to God’s ideal plan for us.
 - iii) Anger tends to be uncontrollable.

⁷ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#), vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 485.

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- iv) Anger is inconsistent with Jesus' command to love our enemies.
- v) Anger expresses the fact that we are not of the same mind.
- 8) If we consider these traits in more detail, we find that being quick to hear and slow to speak are complementary.
- 9) The LABC ties this together nicely:
Constant talking keeps a person from being able to hear. Wisdom is not always having something to say; it involves listening carefully, considering prayerfully, and speaking quietly. When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process.⁸
- 10) The obvious truth is that we can violate these two without causing anger or getting angry but it is still not Christ's way.
 - a) Now I am sure no one here has a problem with any of this – right :<))
 - b) Equally, I can bet that everyone has tried (**or is trying**) to change this situation for themselves at one time or the other (or wished they had).

Let's brainstorm some ideas we might try that might help us implement this commandment – Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

- 11) Verse 21 seems almost **not** to fit when we first look at it...
- ²¹ Therefore, ridding *yourselves* of all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- 12) However, when we see the “Therefore” or, in this case perhaps the better way to translate it might be “For this reason”, we know there is a connection.
- 13) As one commentary puts it:
Progress in our spiritual life **cannot** occur unless we see sin for what it is, quit justifying it, and decide to reject it. James's word picture here has us getting rid of our evil habits and actions like stripping off dirty clothes.⁸
- 14) And of course, the subject (filthiness and wickedness) is referring to (but not limited to) the violations of the commands we just discussed.
- 15) Hard to listen to but fact, nonetheless.
- 16) James then says:
in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- 17) You would almost think he is talking about someone being converted but that is not the case.
 - a) He is talking to believers.

⁸ Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, [*James*](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 31.

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- b) What he is saying is accept God's word as binding.
 - c) We need to accept the fact that we must try to live by them.
 - d) We can't just read it and say, "oh that's nice" and move on just as we were before.
 - e) In fact, James is going to talk about that very idea in the next set of verses we will discuss.
- 18) This final phrase in this verse must be carefully considered.
- a) James is NOT saying that if we fail in our attempts our souls are lost.
 - b) Instead, he is saying that if we do not accept God's commands for what they are i.e. we just say, "oh that's nice" and ignore them then we are putting our souls in jeopardy.
 - c) If we were able to be perfect – never falling short of what God wanted – then He would not have had to send His Son to die for us.
 - d) Grace would not be needed!!