

Fact Sheet for **“No Variation or Shadow”**
James 1:16-18

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These three verses are actually a continuation of James' thought that began in 1:2. I didn't include them last week because there was too much to cover. So, a little review is in order. Follow along with James' line of thought.

Paragraph #1 (1:2-4)

The word “trials” comes from a root word that also has the sense of “temptations”. These trials, or temptations, are things that assay us.

The word “testing” translates a different word. This word has the sense of an assay with a good result. When our faith is challenged by these trials and we assay out well, then it produces a measure of steadfastness in our faith.

Paragraph #2 (1:5-8)

The wisdom James wrote about here is the wisdom necessary to successfully navigate these trials.

Paragraph #3 (1:9-11)

Here James introduces the matter that is the focus of the trials (or temptations) that his readers were experiencing. They were focusing too much on attaining wealth.

Keep this in mind as you read the rest of James.

Paragraph #4 (1:12-15)

Now James picks-up the thoughts he began with in verses 2-4 (“trials” and “testing”) and develops them.

Take another look at the biology of verse 15.

**Then desire when it has conceived
gives birth to sin,
and sin when it is fully grown
brings forth death.**

Remember the words “bring forth”. They translate a word that will show up three verses later.

Paragraph #5 (1:16-18)

Now we come to today's passage.

¹⁶ **Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.**

Historically this verse has been generally understood to begin a new paragraph, but its connection with the previous verses is very strong. This connection is so strong in fact that there are different views on where to place it. The CSB, ESV, NASB, and NIV place it with verses 17-18. The NLT places it with the previous paragraph. The Bible Knowledge Commentary places it with the previous paragraph. The New American Commentary places it by itself. One of my Greek texts places it with verses 17-18. Another of my Greek texts has a marker that the paragraph begins at verse 16, but still places it with the previous paragraph.

Here is why the connection is so strong. Our own inordinate desires about wealth have the ability to easily tempt and deceive us. But our trust should instead be with what James wrote in verses 17-18.

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

There are two Greek words translated here by the same English word “gift”. The New American Standard shows the difference and begins verse 17 this way, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above.”

“The Father of Lights” – Think of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. The sun rises and sets (Eccl. 1:5). The moon waxes and wanes. And as the earth spins the moon travels across our sky. As the earth spins the stars also move across our sky. In addition to that each star appears overhead exactly at midnight only one time each year. Even the planets appear at different positions within the star field. These lights in our sky are there every day, but they are ever changing in how we see them.

But with the Father of Lights there is absolutely no variation or shadow due to change. He never changes. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from Him. He knows what we need throughout life and provides that for us.

Now, put this thought into the context of these five paragraphs. Every good thing we have has been given to us by God. Every perfect gift is from Him. He knows what we need. The solution for being tempted by an inordinate desire to get rich is to have a close relationship with God.

Then, think about the greatest gift He has given us.

¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Is seeking to make a profit, improve your house, or put away for retirement wrong? Not necessarily. It is the inordinate desire to gain wealth that causes the problem.

How do we know when we are slipping?

1. When your trust is in your bank account more than it is in God.
2. When your fears about your financial future are eating you alive.
3. When you never have enough.
4. When your thoughts about money negatively impacts your interpersonal relationships.
5. When your monetary plans get in the way of your relationship to God.

End by reading a portion from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-23).